

Wrestling with God

June 29, 2014 ~ Genesis 32.22-32

Introduction

- ❖ **Read the text** ~ “And he arose that night .. the muscle that shrank.”
- ❖ Jacob is the central character of the book of **Genesis**
- ❖ The story of Jacob covers half of the book (**Gen 25 to Gen 49**)
 - ✧ He disappears briefly **Gen 38 to Gen 41** (Judah/Tamar and Joseph)
 - ✧ But even the story of Joseph is more the story of Jacob (**48.5** sons his)
- ❖ Our text is “**the**” pivotal point in the life of Jacob
 - ✧ We’ll return to this text for the message ..
 - ✧ But first we need to review Jacob’s life up to this event

Summary of Jacob’s Life Prior to Return to Canaan

- ❖ Birth of twins (**Gen 25.19 – 26**)
 - ✧ Isaac 40 years old when he marries Rebekah
 - ✧ He pleads with God for her to have children ~ 20 years
 - ✧ But children struggle within her and she inquires of God
 - ✧ Prophecy of “**two nations**” and older serving the younger
 - ✧ Jacob is grasping Esau’s heel as they are born – “**supplanter**”
- ❖ Jacob was a “**Momma’s Boy**” (**Gen 25.27 – 28**)
 - ✧ Esau was a skillful hunter – a man of the field – “**outdoorsman**”
 - ✧ Jacob was a mild man – dwelling in tents – “**homebody**”
 - ✧ Isaac loved Esau – Rebekah loved Jacob
- ❖ Esau despises his birthright (**Gen 25.29 – 34**)
 - ✧ Jacob was focused on the **future**
 - ✧ Esau was focused on the **present**
- ❖ Esau dishonors parents (**Gen 26.34 – 35**)
 - ✧ At 40 Esau takes two Hittite wives
 - ✧ They were a “**grief of mind**” to Isaac and Rebekah
- ❖ Rebekah and Jacob steal blessing Isaac intends for Esau (**Gen 27**)
 - ✧ **v11** ~ Jacob is not opposed on principle to the deception
 - ✧ **v19, 24** ~ Twice Jacob boldly affirms the lie

Xition: Isaac and Esau realize the deception ..

Summary of Jacob's Life Prior to Return to Canaan (**continued**)

- ❖ The deception is revealed
 - ✧ Of course, they're found out (**Gen 27.32 – 38**)
 - ✧ **v36, 38** ~ Esau rages, weeps and pleads with his father
- ❖ Esau vows revenge (v41)
 - ✧ Rebekah plots to have Jacob “flee” to safety – “few days” (**v43 – 45**)
 - ✧ **v46 – 28.5** ~ But the plan expands to obtain a wife for Jacob
 - ✧ **v6- 9** ~ He aggravates parents further by marrying Ishmael's daughter
- ❖ Jacob's Ladder (Gen 28.10-22)
 - ✧ In a dream he saw angels up/down ladder ~ Lord stood above it
 - ◇ **v14** ~ “your descendants shall be .. your seed .. all families of earth”
 - ◇ **Gen 22.14** ~ promise to Abraham after sacrifice of Isaac suspended
 - ◇ **Gen 26.4** ~ promise to Isaac during famine – went to Abimelech
 - ✧ Jacob makes vow ~ **Read Gen 28.18-22**
- ❖ **Gen 29-30** ~ Jacob marries Leah and Rachel in Haran (*and has Bilhah and Zilpah*)
 - ✧ Leah (R, S, L, J) / Bilhah (D, N) / Zilpah (G, A) / Leah (I, Z) / Rachel (J)
 - ✧ Has 11 sons and at least 1 daughter
- ❖ **Gen 30.25ff** ~ Jacob works for Laban (uncle) for 20 years
 - ✧ 14 years for two daughters ~ 6 years for wages of herd
 - ✧ Jacob conspires to gain advantage over Laban (speckled, spotted)
- ❖ **Gen 31** ~ Laban turns against Jacob and God commands him to leave
 - ✧ Rachel steals idols but they aren't discovered
 - ✧ **v36 – 42** ~ Jacob is outraged and lashes out at Laban
 - ✧ **v43** – Laban admits no wrongdoing (insists all is his) but departs in peace
- ❖ And so we arrive at our text / Jacob has just escaped Laban's wrath

Recap of Jacob's Situation

- ❖ Jacob had been here 20 years earlier / fleeing Esau
 - ✧ At that time God had met him and confirmed His promise to him
 - ✧ Jacob made his conditional vow . . .
- ❖ Now he's back here with 2 companies
 - ✧ **Gen 32.1-2** ~ Jacob sees angels but there is no communication

Xition: So let's return to our text . . .

v1-2 ~ “angels of God met him”

- ❖ Gen 28.12 ~ “angels ascending and descending on it”
 - ✧ Jacob again sees angels ~ though likely not in a dream
 - ✧ He’d referred to this place then as “the gate of heaven”
 - ✧ He’s returned and now calls it “God’s camp”
 - ✧ He names it “Mahanaim” ~ “two camps”

v3-6 ~ “Jacob sent messengers .. Esau .. is coming .. 400 men with him”

