



**Christ Church teaching series**  
**September –November 2013**  
**Journeys with Abraham, Jacob and Joseph**

I like the idea of life being like a journey. Journeys have a beginning, often a challenging middle bit which is made worthwhile by what we know is at the end of it. Last June we made the 400 mile journey by car from Sheffield to Aviemore. I love planning journeys with maps and routes and mileages. I like setting off after all the packing and domestic preparations. It's the middle of the journey when we got stuck in a jam on the outskirts of Newcastle which I found difficult. Another challenge was handing keys to my daughter Heather who boldly drove us up the A1 in heavy traffic, I had to learn that my 'little girl' was a competent and safe driver. Journeys are often best done with others. On the journey there was lots to see and marvel at, the beauty of the Northumberland coast, the Firth of Forth opening out before us and the beauty of a stop in Edinburgh. But it was good to get to our destination and to meet up with all our family.

So, life is like a journey. The excitement of the beginning— how many times were we told in July—it's a royal baby boy!. Then the middle bit of the journey which is often the most taxing when the destination is still over the horizon and the travelling may be very tough and for a Christian the destination – Heaven– an eternity in God's presence is always there as an incentive for holy living.

Our series is about journeys as we follow Abram, setting out from a settled life at the age of 75 to a place which God would show him. It is a journey marked with worship, wrong turnings, decisions with huge historic consequences, and a willingness to trust even when the God's promises seemed to have no possibility of coming to pass.

Abram's son Isaac has twin boys, Jacob and Esau. We follow the journey of this broken family—one of the sub-plots of the series is that God uses a damaged and divided family— a disastrous split, followed by Jacob running away for his life to find greener pastures; Then the 20 year period when God chisels away at Jacob's character before finally delivering healing, repentance and forgiveness.

Our third and last journey is that of Jacob's youngest son, Joseph. The same family favouritisms rear up again and Joseph narrowly escapes being murdered by his jealous brothers. He is sold into slavery, languishes in prison before being elevated to a favoured position next to Pharaoh. God then delivers his brothers into his hands and this is a chance for healing and forgiveness.



In 2005 fighting in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo separated the Mbodi family. The father, Alpha, fled to the UK with his sons Junior and Aime. Upinga Mbodi was not able to reach her family so she fled eastwards to Tanzania with their two year old daughter Gloria.

Alpha and the boys came to Sheffield where Alpha applied for asylum. Financially things were very difficult. Alpha was trying to support the boys and also send money back to Tanzania to support his wife and daughter.

In 2008 a desperate Alpha obtained work illegally and was arrested and sent to HMP Doncaster for six months. The boys, now in their mid-teens, were cared for by their church pastor and his family.

Things seemed to be completely hopeless for this split family. Alpha joined the chapel community at HMP Doncaster where he quickly displayed his faith in gathering a group of Africans together for worship and prayer and spiritual encouragement. Alpha kept trusting in God's provision. He was an extraordinary example of faith, he realised that he had tried to short-cut God's solution by illegally working. We decided to continue to support Alpha and his family on release in 2009. Almost

immediately Alpha was given leave to stay in the UK and to work. Something that was almost unheard of. We began to raise money to bring Upinga and Gloria over the UK. The process was to take three years and eventually cost £5000. But eventually after many ups and downs Upinga and Gloria finally landed at Manchester airport in March last year, seven years after the family were split up. Alpha says now that if he hadn't gone into prison it is likely that the family would still be living apart. In the last year, Aime and Junior have received their UK citizenship, Aime is now studying at Manchester University and Alpha works at the Northern General Hospital. Gloria, a lively ten year old is integrated into her local school.



