

## Persevere in Times of Difficulty

Lesson for September 18, 2022

**Unit I:** God Calls Abraham's Family

**Scriptural Background:** Genesis 32:22-32

**Printed Text:** Genesis 32:22-32

**Key verse:** And He said, "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, NKJV)

### Word Study

#### Hook

The story is told that Andrew Jackson's boyhood friends just couldn't understand how he became a famous general and then the President of the United States. They knew of other men who had greater talent but who never succeeded. One of Jackson's friends said, "Why, Jim Brown, who lived right down the pike from Jackson, was not only smarter but he could throw Andy three times out of four in a wrestling match. But look where Andy is now." Another friend responded, "How did there happen to be a fourth time? Didn't they usually say three times and out?" "Sure, they were supposed to, but not Andy. He would never admit he was beat – he would never stay 'threwed.' Jim Brown would get tired, and on the fourth try Andrew Jackson would throw him and be the winner." Picking up on that idea, someone has said, "The thing that counts is not how many times you are 'threwed,' but whether you are willing to stay 'threwed.'" We may face setbacks, but we must take courage and go forward in faith. Then, through the Holy Spirit's power we can be the eventual victor over sin and the world. The battle is the Lord's, so there is no excuse for us to stay "threwed"!

*Our Daily Bread.*

In today's lesson, Jacob didn't stay "threwed". After wrestling with God he emerged with God's blessing.

#### Key Terms

1. **Alone** (v. 24) – A separation; apart; separate
2. **Break (s)** (v. 26) – Go up; ascend; approach; come
3. **Ford** (v. 22) – River
4. **Halted** (v. 31) – Limped
5. **Hip** (v. 25) – Thigh; loin; side; base
6. **Hollow of his thigh** (vv. 25, 32) – Socket of his hip
7. **Prevailed** (v. 28) – Overcome, won

- 8. Prevailed not (v. 25) – Could not win**
- 9. Preserved (v. 30) – Saved**
- 10. Sinew (v. 32) – A tendon connecting muscle to the bone**
- 11. Wrestled (v. 24) – (*abaq*) Grappled with; struggled**
- 12. Wrestled (v. 25) – (*sarah*) Persisted; exerted oneself; persevered**

## **Lesson Background**

In last week's lesson, following Abraham's death, God reveals to Isaac's wife Rebekah that she will soon give birth to two sons who will represent two nations, one stronger than the other. When Rebekah delivers, Esau is born first and is extremely hairy. Jacob, who is smooth skinned, is born immediately after, grasping the heel of his brother. Isaac's two sons grow to be opposites. Esau is a hunter and a brash man. Jacob stays at home, soft-spoken but quick-witted. One day, Esau comes home famished, demanding to be fed, and agrees to give Jacob his inheritance rights in exchange for a bowl of soup.

Like his own father, Isaac prospers in Canaan and, despite occasional errors in judgment, enlarges his property, making alliances with area rulers and continuing to erect monuments to God. One day, when he is old and blind, Isaac instructs Esau to catch some game and prepare him a meal so that he may give the elder son his blessing. While Esau is gone, Rebekah helps Jacob deceive his father, preparing a separate meal and disguising the younger son with hairy arms and Esau's clothing. When Jacob presents Isaac with the meal, Isaac—smelling Esau's clothing and feeling the hairy body—proceeds to bless Jacob, promising him the inheritance of God's covenant and a greater status than his brother. Esau returns to discover the deception, but it is too late. Isaac, though dismayed, says that he cannot revoke the stolen blessing.

Jacob flees in fear of Esau, traveling to the house of his uncle Laban in upper Mesopotamia. En route, Jacob dreams of a stairway leading up to heaven, where angels and God reside. In the dream, God promises Jacob the same covenant he previously made with Abraham and Isaac. Jacob arrives at Laban's house, where he agrees to work for his uncle in exchange for the hand of Laban's daughter, Rachel, in marriage. Laban deceives Jacob into marrying Leah, Rachel's older sister, before marrying Rachel. The two wives compete for Jacob's favor and, along with their maids, give birth to eleven sons and a daughter.

After twenty years, Jacob heeds God's urging and leaves to return to Canaan, taking his family, his flocks, and Laban's collection of idols, or miniature representations of gods. Rachel, who has stolen the idol figurines from her father, hides them under her skirt when Laban tracks down the fleeing clan in the desert. Unable to procure his belongings, Laban settles his differences with Jacob, who erects a pillar of stone as a "witness" to God of their peaceful resolution (31:48).

