

JACOB WRESTLES WITH AN ANGEL

Old Testament Lesson #25

As Jacob continued his journey, the angels of God met him in a certain place, and he named it Mahanaim (may-ha-NAY-im). Jacob then sent messengers to his brother Esau in the land of Seir (SEE-ir). The messengers were to tell Esau that Jacob was seeking the favor of Esau.

The messengers returned to tell Jacob that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob was fearful, and he divided his people into two groups, thinking that if Esau attacked one, then the other would escape. Jacob asked God to save him.

He then sent a series of herds in separate groups to be gifts to Esau. Esau was to receive them one by one, and Jacob hoped Esau would then receive him.

After the herds had been delivered, Jacob sent his wives, children and all his possessions across the brook. He remained behind alone. During the night a “man” (angel, see Points to Consider) appeared with whom Jacob wrestled until daybreak. The man did not overpower Jacob, and when the morning came, he put Jacob’s hip out of joint and then asked to be released.

Jacob refused unless the man blessed him. The man then asked what his name was. Jacob told him, and the man said that Jacob’s name now would be “Israel (IZ-ray-el), because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” Jacob then realized that the “man” was God and sought his name. The “man” did not tell him but blessed him. Jacob called the place Peniel (pe-NI-el) and said, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- Although this passage refers to the one who wrestled with Jacob as a “man,” the prophet Hosea, in referring back to this story, identifies him as an angel. See Hosea 12:2-4.
- In verse 30, where Jacob says he saw “God face to face,” the Hebrew word for God is *Elohim*, which means “mighty ones.” The same Hebrew word is translated as “angels” in Psalm 8:5 in the King James Version, “heavenly beings” in the New International Version and “God” in the New Revised Standard Version.
- Israel means “having power with God” or “God’s fighter” or, in some references, “prince of God.” Jacob’s name was no longer associated with its meaning of “supplanter” or “deceiver.”

- Jacob limped from that day on.
- Peniel means “face of God.”
- “Mahanaim” means “double camp” or “double host” because the host of God had joined with Jacob’s family (his host).

Jacob Wrestles With an Angel

- I. Jacob wanted to seek Esau’s favor.
 - A. He sent messengers to tell Esau that he was coming.
 - B. The messengers said Esau and 400 men would meet Jacob.
 - C. Jacob was frightened and asked God for safety.
- II. Jacob prepared to meet Esau.
 - A. He sent gifts to Esau, hoping Esau would accept them.
 - B. Then he sent his wives and possessions across the brook.
 - C. Finally, Jacob was alone.
- III. A man/angel appeared to Jacob at night.
 - A. They wrestled until daybreak.
 - B. The angel displaced Jacob’s hip.
 - C. Jacob insisted that the angel bless him.
 - D. The angel told Jacob that Jacob’s new name would be “Israel.”
 - E. Jacob realized he had wrestled with God.

ANSWER KEY:

Jacob was seeking Esau’s favor.

Esau was coming with 400 men.

During the night a man appeared to Jacob. He wrestled with him until daybreak. The man did not overpower Jacob but touched his hip and put it out of place. The man asked to be released. Jacob refused unless the man blessed him. The man said that Jacob’s name would now be Israel. Jacob knew it was an angel and called the place Peniel. Jacob said, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”