

The Wrestling Match Between Jacob and The Angel of the Lord Genesis 32:22-32

Genesis 32:22-32 - *“And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. ²³ He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. ²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. ²⁵ Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. ²⁶ And He said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.”*

But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” ²⁷ So He said to him, “What is your name?” He said, “Jacob.” ²⁸ 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.”

²⁹ Then Jacob asked, saying, “Tell me Your name, I pray.” And He said, “Why is it that you ask about My name?” And He blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” ³¹ Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob’s hip in the muscle that shrank.”

Background Notes

When Jacob got word that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men, he was afraid. After all, Esau had threatened to kill Jacob 20 years earlier. So Jacob did three things. First, he prayed, which is always a good idea! Second, for security reasons, he divided his company into two camps. And third, he sent a very large gift of flocks and herds to Esau. After Jacob sent his gift for Esau on ahead, he and his family prepared to camp on the safe side of the Jabbok River to wait for Esau. But during the night, Jacob got up and took his wives and children over the brook, and then he returned to the safe side to wait for Esau.

What was Jacob doing? Jacob was protecting himself! The area where the ancient road crossed the Jabbok River is mountainous, and Jacob probably picked a nice lookout site to watch for Esau. If he saw that Esau’s wrath was not appeased by seeing the large gift that Jacob had sent, or by seeing the wives and the young children, then Jacob could run!

That is why the wrestling match was so significant. The Lord touched the socket of Jacob's hip and put it out of joint **so he couldn't run** away! The touch was in just the right place, because after the Lord touched him, Jacob couldn't run - he was helpless, he was broken, and he was at the end of himself. All he could do was to desperately cling on and ask for help. And guess what? The Lord blessed Jacob, and there He changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means, "struggled with God, and prevailed."

Verse 24 says "a Man" wrestled with Jacob, and Hosea 12:4 says that Jacob struggled with "the Angel:" *"he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; he wept, and sought favor from Him."* Where do we get the idea that it was the **LORD** who wrestled with Jacob?

The fact that Jacob referred to this Angel as God (v30), and the fact that this Angel blessed Jacob and changed his name to Israel, indicates that this Angel was God Himself. He was "the Angel of the Lord" - God the Son, in His pre-incarnate form. "The Angel of the Lord," who is mentioned only in the Old Testament, was the pre-incarnate Son of God. So the "man" wrestling with Jacob was actually a "theophany" - God taking on human form, as He did many times in the Old Testament.

When Jacob said that he had seen God face to face and his life was preserved, he was not claiming to have seen the essence of deity. No! *"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him"*(John 1:18). Jacob saw the tangible human form that the Lord took on in order to wrestle Jacob. By the way, how old do you think Jacob was when he participated in this wrestling match with the Lord? He was about 97 years old! Can you believe it? He was seventy-seven when he left to run away from Esau, and 20 years had passed since he left home for Haran.

Doctrinal Points

1. "Broken before blessed" will be Israel's testimony in the future.

In the wrestling match between God and Jacob, there is a divine principle: **God's people must be broken before they can be blessed.** This will certainly be true of the nation of Israel in the future. Romans 11:26-27 speaks of the spiritual revival of the Jewish people that will take place in the future: *"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.""*

So a spiritual revival is coming for the nation of Israel in the future, but Israel must be broken of her own strength and her own pride before that blessing can come. She must turn to her true Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Zechariah 12:10

spoke of this future revival of Israel: *“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”* What a testimony!

This future experience for Israel is pictured in the wrestling match between Jacob and the Lord. In Jacob there is a picture of God’s dealings with the nation Israel. As Jacob returned home after a long absence, so Israel is returning to her homeland after a long absence of dispersion amongst the nations. As Jacob was in fear for his security, so Israel fears for its national security. As God protected Jacob, so God is protecting Israel today. But as Jacob had to be broken before he was blessed, so must Israel be brought to the place where she is broken before God - and then blessing will come! The prophetic scriptures indicate that these things will surely take place in the future. “Broken before blessed” will be Israel’s testimony in the future.

2. “Broken before blessed” should be the believer’s testimony in the present.

The wrestling match is a picture of the way God deals with us. God “wrestles” with us to break us of our pride, of our selfishness, and of our independence. God must bring us to the end of ourselves so that we learn that His strength is made perfect in weakness: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Notice several points about the wrestling match that apply to the way God wrestles with us:

- a. God wrestled with Jacob when Jacob was alone.** We need to spend more time alone with God so that the “broken before blessed” process can take place. Too many Christians do not spend enough time alone with God.
- b. The wrestling match went on all night.** God’s breaking process is not a five-minute wrestling match. In some areas of our lives the breaking process must go on for years. For example, some Christians have a hard time submitting to spiritual authority. God has ordained spiritual authority in the church, but some Christians don’t want to recognize it - they question it, they try to overthrow it, or they change churches to get out from under it. Sometimes God must wrestle with individuals like this for years until they are finally broken.
- c. Jacob had to own up to who he really was.** The name Jacob means “supplanter” or even “deceiver”! When God wrestles with us, we must own up to who we really are, admitting our sinfulness and how very far we fall short of God’s holy standard of perfection.
- d. God broke Jacob down in the area of his greatest strength.** God *“touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him”* (v25). If you have ever wrestled, you know that the match is over if your hip goes out of joint! In the same way, God may have to “touch” us in an area of our greatest

strength, to break us down so that we will cling to Him and depend on His strength. He may have to touch us in the area of our health, or our job and career, or our children. Look at Job! God wrestled with Job and touched him in the areas of his greatest strengths. And Job was broken - but then he was blessed! God may choose to wrestle with us and “touch” us in the areas of our greatest strength, if that is what it takes for us to submit to Him.

Is God wrestling with you in an area of your life where you have a hard time submitting to Him? Have you been broken? Have you been broken to the point of blessing? Remember, “broken before blessed” should be every believer’s testimony - right now, in the present.

Practical Application

Are we limping forward?

I love the spiritual picture that we have in verse 31: *“Just as he crossed over Penuel, the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.”* “Penuel” is another form of “Peniel” meaning “face of God.” The wrestling match was over, the rising sun was shining on Jacob, he wasn’t running away, he was limping - but he was limping **forward!** He had been broken, but he was now blessed.

Are we limping forward, or is the wrestling match still going on? It’s better to limp forward in God’s direction than to run in your own strength in your own direction. If God has wrestled with you, have you thanked Him for touching you in an area of your natural strength so that you are now limping - but you are limping **forward?**

Joni Eareckson Tada got to that point. When she was first paralyzed she was bitter towards God, but now she actually thanks God for touching her in the area of her strength. She is now limping forward, and she admits that she would not be moving forward if it was not for that touch of God.

God can touch us in many areas of our lives. His touch will cause us to limp - but limp **forward**, depending on **His** strength!