## *So who wrote Genesis? Here is an extract from the illustrated Bible Dictionary*

### *Moses as author?*

The education that Moses received at pharaoh's court would have enabled him to read and write (Ex. 24:4; Dt. 31:9, etc.), and he would obviously be anxious to preserve the records that had come down. This means that Moses was not so much the author as the editor and compiler of Genesis. Family records had been handed down either orally or in written form, and Moses brought these together, editing and translating where necessary. The creation story in Gn. 1 may have been received as a direct revelation from God, since Moses certainly had the experience of immediate contact with God (e.g. Ex. 33:11; Dt. 34:10). Accordingly, we may legitimately look for documents or for orally transmitted stories in Genesis, and, if we use some recent terminology, we may speak of Moses as the one who faithfully *set down what had* come to him from past generations.

If we allow for a few later 'foot-notes' added by copyists up to the time of the Monarchy to explain points for contemporary readers (e.g. 12:6; 13:7; 14:17, and parts of 36:9-43), there is nothing that need be dated after the time of Moses. While the proper interpretation of Ex. 6:3 does not exclude some use of the name Yahweh in Genesis, it would be perfectly understandable if Moses sometimes substituted the covenant name of his own day for the covenant name 'El Shaddai (God Almighty) of patriarchal times, in order to remind his readers that this was the same God as the God of Sinai.

### *b. The J P E writers*

There is no one theory here that commands general acceptance. Since the 18th century, scholars have looked for various

'documents' in the Pentateuch. These for Genesis are J (which uses Yahweh for the divine name), E (which uses Elohim for the divine name) and P (which is concerned chiefly with religious matters). Early forms of this theory were extremely radical and denied historicity to a great deal in Genesis. More recently it has been argued that the 'documents' grew by the collection of ancient material until they reached their final shape; J in about the 10th or 9th BC, E a little later and P in P' exilic times. Historical accuracy is not necessarily denied in the more modern forms of this theory.

More recently the 'documentary theory has been abandoned by some who deny that formal documents ever existed. Scholars of this school speak of 'cycles of tradition which grew up in various areas chiefly with a religious interest Ex. 1-12 is quoted as a 'cycle of tradition' that has the Passover event as its focal point. Some later editors collected these materials and cast them into present shape. For the most part the material was in oral form; before collection. Again there is no necessary denial of historical accuracy This' history' school thinks in terms of the development of the traditions around central events which had significance for the religious Israel and found expression in their religious rituals and liturgies.

The exact origin of Genesis something of a mystery

Before we start this journey through the eyes of Abram, his son and grandsons I would like to encourage you to take a look at your life's journey. It is good to stop and look back, and take stock in the present. It is also good to look forward to the promise of eternity which God holds out to everyone who trusts in Him. Please keep this little booklet safe, and use it as we follow in the footsteps of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph.

## **My journey**

### **Reflect on your early life.**

What good memories do you have? Bad ones?

Are there any things you need prayer for?

Can you remember when you gave your life to Christ?

Maybe you would like to make that start if you have not already done this.

### **Reflect on the middle part of your journey.**

What do you find tough about it?

What fuel do you use to keep going?

Are there decisions you need to make about the direction of the journey?

### **Reflect on the end of your journey**

Are you confident that God has a place for you in Heaven?

How often do you think about Heaven?

## 1st September The Call of Abram

Genesis 11 vs 30 to chapter 12 verses 1– 9 Mark 1 vs 14– 20

*Prayer point: Lord, open my eyes, ears and heart to your call. Help me to know your way*

The story usually starts at chapter 12 verse 1 with God calling Abram to leave his country and his father's house to go to a land which God was going to show him.

This is only part of the story.

It is a story of migration, a story which we are familiar with at Christ Church; Men and women having to leave their homeland in search of better opportunities else where. The story starts in Ur which is near to the modern Iraqi city of Basra in Southern Iraq. Terah, Abram's father takes his family on a long journey of 800 miles along the Euphrates river to Haran which is on the borders of Syria today. (See map on page 14)

Terah dies there at the ripe old age of 205. By now Abram is 75. Haran seems a good place to settle, but God has other ideas. Abraham has to 'let the dead bury the dead'.

### Your journey:

Have there been times when God has told you to leave comfort and traditions behind and follow him?

Is God calling you to move on with him at the moment?

To offer yourself for his service? Read 1 Corinthians 12 vs 7 – 11.

As at Bethel, Jacob is *alone again, naturally*. Deprived of the security of family and possessions, he faces another dark night. And guess who shows up? A *Stranger in the night* (and it's not Frank Sinatra). He's wearing boxing gloves! This is going to be a frightful, painful night. At Bethel, we meet the God who *comforts* us. At Peniel, we meet the God who *confronts* us. Why? Because the greatest obstacle on the way home, and the greatest threat to the covenant of transformation, is not Esau but Jacob. The natural man Jacob must give way to the spiritual man Israel. That's why God confronts us. It happens at Peniel, in the *face of God*. (Peniel means *face of God*.)

Jacob brought the Stranger to a draw and imposed on him a demand: "I won't let you go unless you bless me." From the womb to the tomb, Jacob orients his entire around this covenant *blessing*. He doesn't fully understand it. But he clings to it (and now to the Giver) with all his might, "I won't let you go unless you bless me." And God blessed him in the strangest of ways; a dislocated hip (a *new walk*, Gen. 32:25, 31); a changed name (a *new identity*, v. 28); and a beautiful sunrise (a *new day*, v. 31). The blessing is transformation.

### A New Walk

"He struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him" (Gen. 32:25). For the rest of his life the patriarch limps along with a staff. The point is subtle but striking. God wounds Jacob – to *heal him*. It's the wound of God that heals the heart. When he finally returns to Bethel to realize the promise of transformation, he doesn't strut in like Sylvester Stallone. He lumbers in with a limp. Like Moses after 40 years in the desert. Like Naomi after exile and bereavement. Like Joseph after the pit and the prison. Like Jesus on the cross. Like Saul blind in Damascus. Like so many others in the Bible and history. Blessed are the broken for they shall inherit the blessing. Nobody struts into the kingdom. We limp. Is it time to change our walk?

**A New Name** Like many today, Jacob goes about his life in a way that offends others. He fought with Esau in the womb (Gen. 25:22). He bartered for the birthright with a bowl of beans. He deceived his aged father for the blessing. He offended his father-in-law Laban. And now it all comes back to haunt him. But God confronts him to change him: "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel" (Gen.32:28). The point is again subtle but striking. *Jacob* cannot return to the awesome place. Only *Israel* can. *Jacob* cannot reconcile with Esau, only *Israel* can. *Jacob* cannot become a great nation and a blessing to all peoples. Only *Israel* can. *Jacob the heel* must become God's *Israel* in order to *heal* God's broken world. And so must we. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Is it time to change your name (identity)?

**Jerusalem** does not lie on any important trade routes nor is there any natural reason why this city should be one of the most important places in the world for more than four thousand years. Jerusalem lies at the crest of a low range of hills which are a barrier to winter rains from the Mediterranean Sea which is only 30 miles to the West. Immediately to the East, annual rainfall drops nearly to zero in the Judean Wilderness. The elevation to the East also drops rapidly to the Dead Sea, falling to 1290 feet below sea level, in less than 15 miles as the crow flies.

Jerusalem's importance as a site chosen by God for His special purposes dates from the call of God to Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, in the city of Jebus, as recorded in Genesis 22. (This important event in the life of Abraham is known to the Jews as "the Akeda" or "the binding of Isaac.") East of Mt. Moriah a few hundred meters is the Mount of Olives which is about 100 meters higher than the high points of Mt. Zion or Mt. Moriah. Jesus ascended to heaven from the summit of the Mt. of Olives according to Acts 1:1-12 and will make his triumphant return to earth from the same location, according to Zechariah 14:4. At the Western base of the Mount of Olives just above the Kidron Brook is the Garden of Gethsamene. This was not only the place of Jesus' arrest and final prayers, it was a popular spot where he and his disciples often met and slept.

