

Jacob Called Israel

You moved across the country. You seem to be having a hard time,” lamented Brianna. “Are you sure you’re supposed to be in Reno, Nevada?”

Autry replayed that conversation in his mind with his baby sister. Autry and his wife, Jada, had moved their two boys from Memphis, Tennessee, to follow where he believed God was leading him. Autry had been an assistant minister at a large, growing church in Memphis.

Now, Autry was face down crying on the carpeted floor of the small office space turned sanctuary/church with the blinds drawn. It was 7 A.M. on a Thursday. The church had 20 members. His personal finances were perilous, and the church’s budget was nonexistent.

“Lord, I don’t understand everything You’re doing, but bless my efforts, or let me go back home,” Autry prayed.

His prayer was interrupted by a tapping on the door. Several seconds later, Autry opened the blinds to see Jadyn.

“Good morning, Pastor. I saw the light on. I just got off work,” said Jadyn, who worked up the street at a convenience store. The 51 year old was a former gambler who had been a member for the past six months.

“I don’t know what I would have done if it had not been for the church,” said Jadyn. “A few of my friends want to come to church with me on Sunday. Are you going to start a morning prayer time at the church? I wish you would.”

1. *What are some mysteries about God that you would like to understand?*

2. *Why can’t we know everything about God?*

3. *How could wrestling with what you don’t know about God help you understand Him?*

Jacob Wrestles with God

Genesis 32:22-26, KJV

22 And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.

23 And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

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

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.

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

Genesis 32:22-26, NIV

²²That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

After clearly duping his older brother out of his birth-right, Jacob and Esau were about to encounter one another after many years. Esau and all of his family were heading right toward Jacob. So many people and livestock were in Jacob's entourage, it was senseless to try to evade his brother. Esau had pledged to kill Jacob. Therefore, Jacob sent his family and all his possessions on the other side of the Jabbok River and waited alone for his brother.

Then a man suddenly appeared and began to wrestle with Jacob. Everyone else was across the river, so there was no one to come to his aid and no possessions to steal. Therefore, Jacob realized that he had simply been

challenged to a fight (of sorts) where one man tries to gain dominance over another.

Within a few hours of the struggle, Jacob would have started to realize that there was something supernatural about this encounter. But even though he was wrestling with some sort of heavenly being, the two men seemed evenly matched.

No man was gaining advantage over the other. And so, the supernatural opponent simply touched Jacob's hip, causing it to dislocate from its joint. Even so, Jacob would not let go of his opponent. Once the supernatural opponent saw the sun was rising, he told Jacob to release him, but Jacob held on tightly. Jacob had stolen Esau's blessing. Now he was demanding one from his supernatural opponent.

4. *Who did Jacob encounter after sending his family and possessions across the river?*

5. *How did the challenger end the wrestling match with Jacob?*

Jacob Asks for a Blessing

Genesis 32:27-29, KJV

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.

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.

Genesis 32:27-29, NIV

²⁷The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

²⁸Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

²⁹Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

The man had just displaced Jacob's hip, so disconnecting from this determined man would not have been difficult. But we get the idea that the opponent is "playing along" for the sake of Jacob. He needs a blessing that is given to him voluntarily. Jacob wanted a blessing given specifically for him, especially in light of the danger that awaited him just across the river.

As Jacob realized later, he was face to face with a human manifestation of God (often called a theophany). Some believe this is either an angel or a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. A blessing received from this supernatural being would not only echo throughout Jacob's life, but for generations to come.

So in keeping with Jacob's request, the challenger asked the patriarch his name. No doubt the challenger knew exactly with whom he had been wrestling. However, this request was for Jacob's sake. He was about to receive a new name from God—Israel, which means "he struggles with God" in Hebrew. What an appropriate name for a nation that would struggle in their relationship with God because of disobedience. The supernatural opponent gave this name to Jacob because he had struggled with God and with man and had overcome.

Now Jacob asked the same question of his opponent. But the challenger refused to answer. Instead, he asked Jacob why he even needed to ask, and finally released Jacob after giving him the blessing.

