

“Wrestling with God”

Jacob became a great man of God, figuring prominently in the entire last half of Genesis (chapters 25-50), and fathering the twelve tribes of Israel. But as we will see, he certainly didn't start out that way. Like most Bible characters, Jacob is full of the same kinds of corruptions and sins that plague us today, and by studying his spiritual growth, we can find helpful insights for our own walk with God.

We're going to focus on one of the most unusual of all the events in his life: the episode when he wrestles with an angel. As a result of this encounter, Jacob's name is changed, and so is the way he walks. He is never the same again. What happened to him? Why is such a strange story in the Bible? What can we learn from Jacob?

To make sense out of the Old Testament, we must **look at the context of and look for the principles in** the historic events. So let's start with the context.

Genesis 25:21-26	Jacob, the younger fraternal twin brother of Esau, is born holding onto Esau's heel. Jacob means <i>heel-grabber, supplanter, manipulator</i> .
Genesis 25:27-34	Jacob takes advantage of Esau's hunger to swindle him out of the firstborn's birthright.
Genesis 27:1-29	At his mother's urging, Jacob deceives his father in order to receive the blessing intended for Esau.
Genesis 28:1-4	Jacob receives the prophetic blessing that was his all along – that he would become “a company of peoples” and that he would possess the lands of his sojourning.
Genesis 28:10-17	While fleeing Esau's wrath and on his way to finding a wife, Jacob encounters the unseen dimension of God and His angels. God promises to give the land to Jacob and to watch over him. “Surely God is in this place, and I didn't realize it,” he says.
Genesis 29:14-30	Laban, Jacob's father-in-law, turns the tables on Jacob and tricks him into working 14 years for the wife he wants (Rachel) <i>and</i> the wife he doesn't want (Leah).
Genesis 30:25-43	By following the business advice God gives him in a dream, Jacob prospers despite Laban's conniving and scheming.

Genesis 32:1-23

Jacob slips away secretly from Laban and returns home, only to run into the brother he cheated years before. Fearing Esau's revenge, Jacob tries to secure and improve his position with a parade of gifts (bribes) he sends out ahead to Esau. Jacob still develops contingency plans for self-defense in case the manipulation fails.

Genesis 32:24-29

1. Doing all the things we know how to do on our own to preserve or to protect ourselves will eventually leave us being all alone. Such points become the defining moments of our life.
2. Wrestling matches with God mostly happen at night when no one is there to see.
3. The real issues of life are not settled by striving with people or by manipulating things to suit our tastes. True resolution for our life's needs and the securing of our identity come as we engages the unseen, spiritual dimension and persist in our determination to receive blessing from God's hand, not from our own.
4. When we wrestle with God, He marks us forever – usually with brokenness, insufficiency or lameness.
5. The Jacob in us fights with circumstances and people, holding onto their hell to make sure we get what we want. The Israel in us chooses to grapple, instead, with God, Holding onto Him for His blessing.