There is some archaeological evidence to suppose that the place of the crucifixion of Jesus was at the summit of Mt. Moriah, probably near the present-day Damascus Gate and the Garden Tomb which would of course be a literal fulfillment of Abraham's offering of Isaac when God said, "On the mount of the Lord it [the final offering for sin] will be provided."

## 8th September Wrong turnings

Genesis 12 vs 10 to Chapter 13 verse 4      John 21 vs 15—19

We can't be sure but Abram and his family may have had to move from Ur to Haran because of famine. It seems to be something which had happened and still happens in that part of the world.

At the beginning of today's reading there is no food. History seems to be repeating itself. Egypt is a place where there is always food, the Nile river even in the driest of seasons irrigates crops.

In the time of need Abram does the obvious thing and goes to Egypt.

Egypt stands for the place of disobedience. It is not 'the land that God wanted to show him'.

Abram leaves Bethel — the house of God— and goes south to Egypt.

He has to live a lie. This lie causes disaster for those around Abram who have shown him kindness.

Even after leaving Egypt Abram wanders around the southern desert with all the wealth he has accumulated.

13 verse 3 Finally he goes north back to Bethel where he worships God. (Notice that in Egypt there is no mention of worship)

### Your journey

Think back to the promises God made you when you first followed him

Have you strayed from these?

Where or what is your Egypt?

## 15th September Walking with promise

Genesis 18 verses 1–15 and 21 vs 1–7 Luke 1 vs 26–38

In Genesis 15 verse 4 Abram has a conversation with God where God promises him a son and as many descendants as the stars in the sky.

Verse 6 says that Abram believed God and the Lord was pleased with him. This is a key verse in the Bible. (Read Romans chapter 4 verses 16–25)

This part of Abram's journey is the faith walk. walking through life with God's promise.

But you cannot short-cut the promises. In chapter 16, Abram has still not had a son, he is now in his 80s, it is ten years since the promise of a son was given to him. Time is moving on. Memories fade.

Sarai comes up with a solution, she gives Abram her slave-girl Hagar. Hagar has a son Ishmael.

This short-cut leads to consequences which are still with us today. (Islam traces its roots back to Abram through Ishmael). In the short-term it leads to bitterness within Abram's family, something that will re-appear in the next generations.

Another ten years pass, Abram is now 98. Chapter 17. God appears to Abram again and changes his name to Abraham, the Father of many generations. God reaffirms his promise of a son, it is 25 years since Abraham first heard the promise.

Chapter 18 and chapter 21 have the story of how the birth took place.

