

Genesis 31-32: Jacob the Wrestler
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In Genesis 30-31 we see how it is that Jacob prospers while Laban his father-in-law stagnates. This is in part based on Jacob's good animal husbandry. But God too has had a hand in this; God speaks to Jacob to tell him that He brought this about, and more importantly, that it is time to leave and return. Genesis 31 tells how Jacob flees and how Laban pursues. Laban may have intended to harm Jacob for leaving as he did, but God appears to Laban in a dream with a message: let Jacob go.

Genesis 32 begins with Jacob worrying over the consequences of his earlier betrayal of Esau. His concern is how Esau will behave. Jacob is coming home after decades away as a rich man, and when he left his brother wanted to kill him. Amidst this worry he send a gift ahead to Esau, and sleeps alone that night. In Genesis 32:19-32 a remarkable event occurs: Jacob wrestles all night with God. Often it is identified as an angel (although He is only called a man). But when Jacob realizes what had happened, he declared that he had seen God face to face and lived. He was given a new name that night: Israel "Strives with God".

There is an important truth here. God' loves wrestlers. Remember that we are told that God loved Jacob. It is wrapped up in how Jacob has pursued blessings from God. We know he did this in despicable ways; in trading from his brother, deceiving his father, and in working for his father in law. But this is the moment where he is before God, and there is a chance God will depart without bestowing a blessing. Jacob chose to wrestle God for a blessing. Even when he had "lost": with an injury, he would not let God. This is why God loved Jacob; because Jacob wanted God's blessing desperately. God loves those who love him and will do anything to be with Him.

This is the characteristic we need to have. Meaning, we need to be willing to FIGHT for God's blessings. Consider fighting for your salvation; in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (and elsewhere) we are told that we are engaged in spiritual war. We need to fight for your salvation against the flesh (2 Pet. 2:11) and against temptation; we need to war against weakness (Gal. 4:9); we need to stand up against deception (2 Cor. 10:5) and ignorance.

At the same time we are told God hated Esau. Esau might have been mighty in the flesh, but he was apathetic in the spirit. God despises spiritually apathetic people (Rev. 3:16). If you don't love God with all of your heart, all of your strength, and all of your might, you are not up to the task. Consider those who give up as soon as it gets tough (Mark 4:1-15), or those who surrender at the first difficulty, or who can't make up their mind who they follow (1 Kings 18:25).

Today, we who are in Christ are the Modern Israel. That special name, given in the moment, is the name we spiritually wear and are named. It is a special name that recognizes we are those who desperately seek the blessings of God, and are willing to fight to keep them.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." Romans 9:6-7