



A delightfull readable yet profound survey of the way stories inform our faith and values, and are essential to our Christian witness. Ralph Milton at his best.

[Click here for more information.](#)

Jacob at the Jabbok **a people who wrestle with God** **based on Genesis 32:22-31** **by Ralph Milton**

Jacob's soliloquy. This was first presented as a monologue acted out as part of a sermon. That's why there are stage directions at various points.

In the story Jacob calls God the "Fear." That's not in the English Bible, but it is a reasonable translation of the word for God in some of the ancient Hebrew legends.

You want to know about my limp? Why I walk like a three legged donkey?

I'll tell you. You see, things were well. Everything was fine.

Except for Laban. More and more difficult that man got. We kept trying to swindle each other, Laban and I. Sometimes he won, sometimes I won. But cheating your father-in-law is not the way to build a good relationship, so I decided it was time to go home.

Actually, it was the Fear who spoke to me and told me to go home. Leah and Rachel and I, we talked about it, and they wanted to go to my home. Yes, I know, one should not discuss such things with women but, well, it was me who decided. After the Fear spoke to me.

We ran, actually. We waited until one day Laban was off shearing sheep, and we left. He came after us, as we knew he would, and there was a bit of a scene, but what could he do. My mind was made up. I was going home.

Home to Esau. My brother. You remember Esau, the big, muscular hairy one? Eh? Esau whom I had cheated out of his birthright, out of his inheritance. Esau who said he would kill me?

You may ask, if my brother wants to kill me, why do I want to see him? I'll tell you.

I don't know. The Fear spoke to me. My heart spoke to me.

Leah and Rachel told me, "Jacob, this thing needs to be faced. You cannot find peace till you are reconciled to your brother." Leah, she said it, "Jacob, deep down you love you brother."

Ah! Emotions are for women!

But we went. My wives, my children, my servants, my sheep, my goats, my camels...when we had them all together, I realized, Jacob, you are a wealthy man. You are a rich man, Jacob, a rich man.

Yes, I was a wealthy man. But I did not know my wealth until that night. That night. And yes, my friend, we are getting to the limp.

"Leah, Rachael, take the children and the servants and the flocks across the Jabbok. Right over there is a nice shallow ford. I need some time to think. I need some quiet time to think over my strategy about how to handle my brother Esau.

He wants to kill me, you know. Yes, you know that already. But I need to think about that, so you go ahead, and I'll spend the night here and meet you on the other side in the morning. And Leah, Rachel, children...I...I... just go."

Jacob lies down, falls asleep, and begins to wrestle and toss and turn and talk in his sleep.

Let go. Let go. I'll give you a fight for your money.... Who are you, anyway? Who? Let go of me. Yes, my name is Jacob. Jaacoob! Yes, the cheat. Jacob the cheater. Jacob!!!

Israel? Is-ra-el? I cannot wrestle with God, I am just a man. Just a man. Just a man.

Jacob screams and wakes himself up.

It was just a dream of course. Think nothing of it. Just another nightmare. *He tries to stand up and screams in pain.* Do dreams cause such pain? The man in the dream called me, Israel. "You will no longer be called Jacob, the cheater. You will be called Israel, the one who wrestles with God." I remember it. Every moment. How can a mere human struggle with God, with a God who offers promises and pain?

This is the Fear who offered me hope, hope for the future, the hope that was promised to my grandparents and my parents is now given to me in a new name. Israel. Why the pain?

There. Now you know. Now you know why I am called Israel, and why I walk like a sickly camel. The Fear did it to me. My mother Rebecca helped it happen. So did Rachel and Leah for that matter. So did my father Isaac and my brother Esau and my uncle Laban, though they didn't know it.

I walk with a limp now. I walk in pain, every step, and I have given much thought to that pain. Why does God offer hope and hurt together? Why does God lead us down such painful paths?

I'll tell you. *(Pause)* I don't know.

But I do know that as I crossed the Jabbok that morning, as I walked beside Leah and Rachel, we talked of deeper things and I think there was a love that grew beyond the bedroom.

Love, yes, and respect too, respect and understanding of the pain that comes with life. I thought differently about my brother Esau too. I stopped wondering how to escape his anger, and hoped instead that we might heal the wound that kept us from each other.

These are new things, and they are painful things.

(To God) Great Fear, I do not know why we must suffer pain as we struggle to be your people Israel. I do know that it shudders through our very bones with every step we take toward the hope you promise, as you lead us through the wilderness of life.

I do not know why, but I do know that it is good. So lead on, Great Fear. Lead us, your people, limping toward your future.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

[Click here to see them all.](#)