

# Jacob Wrestles with God

## 32: 24-32

**DIG:** What was the significance of Jacob's new name, Israel? Why did God slightly dislocate Jacob's hip? What happened to give Jacob greater assurance in facing Esau?

**REFLECT:** How long does God have to wrestle with you before you yield every area of your life to Him? What does Elohim have to dislocate in your life before you come to the end of yourself? Do you need God to rename you to receive your blessing?

Jacob was paralyzed at the thought of meeting Esau. He had expended his energy in elaborate preparations for the coming encounter with his brother. But instead, he had an encounter with God, for which he was completely unprepared.<sup>505</sup>

So Jacob was left alone, and suddenly he is conscious of an assailant. A man wrestled with him until daybreak at the river named Jabbok (32:24). It is significant that the name Jabbok means *wrestler*. There is a play on words here with *wrestled* and Jabbok. In Hebrew, the word Jabbok is *yabok*, and the word *wrestle* is *yaaveik*. The Hebrew word for *wrestling* is found only here and the next verse, and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The word itself comes from the root *avak* that means *dust*. So the basic meaning of this word is *to get dusty while wrestling*. The name Jabbok was evidently given to the river at a later date to remember Jacob's amazing experience that night.

Who was it that Jacob wrestled that night? Was it a man or an angel? His identity emerges gradually, and Ya'akov is quick to pick up on every clue. There seems to be no question that the writer of this passage (originally probably Jacob) intended it to be taken literally. As far as the mysterious *wrestler* was concerned, he was in the form of a man, but was actually an angel. Angels had eaten a meal with Abraham, and two of them had been the objects of the sexual desires of the Sodomites, so there is no doubt that angels can take on the physical characteristics of men if they need to do so. The Holy Spirit indicates that this was an angel as the LORD inspired Hosea to write: **In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the Angel and overcame Him; he wept and begged for His favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with Him there. Adonai ELOHEI-Tza'ot, ADONAI is His name of renown (Hosea 12:3-5)!** But in Jacob's evaluation, his wrestling Partner was more than even an angel. It was none other than the Angel of the LORD, the pre-incarnate Messiah, and the visible manifestation of the invisible God. **The rabbis teach that this man was the guardian angel of Esau.**

As **Jacob** (Hebrew: **Ya'akov**) began to **pray** that night, little did **he** know that as **he** cried out to **ADONAI** for strength and deliverance that **he** would end up **wrestling with God Himself**. As **he** wrestled in prayer, it was as though **he** sensed that **the LORD** was really present with **him**. As **he** cried out more and more in prayer, **God's** presence became more and more real to **him** until, suddenly, **He** was real! **Jacob's** uplifted arms were actually clinging to **ADONAI Himself, God** in human form. **Ya'akov** felt that, if **he** ever let go, it would mean that **God** had left **him** with his prayer unanswered; and so **he** clung desperately, pleading all the while for **His blessing**. **The LORD** in **His** grace allowed **Jacob** to hang on, seeing that **His servant's** faith and understanding were growing as **he** clung.<sup>506</sup>

At some point, when **God** saw that **He** could not overpower **Jacob**, **He** finally gave **him** the blessing **he** sought. It wasn't that **He** *couldn't* overpower **Ya'akov**, but **He** allowed **Jacob** to hold on. Then, to remind **Ya'akov** of the experience forever, **He** touched the socket of **Jacob's** hip so that his hip was wrenched and slightly dislocated as **he** wrestled with **him** (32:25). This would be a continual reminder of this unique encounter. But **Ya'akov** continued to struggle for **the blessing**, despite having a dislocated hip. **The rabbis teach that the laming of Jacob was his punishment for wanting to flee and not relying on God.**

Then **ADONAI** said: **Let Me go, for it is daybreak**. The fact that **the wrestling** lasted until **daybreak** is significant. For the darkness symbolized **Jacob's** situation. Fear and uncertainty had seized **him**.<sup>507</sup> It was a long indecisive struggle. **But** once it dawned on **Jacob** who his assailant was, **he** pleaded: **I will not let You go unless You bless me (32:26)**. **Ya'akov** wasn't **wrestling** any more, **he** was just holding on. **He** found out that you do not get anywhere with **God** by struggling and resisting; the only way that you get anywhere with **Him** is by yielding and just holding on. **Abraham** had learned that, and that is why **he** believed **ADONAI**, and **He** credited it to **him** as righteousness (15:6). When you are willing to hold on, **the LORD** is there ready to help you.<sup>508</sup>

**The Lord** desires men and women to persist in prayer and align themselves to **His** will. **He** delights in yielding to such prayers. **Yeshua** told his apostles a parable to show them that **they should always pray and not give up** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Ih - The Parable of the Persistent Widow**).

