

# GENESIS 28–33

## Introduction

This portion of the “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers Genesis chapters 28–33. LDS “Come Follow Me” studies give new [\*thoughts to keep\*](#) in mind for the month of March.

[You can find the LDS outline of study and resources here.](#)

## LDS Study Focus

The LDS study guide focuses on the theme: “Surely the Lord Is in This Place.”

*Chapters 28 and 32 of Genesis tell of two spiritual experiences that the prophet Jacob had. Both happened in the wilderness but under very different circumstances. In the first experience, Jacob was traveling to his mother’s homeland to find a wife and, along the way, spent the night on a pillow of stones. He may not have expected to find the Lord in such a desolate place, but God revealed Himself to Jacob in a life-changing dream, and Jacob declared, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not” ([Genesis 28:16](#)).*

*Years later, Jacob found himself in the wilderness again. This time, he was on his way back to Canaan, facing a potentially deadly reunion with his angry brother, Esau. But Jacob knew that when he needed a blessing, he could seek the Lord, even in the wilderness (see [Genesis 32](#)). You may find yourself in your own wilderness seeking a blessing from God. Maybe your wilderness is a difficult family relationship, such as Jacob had. Maybe you feel distant from God or feel that you need a blessing. Sometimes the blessing comes unexpectedly; other times it is preceded by a wrestle. Whatever your need, you can discover that even in your wilderness, “the Lord is in this place.”*

## Biblical Focus

The LDS focus of “Surely the Lord is in this Place” starts off in the right direction but fails to arrive at the right destination. Indeed, much of Jacob’s story is about how the Lord was with him as he traveled far from his home and back again. However, unlike the LDS resources, which focus on Jacob persevering with God, the proper focus is on how God perseveres with and provides for Jacob.

Genesis 28–33, as is so much of the Book of Genesis, is really all about how God continues to work with and among sinful people and families to carry out his promises and purposes.

## **GENESIS 28**

### ***Jacob flees and has an incredible dream***

The consequences of Rebekah and Jacob's deceit soon set in. Jacob was sent away from everyone and everything he knew and on a long and lonely journey. This journey was just the beginning of a 20-year exile. All he had was the staff in his hand and the blessing from his father, Isaac. When he chose a rock for his pillow that night, how could his heart have been filled with anything but loneliness, fear, and despair?

God came to Jacob at the perfect moment in the perfect place. His sleep should have been a bit rocky, but God gives him peace through a beautiful vision. This dream was the first of seven appearances by God to Jacob. God developed and molded Jacob's trust in him with his promises.

The ladder or stairway is a significant part of the dream. Jesus explained the meaning of the ladder himself in [John 1:51](#), when he said, "Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending *on the Son of Man*."

Jesus is the ladder that connects God to man! He is our access to God!

It is deeply reassuring to know that Christ is the ladder. However, the ladder does not represent something that we must do to have access to God. Instead, Jesus provides everything for us! This remarkable story points us to Christ, who joins heaven and earth, God, and man, in himself.

LDS members do not know that Christ is the ladder. Instead, their ladder is the covenants they make with God and the commandments they believe they can eventually keep perfectly. Joseph Smith taught:

When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil [died] before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave. (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 268).

Salvation and life eternally with God don't happen because we have learned how to climb a religious ladder, but because Christ came down the ladder to do what we never could. Believers have the reassurance RIGHT NOW that everything that was necessary to do to bridge the gap between God and man has been accomplished.

In the dream, God gave Jacob **not the order** to climb rungs by keeping covenants and commandments, but instead, he provided him with four promises that reassured and prepared him for the coming trials of life.

- 1) Jacob would have numerous descendants.
- 2) All people would be blessed through him.
- 3) God was with him and would watch over him.
- 4) God would bring Jacob back to the promised land.

### Conversation Starters:

- Can you relate to the way Jacob must have felt before the dream? How do you think he felt after the dream? With what promises does God reassure us?
- How have Jacob's promises blessed you? Which of Jacob's promises are the same for us? How do they reassure us?

### Sharing Personally:

*In Genesis 28, Jacob is at a low point in his life. He is on the run for his life, alone and with no possessions. I love how God comforted him with powerful promises. Sometimes life circumstances, and even our own sins, make us feel alone, unblessed, and far from God. At these times, we can go back to the sure promises in the Bible. God promises to be with those who believe in him, and he gives believers every eternal blessing through Jesus.*

### Additional Resources:

For a deeper dive, read: [Mormonism's False Door to Heaven](#)



**God's Ladder by Christopher Powers**

## **GENESIS 29–30**

### ***Self-reliant Jacob***

In a sense, Jacob was in exile. He had traveled 500 miles to Haran, the former home of Abraham and Rebekah, to find a wife and hide from Esau. The meaning of Jacob is “supplant, one who seizes, circumvents, and usurps.” Jacob was a man who relied on himself. He had begun to experience the natural consequences of his self-reliance.

### ***Good old Uncle Laban***

Think back to the marriage contract between Abraham’s servant and Bethuel for Rebekah. Abraham sent an impressive dowry, and Rebekah’s brother, Laban, was right there to help his father’s family accept it. It must have seemed suspicious when Isaac’s son arrived looking for a wife empty-handed. However, since Jacob was in love with Rachel, it was not difficult for Laban to take advantage of the situation and get what he wanted and more in return for his daughter.

### ***Poor Leah***

Leah’s story presents a beautiful picture of God’s grace. Leah’s story is heartbreaking. She was a girl with so little value that her father had to trick someone into marrying her. The Hebrew phrase “weak eyes” is an idiom that can well be translated with the English expression “not easy on the eyes.” Even the name “Leah” held the unflattering meaning of “weary” or “cow.” If you track her relationship with Jacob, her marriage was only the beginning of her heartbreak and devaluation. She bore Jacob multiple sons and hoped with each child that her husband would notice her and love her. Would she ever be worth anything to anyone?

Now, go back and track God’s relationship with Leah. After Leah’s first three sons were born, she gave them names related to her misery. When her fourth son, Judah, was born, she proclaimed, “This time I will praise the LORD!” ([Genesis 29:35](#)) God gave Leah a precious gift! Through Leah’s child, Judah, the Savior of the world would come. This Savior would find Leah, and all of us, so infinitely valuable that he was willing to suffer and die. This Savior would cherish Leah, and us, so much that he would come back as a groom to take her, and us, his bride, to live in his love forever.

### **Polygamy/Plural Marriage**

Many heroes of the faith have multiple wives, including Abraham, Jacob, and King David. Although it might appear to be an excellent place to bring up the history of polygamy in the LDS church and show how each of these plural marriages resulted in family discord, this conversation will likely lead to a debate and not lead to an opportunity to proclaim Christ.

### **Jacob vs. Laban**

The relationship between Jacob and Laban became a cycle of greed, trickery, and subtle revenge. It was evident that Laban was trying to take advantage of Jacob. Still, it seemed that Jacob was trying to manipulate his wages at the expense of his relationship with Laban and Laban’s sons. Instead of manipulating the breeding of the flocks, he could have relied on God to bless him in other ways. Despite it all, God wanted to bless Jacob and allowed his wealth to increase.

## **Rachel**

Before the family ran away, Rachel stole her father Laban's household idols. Either she believed in these false gods, or culturally, she could use them to claim that Jacob was the designated heir of Laban's fortune. In this scene and later, when she is willing to sell sex with her husband, she is less than exemplary.

The LDS resources emphasize Jacob's marriage, and relationship with Rachel, highlighting the fact that a faithful spouse is necessary to enjoy the best of God's blessings in the exalted realm of the [celestial kingdom](#). As with the rest of the patriarchs, Rachel becomes an otherworldly example to follow. The LDS materials claim that Jacob was looking for a wife who "loved the Lord and kept his commandments" and "Rachel was a righteous woman." However, biblically, her character is lacking. She lies, steals, and conspires, just like the rest of her family.

### **Conversation Starters:**

- **The sources of Leah's identity change throughout her life. Name these sources and describe how they affected her. Which identities gave her strife, and which gave her joy?**
- **Does our society value a woman for her appearance? Does our society value a woman based on her marriage or how many children she has?**
- **How did Laban show he loved himself the most in these chapters? How did Jacob show he loved himself the most in these chapters?**
- **How did God use Jacob's family despite its extreme dysfunction?**
- **What did Rachel reveal about her faith when she stole her father's idols?**
- **Do you feel a bit uncomfortable knowing that God blessed Jacob and his family despite the greed, envy, and rivalry? (God's grace can be rather shocking.)**

### **Sharing Personally:**

*God's grace is sprinkled throughout Jacob's life in Genesis 29–31. Even though it took Jacob a long time to believe he could trust in God, God continued to keep his promises and bless him. Therefore, as I continually struggle with unhealthy self-reliance, knowing that God will not abandon me is a comfort. He will mold me and teach me throughout my whole life.*

