

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 19, Jacob Wrestles with God and Meets Esau (Gen. 32-33) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathews, Genesis, Session 19, Jacob Wrestles with God and Meets Esau (Gen. 32-33), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture analyzes Genesis 32-33, focusing on **Jacob's spiritual journey**. The lecture explores Jacob's wrestling match with God, resulting in a name change from Jacob to Israel, symbolizing his **transformation from deceiver to one who struggles with God**. The narrative then examines Jacob's reconciliation with Esau, highlighting the **parallel between his encounter with God and his improved relationship with his brother**. Mathews emphasizes the **themes of struggle, repentance, and God's covenant faithfulness** throughout Jacob's experiences. The lecture concludes by connecting Jacob's story with the broader narrative of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants.

2. 10 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 19 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).



**Mathews_Genesis_
Session 19.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 19, Jacob Wrestles with God and Meets Esau (Gen. 32-33)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' Session 19 on Genesis 32-33:

Briefing Document: Genesis 32-33 - Jacob Wrestles with God and Meets Esau

Overall Theme: The central theme of Genesis 32-33, as presented by Dr. Mathews, is Jacob's transformative encounter with God, which is essential for his successful reconciliation with his brother Esau and his return to the promised land. This passage highlights that true transformation involves wrestling with God, humbling oneself, and depending on divine grace rather than personal manipulation.

Key Ideas and Facts:

1. Crisis and Transformation:

- Dr. Mathews emphasizes that each patriarch (Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph) experiences a crisis that leads to spiritual growth and a confirmation of their faith. For Jacob, the crisis is his impending meeting with Esau, whom he had previously wronged.
- Jacob's struggle is not just with external forces (Laban or Esau) but also with his internal need to depend on God. This internal struggle is represented by his wrestling with God. "The most profound struggle that Jacob has, is not with Esau, it's not with Laban, it's the struggle he has with God."

1. Jacob's Return and the Land of Promise:

- After 20 years in exile, Jacob is returning to Canaan, the land of promise. This return is a key point of tension in the narrative.
- The meeting with Esau is a major obstacle and Jacob recognizes that he needs God's blessing to face this challenge.

1. Wrestling with God (Genesis 32:22-32):

- Jacob wrestles with an unnamed "man," who is later identified by Hosea as an angel and who is ultimately a manifestation of God. "This will prove to be his wrestling with God."

- The location of this struggle is named Peniel, meaning "the face of God," echoing Jacob's earlier experience at Bethel, "the house of God." "Jacob called the place Peniel...it is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."
- This struggle is not about physical strength but about Jacob's dependence on God.
- The wrestling match is ambiguous - both God and Jacob prevail, highlighting the mystery and hiddenness of God.
- Jacob's hip is dislocated during the encounter, acting as a physical marker of his experience and transformation. This physical marker impacts the traditions of Israel in regards to not eating the tendon attached to the socket of the hip.
- Jacob refuses to release his wrestling partner until he receives a blessing. "Jacob replied I will not let you go unless you bless me."

1. **Name Change: Jacob to Israel:**

- During the struggle, Jacob's name is changed to Israel, signifying a change in his character.
- "Jacob" means "he grasps the heel" or "deceiver," while "Israel" means "he struggles with God." "And when it comes to Israel, the intruder calls him Israel, which means he struggles, he wrestles, he struggles with God."
- This name change indicates that Jacob's identity is now defined by his relationship with God.

1. **Messengers and Two Camps (Genesis 32:1-21):**

- Jacob encounters "angels of God" as messengers upon his return. "On his way home, homeward, he was met by angels of God."
- He names the place Mahanaim, meaning "two camps," and divides his people and flocks into two groups. There is a parallel between the spiritual realm and the terrestrial realm, God's camp and his own camps.
- He sends messengers ahead to Esau, referring to himself as "your servant Jacob," a possible act of repentance.

1. **Jacob's Gifts to Esau:**

- Jacob sends wave after wave of gifts to Esau, an attempt to "pacify" his brother, to create reconciliation.

