

“Wrestling With God”

Genesis 32:1-33:4

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Teaching Aim: To examine the events that took place at the Jabbok River as Jacob prepared to meet Esau after the two had been separated for 20 years. To see ourselves in Jacob when we take things into our own hands and don't trust God at His Word. To realize Jacob was radically transformed once he surrendered his pride and acknowledged who he was to the Angel. To understand it was only after Jacob's surrender that God changed his name from Jacob (*“supplanter”* or *“deceitful”*) to Israel (*“one who wrestles with God and with man and has overcome.”*)

DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD'S WORD (BIBLE STUDY)

Part I: In fear Jacob prepared to meet Esau (Gen. 32:1-12)

1. In today's study, we will look at the radical transformation that took place in the life of Jacob. What can we learn about Jacob's pre-conversion character from **Gen. 25:29-34** and **27:33-36**?
2. As we pick up the story, Jacob secretly departed from his uncle Laban's house with the entire herd that he had accumulated during his 20 years in Haran. Laban was furious and pursued Jacob with his men. After a tense confrontation, the two men made a truce and went their separate ways. According to **Gen. 32:1-2**, what did Jacob meet along the way on his journey towards the Promised Land? Jacob called the place *“Mahanaïm,”* meaning two camps. Why two camps? (See Commentaries) How should this camp of angels following Jacob have affected him? What message was God sending to Him?
3. Where is the land of Seir (also known as the country of Edom) located today (**vs. 3**)? (Hint: Search online) Who did Jacob send messengers to (**vs. 4-5**)? Why? Jacob was frightened at the thought of meeting Esau again for the first time in 20 years. What happened 20 years earlier just prior to Jacob's departure? (See **Gen. 27:33-34**)? How did Esau respond to the news that Jacob was on his way (**vs. 6**)? What was Jacob's reaction when the men filled him in on what Esau was doing?

4. What did Jacob do once he realized he had no other choice than to meet Esau and his 400 men (**vv. 9-12**)? Why is it, so often, that we go to God as our last resort in prayer rather than our first? In Jacob's prayer, we find several solid principles of biblical prayer. What are they? Jacob was both a prideful man and a fighter. What glimmer of hope do we find in **verse 10** of a coming change in Jacob?

Part II: Jacob's prayer to God and lavish gifts to his brother (Gen. 32:13-21)

1. According to **verses 13-15**, what did Jacob do after he finished his prayer? Was this an act of faith in God on Jacob's part, or did he slip right back into his old conniving ways? What are some areas that you have struggled with in your life after coming to faith in Christ?
2. How many animals did Jacob set aside as a present for Esau (**vv. 14-15**)? What does this teach us about the amount of wealth Jacob had accumulated in Haran? Do you think this lavish gift to Esau was an attempt by Jacob to pacify the wrath of his brother?
3. What strategy did Jacob take to soften Esau's anger as Esau approached with an army of 400 men (**vv. 16-21**)? What can we learn about Jacob (or "*deceiver*") from the language he instructs his servants to use when addressing Esau? In light of God's promise to Rebekah in **Gen. 25:22-23**, should Jacob have been speaking to Esau this way? Why, or why not? Does ever fear affect the way you respond to certain people? If so, how does the fear affect you?

Part III: Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the LORD (Gen. 32:22-32)

1. What did Jacob do in the middle in this terrifying night (**vs. 22**)? Why do you think he had his wives and children cross the River Jabbok in the darkness of night before Esau arrived? What do we learn about the size of the River Jabbok from **verse 23**? (See Commentaries)
2. **Verse 24** specifically points out that Jacob remained behind alone. What can we learn about Jacob's character from this? A real man would have gone to the front and faced the danger himself in order to protect his family. Why didn't Jacob do this?

