

May 3rd, 2020
Wrestling with God and Man
Genesis 31-32

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Apr 26	2 Kings 15-17	Apr 30	1 Chron1-2
Apr 27	2 Kings 18-19	May 1	1 Chron3-5
Apr 28	2 Kings 20-22	May 2	1 Chron6
Apr 29	2 Kings 23-25	May 3	1 Chron7-8

Lesson Introduction: *Our lesson today finds Jacob fleeing from his father-in-law Laban, and running into his estranged brother, Esau. Jacob had worked many years for Laban, and although Laban was always looking for a way to cheat his son-in-law, God continually prospered Jacob through it all. As we study this week, we will see how God sees the affliction of His people, and remains faithful to His covenant with them, while also seeing how God Himself brings us to a place of complete dependence on Him, that we might cling to His blessings alone for our provision.*

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS:

- **The Lord sees our affliction and labor (31:36-42)**
- **The Lord teaches us to depend on Him through trial and suffering (Ch. 32:22-32)**
- **The Lord is faithful to bless His children (31:1-16; 36-42, 32:28)**

Discussion Section 1: Fleeing from Laban

Read Genesis 31 (Lesson Focus: V. 36-42)

36 Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob said to Laban, *“What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? 37 For you have felt through all my goods; what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. 38 These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. 39 What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. 41 These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two*

daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42 If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”

-Why did God call Jacob to leave Laban’s house? (V. 1-3)

-How did God treat Jacob during the time he was in the house of Laban? (V. 4-16; 36-42)

-What affliction are you working through right now? What comfort can be found in this passage? (V. 42)

Note: *As we saw some last week, Jacob had gone through some difficulty with his father-in-law, Laban. He had been tricked into working 7 years for a wife that he did not want, only to have to work an additional 7 years for the wife that He had wanted all along. Laban had tried to cheat Jacob in the deal they had made concerning livestock, but the Lord had continued to bless Jacob through it all (30:25-43). In our passage today, we see that Jacob, under the Lord’s direction, decided to leave the house of Laban and return home. The Lord in His timing was going to send Jacob back to the land of his fathers and establish him and his son’s in order to fulfill His promise.*

Jacob suffered much under Laban, yet we see that through it all, the Lord was with him and prospered Him. Jacob stated to his father-in-law, “If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.” What a wonderful encouragement this passage should be to us! When Jacob was being cheated, lied to, and taken advantage of, God was in his corner, saw what was going on, and ultimately made it right. God is not absent in our struggles. He sees when we are downtrodden and done wrong. There is nothing that escapes His sight, and as our Good and Perfect Father, He will bring justice and grant us mercy and grace. May we remain faithful in laboring for what is good while entrusting our souls to our Faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19). He has us in His hands and will always do good to us.

Discussion Section 2: Wrestling with God

Read Genesis 32 (Lesson Focus: V. 22-32)

22 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. **23** He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. **24** And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. **25** When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. **26** Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." **27** And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." **28** Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." **29** Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. **30** So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." **31** The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. **32** Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

-Why was Jacob distressed in chapter 32?

-How did the wrestling match come about?

-What was the Lord teaching Jacob through the wrestling match?

-What does the name *Israel* tell us about both Jacob and the nation of Israel? What does it tell us about God?
(V. 28)

Note: In chapter 32, we see that Jacob is greatly distressed. The Lord had told him to return to the land of his father, and that He would bless him and making him a great nation, and that He would be with him wherever he went (**Genesis 28:13-15**), but the reality of facing his brother still had Jacob concerned. Jacob had lied and connived in order to steal his father's blessing out from under his older brother, and now he was unsure how Esau would react upon seeing him after all those years. Jacob had dealt with much strife in his life in human relationships. His relationship with his brother was

estranged, his relationship with his wives was difficult, he and his father-in-law were at odds when he fled from Laban. In general, it seemed that Jacob's life was one filled with tumult. In the midst of his anguish, another battle was about to be had.

There is some mystery as to who the man that wrestled with Jacob in chapter 32 was. Some believe it was the preincarnate Christ, or the angel of the Lord. To be sure, Jacob's declaration at the end of the chapter, that he had seen God face to face and lived, certainly points to the reality that in some real way, God was the One wrestling with Jacob. What we know for sure is that in some way God appeared to Jacob, and that He initiated this strange wrestling match that lasted though the night. Think about it, Jacob was in no mood to wrestle. He was looking for some solitude, some peace before the storm of seeing Esau the next day. He did not need another battle on his hands. Yet, abruptly, the passage tells us that Jacob and this mystery man began a battle that would last till the break of day. God met Jacob in his lowest moment, in order to wrestle with Him! Why would He do such a thing to a man who was in so desperate a situation?

Ultimately, it seems that the Lord was teaching Jacob an important lesson. To be perfectly clear, it is vital that we understand that God was not ultimately overcome by Jacob and begrudgingly gave in at the end of this fight. There is no challenge that the Lord is not up for. Indeed, there is nothing that is truly a challenge to Him at all! We see this clearly in the fact that the Lord put Jacob's hip out of socket by simply touching it! There is no doubt who was in control of this fight. He was not obligated to give into Jacob's request for a blessing because Jacob was a worthy adversary, rather, He was teaching Jacob that his only hope in life was to cling to Him and His promises. This was a painful lesson for Jacob to learn, and he would walk with a limp as a reminder of this lesson. The lesson we learn from Jacob in this story is that sometimes God brings us through painful battles in order to show us our desperate need for reliance on Him alone. In his article **I Will Not Let You Go Unless You Bless Me** on Desiringgod.com, Jon Bloom wrote this concerning Jacob's wrestling match with God:

"Jacob began the night believing his greatest need was to escape from Esau. He ended the night believing his greatest need was to trust in the blessing of God's promise. And what changed him from fearing man to

trusting God's word was prolonged and painful wrestling with God.

Sometimes, in your battle with unbelief, your greatest Ally will wrestle you — he might even make you limp — until you're desperate enough to say, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." It is a great mercy to be brought to the point where you're desperate enough to insist on what you need the most."

*God was so gracious to Jacob in bringing him to a place of complete dependence on Him. He spared Jacob's life, and changed his name to **Israel**. The meaning of Israel is, "he strives with God." How true this was of Jacob, how true it was of God's chosen people, and How true it is of us. All of us have strife with God. We wrestle with doubt and unbelief, we continually disobey the revealed will of God. We regularly think we know a better way than what God has told us. Yet through it all, God continually grants us mercy and gives us blessings we could never deserve. Sometimes the Lord puts our hip out of socket, discipling us in order to make us holy and draw us closer to Him (**Hebrews 12:3-10**). We should be so thankful that, although we have striven with God, we have prevailed by His mercy through the death and resurrection of His Son! As we close out this lesson, consider how God has taught you through difficult battles, and how you have been granted victory in Jesus both in this life, and forevermore.*