But to show the transition between **Jacob's** time of preparation and his time of fulfillment, **the Angel of the LORD** called attention to his name. Then the man asked him, "What is your name?" **The rabbis teach that angels have no set names, but their names change according to the mission given to them**. "Jacob," **he** answered (32:27). Then the man said: **Your name will no longer be Ya'akov, but Isra'el**. **He** would no longer be called

the *supplanter* (it's a secondary meaning) but the *prevailer* (see **Gm - Two Nations, One Womb**). In Hebrew, *Yisra'el* is a combination of two Hebrew words, *sarah* and *el*. Literally it means, *he who prevails victoriously with God*. Other interpretations are such names as *God strives, God fights, or may God contend*. But the reason for the name change is **because you have struggled with God, to gain the blessing, and with men such as Esau and Laban and have prevailed or overcome (32:28)**.

The significance of **Jacob's new name** was ownership. **God** changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah when they **believed in the LORD** and became **His own (15:6)**. In the future, **the Lord** would also change Simon's name to **Peter** because **he also believed in Him (Mark 3:16)**. Therefore, **Jacob** had a new **name** and a new **limp**. The new **name** would forever remind **him** of his new destiny, and the new **limp** would forever remind **him** to live in the **fear of ADONAI (Proverbs 9:10)**.<sup>509</sup>

Now convinced that **he** was wrestling with no mere human, **Ya'akov** pleaded: **Please tell me your name. But ADONAI** answered his question, with a question: **Why do you ask My name (32:29a)?** The implication was this: *think about it and you can figure it out yourself*. This would be very similar to Manoah's question, who was the father of Samson. Manoah asked the same question that **Jacob** did: **What is your name? The LORD** also replied: **Why do you ask My name?** But in the **Judges** passage, the **Angel** didn't stop there; **He** answered the question and said: **It is beyond understanding (Judges 13:17-18)**. The Hebrew word for **beyond understanding**, *pele*, is one of those words in the Hebrew text that is used only of **God**, and never used of a **man**. So in this way **the Angel** answered the question. **When the verses of Genesis and Judges are combined, we can see that this is clearly the Messiah.**

**Then God blessed him there (32:29b)**. So **Ya'akov** received his **blessing**. Without realizing it completely, this was what **Jacob** wanted and needed. **He** had acquired his father's **blessing** by deceit and treachery. Now wracked with fear at **Esau's** revenge, his **wrestling** turned to frantic determination. This time **the blessing** was rightfully obtained.<sup>510</sup>

**The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip (32:31)**. This was the source of a Jewish eating tradition four hundred years later when Moses, being a compiler of the book of **Genesis**, makes a comment in his day looking back on this event. **Therefore, to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon (32:32)**. This practice was not incorporated into Jewish law, and is not considered a part of being kosher today. But evidently this was the practice during the time of Moses. **So Jacob called the place Peniel, meaning the face of God (Judges 8:8 and 17; First Kings 12: 25)**.

**He** did think about it and recognized that **God** met **him** in the form of a **man**, (which was the only way **he** could have survived). **He** said: **Because I saw God face to face, my life was spared (32:30)**. Having come to this realization, **Ya'akov** had the assurance that **Esau** could not destroy **him**, and **his** earlier prayer for deliverance was then answered.

Before returning to the Promised Land, **Ya'akov** was met by **God**. This event was a turning point in **his** life. As a sign of this, **Jacob** received a new **name** that indicated the nature of **his** new relation to **ADONAI**.<sup>511</sup> **He** finally learned that in **the LORD's** way of doing things, strength comes through weakness, which prepared **him** to meet **Esau**.<sup>512</sup>