- Dr. Mathews explores different interpretations of this action: manipulation, wisdom, and repentance. He leans towards repentance, viewing it as a genuine act of humility.
- The word for gift in Hebrew (menhah) sounds similar to the word for two camps (mehanim), drawing a parallel between God's presence, the celestial and spiritual, and Jacob's gifts, the terrestrial and concrete. This also suggests that these gifts might also be considered offerings.

1. **Meeting with Esau (Genesis 33:1-16):**

- Jacob divides his family before meeting Esau, placing Rachel and Joseph at the rear. He bows down seven times, an act of humility.
- Esau runs to meet Jacob with great affection, embracing and kissing him, marking a dramatic shift in his attitude. "Esau ran. Now, notice that Esau ran. He was so excited to see his brother."
- Esau states that he already has plenty and doesn't need the gifts, expressing a restored sense of kinship.
- Jacob acknowledges that God has "graciously given" him his family, recognizing divine favor.
- Jacob's language when referring to Esau as "my Lord" is seen as a pattern of humility and repentance rather than a manipulative ploy.
- Esau offers to accompany Jacob, but Jacob declines due to the slower pace of the herds and children. He desires favor from Esau and not protection.

1. **Settlement and Worship (Genesis 33:17-20):**

- Jacob builds shelters for his livestock at Sukkoth and then travels to Shechem.
- He establishes an altar and names it "El Elohe Israel," meaning "God, the God of Israel," linking God's identity with Jacob's new name. This is seen as a defining moment for the identity of the nation of Israel.

1. **Theological Significance:**

- The passage reveals the tension between God's hiddenness and his desire to be known, seen through his various manifestations.
- God's plan for Jacob's life and the future nation of Israel is in motion despite Jacob's past mistakes. God is at work in the lives of both Esau and Jacob.

- The passage emphasizes that true transformation comes through dependence on God, rather than manipulation or self-effort. It illustrates the importance of repentance, humility, and seeking God's blessing.

Key Quotes:

- "The most profound struggle that Jacob has, is not with Esau, it's not with Laban, it's the struggle he has with God."
- "Jacob called the place Peniel...it is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."
- "And when it comes to Israel, the intruder calls him Israel, which means he struggles, he wrestles, he struggles with God."
- "Jacob replied I will not let you go unless you bless me."
- "Esau ran. Now, notice that Esau ran. He was so excited to see his brother."

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathews interprets Genesis 32-33 as a critical turning point in Jacob's life. It is through wrestling with God and seeking His blessing, not by manipulation or scheming, that Jacob is able to successfully return to the land of promise and experience reconciliation with Esau. The name change from Jacob to Israel symbolizes this transformation, highlighting the importance of wrestling with God for a deep, personal relationship. This passage is not just about Jacob, but about the spiritual identity of the future nation of Israel, founded on their collective struggle with God and dependence on His grace.

4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 19, Jacob Wrestles with God and Meets Esau (Gen. 32-33)

Genesis 32-33: Jacob Wrestles with God and Meets Esau Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the central crisis that Jacob faces in Genesis 32-33?
2. What does the name "Peniel" mean, and why is it significant in Jacob's story?
3. How does the text suggest that the "man" Jacob wrestled with was more than just a human?
4. How does Jacob's language when addressing Esau change compared to his past interactions?
5. Why does Jacob divide his family and possessions into separate groups before encountering Esau?
6. How does the meaning of Jacob's name change to reflect his new identity as "Israel"?
7. What is the significance of the gifts Jacob sends ahead to Esau, and what are some different ways to interpret that action?
8. How does the encounter between Jacob and Esau demonstrate that both men have changed?
9. What lasting physical reminder did Jacob receive from his wrestling match with the "man"?
10. What does the naming of the altar as "El Elohe Israel" signify about the relationship between God and Jacob/Israel?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The central crisis Jacob faces is the imminent encounter with his brother Esau, who had previously threatened to kill him, forcing Jacob to confront his past actions and the possibility of violence. The crisis also necessitates that he come to terms with his need to depend on God.

