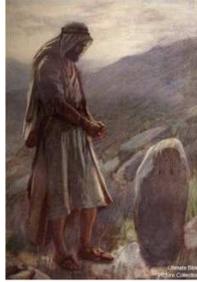


Are You Wrestling With God?



By Ben Godwin

Jacob was a tricky twin. He outwitted his brother Esau and cheated him out of his birthright. This sibling rivalry started before they were even born. These boys fought in their mother Rebekah's womb (Genesis 25:22). In fact, when Esau was born, Jacob's hand held on to his heel, as if to pull him back in and say, "No, me first." That's how Jacob got his name, meaning "heel snatcher."

These fraternal twins were definitely not identical. In fact, they were total opposites. They looked different. Esau was reddish in complexion and hairy, hence his nickname Edom ("red"). Jacob, on the other hand, was smooth skinned and a smooth talker. They acted different too. Esau was a brawny outdoorsman and a skilled hunter, while Jacob was "*a plain man dwelling in tents.*" Translation? He was a mild-mannered momma's boy.

Jacob stooped to a new low when he impersonated Esau and lied to his blind, dying father Isaac. He had already swindled Esau's birthright and then he stole their father's coveted blessing—a verbal endorsement of his and God's special favor. When Esau realized he'd been tricked again, he wept in anguish then vowed revenge. "*So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand; **then I will kill my brother Jacob**'*" (Genesis 27:41).

As Jacob fled from his murderous brother, he ran into a merciful God. Ironically, when he was at an all time low, God gave him a dream of a heavenly ladder and showed him a way up. He called the place Bethel, meaning "house of God." It was Jacob's first recorded encounter with God. Now Jehovah was not just granddaddy's or daddy's deity. Now Jehovah was Jacob's God! Incidentally, the Bible repeats the phrase "*The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,*" but it never says the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Esau. Why? Esau never chose the path of blessing and every individual must have their own personal encounter with God.

Twenty years passed after Jacob's experience at Bethel. He met and married Rachel and worked for her father, Laban, in exchange for two wives and livestock. But his past caught up to him. Esau had nursed his grudge and was coming with 400 men to settle the score. Jacob

envisioned a massacre. So he divided his family and herds into two camps and sent servants with generous bribes to appease Esau's fury. Jacob feared for his very life.

*“And Jacob was left **alone**....”* There was no one else to turn to for help but God. All of Jacob's scheming was of no use now. He was backed into a corner with no escape. It reminds me of the classic hymn, “Where could I go? Where could I go? Seeking a refuge for my soul. Needing a friend to help me in the end, where could I go but to the Lord?”

*“And there wrestled a **man** with him....”* Some believe this being was an angel, but the Bible doesn't say so. We know it wasn't an ordinary man because Jacob later said, *“I have seen God face to face.”* So this must have been a Theophany or a Christophany—an appearance of God or Jesus in a visible form. There are other similar encounters in Scripture. For instance, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and to Israel in a pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 3:2; 13:21). A “man” appeared to Joshua at Gilgal and called Himself the Captain of the Lord's Host (Joshua 5:13-15). A fourth “man” appeared with the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace who looked like the son of God (Daniel 3:25). So let's be clear, Jacob was wrestling with God!

The truth is we've all wrestled with God whenever we resisted His will and insisted on our will. God asked Jacob his name. Why? God already knew his name. Yes, but He wanted Jacob to admit that he'd lived up to his name. He had been a deceiver, a supplanter, a heel snatcher. Then God changed his name to Israel—“Prince of God”—and changed his nature too. Notice, when Jacob quit wrestling with God, God showed him His face. Jacob called that place Peniel, which means “face of God.” When we quit wrestling with God, He will reveal Himself to us in a greater way.

I have three older brothers. As kids we used to wrestle a lot. Being the youngest, I learned real quickly how to say “uncle!” When your siblings are older, bigger, and stronger than you, the best strategy is to concede defeat. That's the best game plan when wrestling with God too—total surrender. After Jacob surrendered, God dealt with Esau. Instead of the bloodbath he feared, Esau forgave him and the twins reconciled. You see, once we get our heart right with God, our relationships with others will improve.

Jacob's hip was disjointed and he limped for the rest of his life as a reminder of the night he wrestled with God. He was weaker in body but stronger in spirit from that day on. Self-reliance gave way to dependence on God. Instead of tricking people to gain an advantage, he relied on God's favor. So quit wrestling with God, friend, and yield to His will. It's about time you say “uncle” to your heavenly Father! After all, who do you think is going to win?



Ben Godwin pastors the Goodsprings Full Gospel Church and has authored three books. Note: this article was recently featured in Ben's column in the *Daily Mountain Eagle*, a newspaper in Jasper, Alabama. To read more articles, visit his website and take advantage of his 3 book bundle for \$20.00 plus shipping at bengodwin.org