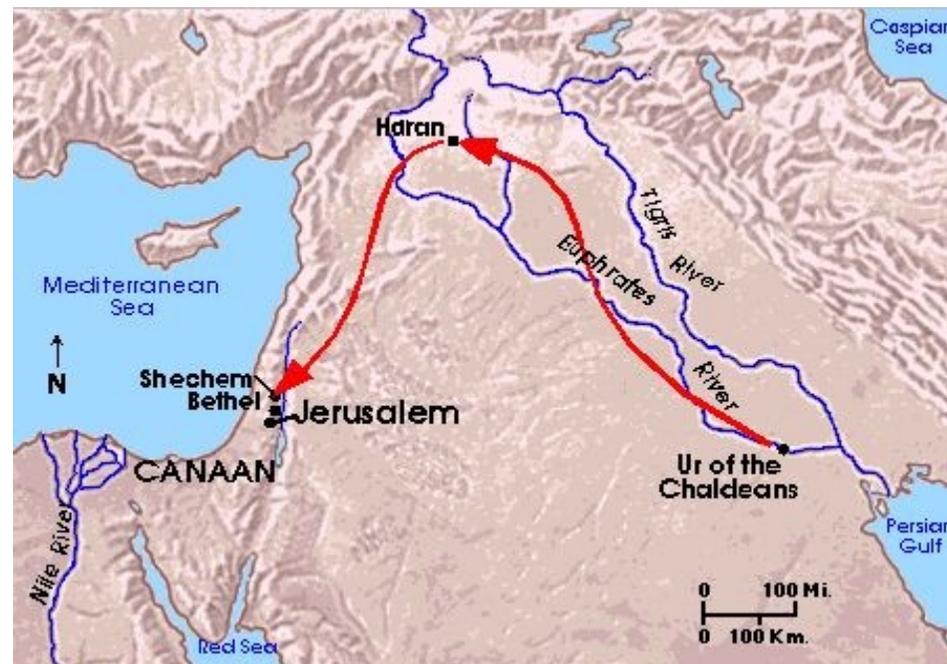
### Your journey

As you reflect on Abraham's journey is there something for which you have waited for many years?

An unanswered prayer perhaps?

Take some time to reflect on this. Reaffirm your commitment to the Lord.

## Extra resources to accompany our Journey material



Abram's journeys from southern Iraq to northern Syria and down to Canaan



Abram left a sophisticated society with all the 'mod cons' to go and wander across the desert in obedience to God's call

## 24th November God goes in front of us on our journey

Genesis 45 vs 1—11 John 6 vs 60 –69

The Pharaoh takes Joseph's advice, and turned Egypt into a grain super-store with Joseph in charge. 41 vs 37 –57

A famine spreads across the Middle East and back in Canaan Jacob and his family hear that there is grain in Egypt. Chapter 42, 43

Read the story of Joseph's meeting with his brothers, chapter 44.

In chapter 45 there is a beautiful scene.

Joseph can't control himself any longer. He introduces himself to his brothers who are dumb-struck. 45 verse 4 –8. "It was not you who sent me here, but God"

How can Joseph say this? Why is he not set on revenge? How can he take a forgiving view of what his brothers did to him.

It is a picture of a man given over to God's ways. So, betrayal, hatred, imprisonment, and false accusations pale into insignificance in the light of God's overarching purposes.

### **"God sent me before you to preserve us."**

Paul wrote, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him". He added that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God. Romans 8 vs 28 and verse 39.

### **Your journey**

Look back over the past weeks as we have journeyed with Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. What has God been speaking to you about?

Write down one action you need to take as the next step.....

## 22nd September The way of sacrifice

Genesis 22 vs 1-14 Mark 8 vs 31—36

Testing is something that is very central to our lives. In heavy industry metals have to be rigorously tested. We take for granted that the necessary tests have been made on the roads which we drive on and the cars which we sit in. But God testing human beings? Isn't that unfair? It seems that it is a picture of God playing with his creation.

Peter writing to persecuted Christians says that their trials are to make their faith like "Gold that has been tested in the fire".

(1 Peter 1 vs 7)

### **So testing in the Bible is seen as something that makes faith stronger.**

At the end of chapter 21 Abraham has been living a long time as a foreigner in the land of the Philistines. Perhaps he had started to drift, certainly he was very rich and respected.

So God decides to test him. He asks him to do a very drastic thing. To go to Moriah (More reading on Page 15) and sacrifice his only son.

Abraham is obedient. Verse 4; On arriving at the mountain, he leaves his servants behind, and takes his son. He goes up right to the brink of obedience. (Hebrews 11 vs 17—18).

### **Your journey**

Is there a cherished thing that you put before your obedience to God? (Family, finances, hobby)

Is there something special that God is calling you to put to one side to follow him more closely?

## 29th September History repeats itself — Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25 vs 21—34 Luke 11 vs 1—13

We skip a generation to Isaac's children. He has married Rebekah, a girl from Haran. The couple remain childless for twenty years. Eventually Rebekah has twin sons, Jacob and Esau.

25 vs 27 The two boys are like chalk and cheese. Esau is the outdoor type, his father's favourite. Jacob, the trickier of the two, is more of a home person and is his mother's favourite.