- ❖ Jacob sends word to Esau / He can’t just sneak back in
 - ✧ He tells of his riches (not to brag – but to allay concerns)
- ❖ Jacob had fled 20 years earlier from Esau alone
 - ✧ Now Esau’s coming with 400 men ..

v7-8 ~ “Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed”

- ❖ Despite God’s command and seeing the angels, Jacob is afraid
 - ✧ Jacob divides everything up into 2 companies for safety

v9-12 ~ Jacob’s prayer (*very different from earlier vow*)

- ❖ “O God of my father” ~ Jacob reminds God of His past promises
- ❖ “Return to your country .. deal well with you” ~ and of His recent command
- ❖ “I am not worthy of the least ..” ~ Not making a vow like before (**Gen 28.20**)
- ❖ “Deliver me, I pray .. for I fear him” ~ Simple plea
- ❖ “treat you well .. as the sand of the sea” ~ Again reminds God of promises

v13-21 ~ Jacob’s Peace Offerings

- ❖ Jacob floods Esau with 5 separate droves of animals
 - ✧ 220 goats – 220 sheep – 30+ camels – 50 cows – 30 donkeys
- ❖ v20 ~ “I will appease him .. perhaps he will accept me”
 - ✧ **Prov 18.16** ~ “A man’s gift makes room for him...”
- ❖ v21 ~ “The present went on over .. but he lodged that night in the camp”

Xition: But Jacob alters the plan in the middle of the night . . .

v22-24a ~ Jacob Sends Family Ahead

- ❖ v22 ~ “he arose that night” / Change of plans
 - ✧ v23 ~ He sent everyone / everything across the Jabbok
- ❖ v24a ~ “Then Jacob was left alone ..”
 - ✧ He needed to be alone just as he’d been 20 years earlier

v24b ~ “a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day”

- ❖ Jacob was alone ~ He made himself available ..
 - ✧ This Man wrestled him ~ the Man was the aggressor
 - ✧ “Man” is capitalized ~ “theophany - preincarnate appearance of Christ”
 - ✧ The wrestling likely went on for hours
- ❖ Some try to spiritualize this ~ regarding it as a prayerful agony ..
 - ✧ But the text clearly presents it as a physical struggle
 - ✧ Genesis is unusual in that God often appeared in human form

v25 ~ “He did not prevail .. He touched .. his hip .. out of joint”

- ❖ The Man merely touches Jacob’s hip and puts it out of socket
- ❖ Though it must have hurt ~ Jacob did not release Him

The Man Gives Jacob the name Israel

- ❖ v26 ~ “Let Me go, for the day breaks”
 - ✧ But Jacob replied, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”
- ❖ v27 ~ The Man asks, “What is your name?”
 - ✧ to which Jacob replies, “Jacob” ~ “grasps heel - supplanter”
 - ✧ v28 ~ The Man then names him “Israel” ~ “Prince with God”
- ❖ And says, “You have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

v28b ~ “You have struggled with .. men, and have prevailed”

- ❖ Let’s take “men” first .. “How had Jacob prevailed over men?”
 - ✧ “Could this possibly refer to his time with Laban?”
 - ◇ Deceiving and being deceived .. yet escaping to safety eventually
 - ✧ “Could this refer to some yet future event?”
 - ◇ That’s what one dispensational writer believed

Xition: No .. Let’s see how God addresses this in Hosea 12

Read Hosea 12.3-5

- ❖ v3a ~ “He took his brother by the heel in the womb”
- ❖ v3b ~ “And in his strength he struggled with God”
- ❖ v4a ~ “Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed”
- ❖ v4b ~ “He wept and sought favor from Him”

“So how did Jacob prevail over men?”

- ❖ He supplanted Esau for the promise as prophesied (**Read Gen 25.23**)
 - ✧ Jacob was **future** oriented / Esau was **present** oriented (**Heb 12.17**)
 - ✧ Esau **despised** his birthright / Esau **despised** the promise of God
 - ✧ But Jacob sought the blessing / even before he knew exactly what it was
 - ✧ God said in **Malachi 1.1** “**Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated.**”
 - ◇ Paul references this in **Romans 9** – the great chapter on predestination

v28b ~ “You have struggled with God .. have prevailed”

- ❖ But “**How had Jacob prevailed over God?**”
- ❖ In wrestling with Jacob it appeared that the Man (Christ) let him win
 - ✧ Yes.. Yes, he did.. Jesus could have defeated Jacob at any time
 - ✧ But He wrestled as long as Jacob was willing to wrestle
 - ◇ Just as a loving father would with an energetic son
 - ✧ Christ told Jacob to let Him go ~ but he would not
 - ◇ Despite the pain, he wanted to remain in the embrace of Christ
 - ◇ Like Job, “**Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him.**”
- ❖ “**What would have happened had Jacob not clung to Him?**”
 - ✧ “**What would have happened .. on road to Emmaus .. not asked Christ to stay?**” Lk 24.13-35
 - ✧ “**God desires to go, if we do not desire Him to stay.**” ~Alexander Maclaren

- ❑ “**Do you wrestle to remain in the embrace of God?**”
- ❑ “**Do you seek the riches & pleasures only God can provide?**”
- ❑ “**Or, are you content with the riches & pleasures of this world?**”

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,

And to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

To God our Savior, who alone is wise,

Be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen *pause* Go in peace . . .