

FPFWC Christian Development



God Calls Abraham's Family

September 2022

Fall Quarter

September 17, 2022

Lesson #3 – Jacob Called Israel

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Genesis 32:22-32

ICE BREAKERS-

1. Why is it difficult to reconcile broken relationships?
2. How should believers respond when they feel left alone by God or others?

Key Verse: “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.—Genesis 32:28

LESSON BACKGROUND –

Today’s text comes from the larger set of narratives regarding Isaac’s son Jacob and his conflicts with others. Jacob’s struggle with his brother Esau began at their birth (Genesis 25:26, lesson 2). Their conflict became more intense by Jacob’s scheming (and meal preparation) when he acquired his brother’s birthright (25:29–34). Later Jacob tricked his father into giving him the blessing set aside for firstborn Esau (27:6–36). Jacob’s scheming destroyed his relationship with Esau; Jacob was “hated” and threatened by his brother (27:41). In response, Jacob fled to the household of his uncle Laban (28:5).

Jacob worked seven years for his uncle to gain the hand of Laban’s daughter Rachel in marriage (Genesis 29:18). However, Laban required that Jacob first marry Leah, leading Jacob to another seven years in service to marry Rachel (29:26–27).

Jacob flourished during his time in Laban’s land, but the relationship between the two men soured (Genesis 31:2). This was due to Jacob’s perception of unfair treatment regarding his payment from Laban (31:6–7). In response, Jacob and his wives took all that they owned and left Laban’s household in secret (31:17–21). Ultimately, Laban confronted Jacob and the two agreed to a covenant (31:44). Jacob’s struggle with his uncle had subsided.

Today’s text comes as a part of Jacob’s preparation to meet his brother. If Jacob returned to the land promised by God, then he would have to be on good terms with Esau. Jacob initiated contact by sending messengers to request grace from Esau (Genesis 32:5). Esau responded with a promise to appear—along with 400 of his men (32:6).

This response brought fear and distress to Jacob. It would appear that the time had come for Esau’s threats to be fulfilled. Jacob responded with alarm: he divided his camp (Genesis 32:7–8), prepared gifts for Esau (32:13–20), and approached

God in prayer (32:9–12). Jacob’s fear was understandable; God had promised him descendants (28:14). An enraged Esau would likely not only kill Jacob but also Jacob’s household. Jacob, known for his scheming ways, openly admitted fear of someone else’s scheme.

Throughout his life, Jacob’s clever planning had generally paid off in his favor, often to the detriment of others. A mysterious struggle would now define Jacob in unimaginable ways.

LESSON COMMENTARY

Jacob’s spiritual struggle is here epitomized as well as brought to a climactic resolution by God when **a man** appeared and **wrestled with him until daybreak**. This struggle is not to be seen as an isolated event but a synopsis of Jacob’s entire life, constantly striving with both God and people. That this “man” was in fact God Himself in human form (specifically, a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God) is evident from the following facts. (1) **Jacob’s thigh was dislocated** just by the man’s having **touched** it (vv. 25, 32). (2) The man changed Jacob’s **name** (v. 28) to one better suited to his *covenant* position: **Israel**, meaning “God strives” (i.e., on behalf of Jacob), *not* “he has striven with God.” The former over the latter rendering is supported by (a) the imperfect (i.e., ongoing) Hebrew tense, (b) the normative presentation of *God* as the verbal subject in theophoric names, and (c) the ongoing covenant reality of Jacob’s position as intended by God, the Namer. This final item of support hearkens back to the same reason God changed Jacob’s grandfather’s name from “Abram” to “Abraham” in 17:5 (and, more generally, with Christ’s changing of the names of those who submit to him in faith). (3) The man’s reference to Jacob having **striven with God**—which, while reflecting the overall trajectory of Jacob’s life to this point, also clearly referred to the present struggle or wrestling match between Jacob and the man himself (v. 28). (4) Jacob named the site of the wrestling match “Peniel,” meaning “The face (or “presence”) of God,” for as Jacob himself explained, “I have seen God face to face” (v. 30). Although Ex 33:20 says that no one can see God and live, that text likely refers to God the Father (cf. Jn 6:46; 1Tm 6:16; 1Jn 4:12). The Son of God is the visible God (Col 1:15), making preincarnate appearances as the Angel of the Lord (as He appears to be doing in this narrative; cf. Jdg 6:11–16; Is 6:1–5; Dn 10:5–6) and after the incarnation in the person of the God-man, Jesus (Lk 2:25–32; Jn 1:18; 17:1–8; 2Co 4:6; Php 2:6; Heb 1:3; Rv 1:12–18).

32:26–32. Jacob continued to struggle, holding on to the mysterious man, even with his dislocated thigh, until he blessed him. Ultimately, the Angel of the Lord acquiesced and changed the patriarch’s name, because he had **striven with God and with men and [had] prevailed** (v. 28). The word **prevailed** does not mean that Jacob won the wrestling match by overpowering the man. Instead, it means that Jacob, having in the end been forcibly subdued by God, prevailed in receiving the blessing. That is, he was not just a benefactor of the material promises of the Abrahamic covenant, but also of its more selective spiritual promise of the blessing of saving faith. Paradoxically, he **prevailed** (received the blessing) through submission. This is precisely Jacob’s point at the end of v. 30, in which he said, **Yet my life has been preserved**. However, this is better translated, “and my soul

has been rescued (or, 'saved')." This is the picture of a man who was brought to God (*by God*) "kicking and screaming." As a result, Jacob was transformed from being a schemer to a triumphant receiver of God's blessing. Thus, the original readers—the people of Israel entering the promised land—would learn that their victory was not to come only through striving with others but also through God's blessing.

LESSON NUGGET – Jacob was broken to be healed and weakened to be strengthened. When he surrendered, he won and became a "prince with God." His limp would be a constant reminder that God would be in control of his life. "God fights against us with His left hand and for us with His right hand.", wrote John Calvin. When we let God have His way, it is the dawning of a new day (v.31).

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible, Life Application Bible Notes and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary