



Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus A Discipleship Journey

The OLD TESTAMENT- Their Story is Our Story
Jacob's Return from Exile- Genesis Chapters 28-33, Week 8

At the end of last week's story Jacob left the land of his father, Isaac, and was headed to his Uncle Laban's homeland. Esau, Jacob's brother, had threatened his life and Rebekah, Jacob's mother, wanted him to find a proper wife in the household of her brother, Laban. Jacob was obedient to God and to his parents and left. He had received both the birthright and blessing from his father, Isaac. Along the way, Jacob had a dream in which God came to him and promised that he would someday return to the land of his father, inherit this land, have many descendants and have God's blessing and protection.

Laban welcomed Jacob into his household but not as family, as a servant. Jacob fell in love with Laban's youngest daughter and Laban tricked him into marrying both of his daughters and being in service to Laban for 14 years as payment. Jacob remained in Laban's household for another 6 years working for livestock, building his wealth. Jacob was a skilled herdsman and Jacob's flocks prospered greatly, making Laban and his household jealous of him. Jacob began to fear that Laban would retaliate. God told Jacob to go back to the land of Isaac.

Now Jacob was between a rock and a hard place. He wanted to be obedient to God and go back, he also didn't want to stay in Laban's household and continue to be treated badly but he was afraid of how he might be treated by his brother when he returned. Even though he had received many blessings from God, he wasn't totally confident in God's plan to have him return.

Jacob and his family and livestock did leave for the land of Isaac. It was a long journey; some estimate 450 miles. He had 11 young children, 2 wives, 2 handmaids that had borne his children and many flocks. Travel was slow and Jacob had a lot of time to think about how the meeting with his brother would go. As the journey wore on Jacob's anxiety and frustration built. He imagined Esau and his army attacking and killing his family. He even went so far as to divide his family and livestock into 4 parts so that if Esau should attack, only part of the family and livestock would be destroyed. He sent many gifts ahead of him to his brother to pave the way. This anxiety and worry grew until the night before he was to meet his brother. That night when he laid down to sleep, he was visited by an angel. He insisted on fighting the angel for the entire night, even to the point of dislocating his hip. The physical release of the fight probably felt good but what he really wanted was the angel's blessing, God's reassurance that everything would be ok when he entered his father's land. In the end Jacob chose to trust God and received the blessing. Jacob entered the land of his father a changed man. He had a new trust in God and a new name, Israel. He was ready to trust in God and God's plan. Esau welcomed him warmly and Jacob settled his family near the spot he had had his first dream of God.

God promises us that He will be with us during the troubled times in our lives, yet we too get caught up in the "what if's". We let anxiety and fear and worry take the place of trusting in God. We have a lot of anxiety in modern life. We are afraid of many things. What if I lose my job? What if my spouse dies? What if my parents need help in their old age? How will I manage? God will help if we only ask. Talk to God about something that causes fear or anxiety in your life. Spend some time listening for God's response.