Jacob continues on and, nearing home, fears an encounter with Esau. Jacob prepares gifts to appease his brother and, dividing his family and belongings into two camps, spends the night alone on the river Jabbok. Jacob meets God, who, disguised as a man, physically wrestles with Jacob until dawn. Jacob demands a blessing from his opponent, and the man blesses Jacob by renaming him "Israel," meaning, "he struggles with God."

Summarily, following last week's lesson, the events leading to this week's lesson include:

1. Genesis.27 - Jacob receives the blessing instead of Esau by deceit.
2. Genesis.28 - Jacob escapes from Esau to Bethel where he meets God in a strange dream that shows a ladder from earth to Heaven
3. Genesis 29 - Jacob meets Rachel and marries Leah by deceit from Laban
4. Genesis 30-31 Jacob has trouble with Laban, and secretly flees. Laban comes after him, but after being warned by God, makes peace with Jacob

## **Lesson in Depth**

### **I. Struggling with God (Genesis 32: 22-26)**

According to Proverbs 13:15, "Good understanding gains favor. But the way of the transgressor is hard." We can run but cannot hide. The past will always catch up with us. Jacob had fled in fear years before, but he now had to face the brother he cheated. We always reap what we sow!

**And he rose up that night:** In the middle of the night, for it was long before break of day.

And took his two wives": Rachel and Leah.

**And his two women servants:** Bilhah and Zilpah, or, "his two concubines", which distinguishes them from other women servants or maidservants, of which, no doubt, he had many.

**And his eleven sons:** At this point Joseph has already been sold into slavery; together with Dinah his daughter, though not mentioned, being the only female child.

**And passed over the ford Jabbok:** Over that river, at a place of it where it was crossable, or where there was a ford or passage. This was a river that took its rise from the mountains of Arabia, was the border of the Ammonites, washed the city Rabba, and ran between Philadelphia and Gerasa, and came into the river Jordan.

**Jabbok:** A stream 60 to 65 miles long, east of the Jordan River which flows into that river midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea (45 miles south of the Sea of Galilee).

**And he took them and sent them over the brook:** His wives and children, under the care of some of his servants. This was a demonstration of his faith because Jacob left himself no retreat. If Esau wanted to attack his group, they would quickly be backed up against the river.

**And sent over that he had:** All that belonged to him, his servants and his cattle or goods.

**And Jacob was left alone:** Jacob sent his family over the river, and he stayed behind alone. He was afraid his brother was coming to destroy all of them. This was his last night on the east side of the Jordan River, and he probably spent the night in prayer. This Scripture does not say, but we may assume that he was crying out to God. God was the only one that can help him now.

**Wrestled a man with him:** The site name, Peniel, or “face of God,” given by Jacob (verse 30), and the commentary given by Hosea (Hosea 12:4), identifies this man with whom Jacob wrestled as the Angel of the Lord who is also identified as God, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was an interesting statement. How can you be alone and wrestle with someone at the same time? This man that Jacob wrestled with had to be a spirit. Jacob didn't wrestle with the **Man**. Instead, **a Man wrestled with him**. Jacob didn't start out wanting anything from God; God wanted something from him. God wanted all of Jacob's proud self-reliance and fleshly scheming, and God came to take it, by force if necessary.

**Until the breaking of the day:** We can only imagine what this scene looked like. Perhaps sometimes it looked like a barroom fight, and perhaps at other times it looked like an intense wrestling match. “How did Jacob ever manage to keep up his struggle throughout the entire night? I do not know. But I do know that his determination to hang in there was no greater than our frequent determination to have our own way and eventually win out over God.” (Boice)

**He saw that He did not prevail against him:** As the fight progressed, it seemed Jacob was somewhat evenly matched against the **Man**, but the match was only evenly matched in appearance. The **Man** could have won easily at any time, using supernatural power. Not because the **Man** could not, but because he would not, being willing to encourage the faith of Jacob against future trials and exercises. And especially under his present trial.

**He touched the hollow of his thigh:** The hollow part of the thigh or the groin, or the hollow place in which the thigh bone moves and is said to have the form of the hollow of a man's hand bent backwards.

