

God of Our Fathers: Genesis

Lesson 15: Jacob Wrestles with God

Lesson Introduction

- Describe a situation in which you struggled to come to resolution about a thing.
- How did that struggle change you?
- What does it mean to walk with a “limp” in a metaphorical sense?

Lesson Objectives

- Describe Jacob’s encounter with God at Jabbok
- Discuss how the encounter changed Jacob
- Express understanding of who God is

Background for the Scripture

As we have seen earlier, enmity existed between Jacob and Esau. To avoid Esau’s wrath, Jacob fled to Haran to stay with Laban, his uncle. During his 20 years in Haran, and through a series of schemes and other circumstances, Jacob acquired a great deal of wealth and a large family that included two wives, two concubines, and eleven sons (Genesis 28:1-31:55). After being released from his obligations to Laban, Jacob returned to Canaan, where a twelfth son was born to him. These twelve sons form the foundation of the new nation God had promised Abraham.

Upon his return to Canaan from Haran, Jacob rested near the banks of the Jabbok River. There he encountered a strange man with whom he wrestled until daybreak. Gregg (2015) pointed out that the “Bible doesn’t record the blow-by-blow details, but it probably wasn’t like the wrestling we’re used to seeing.” Though they wrestled vigorously and persistently, the man did not prevail against Jacob. That’s when the man struck Jacob on the hip socket, throwing it out of joint. In spite of sustaining such a serious injury Jacob did not give up, saying he would let go only if the man would bless him (Gen 32:26). Gregg (2015) noted, “Jacob perceives his opponent as someone capable of blessing him is the strongest indication yet that this is no ordinary wrestling partner.” As it turns out, Jacob had spent the night wrestling with God.

The story of Jacob includes many sub-plots. Discussion of these stories is beyond the scope of this lesson, but in your reading of Genesis you should become familiar with some of the accounts listed below:

- Jacob and Esau Meet: Genesis 33:1-17
- Rape of Dinah: Genesis 34:1-24
- Dinah’s Brothers Avenge Their Sister: Genesis 34:25-31

- Jacob Returns to Bethel: Genesis 35:1-15
- Birth of Benjamin and Death of Rachel: Genesis 35:16-26

Genesis 32:11, 22-32 (KJV)

¹¹ Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.

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²² And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two women servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.

²³ And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

²⁴ And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

²⁵ And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

²⁶ And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

²⁷ And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

²⁸ And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

²⁹ And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

³⁰ And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

³¹ And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

³² Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

Examining the Scripture

1. Who was the person with whom Jacob wrestled? How do we know?
2. What might it mean that Jacob “prevailed” in his wrestling match with God?
3. What is the significance of Jacob’s name being changed?

Applying the Scripture

1. Reflect on this statement made by one theologian: “The God who wrestles with us in the mess of our lives and leaves us ‘limping, but blessed’ is good news for us today.”
2. In what ways do we wrestle with God today?

Quest to Know God Activity

1. What does this scriptural account reveal about God?
2. List two or three characteristics you discerned about God as you went through this lesson.
3. What statement can you make about the God of our fathers that you can pass down to future generations?