

## Jacob's Limp

Scripture Reading: Genesis 32:1-12

We studied the beginning of Jacob's life and saw some very dramatic turbulence in the family. A struggle for power and authority left Jacob fleeing his home to escape the wrath of his brother Esau. As Jacob fled, he encountered the grace of God. At a place called Bethel the Lord revealed Himself to Jacob. A covenant was made. A personal relationship was now established. The promises of God were established with Jacob. He will now live by faith. Jacob was now a changed man, but he had more changing to do. God was planning to cause growth and development of this patriarch through the experiences he would have at the home of Uncle Laban. After twenty years of serving Laban, the grace of God, which led Jacob away from his home, was now leading him back home. A new level of change and maturity was about to happen. The Jacob who left his home was not really the same Jacob who was returning.

### **Genesis 32:1-2 – The Appearance of God's Host**

As Jacob headed to his homeland, God gave an appearance of angels. This also happened when Jacob left his homeland twenty years earlier (Genesis 28:10-15). Doubtless this was an affirmation to Jacob of the promises God made to Jacob at that time. Jacob named the place **Mahanaim**, which means "*two camps*." The presence of God and the promises of God help us understand an alliance of two. We are never alone. If God is with us and if God is for us, we have every right to be confident and courageous. See Psalm 46:1-11; 48:14; 121:1-8; Matthew 1:21-23; 28:18-20; Romans 8:28-39; Philippians 1:6; II Timothy 4:16-18; Hebrews 13:5-6. Perhaps the importance of being a patriarch, responsible for his family, was settling into Jacob's mind. For he saw his family also as "*two bands / camps / companies*" (Genesis 32:9-10).

### **Genesis 32:3-23 – Apprehension: The Appeasement of Esau's Wrath**

Jacob wanted to test the waters (i.e. determine what he was facing when he would meet Esau after all of these years). He sent messengers ahead, to see Esau and announce his return. The report of the messengers was simply that Esau was coming with four hundred men! There was no verbal communication. Esau wasn't always so good with that. He spoke with few words, and more with action. This news was disturbing. Jacob divided his livestock into two groups. He was making an escape plan in case his brother was coming to attack. Jacob prayed. Then he established groups with livestock and sent them ahead as gifts of good will to Esau. He separated his family from all of the livestock. Finally, Jacob separated himself to be alone with God.

Jacob's concern and fear was rational. He sought to prepare himself and his family for the worst. His strategy included prayer and faith in the promises of God (Genesis 32:9-12). See Psalm 34:1-22; 56:1-13; 62:5-8; 118:5-6; II Thessalonians 3:1-3.

## **Genesis 32:24-32 – Appealing to God: Face-to-Face wrestling with God**

Jacob was not simply alone. He was alone with God. A very literal wrestling match took place. A visible appearance of God is called a “theophany.” More precisely, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God is called a “Christophany.” We can get confused over the appearance of a spirit that has a solid bodily form. We might be tempted to think of a ghost-like, almost transparent appearance of a personage. There is no doubt of a solid form in this story. Jacob was grabbing and wrestling with Him.

Considering that this is God, the “*man*” was being gentle. Jacob showed such intense effort that the “*man*” had to bring this to a conclusion. The day was about to dawn and the Lord did not want him to see His face (cp. Moses with the Lord – Exodus 33:17-23). Jacob was determined to get a blessing from Him. God has unexpected blessings for us. This one wasn’t going to feel good. The Lord struck Jacob’s hip socket and put it out of joint, causing him to limp the rest of his life. Next, the Lord dealt with Jacob’s name (“*heal-grabber*” / “*Supplanter*” / “*Deceitful*”). Jacob received a new name, “*Israel*” (“*Prince with God*” / “*A fighter*” / “*One who struggles or contends*”). “*Prince*” implies that Jacob will be a leader among men. Yet this word emphasizes a fighter / contender. Israel is one who will be struggling with God – seeking Him / His holy nature and will. Israel will also be struggling with men – many conflicts with man’s sinful nature and will. See how Jacob will comment on his life when speaking to Pharaoh (Genesis 47:8-9). Jacob’s life, along with the life of Joseph, dominate the rest of the book of Genesis. The conflicts in Jacob’s life will be many (Psalm 34:19).

In Genesis 32:29, Jacob asked the “*man*” for His name. He answered Jacob by asking him why he would even need to ask. Remember, Jacob had been praying to God for help just that day (Genesis 32:9-12). Jacob was not quite prepared for God to answer him that quickly and that powerfully. Does God ever surprise us and catch us off-guard after we have sought Him in prayer? Consider the disciples in Acts 12:1-16.

Jacob named this place “*Peniel*” / “*Penuel*” (verse 30 “*peh-nee’-el*” / verse 31 “*peh-noo’-el*”). The name means “*the face of God*.” Jacob will never forget this moment. His name has been changed and he will walk with a limp for the rest of his life. Consider how we should remember our experiences with God. See Psalm 77:1-6,10-12; 20:1-9; 42:1-5; 63:1-7; 105:1-5; 111:1-4; 119:50-52; 143:1-6; Romans 8:26-39; Hebrews 10:30-39.

**Are we willing to experience weakness, pain and hardship in order to know God better and to serve Him with His strength instead of ours?** See John 3:30; II Corinthians 12:7-10; Galatians 2:20; 6:12-18; Ephesians 6:10-20; Philippians 1:20-21; 2:5-18; 3:1-10; 4:4-13; II Timothy 2:8-13.

**See the divine commentary on this story in Hosea 12:1-6.** It concludes by encouraging us to **1)** Turn to God, **2)** Keep focused on mercy, kindness, love, and justice, **3)** Wait on your God continually. **See Romans 15:30-33** (Note the Greek word for “*strive*” in verse 30. From this we get the English word “*agonize*.”); II Corinthians 1:8-11; Ephesians 6:18-19; Colossians 4:2-3,12.