**And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him:** That is, the hip bone, or the thigh bone, was moved out of the hollow place in which it was. This was done to let Jacob know that the person he wrestled with was superior to him, and could easily have overcome him, and obliged him to cease wrestling with him if he would. And that the victory he got over him was not by his own strength, but by divine assistance, and by the sufferance of the one he wrestled with; so that he had nothing to boast of. And this shows the truth and reality of this conflict. That it was not visionary, but a real fact, as well as it teaches the weakness and infirmities of the saints, that attend them in their spiritual conflicts.

Have you ever been in prayer all night and wrestled with God? Sometimes, when we need an answer to a prayer, we will keep on praying, just like Jacob did here, even unto the breaking of day. “The fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). When we pray in earnest without doubt, our prayers will be answered.

Jacob needed God desperately. He felt that all was lost unless God intervened. He just would not give up. He had to have God's help. This touch would affect the walk of Jacob. Jacob would never be the same again.

**Then the Man said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks”:** The Man let Jacob know this would not last much longer. Even though Jacob clung to him desperately, Jacob had lost. A better, greater Man defeated Jacob. This is an invaluable place for everyone to come to: where God conquers us. There is something to be said for every man doing his wrestling with God, and then acknowledging God’s greatness after having been defeated. We must know we serve a God who is greater than us, and we cannot conquer much of anything until He conquers us.

**I will not let You go unless You bless me:** by his touching of Jacob’s thigh, and the effect of that, Jacob perceived he was more than a man, even a divine Person, and therefore insisted upon being blessed by him. This wasn’t Jacob dictating terms to God as he did on previous occasions. God overcame Jacob here, and we know from Hosea 12:3-5 that Jacob sought this blessing with weeping. He knew he was defeated, yet desperately wanted a blessing from this Greater One.

Through his past, Jacob was always clever and sneaky enough, so he never felt the need to trust in God alone. Now he could *only* rely on the blessing of God. Jacob was reduced to the place where all he could do was to hold on to the LORD with everything he had. Jacob could not fight anymore, but he could hold on. That is not a bad place to be.

Here, God has answered Jacob’s prayer in Genesis 32:9-12. Yet before Jacob could be delivered from the hand of his brother, he had to be delivered from his own self-will and self-reliance.

## II. Struggling with Self (Genesis 32: 27-32)

**What is your name:** The question is put by the Man, not as being ignorant of it, but in order to take occasion from it, and the change of it, to show that He had granted Jacob’s request, and had blessed him, and would yet more and more.

**And he said, Jacob:** the name given him at his birth and by which he had always been called, and therefore tells it him at once, not staying to ask the reason of the question. Jacob must have felt a sense of shame, admitting his name was **Jacob**, with all its associations of deception and cheating. Yet this was *who he was*, and Jacob had to admit to it.

**Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel:** The name **Israel** is a compound of two words: *sarah* (meaning, *fight, struggle, or rule*) and *el* (meaning, *God*). Some take the name Israel to mean, *He who struggles with God, or He who rules with God*. But in Hebrew names, sometimes God is not the object of the verb but the subject. *Daniel* means *God judges*, not *he judges God*. This principle shows us **Israel** likely means, *God rules*. Jacob’s personal name changed from one meaning “heel-catcher” or “deceiver” to one meaning “God’s fighter” or “he struggles with God”.

**For you have struggled with God and with men:** An amazing evaluation of what Jacob had accomplished, i.e., emerging victorious from the struggle. In the record of his life, “struggle” did indeed dominate:

1. With his brother Esau (chapters 25-27);
2. With his father (chapter 27);
3. With his father-in-law (chapters 29-31);
4. With his wives (chapter 30);
5. With God at Peniel (verse 28).

**For you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed:** This is given as a reason of his name Israel, which signifies a prince of God, or one who as a prince prevails with God.

Jacob prevailed in the sense that he endured through his struggle until God thoroughly conquered him. When you battle with God, you only win by losing and by not giving up until you know you have lost. This is how Jacob prevailed.

He now prevailed with God in prayer, and by faith got the blessing, as he had prevailed before with Esau and Laban, and got the better of them, and so would again of the former. Hence some render the word, “and shall prevail”; and indeed, this transaction was designed to fortify Jacob against the fear of his brother Esau.

And from this he might reasonably conclude that if he had power with God, and prevailed to obtain what he desired of him, he would much more be able to prevail over his brother, and even over all that should rise up against him and oppose him.

Jacob’s tenacity or hanging on to God in the face of all odds, had won him favor with God. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are spiritual Israel (God’s fighters). We also, will be princes and princesses, when we reign with the King of kings and Lord of lords.

