

JACOB—A MAN WHO LEARNED THE HARD WAY HOW TO TRUST IN GOD [Part 2]

Presented by
Blake Brown

[NOTE TO THE READER: This is the second of a two-part series that was presented on a single Sunday by Tyler (part one) and Blake (part two).]

It was at this point in time that what likely became the single most-important event in Jacob's life occurred. Genesis 32:24-32 explains what happened. Verse 24 tells us that "Jacob was left alone." It was nighttime, and in the darkness Jacob suddenly found himself engaged in a wrestling match with someone he did not know and had never seen before. In fact, this long wrestling match lasted until dawn! During Jacob's struggle with the mysterious stranger, the socket of his hip was thrown out of joint. Yet Jacob refused to release his grip because he did not like the thought of having wrestled all night long **for nothing!** He wanted **something** as a reward for his effort, even if it meant that **every one** of his bones ended up being thrown out of joint! For the first time in his life, Jacob had been unable to defeat an opponent. Yet he still wanted to go away with something to show for his troubles.

The "mysterious stranger" who had wrestled that night with Jacob was, as it turned out, an angel. But this was no ordinary angel. Hosea 12:4-5 identifies the Angel as "the Lord God of hosts." As the two fought, the Angel asked Jacob to identify himself. Because Jacob finally had been emptied of all his cleverness and self-confidence by this fierce struggle, he freely confessed that his name was Jacob—"the supplanter," "the trickster." The Angel then said to Jacob, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but **Israel**; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed" (Genesis 32:28).

Jacob then asked the Angel **His** name. But Jacob's request for that information was denied. In Genesis 32:29 we see the Lord asking Jacob, "Why is it that you ask about **My** name?" The question seems to be stressing two points. First, the idea behind the question appears to be, "What good would it do you to know My name?!" And second, the thought seems to be that if Jacob would just stop and think about it for a moment, he would **know** the One with Whom he had been fighting! After all, who else could have thrown Jacob's hip out of its socket with just a touch? And who had the authority and power to change Jacob's name?

Jacob apparently got the point, because he ended up assigning a name to the spot where these unusual events had transpired. From that time, on the place would be known as Peniel, which means, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Genesis 32:30).

Although Jacob lost the encounter physically, he won a great spiritual victory. He learned to triumph through defeat. And he learned to be strong through weakness. Previously, Jacob had not trusted God as he should have. And he always had appeared to be brash and grasping—as he tried to enrich himself at

the expense of others in order to secure his future. At Peniel, Jacob finally “sensed the presence of the holy.” And it is safe to say that his life never would be the same again.

However, this story **does** have a happy ending. Genesis 33:3-4 records that when Jacob and those who were with him finally met up with Esau and the 400 men who were with him, Jacob “bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. Esau then ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.” After twenty years of being apart from each other, the twins finally were reunited, and all was forgiven. As Genesis 33:18-20 goes on to report, Jacob eventually ended up at the city of Shechem in Canaan, where he bought a piece of land and built an altar to God. Some time later, according to Genesis 35:28-29, Jacob and Esau’s father, Isaac, who was 180 years old, died, and the twins buried him.

By this time, Jacob had twelve sons, including Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. You might think that now that Jacob was back in his beloved land of Canaan, he simply would live out the remainder of his life in peace and happiness, surrounded by his twelve sons and their extended families. But that is not what was going to happen because, you see, included among those twelve sons was a young man by the name of Joseph, who was going to be favored by his father, despised by his brothers, imprisoned by his employer, and forgotten by everyone else—**except God**.

That series of events comprises an incredibly fascinating story—one that we will have to save for another time. For now, we simply need to remember that when God said to Abraham, “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great” (Genesis 12:2), and when God told Isaac, “I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands” (Genesis 26:3), and when God promised Jacob, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you” (Genesis 28:15), **He meant every word of what He said**. God was not yet finished with Jacob or his twelve sons—**not by a long shot!**

There was much yet to be done. But no one—especially 17-year-old Joseph—could ever have guessed the unusual sequence of events that God was going to use to bring about His divine will for humankind. As Isaiah would say many years later, “The Lord of hosts has purposed, so who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27). In fact, God Himself told the prophet, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). Jacob, Joseph, his eleven brothers, and a lot of other unsuspecting people were about to learn the true extent of God’s power, and exactly how determined He was to bring about the salvation of mankind. But, as I have said, that is a story best left for another time....