



New identity (Genesis 32:22-32)

Small Group Study, week commencing 26th February 2024

For starters

If someone were to ask you what Genesis is about, what would you say?

Introduction

What is Genesis is about? Your immediate reply might be ‘creation’ or ‘the fall of humanity’. Although these are key aspects of Genesis, a look at the book overall reveals a progressive narrowing of attention from creation and all humanity down through the generations to one family and his descendants. Like a photographer gradually zooming in, the author’s focus gets narrower as the book progresses.

The reason for this narrowing of focus is that Genesis is the start of the story of God’s people, and the people of God are named for the first time in the passage we are about to consider.

Study

Read [Genesis 25:19-26](#).

1. Jacob was the son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham, and twin brother of Esau. **What do we learn of Jacob’s destiny while still in his mother’s womb? How might the story of his birth have shaped his actions in later life?**

Jacob means he grasps the heel, a Hebrew idiom for he deceives. He grew up with this name, and with a prophecy that his older brother would serve him. Might these two factors have shaped his view about himself as he grew up, and contributed to the two incidents of trickery ([Genesis 25:27-34](#) and [Genesis 27:1-40](#)) that led to alienation from his brother and fleeing to save his life ([Genesis 27:41-45](#))?



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2. Jacob grew up with the identity of a trickster and a deceiver. Later in life he will have two significant experiences: a powerful encounter with God ([Genesis 28:10-22](#)) and being on the receiving end of his uncle Laban's trickery ([Genesis 29:1-30](#)). **How might these experiences have challenged his sense of identity?**

They are two significant events in his life which will have caused him to ask the question, "Is this the person I want to be?"

The first experience left him in awe, and appears to have been a turning point in his faith, because he makes a conditional promise to God: "If God will ... I will ..." (Genesis 28:20-22. In the NIV at least, Jacob lays down three conditions, and makes three commitments in return). Perhaps this experience challenged Jacob's belief that he had to deceive his way to achieve his destiny.

The second experience of being on the end of his uncle's trickery will have further challenged his belief that deceit and its consequences was the way to go in the future.

3. **Have you experienced any significant life events that have challenged your sense of who you are?**

For some it may be their conversion experience. Others may have experienced life-changing events (the death of a loved one, perhaps) which have significantly shaped their direction in life.

Read [Genesis 32:22-32](#).

4. Jacob is about to meet his brother Esau, who had vowed to kill him (Genesis 27:41). Alone and fearful, he has an extraordinary wrestling encounter! **Is Jacob's wrestling to be taken literally, metaphorically, or both?**

5. Verse 28 is at the heart of this passage. Jacob (*he grasps the heel / he deceives*) is given the name Israel (*he struggles with God*). **What does the man mean when he says "... you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."**



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The man is pointing to Jacob's perseverance. Despite a lengthy, late-night contest and a dislocated hip, Jacob wouldn't give up. Previously he had worked 14 years for the woman he loved ([Genesis 29:18-28](#)). Whatever his faults, Jacob couldn't have been described as a quitter, and this is the reason the man gives for Jacob's new name.

6. Consider the following examples:

- A teenage boy is nicknamed 'Ace' by his football friends because he is such a good goal scorer
- At work a woman's colleagues start calling Maddie 'Muddly' because of some mistakes she has made
- Emma is appointed 'chairman' of her company

How would being given a new name or a new title affect how these people view themselves and behave?

7. What new names or new titles can you think of that are now yours by virtue of your faith in Jesus? How should these shape your view of yourself and how you behave?

Here are some you might consider:

- *Christian (disciple of Jesus)*
- *Saint (someone made holy)*
- *Disciple (apprentice)*
- *Brother / sister*
- *Friend of Jesus*
- *Servant of God*
- *Son / daughter*
- *Priest*
- *Ambassador*



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Pray

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Give thanks to God for your new identity, and pray for the grace and courage to be the person you are!