

Genesis 32:22-30
Wrestling with God
WRCoB 9.24.23

Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah
Married Rebekah and they had twins
For her first pregnancy!

As you can imagine, it was not an easy pregnancy.

Rebekah felt as if they were constantly fighting
Which, knowing their later relationship
They probably were!

When the time came for her to give birth
Two very different male babies arrived!

The first to arrive they named, Esau.

Esau in Hebrew means “hairy”
For he was covered with red fur-like hair!

The second-born came out.

He was hanging on to the heel of his brother Esau!

So guess what Isaac and Rebekah named him?

Yep, “heel,” in Hebrew, Jacob.

Imagine naming your twin boys, Hairy and Heel?
Certainly not the most complimentary of names!

And if, in some way, we grow into our names.

Then Jacob grew into his!

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary
Heel not only means the back of the foot.

It also means, "*a contemptible person.*"

At any rate, Jacob did in fact personify his name.

Before we look at today's scripture lesson
Let's look at some of Jacob's
Less than stellar moments.

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Now Esau was the rugged, outdoor type.
He enjoyed hunting and fishing.

He was the kind of guy that liked to wear camouflage
Even when it wasn't hunting season!

Esau was his father's favorite, a man after his own heart!

Jacob, on the other hand, was his mother's favorite.

He preferred staying at home
And helping his mother in the kitchen.

On one occasion, Jacob was in the kitchen
Cooking up his favorite stew.

Esau came in from outside, cold and hungry
And said to Jacob

**Genesis 25:30 NRSV “Let me eat some of that red stuff,
for I am famished!”**

And Jacob cunningly replied

31 “First sell me your birthright.”

**32 “Look, I am about to die,” Esau said, “What good is
the birthright to me?”**

33 But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.”

So, Esau swore an oath to Jacob

 Thereby selling his right to his father’s inheritance
 For a bowl of soup!

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Jacob’s second deception occurred years later.

 Actually, it was prompted by his mother.

The boys were 40-years-old (Gen 27).

Isaac had grown so old that he could no longer see
 Nor hear, nor get around at all.

He called for Esau.

And asked him to go out
 And hunt up some wild game.

Prepare it just the way Isaac liked
 And bring him some for supper.

Afterwards, he would give Esau his final blessing.

Rebekah, hearing what was said
Went to find Jacob.

She told Jacob to go find a choice young goat.

She would prepare it for Isaac.

Jacob would take the food to his father
Pretending to be Esau so that Isaac
Would bless Jacob instead of Esau.

11 Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I’m smooth skin. 12 What if my father touches me?”

But Rebekah had that covered too.

Rebekah was a conniving piece of work.

Rebekah found some of Esau’s dirty camouflage
In the dirty laundry basket
And placed them on Jacob.

She took the goatskin
And covered Jacob’s hands and neck.

So that Jacob would feel hairy just like Esau
And sent him on his way.

It worked!

Jacob fooled his father into believing he was Esau
And received his father’s blessing.

Now, Esau prepared the wild game he's shot
Entered his father's quarters
Expecting his father's blessing.

He discovered he'd been duped out of it by Jacob.

And so strong and final was Isaac's word
That he could not take it back.

The blessing would stay with Jacob.

Esau vowed he'd kill his brother Jacob!

Rebekah hearing his threats
Warned Jacob to flee to her brother Laban's in Haran.

With the help of his manipulating momma
Jacob cheated his brother Esau
Out of his birthright and blessing.

But despite all this dysfunction
God used it to establish the nation of Israel.

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Twenty years Jacob lived in Haran
Living with the knowledge he'd cheated his brother.

Twenty years he lived estranged to his brother and parents.

But in those twenty years, Jacob prospered.

Starting out with nothing
He married two sisters, Leah and Rachel
And became a very rich man!

But even with his new life his past haunted him.

After twenty years, Jacob decides to return home.

Jacob sends messengers to Esau informing him
Jacob planned to return home.

The messengers returned to Jacob with this message

32:6 “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him. “

Jacob, greatly frightened
Split his people and property into two groups

Hoping that if one group was attacked
The other could get away.

Jacob then prayed to God, our first OT Reading.

As night fell
Jacob decided to send gifts on ahead of him.

He selected 200 female goats, 20 male goats
200 ewes and 20 rams
30 female camels and their young
40 cows and 10 bulls
20 female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

He separated each herd and sent them on
And offer these gifts as a gesture of peace.

They settled down for the night on the shores of the Jordan.

But Jacob didn't sleep.

And he didn't let anyone else sleep either.

He took his wives, Rachel and Leah

The rest of his family

And the rest of his property

And sent them across the river and on their way

Leaving himself alone.

Our second reading describes Jacob's struggle with a man.

They fought all night long

Fighting so hard Jacob's hip became displaced.

As dawn broke, his opponent struggled to get away

But Jacob said

I will not let you go until you bless me!

Genesis 32:28 CEV The man said, "From now on, your name will no longer be Jacob. You will be called Israel, because you have wrestled with God and with men, and you have won."

The name, Israel, which the whole nation

Would be named after originates here.

The name means, one who wrestles with God.

And I can't think of a more apropos name for nation Israel

As the sun rose that day
Israel, who was once called Jacob the "Heel,"
Went forward to meet Esau.

At 60, Jacob decided to do the right thing!

But it could potentially be at a great cost.

The question, really, for Jacob was this

Is it better to live with the guilt and remorse of past sins
For the rest of your life
Estranged from your family and loved ones?

Or to make things right even if it risked being killed for it?

This is what Jacob wrestled with that night.

He was sick living with the sins of the past
But scared to reconcile with Esau.

Jacob wrestled with God
He wrestled with his conscience
He wrestled what to do.

And God blessed him!

God blessed him with a new name, Israel
One who wrestles with God and wins.

God took away his old shameful name "Heel,"

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Today's scripture is a powerful lesson
On the need to wrestle with your conscience!

I mean, isn't it true that we've all wrestled with God,
Somehow, in some way, at some point in time?!

Wrestled with the decision to do the right thing?

Laying awake with the burden of past mistakes
Unresolved issues

Haunted by arguments that have destroyed relationships
Divided brother and sister, parent and child
Husband and wife?

What do we do?

Live with a sense of guilt our whole life?

Or face up to our past mistake squarely

What do we do?

Let's do what Jacob did!

Wrestle with God.

Wrestle with God until the break of day!
Until we come to grips with it
Until we receive God's blessing

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Jacob was a different man when the new day dawned.

He crossed that river with a peace and a determination
To make it right with his brother or die trying.

Genesis 33:1-4 CEB

33 Jacob looked up and saw Esau approaching with four hundred men. Jacob divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two women servants.

² He put the servants and their children first, Leah and her children after them, and Rachel and Joseph last.

³ He himself went in front of them and bowed to the ground seven times as he was approaching his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him, and they wept.

Today's scripture is a lesson for us all.

God's whole purpose is redemption.

Redemption between God and us

And redemption between one another.

God would not have us wait 20 years.

Life's too short to carry that sort of burden around.

Past sins will grind you down.

Make every effort to reconcile

And to restore any and all broken relationships.

You might need a wrestling match with God.