

## Jacob is Renamed Israel

Teacher Pep Talk: When momentous spiritual changes happen in the Bible, God often renames the individual involved. (Abram became Abraham, Simon became Peter, Saul became Paul, and Jacob became Israel.)

God told Jacob, “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.” But doing so meant that Jacob had to face his brother, Esau, again; whom he had tricked and from whose anger he had fled. Jacob obeyed; but the night before he was to meet Esau, the Bible says that Jacob “wrestled” with God. Jacob, who had been the trickster, had no tricks up his sleeve this time. He had to face Esau in the morning and take whatever came.

God renamed this man of faith, who obeyed God solely on His promise that He would be with him. God changed his name from Jacob (the trickster) to Israel (He who struggles with God.)

You will need: Bible  
A chart showing all 12 of Jacob’s sons’ names

Major Points: God Told Jacob to Return Home  
Jacob had to Face Esau Again  
Jacob was Worried, But He Obeyed God  
Jacob Wrestled “with God and Man” and Overcame  
Jacob got a New Name: Israel

Scripture Ref: Genesis 31-33

Memory Verse: Genesis 31:3 “**Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.**”

Lesson: **Introduction**

- *[Be sure to start with your Bible sitting on your lap. Also have the chart showing all 12 of Jacob’s sons’ names.]*
- Have you ever been to a family reunion? Ever had your whole family get together for something? (Maybe a wedding or a party)
- Usually getting your whole family together is a great thing and you have a lot of fun...
- Our story today tells of a family reunion when the people in it weren’t so sure if it would be fun or not!

**God Told Jacob to Return Home**

- *[Review the Timeline in the classroom, if available – See series lessons instructions.]*

- Jacob had run away from his home when Esau was so mad at him.
- He had gone to live with his Uncle Laban.
- While he was there he married Leah and Rachel and they had many sons. (*Show Chart of Jacob's Sons' Names*)
- (*NOTE: They had already had 11 of their 12 sons! Everyone but Benjamin had already been born. He was born later.*)
- God told Jacob that it was time for him to go back home
- God said “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”

### **Jacob had to Face Esau Again**

- But you know what that meant!
- It meant that Jacob had to face Esau again!
- Uh oh... Jacob had run away from Esau.
- Esau had been very angry with Jacob!
  - Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup
  - Jacob tricked Esau out of his blessing
- It had been a lot of years... but Jacob figured that Esau might be really angry!

### **Jacob was Worried, but He Obeyed God**

- Jacob was really worried!
- How would you feel if you had to go and talk to someone who had been really mad at you? (*Wait for answers. Take some time here. Explore the question with the children and let them talk about any similar fears or concerns from the past.*)
- Yes, meeting up with someone who has been upset with you can cause you to worry
- But Jacob knew that God had told him to go back, and so he made plans to return to the land of his fathers
- Jacob knew that God had promised to be with him, and to bless him...
- Jacob knew that God always keeps His promises!

### **Jacob Wrestled “with God and Man” and Overcame**

- So Jacob and his family started back home
- Jacob sent messengers and lots of presents ahead to Esau
- But as they all got closer to home, Jacob got worried again!
- The night before he was to meet Esau, he sent all of his family and possessions across the river ahead of him
- Then Jacob was left alone in the night and he wrestled with God
- The Bible says, “..a man wrestled with him until daybreak.” (*NOTE: This is quite likely a theophany; an appearance of Christ as a man, before He came as a baby in Bethlehem.*)

### Jacob got a New Name: Israel

- As morning came, the man told Jacob to release him
- Jacob said he would not let him go unless he blessed him
- The man asked Jacob his name. What do you think Jacob said? Yes! He said his name was Jacob!
- Then the man said *“Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”*
- Israel means “he struggles with God”

*[You may omit this part of the story with younger children]*

- Then Jacob/Israel asked the man “Please tell me your name.”
- What do you think the man said? *(Wait for answers.)*
- The man said... *“Why do you ask me my name?”* And then he blessed him there.
- Why would the man say something like that? *(I think because Jacob/Israel already KNEW who it was!)*
- Jacob/Israel had been struggling with **God** all night.
- In fact, Jacob/Israel named the place Peniel, which means “face of God”, because he said that he had seen God face to face and lived to tell about it... (His life had been spared.)

### God was with Israel

- Jacob (now called Israel) went across the river and met his brother Esau again
- And, you know what... Esau was glad to see him!!
- God kept His promise to be with Jacob and to bless him!
- God always keeps His promises!

Let's pray and thank God for always keeping His promises to be with us!

Prayer: Dear God,  
Thank you that you always keep your promises!  
Thank you that you were with Jacob.  
Thank you that you are with us!  
Thank you for loving us!  
We love you back!  
Amen.

Suggested Activities: *(Choose 1 or 2 that will work with your group.)*

**Jacob Gets a New Name!** – *The children will learn Jacob's new name: Israel.*

**Before Class:** Make copies of the activity sheet. Provide crayons, yarn, and tape.

**During Class:** Color in the letters of Jacob's new and old names. Fold the paper in half and tape the edges. Tape a loop of yarn at the top; creating a way to hang it up.

**Wrestle Mania!** – *The children will have lots of fun arm wrestling a visiting superhero.*

**Before Class:** Obtain a special outfit to wear in class. This can be for you, or another adult volunteer. Consider various “hero” or “wrestling” outfits. (Ex: Spiderman, Batman, Incredible Hulk, etc.) **OPTION:** Bring towels and clothespins to make capes for the children. You can bring masks too, if you like (*to protect their secret identity.*)

**During Class:** Wear your costume during the whole class, if you like, or change into it after the lesson. Alternatively, invite your adult volunteer, who will wear the costume, to join you after the lesson is over. Make up a pretend superhero, if you like.

Ask the children:

So...What do you think? Who would win?

Moose vs. Lion?

Batman vs. Spiderman?

Superman vs. the Incredible Hulk?

Sometimes we wonder if two superheroes wrestled each other, who would win.

Today we have a chance to do some arm wrestling with a superhero!

Let's see who wins!

Set up a low table where the children can take turns arm wrestling with the superhero. Make sure the superhero lets the Little Guys win now and then. Be careful not to let anyone get hurt! (Especially the superhero! 😊)

Let the children use the towels and clothespins as capes if they like. If you have masks, let them wear those as well. It's fun to stay dressed up during snack time, too!

You will need to supervise the children carefully so that they don't end up wrestling with each other. Let them use their superpowers for good for while around the classroom. Ask them not to be pouncing on each other, etc. **Serve snacks fairly quickly.** If/when things get too rowdy, explain that it's time to take off the superhero capes and masks.

**Memorize the Bible Verse** – *The children will memorize Genesis 31:3*

**Before Class:** Familiarize yourself with the Memory Verse: “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.” Shorten the verse as necessary for the age group of children. 4-5 year olds: *Go back... and I will be with you.* 6 year olds: *Go back to the land of your fathers... and I will be with you.* 7 year olds: *entire verse*

**During Class:** Go over the verse with the children. Remind them that this was God talking to Jacob. Even though Jacob knew what God wanted him to do, he was afraid of Esau and what Esau might do. Jacob obeyed God, even though he wrestled with fear. God kept His promise and was with Jacob. God also blessed Jacob.

**To practice the verse:** Have Group 1 stand on one side of the room, and Group 2 stand on the other side. Group 1 walks across the room and Group 2 says “Go back!” Group 1 stops and goes back to their original side, and Group 2 says “And I will be with you!” Then Group 2 hurries to join Group 1 on their side. Switch teams and play again.

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