

HOW TO FIGHT WITH GOD AND WIN

Genesis 32:22-32

Why are we always trying to earn God's blessing by our own efforts?

When faced with a challenging opportunity, we take matters into our own hands—use whatever means are at our disposal to work things out for ourselves.

We scheme and manipulate, claw and connive, to get our own way.

Even people that we would normally identify with godliness have a tendency to attempt to manipulate people and circumstances to come out the way we want them to!

That's the kind of person Jacob was.

JACOB IS IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF THE HEROES OF THE FAITH Heb. 11:9, 21

God identifies with him down through history—He is *the God of Jacob!*

[But at the same time, . . .]

JACOB IS INTRODUCED AS “A SCHEMER” Gen. 25:26; 27:36; 31:26-27

He was pretty clever, pretty crafty.

He cleverly outwitted his brother—twice.

He eventually conquered Laban, getting rich at his expense

He was *named* for that ability—“the schemer”, “the deceiver”, the manipulator.

Until one day he ran into an adversary he couldn't manipulate, he couldn't out-scheme, and he couldn't defeat.

“The heel grasper” => “the deceiver”, the schemer, the cheat => “the overcomer—the one who was victorious with God!

God transforms Jacob from “*deceiver*” to “*overcomer*” with God.

JACOB TRANSFORMED INTO VICTOR

What changed him?

Jacob came to the end of himself—came face-to-face with God.

Jacob's in a mess he can't control; he's not sure what to do about it.

First encounter with God Gen. 28:10-22

Occurs on his way to Uncle Laban's house—at Bethel 28:10-15

God appears to him and promises His presence and His protection.

God's promise: “I am with you”

“I will watch over you wherever you go” “I will bring you back to this land.”

Jacob's response 28:16-22

He suddenly realizes that God is there with him—in his barren wilderness

God is sending messengers from his heavenly throne to Jacob's barren wilderness to care for him!

This is God's place and He is with him!

Awesome!

Jacob's vow: “Yahweh will be my God!”

For the first time he expresses his own personal faith in Yahweh

He builds a memorial

He worships God

Revelation of God's presence and blessing inspires him to worship.

[2nd event comes on the way home from Uncle Laban's house.]

Second encounter with God

Gen. 32:22-32

Jacob has been there for 20 years, hiding from Esau.

Now he's on his way home to face Esau.

Any moment he'll face a brother who wants to kill him.

Again he's afraid.

He makes elaborate schemes to manipulate Esau and win him back.

Motivated by fear, Jacob seeks to pacify Esau **32:20**

... sends his family to the other side of the river **32:22-23**

Deep down inside he fears what will happen if the schemes don't work.

He makes provision for his family's protection, sending them across the river, in case something happens to him, then he stays behind, where he can be alone.

Now he is left alone **32:24a**

Suddenly Jacob meets an adversary he didn't prepare for; someone *he can't defeat!*

In Jacob's struggle with God TWO MAIN THINGS occur: 32:24b-25

After prolonged struggle the Assailant applies a supernatural blow.

God touched the wrestler's strongest muscle, and it shriveled.

His carnal weapons were lame and useless.

With that, his persistent self-confidence shriveled as well.

This was a battle Jacob could never win.

Jacob the deceitful fighter was in the hands of Someone he could neither outsmart, nor defeat

—One against Whom it was useless to struggle.

1. Jacob was crippled

From this point forward, Jacob bears a perpetual reminder of his struggle with God—a reminder of his own weakness.

—of his inability to “pull it off himself, in his own strength.

His struggle took a new direction; crippled in his own strength, he became bold in faith.

He clung to his adversary tenaciously to receive divine blessing.

Encounter raises interesting issues:

- * Apparently God revealed Himself to Jacob in ordinary human form.
- * Jacob thought he could handle this situation the way he handled others.
Few had taken Jacob's challenge and won.
- * Apparently God allows Jacob to prevail, at least to the point of staying even with Him all night long.