**and**

*Like Leah in Genesis 29, I struggle to understand the source of my personal value and worth. Do I have worth because of my relationships? Marriage to the right spouse? The number of children I have? My achievements? My well-kept home? My potential?*

*No, I have great value in God's sight because Jesus has made me worthy.*

*As Jesus demonstrated during his ministry, God cares for those despised and distanced as Leah was. God gathers such people to himself. To him, I am precious. To him, I am lovely. Through faith in him, Jesus welcomes me into the family of God.*

### **Additional Resources**

Sally Lloyd Jones in *The Jesus Storybook Bible* captures the essence of God's relationship with Leah so well. Listen to the chapter ["The Girl Nobody Wanted."](#)

## **GENESIS 32**

### **Jacob's exile ends**

Jacob wore out his welcome in Laban's home. It was time to return to the land of his father, Isaac. This story bookends Jacob's exile from Canaan. He had left alone but now returns with four wives and twelve sons. He departed with only his staff in his hand and now is rich with cattle. He began his journey with a miraculous vision from God, and now he meets God again in a different way.

### **Jacob prepares to meet Esau**

If Jacob was anything, he was a man of strategy. Here his self-reliance comes to a head. He sends a gift ahead to Esau, hoping to appease him. When Esau sent back no answer, Jacob fearfully calculated how to preserve his life. He sent two more waves of gifts and split his family into two camps. Notice where Jacob was. In the back, behind all of it!

Realizing that he could not save himself, Jacob *finally* turned to God!

### **Jacob wrestles with God**

Many believers can say they have figuratively wrestled with God, but Jacob did so literally! Again, God met Jacob in an unexpected way. He condescended and became a man that was just a bit weaker than Jacob. God *allowed* Jacob to beat him in a wrestling match.

### **Another new name**

Any time God changed a name in the Bible, it came with great significance. Jacob would no longer go by the name "supplanter." Nor would he struggle to make his *own* name great. Instead, God gave him a new name, Israel: *One who struggles with God*. This description of Jacob's relationship with God would also be the name of God's future chosen nation. This future nation would also demonstrate many similar struggles between reliance on self and reliance on God.

LDS study resources emphasize Jacob's "perseverance with God" rather than on the one on *whom* his faith eventually rested.

*Jacob's name was changed to Israel, a name that means "he perseveres with God." Your patriarchal blessing declares your connection to one of the tribes of the house of Israel. Being a part of the house of Israel means that you have a covenant relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. It means that you are one who "perseveres with God" as you honor your covenants with Him.*

Jacob is not the hero of the story. The God who came down to Jacob is. Jacob often dishonored the Lord in what he did and said, yet God persevered with him and continued to bless him and draw him to himself.

### **Jacob meets Esau**

Finally, after a long, worrisome journey, multiple costly gifts, and a long night of wrestling, Jacob and Esau met. Jacob positions himself *in front* of his family now. He bowed down in humility before his brother and seemed ready to accept anything that happened next.

Miraculously, twenty years of resentment and anger melted away. Esau forgave his brother and welcomed him home.

**Conversation Starter:**

- **Can you see how self-reliance can hurt others? Who was hurt by Jacob? In what ways can you relate to the struggle of self-reliance or relate to being a victim of another's?**
- **How did God allow Jacob to come to the end of himself?**
- **Why do you think God chose to wrestle with Jacob instead of a nice, calm face-to-face conversation?**
- **Why do you think God changed Jacob's name?**
- **Jacob struggled to turn from self-reliance to trusting in God. In what ways does God teach us to rely on him?**

**Sharing Personally:**

*At first, it bothers me in Genesis 32 that God became weak enough to let Jacob win their "wrestling match." Then I consider how God condescended to become a floating fetus, a wobbling baby, a TEENAGER, and then a man despised by many. This man, willing to lose so Jacob could gain, was also beaten and defeated by humanity on the cross. Because God condescends, I am glorified.*

*Additionally, the fact that God did not change Jacob's name to something like "peace or compliance with God" highlights God's love for Jacob as he was, not for who he was becoming or would eventually be. It is comforting to know I can safely struggle in my faith, and God will meet me and fight with me. He patiently teaches me that I can give up relying on myself for my salvation and a place with my Heavenly Father forever because I can depend entirely on him.*