

TITLE. WRESTLING WITH GOD TEXT. GENESIS 32

INTRODUCTION. Jacob is a major character in Old Testament history. Many fascinating things have happened to him prior to the incident we study today. And Jacob will have a few more interesting experiences in the years following. In order to better appreciate what happens in Gen. 32, here's a brief summary of Jacob's life so far.

Jacob was a twin. Born second, he arrived holding onto the heel of his brother Esau, so he was named grasper, deceiver. Jacob did use trickery and cheating to get ahead. As a young man, Jacob weasled Esau out of his birthright. Then with the help of his mom, Jacob deceived his dad into giving him the blessing that belonged to Esau. This forced Jacob to run, because Esau wanted him dead. Jacob eventually started his own dysfunctional family, having 12 children by four women, two of whom he married, and one he loved. He schemed to get ahead, relying on folk magic rather than God.

DISCUSSION. What are the most common fears we face in our society? When is fear a good thing and when is it a bad thing?

EXAMINATION. Vv.1-5 Jacob returns home with great anxiety, wondering if the intervening years had done anything to dampen Esau's desire for revenge. On the way, Jacob encounters angels, recognizing them as soldiers from God, an evidence of divine protection. He reacts by naming the place Mahanaim which means "double camp." This reflects Jacob's realization that he is not alone. There is another camp of God's angels alongside of his camp. It is with this reassurance that Jacob acts to contact his brother. What words in Jacob's message indicate deference and respect toward Esau?

Vv.6-8 News of Esau's approach with so many men ramps up Jacob's anxiety. Different Hebrew words are used to describe it: "Great fear" (translated "terrified" in Exodus 14:10. Read that verse to get a sense of Jacob's level of fear); "Distress" is a word used only 9 times in Scripture (see Judges 2:15). How do you feel about Jacob's strategy in response to his fear?

Vv.9-12 Whether or not Jacob's strategy was right or wrong, his prayer is a good one. It has something to teach us about how to pray when we are afraid.

- v.9—Connect God to his promises. Name some things God has promised us.
- v.10 —Admit your weakness and God's faithfulness.
- v.11—Identify your fears. Is there an indication of Jacob's honesty here?
- v.12—Repeat God's promises.

This is not a formula, but shows the intensity and direction my prayers should have when I am afraid.

Vv.13-23 What do you think of Jacob's attempt to pacify Esau?

Vv.24-26 Consider the significance that after 20 years of struggling to acquire and get ahead, everything Jacob had was on one side of the river and he was on the other. Utterly alone, Jacob begins to struggle with an unidentified man. The intense tussle lasted the night. Jacob was finally disabled by only a "slight touch" from the man, dislocating his hip. How is Jacob's demand for blessing one of the first clues to the stranger's identity?

Vv.27-29 Why is the question of Jacob's name is significant? (consider one of the tricks from his past, as well as the meaning of his name) Discuss the significance of the name change. What was it about this struggle that was different from the struggling Jacob had been doing his whole life?

Vv.30-33 Jacob is convinced that he encountered God. Consider other times when God/the Angel of the Lord appeared in human form, prior to Bethlehem (Judges 6:11-22; Judges 13:9-21; Joshua 5:13-15) While Jacob may be marveling that he lived despite seeing God, there is another way to understand v.30. The word "yet" is not in the Hebrew text. Jacob could mean, based on his encounter with God, his prayer has been answered, and he will be saved from the hand of Esau.

APPLICATION. THROUGH YOUR FEARS, GOD IS CALLING YOU TO CLING TO HIM. Jacob was focused on getting God to help him with his Esau problem; but Esau was just a way to help Jacob focus on his God problem. How have you seen God work like that?

Consider what Jesus says in Mat. 10:28. How does that relate to this lesson?

Jacob's wrestling match suggests what is involved in clinging to God.

- Desire the blessing of God more than any other blessing.
- Come clean about who you really are.
- Expect to go away limping.

Brian Morgan— "Spiritual transformation and spiritual growth toward maturity often come during times of struggle or crisis in our lives. Are you struggling with a broken past or an uncertain future? Consider this: Like Jacob, you may be on the verge of a life-changing encounter with God."

Bruce Waltke: "Jacob's remarkable encounter reminds saints that they too may encounter God in ambiguity, even in apparent hostility, in mystery cloaked in darkness, and in such humility that he restrains himself from dominating their lives. When they stop wrestling with God and start clinging to him, they discover that he has been there for their good, to bless them."