

Genesis 32:24-32

Introduction

Going home. For many, those are exciting words. They speak of special occasions or events. They also describe opportunities to spend time with family. For others, though, the thought of going home can be more stressful. Perhaps relationships with family members are not what we might like. In today's passage, we read about Jacob's journey home. He knows he will have to face Esau. What would this be like?

The Match (Gen. 32:24-26). The focal passage for this week's lesson begins with a very telling phrase – "Jacob was left alone." In the context of Jacob's story at this point, this phrase seems to be descriptive of both Jacob's physical reality as well as his spiritual and emotional reality. Think about this for a moment. Physically, Jacob has been left alone because he divided his family and possessions into two groups as he prepared to meet Esau, his brother (Gen. 32:6-7). Spiritually and emotionally, he is left alone as he wrestles with his relationship with Esau. Even though several years had passed since they last saw each other, perhaps Jacob wondered what it would be like to see him again. The last time they were around each other, Esau had vowed to kill Jacob (Gen. 27:41-42). Would Esau still harbor a grudge against him? Would Esau still desire to kill him? In the midst of his distress, the Bible tells us that "a man wrestled with him until daybreak" (Gen. 32:24). Who was this man and what was the significance of their meeting?

The Title (Gen. 32:27-29). As Jacob wrestled and struggled with the man, he refused to let the man go until this man blessed him (Gen. 32:26). The man agreed to bless him. The blessing seems somewhat unusual. For example, we might expect a blessing for someone to include the promise of health, or more land, or more camels, or more sheep, etc. This, however, does not happen. The blessing comes in the form of a name change. The man said to Jacob, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28). From a cultural standpoint, a name change was significant. To highlight this, Ken Mathews explained that "the change in name signaled God's favor toward the patriarch (Mathews, *Genesis*, NAC, 558). More than just a change of name, then, Jacob's new name demonstrated God's continued presence with Jacob. This would be an important reminder to Jacob as he prepared to meet Esau.

The Venue (Gen. 32:30-32). After having been blessed, the Bible reports that Jacob, now Israel, gave this location a name. Jacob named the place where he wrestled the man, Peniel (Gen. 32:30). Jacob chose this name based on his recognition of the fact that the man he wrestled with appeared to be God. The Hebrew term translated "Peniel" literally means the face of God. This is indicated in the very next phrase in Gen. 32:30 where Jacob states that "I have seen God face to face." The marks of having wrestled with God were evident in two observable ways. First, Jacob now has a new name. Second, he walked with a limp (Gen. 32:31-32).

Conclusion

Like Jacob, many know the feeling of being left alone, both physically and spiritually. Furthermore, as Jacob learned on this occasion, even in those times, God continues to reveal His presence.