2. "Peniel" means "the face of God." It is significant because it's the place where Jacob wrestles with God and experiences a direct encounter, marking a spiritual transformation in his life.
3. The text suggests the "man" is more than human through several indicators: Jacob calls the place Peniel after seeing God face-to-face; the wrestling causes a permanent physical injury with just a touch; and Hosea identifies the man as an angel.
4. Jacob uses language like "my master" and "your servant" when addressing Esau, a significant change from his earlier manipulative and deceitful behavior, showing humility and repentance.
5. Jacob divides his family and possessions into separate groups as a strategic attempt to ensure at least some of them would survive should Esau attack, revealing his fear and a shift toward dependence on God rather than on manipulation.
6. Jacob's name, meaning "he grasps the heel" or "deceiver," is changed to Israel, meaning "he struggles/wrestles with God," which symbolizes his spiritual transformation from a trickster to one who has personally wrestled with and sought blessing from God.
7. The gifts can be interpreted as attempts to appease Esau, an act of wisdom according to the Proverbs, or as genuine expressions of repentance for his past deceit, alluding to the idea of atonement or reconciliation and demonstrating a change in Jacob's heart.
8. The encounter reveals that both men have been transformed: Jacob has become humble and repentant while Esau has shifted from wanting revenge to embracing his brother, highlighting God's work in both their lives.
9. Jacob received a permanent limp from his hip being wrenched in the wrestling match, serving as a constant physical reminder of his encounter with God and his dependence on the Lord.
10. The altar's name, "El Elohe Israel," meaning "God, the God of Israel," signifies the unique covenant relationship between God and Jacob (now Israel), highlighting God's specific and personal connection to this family and their future as a nation.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the significance of the wrestling match in Genesis 32, considering the identity of Jacob's opponent, the physical and spiritual implications, and the impact on Jacob's identity as Israel.
2. Compare and contrast Jacob's actions and motivations before and after his encounter with God at Peniel, using specific examples from Genesis 32 and 33.
3. Explore the theme of reconciliation in the meeting between Jacob and Esau, considering the various factors that contribute to their eventual reconciliation.
4. Discuss how the author of Genesis utilizes literary devices such as wordplay, allusions, and irony to convey the themes and significance of Genesis 32-33.
5. Evaluate the extent to which Jacob's experiences in Genesis 32-33 represent a broader pattern of God's interactions with the patriarchs in the book of Genesis.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Peniel:** The name Jacob gives to the place where he wrestles with God, meaning "the face of God."
- **Beth El:** The name Jacob gives to the place where he experiences his dream of the ladder and the angels, meaning "house of God."
- **Israel:** The new name given to Jacob after wrestling with God, meaning "he struggles with God," signifying a change in his identity.
- **Jacob:** The name of the younger twin brother who wrestles with God and whose name means "he grasps the heel" or "deceiver".
- **Esau:** The elder twin brother of Jacob, who initially seeks revenge on Jacob.
- **Mahanaim:** The place Jacob names "two camps," where he encountered angels before meeting Esau, symbolizing a dual presence, divine and earthly.
- **Jabbok:** A river that Jacob crosses, its name similar to "Jacob" and "wrestle" in Hebrew.
- **Menhah:** A word for "gift" and also "offering" that was used to describe Jacob's animals and offerings to Esau.

- **Sukkoth:** A place that means "booths" and where Jacob built shelters for his livestock.
- **Shechem:** A city in Canaan where Jacob resides and where the rape of Dinah occurs later in the narrative.
- **El Elohe Israel:** The name Jacob gives to the altar he sets up, meaning "God, the God of Israel," signifying God's covenant relationship with Jacob and his descendants.
- **Covenant:** A formal agreement or promise between God and his people, exemplified in the relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob.
- **Wrestle:** A symbolic struggle, here referencing Jacob's physical and spiritual contest with God.
- **Reconciliation:** The restoration of friendly relations, particularly in the context of Jacob and Esau.
- **Atonement:** The act of making amends or reparation for a wrong or injury.
- **Repentance:** Turning away from past behavior and towards the Lord, characterized by humility and changed actions.
- **Favor:** A state of being accepted and well-received, used in the text regarding Jacob and Esau's interactions.