[2nd thing happened as a result of wrestling with God: **32:26-30**

2. Jacob was blessed and renamed [received a new name]

When God touched hip, Jacob realized *Who* He's struggling with.

Maybe he just realized that no normal human was tenacious enough to stay with him that long, much less get best of him.

In sheer determination, Jacob was not going to let *this* moment escape without a blessing.

(He was pretty good at getting blessings! Ask Esau!)

Before blessing him, God asks him his name.

Jacob has to reveal his name, = a confession of his character.

(Notice that the first time he got a blessing, Isaac didn't know the real name of the one he was blessing; that wasn't going to happen this time!

God knew exactly who he was!)

He had to be transformed to receive God's blessing.

Jacob's new name => "ISRAEL" probably means "**God fights**"

Jacob had learned to fight for himself all his life.

Now he learns that God is a fighter – One he will never beat!

God fights for Israel also. That's why he overcomes.

His new name indicates that this is an encounter he wins.

God specializes in transforming deceitful schemers into overcomers.

Did he win because he overpowered God? No.

He wins because he clings to God and God chooses to bless him.

Jacob asks his opponent HIS name. 32:29

Question needs no answer.

1. It's irrelevant.

2. He already knows who the assailant is.

The significance of the event is revealed in the **name given to the place.**

Jacob names it: "PENIEL" => "Face of God" (God's face) 32:30

He saw the face of God and was saved.

NIV adds: "yet", giving the idea that He saw God's face and in spite of it was spared from being consumed [normal expectation!].

Original only has "and". "I saw God face to face and I was spared!"

Remember why he stayed there.

He was desperate; next day he had to face Esau and be destroyed.

At least that's the fate he feared.

Would it happen? No!

Why? Because of God's face!

He saw God face to face and was saved from the expected fate.

He had called to God earlier. Once he was free of Laban, follow his journey:

31:53-55 *May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. 54 He*

offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there. 55 Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

32:1-2 Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim.

32:9-12 Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' 10 I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. 11 **Save me,** I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. 12 But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

Jacob didn't get *himself* out of this mess.

The face of God spared him!

Having seen God face to face, Jacob could now face Esau, a mere man, without fear!

Jacob's story: **struggle of someone who deceived others to get his own way!**

Jacob always manipulated other people to get his own way!

Because he was guilty, **he feared his brother, and God was His adversary.**

Face to face with God, his scheming weapons were useless!

God incapacitated him.

When he struggled for God's blessing, God promised that, and resolved the issue which caused him to fear man.

His struggle with God gave victory with both God AND man.

VICTORY COMES FROM CLINGING TO GOD,
NOT FROM OUR SCHEMING.

Do we get the point?

GOD'S VICTORY DOESN'T COME BY HUMAN MIGHT,

NOT BY HUMAN POWER, BUT BY GOD'S SPIRIT (Zech. 4:6)

If we are to accomplish what God wants, it must be by faith in Him, not by our struggle to make it happen.

If we keep trying to "pull it off" ourselves, God will eventually bring us to the place where we can't possibly win, so we will have to cling to Him.

Why do we wait until He brings us to desperation?

Why don't we just decide to cling now and avoid the pain?

God let's us go that way for a while, but **eventually He will bring on an adversary we can't beat, so we will learn to cling to Him.**

Our response: grab hold of God and insist we won't let go until He blesses us!

Why are we so slow to learn? How long will it take?

What kind of circumstance will God have to bring into OUR lives before we realize we can't pull it off by ourselves?

Before we stop trying to control everything and everybody for our own good?

Before we grab hold of HIM and say "I WON'T LET GO UNTIL YOU BLESS ME?"

When Jacob decided to cling to God, and saw Him face to face, God transformed his character.

He changed him from a schemer into a victor!

That's how it works for us too,

when we cling to God

when we see Him face to face, as He is,

God changes our character => into the image of His Son.

That's not the result of our attempt to change ourselves.

That's God's work in our life!

Will we stop trying to pull it off ourselves and cling to Him, so that He can bring about the transformation of our character that we so desperately need, and that will bring glory to Him?