

The Story of **JACOB** Becoming **ISRAEL**: God Gives New Beginnings



"9 ...God blessed him, 10 saying, 'Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel.' So God renamed him Israel." Genesis 35:9-10 NLT

- ▶ Have you ever messed up so badly in life that you felt as if you had no chance to redeem yourself, no chance to be forgiven by God, no hope?

God gives people a chance to have a new beginning in their lives. The Bible is filled with stories of people who did really bad things, but experienced a new beginning after they sought God for forgiveness. Some examples are:

- **Rahab** the prostitute - who turned to God and protected the spies of Israel (Joshua 2). Rahab was in the lineage of King David and eventually Jesus, the Messiah (Matt. 1:5).
- **King David** - who committed adultery with Bathsheba and tried to cover it up with the murder of Uriah, her husband (2 Samuel 11). He experienced forgiveness and new life.
- **Matthew** (Matt. 9:10) and **Zacchaeus** (Luke 19) - dishonest tax collectors who over taxed people and pocketed the overage. They experienced forgiveness and new life.
- **The woman at the well** - who lived a life immorality but experienced forgiveness and new life (John 4).
- **Peter** - who had denied knowing Jesus three times (Matthew 26). He was forgiven and restored to ministry and became an Apostle (John 21).
- **Paul** - who was self-righteous and used his religion to oppress people (Acts 9:1-2). He said of himself *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners —and I am the worst of them all."* (1 Tim. 1:15).

To this list of bad people who sought God's forgiveness and experienced a new beginning - is **Jacob who became Israel** (Genesis 35, 32). Jacob was a **con man**. He took advantage of his brother, Esau, when he was starving and tricked him in selling his birthright (Genesis 25). He deceived his father Isaac and stole Esau's blessing (Genesis 27).

In **Genesis 32:22-32** Jacob has a wrestling match with God. This is a turning point in his life. The *Believers Bible Commentary* explains: "Although Jacob lost the encounter physically, he won a great spiritual victory. He learned to triumph through defeat and to be strong through weakness. Emptied of self and of confidence in his own cleverness, he confessed he was Jacob, a supplanter, a 'con man.' God changed his name to Israel (variously translated as 'God rules,' 'one who strives with God,' or 'a prince of God')." (p. 68).

Central Lesson - No matter how bad we have been - God loves us, will forgive us, and offer us a new beginning in life - if we ask forgiveness and seek Him.

The story of Jacob becoming Israel is recorded in two major passages - **Genesis 32:22-32** and **Genesis 35:9-15**. His name change symbolize his new beginning.

Jacob Wrestles with God - Genesis 32:22-32

1. **Jacob encountered God when he was **ALONE** - and we can too** (32:24). *"24 This left Jacob all alone in the camp..."*

We need alone times with God. Times when we worship Him, read His Word, and talk with Him through prayer.

2. **Jacob had a **WRESTLING** match with God - and at times we do too** (32:24).

"24 ...and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break."

Many people today have wrestling matches with God over issues or certain tragic circumstances that take place in their life. These wrestling matches can lead to new understandings and devotion to God.

3. **Jacob prevailed in his wrestling match with God because of His **PERSISTENCY** - and we can too** (32:25, 27-28).

"25 When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket." "27 'What is your name?' the man asked. He replied, 'Jacob.' 28 'Your name will no longer be Jacob,' the man told him. 'From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won.'"

Someone has observed - how can anyone wrestle with God, the almighty sovereign creator of the universe, and win - unless the wrestling match was fixed? Bottom line, God wanted Jacob to win. God let Jacob win. God wants us to win, too. But there are important lessons and character development that is achieved only through the struggle (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7). Jesus taught us to be persistent in our seeking Him and praying to Him in Luke 11:5-10.

4. **Jacob **SOUGHT** God's blessing and favor - and we should too** (32:26, 29-30).

"26 Then the man said, 'Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' 29 ...Then he blessed Jacob there 30 Jacob named the place Peniel (which means 'face of God'), for he said, 'I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared.'"

Jacob Encounters God - Genesis 35:9-15

5. **God wants to **REPEATEDLY** bless His people** (35:9-10).

"9 Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him, 10 saying, 'Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel.' So God renamed him Israel."

6. **God had a **PURPOSE** and mission for Jacob's life** (35:11-13).

"11 Then God said, 'I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Be fruitful and multiply. You will become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants! 12 And I will give you the land I once gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants after you.' 13 Then God went up from the place where he had spoken to Jacob."

The Central Lesson:

No matter how bad we have been - God loves us, will forgive us, and offer us a new beginning in life - if we ask forgiveness and seek Him.

- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior.
- ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ.
- ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday's study.
- ▶ Attend a small group.
- ▶ Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses.
- ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.