6. What did Jacob demand of his opponent?

7. How did Jacob's challenger fulfill the patriarch's request?

Jacob Names Peniel

Genesis 32:30-32, KJV

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

Genesis 32:30-32, NIV

³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and

life is preserved.

31 And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

yet my life was spared."

³¹The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. ³²Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

The biblical writer makes it clear as to how this event is to be interpreted. Those who commit their lives to God will inevitably wrestle with Him. As a father tussles with his children to teach them endurance and perseverance, so God wrestles with those who love Him.

Peniel, in Hebrew, means "the face of God." Centuries later, the Lord put Moses in the cleft of a rock and covered Moses with His hand while the glory of God passed by. This was all a human being could stand—and even then, the Lord probably veiled Himself so as not to consume Moses.

As Jacob was leaving to rejoin his family across the river, the sun was rising behind him. This means only minutes had passed since the wrestling match was over.

Jacob was left with an injury that would remind him with every step he took that he had encountered God, and not only survived, but had overcome the challenge. To commemorate the event, Israelites would not eat the tendon of any animal that joined the femur to the hip socket. Many Jews today keep up this tradition. It is reminders like these that keep the important stories in front of God's people.

8. *What did Jacob do when he realized he had been wrestling with God?*

9. *What did the Jews do to commemorate Jacob's injury?*

Why Me?

Josephine tossed and turned in her bed. Whenever she closed her eyes, all she saw were the two policemen standing at her front door. When her husband shared with her that God wanted them to go into full-time ministry, she agreed. Now, she lay alone in her bed. Tomorrow she would bury her husband of 20 years. Josephine cried out to God, "Why me?" Why did a stray bullet during an armed robbery have to kill her husband while he was simply purchasing some milk?

Pastor Smith paced up and down the hospital children's ward. He felt as if his prayers were bouncing off the wall. He couldn't understand how his little baby boy, whom God had given them after 10 years of marriage, was dying of cancer. His wife and church members continually tried to encourage him to believe that God was still in control. But all he could cry out to God was, "Why me?"

Paul had a dramatic conversion and suffered for his faith in Christ. He led many people to Jesus. Yet he pleaded with the Lord three times to remove the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10). God responded, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

We all wrestle with the mysteries of God such as why bad things happen to good people. We believe in all of God's attributes, especially in His sovereignty, love, and faithfulness. Yet, we wrestle daily with unanswered questions. In the end, we accept that God is God and knows what is best for us. That is the essence of faith.

10. *What are some of the mysteries of God you have wrestled with (for example, His mercy toward those who we think don't deserve it)?*

11. *Is there a circumstance in our life that you are asking God, "Why me?"*

12. *Does knowing God's attributes lessen the chances of wrestling with God when tragedy occurs?*

We'll Understand It Better

“By and by, when the morning comes, When the saints of God are gathered home, We'll tell the story how we've overcome, For we'll understand it better by and by.”

—Charles Albert Tindley (1905)

As finite human beings, we can never comprehend all the mysteries of our great infinite God. However, God in His love and mercy chose to give us a glimpse of Himself through Jesus Christ. Colossians tells us that the mystery of God is Jesus Christ (Col. 2:1-5). The more we know Jesus, the more we know God.

► *Celebrate the mysteries of God by writing a short poem or list of sentences that express how you may not understand everything about God, but you are thankful for the glimpse of Him we have through knowing Jesus.*

KEY VERSE

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.

—Genesis 32:28, KJV

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

—Genesis 32:28, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 19 through September 25

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Genesis 38:12-19, 24-26—Tamar Asserts Her Rights.

Tue. Ruth 4:9-17—Ruth Gives Birth to Obed.

Wed. Numbers 23:18-26—God's Blessings for Israel.

Thu. Numbers 24:2-9, 15-17—A Scepter Shall Rise from Israel.

Fri. Revelation 4—The Heavenly Throne.

Sat. Revelation 5—The Conquering Lamb.

Sun. Genesis 49:8-12—Judah Destined to Reign.