3. What mysterious figure came to Jacob that night while he was alone on the north side of the Jabbok (**vs. 24**)? Does the Bible identify who this “Man” was? (See **Hos. 12:35; Gen. 32:30**) What is a “*theophany*?” (Search online) Had God ever come in the appearance of a man before? (See **Gen. 18:1-33**)

4. What did Jacob do with this mysterious visitor (**vs. 24**)? Warren Wiersbe writes, “*God meets us at whatever level He finds us in order to lift us to where He wants us to be. To Abraham the pilgrim, God came as a traveler (Gen. 18); and to Joshua the general, He came as a soldier (Josh. 5:13-15). Jacob had spent most of his adult life wrestling with people – Esau, Isaac, Laban, and even his wives – so God came to him as a wrestler.*” How did God come to you and what did He use to bring you to Christ?

5. How long did Jacob wrestle with the Angel of the LORD (**vs. 24**)? What did the Angel do that injured Jacob? Can pain be a good thing? If so, when? Did Jacob stop wrestling? Why not? Do you ever find yourself wrestling with God? If so, about what? What was Jacob wrestling for?

6. What question did the Angel of the LORD ask Jacob in **verse 27**? How did Jacob respond the last time he was asked the same question? (See **Gen. 27:18-19**) How did Jacob respond this time (**vs. 27**)? The name Jacob means “*supplanter*” or “*deceiver*.” In a certain sense, what was Jacob actually saying when he gave up his name to the Angel?

7. What happened once Jacob acknowledged who he really was, a deceiver (**vs. 28**)? What is the meaning of this new name? (See Commentary) Who are the twelve tribes of Israel and the nation of Israel named after today? Why is surrendering to God so important for every one of us?

8. What question did Jacob ask the Angel in **verse 29**? Why did the Angel refuse to give Jacob his name? (See **Exod. 3:13-14**) What did the Angel do for Jacob at that very moment?

9. **Verse 30** tells us Jacob named the place "*Peniel*," why? What do we learn about the nature of the Angel Jacob wrestled with from **verse 30**? **Exodus 33:11** says, "*So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.*" Is there a contradiction between **Gen. 32:30**, **Exod. 33:11** and **Exod. 33:19-20**? How do you explain the difference?

10. The darkness of night symbolized both Jacob's situation and his spiritual state at the time. What is symbolized by the sunrise over Peniel and Jacob's new walk with a limp (**vs. 31**)? What experiences in your life have helped you to become more dependent upon God? How has going through affliction affected you? Did you become angry with God, or did you cling to Him?

11. What do we learn about ancient Jewish dietary practices from **verse 32**? When **verse 32** says, "*Therefore to this day...*", what day is being referred to? Note: Even today orthodox Jews will not eat the sciatic nerve or thigh vein from slaughtered animals.

12. Once Jacob's night of wrestling with God was over, he crossed the Jabbok River to meet back up with his family. What frightening sight did he see when he raised his eyes? (See **Gen. 33:1**) How did Jacob respond (**vv. 1-2**)? By placing Rachel and Joseph last, Jacob demonstrated the kind of favoritism that eventually led to Joseph being despised by his brothers. (See **Gen. 37**) How can the favoritism of one child negatively affect an entire family today?

13. What was Jacob's response as he approached his brother (**vs. 3**)? (See Commentaries) Was this appropriate given the promise to his mother in **Gen. 25:22-23**? What can we learn about Jacob's newfound trust in God from this response? How do the actions of Jacob and Esau contrast (**vs. 4**)? How had God been working in Esau's life over the past 20 years?

14. With God all things are possible. Is there a relationship in your life that is strained? As a Christian, should we be willing to forgive those whom we've had conflict with? (See **Matt. 6:14-15**) According to **Rom. 12:17-18**, how should we as Christians respond?

MINER'S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!*

- When afraid, rely on God not yourself.
- Prayer should be our first resort, not our last.
- Pray specifically, persistently, and expectantly.
- Favoritism of one child will cause problems in the family down the road.
- All of us have wrestled with God at times, usually over something that we want.
- Jacob wrestled with the Angel literally, refusing to let go until God blessed him.
- Only after Jacob surrendered and admitted that he was deceitful did the LORD bless Him with a new name, "*Israel*," which means "*he has struggled with God and with men and has overcome.*"
- Each of us should be clinging to God, asking for His blessing in our lives and on our families.