

## Jacob Wrestled (and Learned Four Things)

Genesis 32

Jacob was alone. And he knew he might be killed the next day.

Jacob wrestles that night with whom?

1. A "man"? Yes, see Gen 32:24, although angels often appear as men (e.g. Mark 16:5).
2. An "angel"? Yes, see Hosea 12:2-4.
3. A manifestation of God Himself (a theophany)? It looks that way, for Jacob says he has seen God (Gen 32:30).
4. The angel of the Lord? This would incorporate all three answers above. In the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord speaks as God and identifies Himself with God (Genesis 16:7-12; 22:11-18; Exodus 3:2; Judges 2:1-4; 5:23; etc.) In short, the angel of the Lord appears to be God Himself, a theophany.

In this one incredible episode, we see that God taught Jacob (and us!) a number of things:

### 1. Jacob struggled – *and won*.

- "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Gen 32:28)
- Striven with men? Yep. (Gen 31:4-7; see 1 John 5:4-5)
- Striven with God? *And prevailed?* This is the most surprising part of this passage.
  - Jacob's victorious wrestling is taken seriously by God– and praised.

### 2. God blessed Jacob. (Gen 32:29)

- Jacob was savvy in his approach to Esau (Gen 32:7-8, 13-23). But he was still terrified (Gen 32:7), and desperately prayed for help/blessing (Gen 32:10-11, 26).

- Jacob would survive the next day, and for many years. Why? Because God blessed him.
  - Like Jacob, we are blessed "in Abraham" (Gal 3:8-9)

### 3. God humbled Jacob.

- Jacob's conversion? "I am not worthy of your love, Lord..." (Gen 32:10)
- He intentionally injured Jacob's hip (Gen 32:25).
- Before blessing him, he asked for Jacob's name (Gen 32:27).
  - This time the blessing would come through honesty! (compare Gen 27:19)

### 4. God let Jacob win.

- Of course the omnipotent God fixed the match. But why?
  - And why do dads wrestle with their children?
- The sovereign God lets humans act and exert themselves—even in evil, as the crucifixion of Jesus shows. But in doing so they fulfill his sovereign plan (Acts 3:13-18).

### Questions for Reflection and Application

1. Read Genesis 32. This passage requires sustained reflection (i.e. meditation). There's a lot going on!
2. Some people think Jacob is converted in this passage. What verses do you think might suggest this?
3. Find in the passage the first three of the four things God taught Jacob. (The fourth is hard to find in this passage.)
  - a. Do you think Jacob learned all of these things at once?
  - b. It's been said that we can learn many facts quickly, but practically speaking we can only *work on* only one or two things at a time. Do you think this is true?