

Jacob's Wrestle with God

By Gerry Watts

And seeing in a vision, Jacob sees the camp of God encamped. And messengers of God are coming upon him. And Jacob is saying as he sees them, "This is the camp of God!" And he is calling the name of that place Mahanaim...Yet that night Jacob lodges in the camp.

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the river, he sent over all his possessions. And Jacob is left alone. And a Man is wrestling with him till the rising of the dawn. And he (Jacob) is seeing that he does not prevail against Him (the Man). Yet He (the Man) is touching the palm of his (Jacob's) thighbone. And the palm of Jacob's thighbone is strained in his wrestling with Him.

And He (the Man) is saying to him, "Send Me away, for the dawn is rising." And he (Jacob) is saying, "I am not letting you go unless you bless me." And He (the Man) is saying to him, "What is your name?" And he is saying, "Jacob." And He (the Man) is saying to him, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but rather your name is Israel. For you are upright with God and with men, and you are prevailing."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name?" And He replied, "Why is it that you are asking for my name?" And He is blessing him there. And Jacob is calling the name of the place Peniel, saying "for I see God face to face, and my soul is rescued." And as he passes Peniel the sun is irradiating him. Yet he is limping on his thigh.

(Genesis 32:1-2, 21b-31 Free Translation based on the Concordant Version)

The story of Jacob's life is very much a type of the history of his descendants, the nation of Jacob/Israel. But in the above account we have it all condensed into this one key event in Jacob's life. Jacob and his brother Esau were enemies. There was a huge amount of envy between them. Esau had made the mistake of selling his birthright to Jacob during a brief time of hunger, settling for a quick meal to satisfy his flesh rather than hold on to his precious God-given birthright, and Jacob took advantage of this. On the other hand, Esau had every right to be angry at his brother's deception of claiming the special blessing from their father Isaac in his place (Genesis 27:36).

But in Genesis 32-33, we see Jacob doing his best to reconcile himself with Esau, and for a time it worked by sending him gifts. But this speaks of a time when the nation of Israel will be at peace with their enemies, including Esau/Edom, in the coming kingdom. But before this reconciliation can occur, Jacob has to have a special encounter with God.

We shall now find that as we consider this account, the typology can be applied on at least three levels:

1. To Jacob himself
2. To the nation of Jacob/Israel
3. To each individual in the Body of Christ

Jacob means **heel**, as in one who grabs the heel causing one to trip, that is, a supplanter or deceiver. This is a type of the flesh. The heart of the flesh is deceitful and desperately sick (Jeremiah 17:9). Jacob himself, and his descendants, as well as each one of us, are born in the flesh. The soulish (or carnal) has to come first, and then the spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:46). The flesh gives birth to flesh but the spirit gives birth to Spirit (John 3:6).

Jacob then sees a vision of spiritual messengers (or 'angels') encamped as an army coming towards him. He exclaims 'This is the camp of God!' He then names that place Mahanaim, which means **camps**. This vision then prompts Jacob to send messengers to his brother Esau. So here we have the place of two camps, the spiritual camp of God and the fleshly camp of Jacob. This is the beginning of the battle between the flesh and the Spirit, the two camps. It is here that Jacob lodges for a few nights before crossing the Jabbok River.

Then during the night, he moves all of his family and possessions across the ford of the Jabbok River. Jabbok comes from a root word meaning **to empty or make void**. This is the next stage of spiritual maturity where the flesh has to be made void, emptied, made nothing by the power of God.

After they've crossed over, Jacob is left alone while the others continue on. He may have been praying. Then a messenger (or 'angel') appears to him, who is described as a Man. For the rest of that night, Jacob wrestles with the Man. What started this wrestling match, we are not told, but Jacob finds that he cannot overpower this Man. It is like a stalemate, with neither one winning over. Clearly the Man is the stronger one, but He only matches Jacob's power, rather than flatten him! He allows Jacob to continue wrestling Him.

Then as the dawn approaches, the Man touches Jacob's hip socket causing his sinew to become strained and numb. That's all it took! One touch, and Jacob loses! The Man then says to him, 'Send me on my way!' The dawn was rising, time was getting on, they had been wrestling all night - and Jacob still does his best to keep hold of the Man. He didn't want Him to go. Jacob then demands a blessing from the Man. The Man then changes Jacob's name to Israel.

Israel means **upright with God**. Jacob had overcome or prevailed, even though to all intents and purposes he had lost the wrestling match! Yet he is now told that he is upright with God and with men, and he is now an Overcomer. Jacob then foolishly asks for the name of this Man. He should've known it, hence the reply of the Man, 'Why are you asking me this?' Then the Man blesses Jacob/Israel there.

Then after his blessing, Jacob realises the truth about who he has been wrestling with all night. The Man is God, the Messenger of Yahweh, the Angel of the Lord, the Son of God Himself appearing in the Form of God. No other could bless him and change his name, as well as his character. In the light of this revelation, he then names that place Peniel, which means **the face of God**. He had seen the face of God and yet his soul had been saved or rescued. As he leaves Peniel, the sun shines on him - while he limps away.

What a glorious illustration of the salvation of the Remnant of Israel, as well as the salvation of each of us. Israel as a nation is Jacob, the man of flesh, the supplanter. The nation is divided into two camps, the spiritual and the soulish. The soulish (Ishmael or Esau) will always persecute the spiritual (Isaac or Israel) (Galatians 4:28-29). Only when Mahanaim is left behind can Israel move on to cross the Jabbok. This can only occur through the night of great affliction.

During this time he will wrestle with God in his stubbornness. Yet in His grace and mercy God will save the remnant of His people when they see Him face to face. He will not totally destroy them, but He will rescue their soul, as they seek to cling to Him with all their might, seeking His blessing. They will come out limping in humility, but they will know that they have been touched by God. They will truly become Israel, upright with God and men, a nation blessed by God. Only then, as they move on from Peniel, can the Son of Righteousness shine upon them in the kingdom, where there will be lasting reconciliation with their enemies.

The same applies to each of us in Christ as we move on in spiritual maturity to become sons of God. Jacob must give way to Israel, the flesh must give way to the Spirit. We must move from being in two camps to being in the camp of God. We must cross the emptiness, the void, the darkness of affliction and crucifixion of the flesh, to come face to face with God. We must wrestle with the spiritual Man and come out limping to appreciate the glories and blessings of the kingdom. Stubbornness and pride must fall as we cling to the only One who can rescue us and bless us, and give us a new name as Overcomers (Revelation 2:17). The old must pass for the new to come.

For further study of typology, see *Typology*; and for prophetic messages using typology, see *The Gideon Remnant*, *The Gideon Commission* and *The Elisha Anointing*.