

# GENESIS

## Lesson 48

## Jacob Gets a Name Change

<sup>28</sup> 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]

In Genesis 27:43-45, Jacob was sent to Laban's by his mother, Rebekah, and was instructed not to return until she sent for him. However, in our previous lesson, we find Jacob is heading home at the behest of God (Genesis 31:3), and not his mother. Twenty years has passed since Jacob was last at home, but no word has yet come from his mother that Esau is no longer angry with Jacob and no longer wants to end Jacob's life. For all that Jacob knows, Esau has had twenty years to think about what Jacob did to him and will be looking to kill him as soon as he arrives back home. Thus, we have the backdrop for this lesson.

<sup>1</sup> Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. <sup>2</sup> When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. <sup>4</sup> He instructed them: "This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: 'Your servants Jacob says, "I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. <sup>5</sup> I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.'"

<sup>6</sup> When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

<sup>7</sup> In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. <sup>8</sup> He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

<sup>9</sup> Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' <sup>10</sup> I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. <sup>11</sup> Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. <sup>12</sup> But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

<sup>13</sup> He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: <sup>14</sup> two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, <sup>15</sup> thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. <sup>16</sup> He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds."

<sup>17</sup> He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?' <sup>18</sup> then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.'"

<sup>19</sup> He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. <sup>20</sup> And be sure to say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" For he thought, "I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me." <sup>21</sup> So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.

Genesis 32:1-21 [NIV]

Fear is a major motivational factor in all of our lives. It was for Abram when he and Sarai went into Egypt, and it was for Isaac when he met King Abimelech. Jacob's fear of Laban caused him to leave without telling Laban that he was going and taking all his possessions with him, and now, once again, we see fear influencing Jacob's actions as he prepares to meet his twin brother Esau. Going twenty years with no communication between he and Esau, nor having received any update from his mother, Jacob now fears the worst and goes about preparing to meet his brother as though Esau is about to kill him and his family. (Genesis 32:7 and 11)

The contrast between Jacob's fear and God's promises to Jacob are notable. Clearly, Jacob is in great fear even though God has spoken directly to him.

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***Respond to the following questions:***

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1. During his return journey, Jacob names a camp "Mahanaim." Why? (Genesis 32:1-2)
2. God makes Jacob a promise in Genesis 32:9. What is it?
3. Jacob also knows that God promised him something else in Genesis 32:12. What was it?

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In spite of God's presence in his life, in spite of all of the prosperity and blessings that God has given him, and in spite of God's specific promises to "prosper him" and make his descendants "like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted," Jacob is still in great fear for his life.

I am wondering as we study this if any of you are like me, that is, we see a miracle in our lives, answered prayers, blessings, and prosperity, knowing that it all comes from God, and then the moment that something threatens us or our family, we become fearful and believe that God cannot possibly protect us from this current danger. Isn't it something how we can have great faith one moment, and then life-ending fear the next? Fortunately for all of us, God understands our humanity, and He knows that we are weak; but yet He loves us in spite of ourselves. I am reminded often of what God tells us about weakness—specifically, that His power is revealed to us and those around us through our weaknesses. (2 Corinthians 12:9) Jacob is about to come face-to-face with his fears when he meets Esau the next day, and God's power will be reflected in everything that happens.

However, first, Jacob has an interesting evening the night before he meets Esau.

*<sup>22</sup> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.*

*<sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When 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. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup> The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. <sup>28</sup> 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."*

*<sup>29</sup> Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." <sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. <sup>32</sup> Therefore 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.*

Genesis 32:22-32 [NIV]

A remarkable thing happened that evening in camp Mahanaim. Jacob would wrestle with one of the angels of God whom he encountered in Genesis 32:1-2. Or does he? All night long the struggle went on, driven by Jacob's anxieties and fears. The struggle lasted through the night. Just as we have had sleepless nights because of fear and anxiety, Jacob had a similar experience. Only, in the case of Jacob, he was in the presence of God and His angels.

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***Continuing our discussion, respond to the following question:***

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4. Does Jacob wrestle with God, or with an angel? (See Genesis 32:28 and 30.)

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As a result of Jacob's great struggle, God gives Jacob a new name, Israel, which means "struggles with God." Certainly, this was prophetic—as Jacob's descendants, even today, struggle with God. But one day, God's only Son, the Messiah, will return and end their struggle, as well as ours. For now, we hope and wait patiently for the Messiah's return and pray for the "peace that passes all understanding" which comes from having Jesus as our Savior. What a day of celebration it will be, as Christ brings an end to war, death, tears and sorrow! Until that day, the struggle goes on, just as it had for Jacob.

In the next lesson, the family reunion finally happens, as the twins are reunited.

Have a great week everyone!

In Christ,

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