

On the Beginning

32. Jacob Becomes Israel

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 31-32

Remember what Jacob said when he fled home to escape his brother's wrath?

"And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." (Genesis 28:20-22)

It is obvious from this statement that Jacob was not right with God when he spoke these words. If God would take care of him so that he could one day return in peace, *"then shall the Lord be my God."* Jacob could not at that time say that the God of his father was truly *his* God! As we have seen in Chapters 29 and 30, the Lord was working in Jacob's life to bring him to the place of repentance and *full surrender*. God is working in our lives to bring us to that same place! The crisis that brought about the change Jacob needed is found in Chapter 32. The symbolic indication of that change was the changing of his name from Jacob (supplanter) to Israel (prince or prevailer with God).

1. Following God's **Call**.

Genesis 31:1-16 tells us what got Jacob to leave the home country of Laban his father-in-law to journey back to Bethel and then back home to Isaac and Esau. It was the call of God (notice verses 3 and 11-13). This call in his heart was confirmed by circumstances (vs. 1-2) and by the consent of his family (vs. 4-16). When a man knows God is calling, he does not really need the confirmation of circumstances or family-consent, but it can help. God can re-enforce His work in our hearts by these things. Another confirmation came when Jacob's family actually departed from Padan-aram. As they went, a band of angels went with them (Genesis 32:1-2). Often when we start out in the right direction, God sends confirmation and assurance that we are doing the right thing.

2. Laban's **Images**.

One curious part of the story has to do with idols that Rachel stole from her father's house when they left. Read about it in Genesis 31:17-55. Rachel was wrong to do it, for many reasons, but Jacob was completely unaware of what she did. In Genesis 35, we learn that Jacob had become aware of idolatry in his household and that he demanded that it stop (verses 1-5). In the whole situation, however, we can see that Laban in a sense paid for his crooked treatment of Jacob. God saw to it!

3. Jacob's **Prayer**.

As we get into Chapter 32, we find Jacob fearfully preparing to meet the brother he had not seen in perhaps twenty years. The last he knew, Esau was determined to kill him (See Genesis 27:41). So he sent a message to Esau and then divided his family and servants in a way that might afford some protection (See Genesis 32:1-23). Also he prayed to the God of his father.

"And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to

thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” (Genesis 32:9-12)

Notice the important elements of his prayer:

- A. Appeal to God’s command and God’s promise. The situation involved obeying God’s command and trusting God’s promise. Jacob made his petition on the basis of God’s Word (v. 9).
- B. Humility and gratitude toward God (v. 10).
- C. An honest, straightforward, specific request (v. 11). See Philippians 4:6.
- D. A final appeal to another great promise of God (v. 12).

We would do well to learn from Jacob how to pray in the time of danger!

4. The **Wrestling** Match.

From verse 24 through the end of Chapter 32, we read the famous story of Jacob’s wrestling with God. Of course, verse 24 says it was “*a man*,” but Hosea 12:4 says it was an angel. Yet verse 30 makes it clear that the One who wrestled with Jacob that night was God Himself! Remember that the LORD manifested Himself as an angel often in the Old Testament, and specifically in the book of Genesis. This was such a manifestation. Read carefully the account of this wrestling match, and then ask the question, “Who won?” In a way, Jacob won, because he got the blessing he wanted (vs. 26-28). In another way, God won, because Jacob limped away from the match permanently disabled (vs. 25 and 31). Really, Jacob got what he wanted (a promise of protection from Esau) and God got what He wanted (the breaking of Jacob’s stubborn will). Often men surrender through wrestling with God. There comes a problem so big that the man (or woman) *must* have help from God (see v. 26). He (or she) may pray into the night, agonizing and crying out. But as they beg for their blessing, the Lord speaks to them about their lives. Finally, such a person surrenders all, and God gives them the blessing they sought. Many times it happens this way. Perhaps you should wrestle with God today.

Jacob really was changed that night. He became one that has “*power with God*” (v. 28). Jacob means “supplanter,” and his earlier life was certainly one of conniving to get what he wanted. Israel, his new name, means “a prevailer with God.” *El*, of course, means God, and the other part of the name comes from a verb that means to prevail or have power and can mean being a prince or ruler. Jacob was no longer a conniver, one who lives by his wits. He was Israel, a prevailer or prince with God, who faces life looking to the Lord to solve his problems and get things done for him. Many need to have the same change in their own lives, from manipulating their circumstances to prevailing in prayer with God. What about *you*?

