

Genesis

Memorize the TRUTH!

Lesson 18 Wrestling With God Genesis 32–33

All of you, clothe yourselves with
humility toward one another, because,
"God opposes the proud but gives
grace to the humble."
1 Peter 5:5b

Returning to Canaan — Genesis 32:1-12

Day 1

1. Why do you think the Lord sent His angels to Jacob at this particular time?
2. a. What effect did Jacob hope the message he sent to his brother would have?

b. What report did his messenger bring back?

c. How did Jacob react to this report?
3. Read Jacob's prayer in verses 9-12. How had he changed in the 20 years he had been away from Canaan?

Learn the TRUTH!



No sooner was Jacob free of Laban's dishonesty than he found himself preparing to meet a military force headed by a man with a grudge — his brother Esau. Humility plays a key role in their encounter. It is hard to humble yourself, even when you know you've been wrong, unless you ask for God's help!

Esau is Coming — Genesis 32:13-21

Day 2

4. In spite of his experiences with God, fear still controlled Jacob's life. Why is fear inconsistent with faith?
5. Consider any areas in your life in which you still struggle with fear. What could you begin to do today to break its hold on your life?

Psalms 56:3-4

Isaiah 41:10

Philippians 4:6-7

A New Name
Genesis 32:22-32

Day 3

6. a. What happened to Jacob after he sent his family across the Jabbok River?

b. Jacob had conflict with men all his life. How had he also struggled with God all these years?
7. a. Names almost always signify character in Scripture. What did Jacob's original name mean? Genesis 25:26

b. Why do you think God asked him to state his name?

c. What new name did God give Jacob? Why do you think He gave him a new name?

Encountering Esau
Genesis 33:1-9

Day 4

8. a. How did Jacob react when he saw Esau and his entourage approaching? Why do you think he did that?

b. Did his strategy prove necessary? Why or why not?
9. Under what circumstances had these brothers last seen each other? Genesis 27:41-45
10. a. When they met, what did Jacob call Esau, and what did he call himself?

b. How is this exchange ironic in light of the birthright Jacob had "stolen" from Esau many years earlier? Genesis 27:29, 39-40

Humility and Reconciliation
Genesis 33:10-20

Day 5

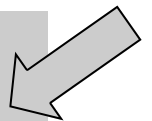
11. a. What message do you think Jacob was trying to send?

b. Why do you think Esau responded as he did to his brother's efforts at reconciliation?
12. a. What does 1 Peter 5:5-6 teach about reconciliation?

b. How are the actions of these men a model for us?

Live the TRUTH!

Reconciliation requires people to admit wrongdoing and ask forgiveness of each other. Only when Jacob finally understood submission to his God could he then humbly bow before the brother he had wronged (Genesis 33:3). The Bible does not record their actual words, but the actions of both show changed hearts. When you settle matters with God, He enables you to settle them with the one you have wronged.



Commentary Genesis Lesson 18

Jacob heads toward the Jordan River. Before his crossing, God sends angels to meet him. He recognizes their appearance as a sign of God's protection, a guarantee that he will survive the encounter with Esau and live to see God's promises fulfilled. Their appearance serves as a subtle reminder to him of the vow that he made at Bethel. The patriarch considers the location to be worthy of a new name. He calls it *Mahanaim*, *Two Camps*, or *Twin Camps*.

Jacob seeks a genuine reconciliation with his brother and makes a series of goodwill gestures. His messengers inform Esau that he has become a wealthy man. He is not returning to take anything that Esau owns. The returning men convey a frightening fact: Jacob's older brother is approaching with an entourage of 400 men. This causes Jacob "great fear and distress" (32:7). He divides his family and possessions into two companies. If one is attacked, perhaps the other can get away. He prays and asks for God's protection. When Jacob left the land years before, God was known to him mostly by reputation. As he re-enters the land, he brings the blessings of the Lord with him. He had possessed nothing when he departed. Even after years of Laban's dishonesty, he is returning a rich man, which could only be attributed to the God of Abraham and Isaac. Jacob reminds the Lord of his earlier promises.

Jacob decides to sweeten their meeting by extending lavish gifts to his brother. His presents of 200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 camels, 50 head of cattle, and assorted donkeys gives a hint of the magnitude of Jacob's wealth. To allow his 550 animals to have their maximum impact, he segregates them into herds so he can stagger their arrivals at Esau's camp. Esau could hardly fail to be impressed with his brother's humility and with the size of his estate. Jacob will face Esau and do whatever is right to reconcile with him.