The seeds of conflict are sown. Remember how Abraham's decision with Sarah and Hagar opened up splits a generation before.

Esau sells his rights as the first born son for some fast food cooked by Jacob.

25 vs 34-35. Esau marries badly and brings grief to his parents.

Chapter 27 is the final parting. Jacob, put up to it by his mother, tricks Esau out of his old Father's final blessing. It is a dirty trick pretending to the blind Isaac that he is the hairy Esau.

The result, 27 vs 41, is hatred. Esau vows to kill Jacob. Rebekah, forever the schemer, sends Jacob away to Haran until Esau's anger calms down.

The tragic result of Jacob's scheming is that he will never again see his father or mother alive.

### Your journey

Families can be places of happiness and growth but also of conflict. Reflect back over your family life. Thank God for the good parts.

If there are sad memories ask God for healing. Are there any practical steps you can take to start that healing?

## 17th November Journeys in imprisonment

Genesis 39 vs 19-23 chapter 41 vs 46—49 (Gospel 6 vs 46—49)

The young Joseph finds himself working for Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. The Lord is with Joseph and he prospers; through Joseph the whole of Potiphar's household is blessed.

Sometimes God blesses us through those who have suffered great difficulties. Christ Church is very blessed by those who have had to seek safety in this country and who worship and work with us.

Joseph is trusted with everything in the household. Joseph is again tested, this time with temptation in the shapely form of Mrs. Potiphar. She frames him and has him falsely imprisoned on a charge of rape.

Even in prison Joseph finds favour in God's eyes. 39 vs 21. Prison becomes the place where Joseph learns again about the steadfast love of God. Again he 'blossoms where he is planted', even in prison.

Chapter 40 tells the story of the baker and the butler who are imprisoned alongside Joseph. Each has a dream which Joseph interprets for them 40 vs 8

The interpretations of the dreams comes true, the baker is executed but the butler is set free. He instantly forgets about Joseph.

Another two years pass and then the Pharaoh has a dream. 41 vs 1

Vs 9 The Butler remembers Joseph who is called to the Pharaoh.

Joseph's answer, 41 vs 16, shows his faith. Remember he has been in prison for upwards of four years but he is still totally confident that his life is in God's hands.

### Your journey Read Alpha's story (page 18)

Reflect on the times when your life has gone through great difficulty and testing.

How did you react?

Were you conscious of God's steadfast love? Did you lose your faith?

(Further reading— Hebrews 12 verse 7—11)

### 3rd November Journeys of misery

Genesis 37 1—28 Gospel Luke 22 vs 47—54

Joseph, like his father Jacob (renamed Israel), has inherited the same self-confidence and arrogance which his father showed in his younger days. (37 vs 3). Joseph tells on his older brothers.

The same faults are still there in the family. In an echo of his parents' behaviour Jacob loves Joseph more than his other children and gives him a special coat. When the brothers see this they hate Joseph and will not speak to him.

Joseph makes this worse by telling his brothers about two dreams. Vs 6—9

This simmering hatred in the family causes the brothers to plan Joseph's murder. Vs 19 –20. They attack Joseph, strip him of his hated coat and throw him in a pit. They then sell him as a slave. They dip the coat in goat's blood and take it back to Jacob with the story that Joseph has been killed by a wild animal.

In an echo of Jacob's story it will be twenty years until the family is reunited.

#### My journey

CS Lewis wrote, "Pain is God's megaphone" Can you think of times of great difficulty when God has spoken to you through pain and suffering?

Look up 2 Corinthians 12 verse 7 –10 to read Paul's teaching on pain.

Sometimes surgery or chemotherapy is needed to remove infection from the body. Do you think that God does heart surgery? Are there areas in your life or in your family's life which need radical healing?

### 13th October Recognising God on the journey

Genesis 28 vs 10-22 Gospel John 1 vs 43—51

Jacob has to run for his life from his brother Esau.

