

From Jacob To Israel

"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). The story of Jacob wrestling with "a man" throughout the night that he believed could have been his last on earth, is one of the most ancient and meaningful stories told to man. Yet it is so much more than a story, it is inclusion within holy inspiration. It is a portion of God's biography with man.

Jacob was a trickster—that's what his name means. He tricked Esau out of his birthright. He tricked his father into thinking he was his brother. He reaped what he sowed when his father-in-law tricked him out of his bride, giving him Leah, instead of his heart-throb, Rachael. Through the years he matured, he found Bethel (The House of God)! He became a dreamer of God's dreams (Genesis 28:12). He made a discovery more important than the house of God, which is disclosed in these words, *"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not"* (Genesis 28:12). The blessing escalates as he continues, *"And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven"* (Genesis 28:17). What a revelation: the place where God meets man becomes heaven's gate! Our Lord confirms that He Himself was the door or gate of Heaven. For when Jacob rested, the Bible says, *"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it"* (Genesis 28:12). When we trust Christ as Savior, we in fact enter into His rest (Hebrews 4:9, 10). In the New Testament Jesus said to Nathanael, *"And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man"* (John 1:51). A magnificent illumination transcending both space and time is given to Jacob of Heaven's gate or the coming of Messiah to Earth, who is the ladder to Heaven, the way the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

Our sojourner, Jacob, had one more river to cross. Although this phrase is often used metaphorically, it was also quite literal in the life of our friend, Jacob. Esau, his angry brother had years of vengeance stored up to release upon his younger brother. And he was on his way to see Jacob. Jacob was scared stiff! He began to divide his family up as a line of defense for themselves and himself. In his mind he is reflecting back on all that his brother had lost and he was aware that he was the one person Esau had to blame. So, worried Jacob rose up in the middle of the night, and took his family across the River Jabbok (Genesis 32:22, 23). After sending them over the brook, he experienced his own personal Gethsemane. Appropriately, the name Jabbok means "a pouring out" or an "emptying". The great patriarch now becomes everything God has intended for him to become, but not without a fight. This fight illustrates three great principles that God's true followers must go through before they enter the greater realm of usefulness: First there is:

I. The Struggle

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (Genesis 32:24). When God has decided to use you, He isolates you. He raised up Elijah and John the Baptist in the deserts. He put Moses on the backside of the desert. He put David in the caves hiding from Saul. Our Heavenly Father even allowed His only begotten Son to go to the wilderness for forty days and be tempted of Satan in preparation for His ministry! In the solitude, He makes us fit for service. Even as Jacob wrestled in solitude, we too must learn to wrestle with God and show tenacity. *"And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me"* (Genesis 32:26).

II. The Striking

"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" (Genesis 32:25). Although God desires us to wrestle and pray through, it is not without a price. He threw Jacob's hip out of joint and until his dying day, he walked with a limp. This was ever a reminder of His wrestling match with God. God allowed Moses to live with a flawed reputation of having taken a man's life. God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh. Christ's demand is still intact: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:7). God had only one Son without sin, but none without chastening. And those He chooses to use the most sometimes are the very ones to be inflicted and humbled above all others.

III. The Surnaming

In antiquity, the surname is the family name or epithet given to a name, e.g., Richard the Lion Heart. On this day, Jacob became know as Israel, which means *Prince of (or with) God*. *"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). Jacob prayed the price and experienced a break-through. No longer would he live in fear of man. He is dominated rather by the fear of God. No longer would he be tricking anybody out of anything. He would dwell in the land God told him to, and enjoy the fruit of his hard earned labor. And most of all, he would raise up the family that would eventually in God's timing bring in the only Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Oh that our names might say something more than we can imagine! "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20).*

When I was a teen-age preacher, I met a saint of God named Mrs. Easley. She was known in North Mississippi and the Memphis area as a great prayer warrior. Her specialty was a kind of spiritual adoption of preacher boys that she would nick-name and pray for every day. She named me her "Jacob". I never told her, but I did not like being called Jacob, because I was aware of the meaning, i.e. "Trickster or Supplanter". I remember one preacher-boy she called "Daniel" because, she said, he had an excellent spirit. In my jealous heart, I thought, "I wish I was Daniel" or "how about Joseph?" Throughout the years, I heard from this old prayer warrior. It was uncanny how she would be impressed to pray for me at different and needy times. Years had gone by since she had heard me preach in person. Then one day just before she died, she walked up to me in a crowd of people. Her eyes were bright and brimming with tears and she said, "You are no longer Jacob, but Israel, a prince with God. Son, I always knew you would come to this place." Shortly afterwards she passed away. A few days ago, I finished preaching and as I dropped my head in prayer, I felt a warm, strong hand on my shoulder. I looked up and there was a kind man who said, "I'm Bobby Easley, I've got Mama's prayer list. You were on it and I pray for you everyday. Here's some water." As Bobby walked away I didn't want to throw the bottle away, I thought about putting it on my desk to remind myself of the Jabbok God has brought me over. And in my prayer, I only hope that I could be an Israel, as I hope and pray for all in the flock at Christchurch.

- Pastor Pope -

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