

Research on: **Jacob Wrestling with the Angel**

Gen. 32: 24-30

“Jacob, a patriarch, was the second son of Isaac and Rebekah and the grandson of Abraham. He fathered the twelve tribes of Israel and was connected with the period which marked the beginning of the history of the Children of Israel” (Shotwell 102).

Jacob is *ya'aqob* in Hebrew which means “heel holder or supplanter” (Gesenius 357).

Rebekah is *Ribqah* in Hebrew which means “rope with a noose, the name of a girl who ensnares men by her beauty, ensnarer” (Gesenius 755).

Isaac is *Yitschaq* in Hebrew which means “he laughs” (Gesenius 360).

“This second son of Isaac and Rebekah is a wonderful example of the two-fold nature of the average human being. A born bargainer, he even bargained with God, vowing that if Jehovah would be his protector and good provider, he would put Him first in his life and tithe regularly. He shrewdly bargained with his twin brother, Esau, for the much coveted birthright, and craftily obtained the firstborn blessing with the connivance of his mother. He met his peer in his Uncle Laban, who became his father-in-law: the deceiver became the deceived. From then on, the two were engaged in a battle of wits, a battle which Jacob won by outmaneuvering Laban.

“But Jacob also expressed many admirable qualities: He was deeply religious with a strong faith in God’s omnipresence and ever-available protection and goodness. He was patient in disappointment when he discovered after seven years of unpaid labor that he had been given the wrong sister in marriage” (Tatham 61-62).

24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

In Hebrew, the word for *breaking* is *alah* which means “to go up, ascend, to come up before God, cause to go up, stir up mentally, increase the light” (Gesenius 630).

“**There wrestled.**—This verb, *abak*, occurs only here, and without doubt it was chosen because of its resemblance to the name Jabbok. Its probable derivation is from a word signifying *dust*, because wrestlers were quickly involved in a cloud of dust, or because, as was the custom in Greece, they rubbed their bodies with it” (Ellicott’s Commentary, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/32-24.htm>).

“Jacob’s struggle there took place in his own consciousness; he was alone with his fear of Esau and the evil in his own nature which he knew must be overcome: sensuality, deceitfulness,

selfishness, covetousness. Until these devils were cast out, he knew he did not deserve God's protection and benefactions. He won the wrestling match when he saw "God face to face" (Tatham 62).

"The O.T. story is dramatizing here the consequence that comes to every soul that has tried too long to evade the truth about himself. Thus far, Jacob's life had seemed successful. By one stratagem and another he had outwitted Esau, Isaac, and Laban. Coming home prosperous, all the outward circumstances might have made him boastful. But his conscience saw something else. He saw his world shadowed by his guilt. He was brought up short to a reckoning with himself, which was a reckoning with God" (*IB* 1.723).

25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

"The hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, it was a symbol of the fact that Jacob was in the grip of a power which his self-assurance could not match. Jacob knew that henceforth he could never walk in lofty arrogance again" (*IB* 1.723).

"The Bible account pictures the transformation process as a wrestling match between Jacob and "a man"—perhaps his better nature. By daybreak, "the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him," and Jacob was defeated.

Literally without a leg of his own to stand on, Jacob conceded to the overwhelming power of his better nature. ("The art of peacemaking", [May 6, 2002 issue](#) of the *Christian Science Sentinel*)

"By weakening his mortal sense of power, the angel caused Jacob to make great strides of spiritual progress. So today, Truth exposes error's falsity and by doing so causes it to be self-destroyed." (End of the Year Checkup" Naomi Pricer, December 28, 1974, CSS)

(From a friend on Jacob's thigh: "I was thinking about Jacob's thigh, and looked up the bone that's in the thigh. It's interesting that the femur or thigh bone is considered to be the longest and strongest bone in the body according to physiology. So the angel challenged the biggest manifestation of Jacob's trust in matter—his human power, virility, manly strength.")

26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

"A great while before day, Jacob being alone, more fully spread his fears before God in prayer.

. . . Jacob kept his ground; though the struggle continued long, this did not shake his faith, nor silence his prayer. He will have a blessing, and had rather have all his bone put out of joint than go away without one. Those who would have the blessing of Christ, must resolve to take no denial. The fervent prayer is the effectual prayer” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/32-25.htm>).

“In the good and evil that made up Jacob there were two factors of nobility that saved him. The first was his awareness that life has a divine meaning above its material fact—the awareness that made him seek the birthright and made possible his vision at Bethel. The second quality, revealed here in his wrestling, was his determination. He had struggled all night until he was lame and agonized; but when his antagonist wished to separate himself, Jacob desperately held on. When a man is forced to wrestle with moral reality and its consequences, he may try to get rid of them as quickly as he can. But Jacob’s quality was otherwise. Caught in the grip of judgment, his prevailing desire was not for escape. He would hold on until something decisive happened. In punishment, as in prosperity, he would not let the experience go until he had wrung a blessing from it” (*IB* 1.724).

“Throughout the narratives Jacob’s life has been characterized by struggle—particularly by a struggle to obtain a blessing from God. Jacob has struggled with his brother, his father, his father-in-law, and now with God. His own words express the underlying meaning of each of these narratives: ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’ Here we see a graphic picture of Jacob’s struggling for the blessing, struggling with God and man” (*EBC* 1.255).

27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

“*Israel*. That is, *He who striveth with God*, or, *God striveth*. The name is clearly a title of victory, from a root meaning “to persevere” (Cambridge Bible, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/32-28.htm>).

“A new name is given to Jacob. There is profound significance in the names of God (see *Expos. on vs. 29*). What of the significance of the name of a man?” (*IB* 1.724).

“A name was much more than a label of a personality. Know a name and you had a way open to the secret of the person” (*IB* 1.726).

“...he spent a long night in prayer, and ‘there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.’ In this spiritual experience his self-will yielded, his nature was changed and the true

birthright became his through grace. The angel said, ‘Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.’

“As the name was to the Hebrews the symbol or expression of the nature, the change of name is significant of the moral change in the patriarch himself; he is no longer Jacob the Supplanter, the Crafty one, the Overreacher, but Israel the Perseverer with God, who is worthy also to prevail” (Shotwell 103).

29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

“Disclose to me thy nature” (Barne’s Notes, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/32-29.htm>).

“Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? - Canst thou be ignorant who I am? And he blessed him there - gave him the new heart and the new nature which God alone can give to fallen man, and by the change he wrought in him, sufficiently showed who he was” (Clarke online).

30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

“Jacob had to feel the truth of God—to feel in his own experience an actual contact with the Infinite, to know the awful power of God’s holiness that may have to blast and burn our petty human confidence before it can fully bless. That is why Jacob called the place of his struggle Peniel, and said that he had seen God face to face. He did not need to be told anything. Ineffably he knew that his soul was not only preserved but expanded because he had encountered the terrible but transforming spirit of the Lord” (*IB* 1.728).

Peniel in Hebrew means “the face of God” (Gesenius 682). There are two ways to pronounce this word in English: “ pih NIGH el, or PEN ih el” (Severance 128).