On the first lonely night out from Beersheba on a five hundred mile journey on foot, Jacob stops and uses a large rock for a pillow.

*Poor decisions often lead to uncomfortable consequences.*

He has a dream where he sees a ladder with angels going up and down. As with Jacob's grand-father Abraham God promises him many descendants, and also that his family will be a blessing to all people.

God also promises that he will watch over him and will bring Jacob back to the land.

Vs 16 Jacob wakes up "The Lord is in this place and I didn't even know it" Jacob uses his rock pillow as an altar. He renames the place Bethel, the house of God.

Vs 20 Jacob make a deal with God. It is a solemn deal but you get the feeling that Jacob, forever the bargain hunter, is making a deal with God. God, **if** you do this.... You will be my God.

#### My journey

Have there been times when your eyes have been opened and you have seen God at work in a way you did not expect?

When have you made deals with God? Perhaps there have been times when your faith has depended on God working or not working in your life?

Lord, help, me not to grumble about circumstances but to see you at work in them

## 20th October Chiselled away by circumstances

Genesis 29 verse 15—28 chapter 29vs 31 to chapter 30 vs 2

This is a long story which runs from chapter 29 through chapter 31. *Take some time to read it.*

Jacob meets his match in more ways than one.

First the girl of his dreams but then the stuff of nightmares as his uncle Laban tricks him. Jacob thought he knew all about tricks, how mistaken he was.

Once again family splits emerge as the two women in Jacob's life struggle to dominate the family. It is a very human story (30 vs 1 ,2) Just like his grand-father, Jacob complicates things still further by getting involved with a slave girl.

Jacob tries to sort out the power struggle using his wits to do some surprisingly modern selective breeding (30 vs 31 -42). The result is that Laban gets the weak animals and Jacob the strong. He became very rich.

You can't help thinking that Jacob had become an unpleasant person. Jacob and his large family do a runner. God tells Jacob to go back to Beersheba. But once again Jacob does it in his way. They sneak away without telling Laban.

Laban chases them but eventually the two men make a binding agreement. Jacob sets up a pile of rocks and names the place, Galeed and Mizpah. The reminding place that God is watching over us. Jacob seems to be learning.....

### Your journey

Can you think of circumstances that have shown you up in a bad light?

What was God teaching you through them?

Is there something you need to put right?

Lord, break down my stubbornness in any way you can so I can follow you

## 27th October Wrestling with God and submitting

**Genesis 32 vs 22 to chapter 33 verse 4 Luke 22 vs 24—34**

Angels meet Jacob as he approaches the show-down with his brother Esau.(32 vs 1—2) A reminder of the angels at Bethel 20 years before. (see 13th October)

Jacob sends messengers ahead of him with a message of peace. They come back to tell Jacob that Esau is coming with 400 men. Jacob is afraid, 32 vs 7, so he divides his flocks and herds into two companies. This is the old Jacob. Then we see a new Jacob emerging vs 9 -11. A trusting Jacob, a less demanding Jacob, a man who is frightened and humbled. "I am not worthy of all the steadfast love that you have shown me", he prays.

Jacob has been brought to his knees by his journey. Yes, he has much wealth, a huge family, but he has finally learnt to be poor in spirit. Verse 13—21, but he still plans in a human way, hoping that a succession of gifts will make Esau better tempered.

Verse 24 It is time for God to step in. Jacob is alone, "and a man wrestled with him until the break of day".

Even an angel is unable to overcome Jacob's stubborn resistance, until he touches Jacob's hip and puts it out of joint.

(Read page 16 for more commentary on this story)

Jacob demands a blessing, and receives a new name, Israel. He goes out to meet Esau....

### My journey:

There is a stubborn part of us which will not surrender to God. Take a moment to think of those areas of your life which you hold back from God. Ask yourself the question: Do I ever say, 'God could never change that in me'? Or 'that's just me, its my character'?

Have there been times when you have wrestled with God?