Jacob sends his wives and maidservants ahead during the middle of the night. He finds himself alone at Mahanaim. Yet he is not alone. Verse 24 tells how "a man" wrestles with him — all during the waning hours of the night. The identity of this figure is none other than the Lord Himself. As so often in Genesis, His glory is veiled. In verse 25 He seems unable to overpower Jacob and insists that their wrestling cease. Yet with merely a touch, He dislocates Jacob's hip joint, demonstrating that He could overpower Jacob at any time. By this time Jacob has concluded that his opponent is the One upon whom his whole life depends. Now God is teaching him that the true struggle of his life is with Him rather than with men.

Jacob seems to understand the message, for he insists that the Visitor bless him before leaving. "The man" complies by changing Jacob's name. The patriarch has been known as *Jacob, the deceiver*. Henceforth, others will call him *Israel: He struggles with God*. He is a changed man, recognizing that he has survived a rare, if not unique, privilege — a close encounter with God Himself. He is altered physically as well, for the man's touch will cause him to limp the rest of his life. He renames the place *Peniel*, meaning *the face of God*. The repercussions will outlive him. For many generations, Israelites will refuse to eat the tendon of any animal they slaughter for food.

Check It Out:

The Bible repeatedly states God's opposition to pride. Pride brought about Satan's downfall. How many times have we wanted to tell God what to do with our lives and difficult situations? Is that not elevating our will to a position above God? It seems to be a natural tendency of human beings to be prideful — even arrogant. A heartfelt commitment to submit our will to His will and to enthrone our Savior as Lord of our life is essential. Each of us needs to ask ourselves this question: Am I willing to humble myself under His Mighty hand and trust Him to lift me up in His time, in His way?

No sooner has "the man" departed than Esau arrives. Jacob concludes that the 400 men must be a military force. He openly displays a preference for Rachel and Joseph, placing them last in line. He reasons that by the time any conflict reaches the rear, Rachel and Joseph will have escaped. To show his repentant and sincere spirit, he humbles himself by bowing down to Esau seven times.

Jacob receives a warm welcome. Esau's men are there to escort them to their new home, not to slaughter them. God honors Jacob's prayer and gives him favor with his brother, who seeks reconciliation. The reunion is emotional for both. Though Esau has come some distance to welcome Jacob and ensure his safety, the patriarch does not seem to want an extended relationship with him. When Esau offers to accompany him as he moves to a permanent camp, Jacob declines. He will arrive there at a slower pace. Esau offers to leave guards behind to protect Jacob's family, but Jacob again refuses. Esau heads south to Seir; Jacob turns west and moves to Succoth. There he establishes a semi-permanent settlement by building shelters (Hebrew, *succoth*) for his family and livestock. Jacob stays in this location east of the Jordan for a while, perhaps as much as 10 years.

Afterward, Jacob crosses the Jordan and settles near the town of Shechem. There he purchases a piece of property and settles down. He sets up an altar and worships God in the land that Abraham was told would belong to his children. Jacob calls his shrine *El Eloe Israel, God, the God of Israel*. He establishes a testimony among the Gentiles of the region that a worshiper of God is now among them, and he takes the first steps toward fulfilling an old vow. Although he has not yet returned to Bethel, he has at least acknowledged before the world that the Lord is indeed the God of Israel.



Jacob physically wrestled with God who appeared to him in human form. He struggled again as he threw himself on the mercy of God in prayer. Prayer would likely be the way we wrestle with God, and it can feel like a wrestling match. Much can be learned from Jacob's prayer. Jacob begins by reminding himself and God of how faithful God had been to his father and grandfather. He is unworthy of God's grace; yet he proceeds to beg for mercy. His rationale is based solidly on the promises of God. He had no Bible to turn to, but he remembered what God had promised and thus based his prayer on God's Word. God's Word still stands. He must be delighted when we remember His promises and claim them in faith. If the Holy Spirit reminds you of a promise, speak that promise back to God and take your stand on it. This method of prayer worked for the patriarchs, so it is surely good enough for you and me. Commit yourself to prayer, and trust Him to give you victory.



What insight does Hosea 12:3-5 give into Jacob's struggle with God? How does it apply to you?