5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 19, Jacob Wrestles with God and Meets Esau (Gen. 32-33), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Genesis 32-33: Jacob Wrestles with God and Meets Esau

1. **What is the central crisis Jacob faces in Genesis 32-33, and how does it connect to his spiritual journey?** The central crisis for Jacob is his impending encounter with his brother Esau, who had previously vowed to kill him. This meeting forces Jacob to confront his past actions and his need for God's blessing before he can return to the promised land. This crisis is a pivotal point in his spiritual journey, compelling him to depend on God instead of his own manipulative schemes.
2. **Why does Jacob wrestle with a mysterious "man" at Peniel, and who is this "man"?** Jacob wrestles with an unnamed antagonist, who is ultimately identified as a manifestation of God. This wrestling match is a profound spiritual struggle where Jacob grapples with his dependence on God and his own shortcomings. The "man" is also referred to as an angel in Hosea and is understood as a form of God manifesting himself. The struggle is not only physical but symbolic of Jacob's inner struggle and need for God's favor.
3. **What is the significance of the name change from Jacob to Israel, and what does it represent about his transformation?** The name change signifies a profound transformation in Jacob's character. Jacob, meaning "he grasps the heel" or "deceiver," represents his past manipulative nature. Israel, meaning "he struggles with God," represents his new identity as one who is willing to wrestle with God and depend on Him, symbolizing his humility and reliance on divine blessing. This name change is a marker of his spiritual growth and identifies the character of his descendants.
4. **How does Jacob's approach to Esau before their reunion reflect a change in his character, and what strategies does he use?** Jacob's approach to Esau is marked by humility and repentance. He repeatedly refers to himself as Esau's servant and sends waves of gifts ahead of him. While some might see these gifts as manipulative, they can also be interpreted as an expression of repentance, as recognition of Esau's authority, and a genuine attempt to reconcile with his brother. This approach demonstrates his willingness to lay down his pride.

5. **What is the parallel between Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel and his meeting with Esau in Genesis 33?** There's a direct parallel between Jacob's wrestling with God and his encounter with Esau. In his wrestling, Jacob names the place Peniel, "the face of God," because he saw God face to face and his life was spared. Then, when he meets Esau, he tells him that to see his face is like seeing the face of God. This connection underscores that Jacob's favorable meeting with Esau was a direct result of God's presence, blessing, and plan working in his life. This connection ties God's favor to the reconciliation.
6. **How does the author use wordplay and literary devices to enhance the meaning of Genesis 32-33?** The author uses various literary devices, such as wordplay (Peniel/face of God, gift/offering, Jacob/Jabbok), allusions (Bethel, messengers/angels), and ironies (Jacob sending gifts to Esau) to highlight key themes. This use of language underscores the interconnectedness of divine presence, the reconciliation of brothers, and the spiritual growth of Jacob. The ambiguity about who prevails in the wrestling match, or who is blessing whom, highlights the mystery of God and his relationship with humanity.
7. **What is the significance of the messengers and gifts that Jacob sends to Esau, and how do they relate to the themes of repentance and reconciliation?** The messengers and gifts are essential in the narrative as they signal Jacob's sincere efforts to reconcile with Esau. The repetition of "your servant Jacob" in the message reflects humility, while the multiple gifts aim to demonstrate his repentance for past actions. The gifts are intended to "pacify" or "atone" for his past wrongdoings, mirroring the concept of atonement for sins.
8. **What are the long term spiritual implications of Jacob's transformation?** Jacob's transformation and his name change to Israel are foundational for the identity of the nation of Israel. His encounter at Peniel is meant to resonate with all those who would be connected to the people of Israel. It shows the importance of struggling with and depending on God, seeking his blessing, and demonstrating loyalty to him. The tradition of not eating the tendon connected to the socket of the hip serves as a reminder of this pivotal encounter, linking his story to the spiritual identity of his descendants.