**And Jacob asked him, and said, tell me, I pray thee, thy name:** Being asked his own name, and told it, and having another given him more significant and expressive, he is emboldened to ask the person that wrestled with him what was his name (Exodus 3:13).

For Jacob knew that he was God, as appears by his earnest desire to be blessed by him; and he knew it by the declaration just made, that he had power with God as a prince.

But he hoped to have some name, taken by him from the place or circumstance of things in which he was, whereby he might the better remember this affair; as he was pleased to call himself the God of Beth-el, from his appearance to Jacob there (Genesis 31:13).

**Why is it that you ask about My name:** The Man probably refused to tell Jacob His name because He figured Jacob should already know it, and it turned out that Jacob *did* know exactly who this was.

**And He blessed him there:** Surely, this was the blessing of being defeated by God. It was the blessing of the passing of the old (**Jacob**) life, and the coming of a new (**Israel**) life. It may also have had to do with the great idea of the blessing of Abraham, and meeting Jacob's immediate needs for security in the midst of fear. Whatever Jacob needed, God's blessing provided at the moment.

We note that **He blessed him there** – at that particular place.

- The place of special trial and testing.
- The place of intense pleading to God.
- The place of seeing the face of God.
- The place of conscious weakness.

**Jacob called the name of the place Peniel:** The *first memorial* was a name. Jacob named the place **Peniel** (*Face of God*), because he *did* know the name of the *Man* who wrestled with him. He was the same One who wrestled with Jacob all his life. Jacob also understood it was only by God's grace and mercy he escaped from this episode with his life. No man should be allowed to wrestle with God and live, but God was gracious.

**For I have seen God face to face:** It may be observed, that in wrestling, men are face to face, and in this position were Jacob and the man that wrestled with him, which he seems to have respect unto, as well as to the familiarity and intimate communion he was admitted to.

**And my life is preserved:** Though he had wrestled with one so vastly superior to himself, who could have easily crushed this worm Jacob to pieces, as he is sometimes called; and though he had had such a sight of God as face to face, referring as is thought, to a notion that obtained early, even among good men, that upon sight of God a man instantly died.

**And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him:** It was break of day when the angel desired to be let go, and by that time the parley held between them ceased, and they parted.

**He limped on his hip:** The *second memorial* was a perpetual limp. Jacob would remember his being conquered by God with every step he took for the rest of his life. This was a small price to pay for such a great gift. The memorial of his weakness was to be with him as long as he lived.

**Therefore, the children of Israel eat not the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day:** Which was contracted by the touch of the angel, and by which it was weakened and benumbed; or the sinew of the part that was out of joint, the sinew or tendon that keeps the thigh bone in the socket.

This might refer to the sciatic muscle or tendon. The observation that up to Moses' time ("to this day"), the nation of Israel did not eat this part of a hindquarter intrigues because it bears no mention elsewhere in the Old Testament, nor is it enshrined in the Mosaic Law. It does find mention in the Jewish Talmud as a sacred law.

This abstaining from eating the sinew is a reminder, even now, to Jacob's descendants of his encounter with God.

## Lesson Summary

Everything happens for a reason, and God is trying to teach this old deceiver some very important lessons. In every crisis there is a purpose for growth, honesty, and confession.

What is He trying to teach you and me today? Remember that for every crisis, we have the Christ. When Jacob wrestled with the “Man” this is a picture of what we must do as we follow Jesus Christ. Just like Jacob, our will must be broken so that we submit to His will. All of self and none of “thee” must become none of self and all of thee! Only when we say, Not my will but thine be done can there be victory.

Once we encounter God, we will never forget the experience:

1. Jacob has a limp to prove it – something to forever remind him.
2. Also, he receives a NEW NAME – Israel. Today God wants to give you a NEW NAME and a new NATURE. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)
3. When you give in to His claims upon your life, then you also will be a "prince or princess of God" – another meaning of Israel.

Stop struggling with God. You can't outbox Him. He will win every time. Make a Godly change and you will discover that life will be better, beautiful, and more blessed than ever before. When you make peace with God, you can begin to live at peace with others too. Holiness, harmony, and happiness are the results.

God has great plans in store for each of us, but he needs our submission and co-operation to make these happen. Jacob had spent most of his life running from people, even God. Now he decided to quit being a greedy grabber and allow God to work on his heart. Now he was a Believer not a Deceiver. What Jacob needed is what we need - a humble, holy attitude that comes from a godly change. *“For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death”* (2 Corinthians 7:10).