

Jabbok



David Wilkerson December 1, 1982

Jabbok! It may not have meant anything to you before now — but after you hear this message it should become one of the most important words in your spiritual vocabulary.

Jabbok is the place where Jacob wrestled with the Lord. It is where he made his total surrender to God. It is where he got his new character, and new name — Israel. It was the place where he cast down his last idol, and won his greatest victory.

"And he rose up that night...and passed over the ford Jabbok..." (Gen. 32:22).

Jabbok means "a place of passing over". It also stands for struggle; to empty and pour out. What a glorious truth is revealed in this place called Jabbok. It has everything to do with us today. It is the place where God's people discover the secret of power over every besetting sin. It represents a life and death crisis — one that leads to absolute surrender.

There can be no glorious victory over self and sin until you go to Jabbok. There comes a time we must "have it out with God". We must face ourselves and be emptied of all evil desires and selfish ambitions.

In the past believers have been taught there are two crossings in the life of a Christian — the Red Sea and the Jordan. The Red Sea crossing represents coming out of the world. It speaks of a new start. It symbolizes "getting saved". A lot of God's people come out of Egypt, but they never get into the Promised Land. They get stuck in the wilderness of unbelief, fear, and confusion. They leave the world but never enter the joy of the Lord.

Another crossing is required — the Jordan! The Jordan represents a commitment to go on with the Lord. Water baptism! Bible reading! Witnessing! A desire to grow in Christ! It is a passing over into a life of praise. For many, the Promised Land represents the fullness of the Holy Spirit. A baptism in, and with, the Holy Ghost.

Isn't that all there is? A Promised Land? A spiritual Canaan for the children of God? Saved, baptized, and filled with the Holy Ghost? The children of Israel entered their Promised Land. They got their inheritance. But they never did enter into the rest God wanted them to have! These God-fearing children of God, Spirit led, still had sin in their hearts! They had hearts that held onto secret lust and idolatry.

How tragic that the same is true today. Multitudes of Spirit-filled, Spirit-led believers have never known the true rest of God! Their peace is disturbed by a troubled conscience. God said Israel "...could not enter in because of unbelief...there remaineth yet a rest to the people of God..." (Hebrew. 3:19 — 4:9).

It is possible to be saved, Spirit-filled, totally dedicated to the work of the Lord, and still be hooked by a secret sin! It is possible to cast out devils in Christ's name, heal the sick, perform miracles, discern, do great works, all in the name of Jesus Christ — and still be a sin-hooked worker of iniquity.

Only God knows how many Christians carry the burden of a secret sin or overwhelming lust. Multitudes have never experienced total victory and deliverance from besetting sins. Many dedicated Christian young people fight a losing

battle against a habituating sin. They fight a craving for drugs, alcohol, sex. They dearly love the Lord — but there is "this one thing in their lives." They hate it but keep doing it. They don't want to give up on Christ or go back into the world. But there is still one idol they can't seem to surrender.

And, oh, the men and women of God — including ministers of the Gospel — who struggle with a besetting sin! They have a hunger for God. They never once think of turning to the beggarly elements of the world. They long for the fullness of Christ. They cry for holiness! They are truly dedicated children of the Most High God.

But there is still this one thing. This lingering problem. This little idol! It causes them grief and tears. They are torn with guilt and condemnation. They feel helpless, unworthy, and confused. They fast, they pray, they make promises — but suddenly they are overwhelmed and are led forth as a lamb to the slaughter.

For years I have struggled with the theology of total victory over sin! I do not mean "sinless perfection". I mean freedom from slavery to any besetting sin! Few men have studied more than I have about the doctrine of sanctification. I have studied and read about holiness for years.

I've worked with some of the worst sin slaves on the face of this earth. So I needed answers. I needed a clear and simple message on how to get and maintain victory over the sins of drugs, alcohol, violence, smoking, gambling, illegitimate sex, and various other kinds of addictions. Until the Spirit showed me Jabbok, my understanding was incomplete.

What about all those Christians, including ministers who carry on secret affairs? What about husbands and wives who are giving up on their marriages, hoping to find someone else who will please them more? Often they lie about how horrible things are at home — to excuse their secret love affair with someone else. They often become helplessly involved with another.

Sexual lust — adultery, fornication — is sweeping through the church today like the black plague. Is there no victory over all this runaway lust? Must a true child of God go through life always a slave to a besetting sin? Is there no place of absolute victory? I do not mean freedom from temptation, but freedom from giving in to lust.

There is a third crossing — Jabbok!

Jabbok was a tributary of the Jordan. It was a lonely place. Our Jabbok must be faced alone. You can cross the Red Sea with a mighty host of the redeemed who leave Egypt. You can cross the Jordan with the victorious army of the Lord all about you. But you will cross Jabbok alone! No counselors, no friends, no helpers. This is your private war — between you and the Lord alone.

"And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (Gen. 32:24).

Jabbok is where the Jacob in us is given its final death blow. It is where God deals with us not only about our sin, but about our very character.

Jacob was a troubled, desperate man. God had put his back up against the wall so to speak. He was returning after many years, to claim his inheritance. Esau, the brother he had swindled the birthright from, was coming in his direction with an army of 400 men.

Jacob had matured in many ways. He was now a loving father. He was obedient to the Lord, following the Lord's command to return home. He loved truth. He was a humble, praying man. Listen to his prayer:

"O God, I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant..." (Gen. 32:10).

But this humble, obedient, praying, God-fearing, truth-loving servant of God was still into appeasement! That means, "giving in to a dangerous power to avoid trouble." Peace at any cost includes compromise!

Instead of trusting God in his crisis, he worked angles. He tried to think his way through his problem. He divided his cattle into separate droves, sending them on ahead to soften his brother's heart. He would bombard Esau with wave after wave of gifts of goats, camels, bulls, sheep, donkeys, and rams.

"For he said, I will appease him..." (v. 20).

Appeasement! That is what multitudes of Christians are into! They give in to a dangerous power, because they are afraid they are helpless! You hear it everywhere nowadays "I just can't help it! I don't want to do it. I hate my sin. But in spite of all my super efforts, I give in and fail!

So over and over again, we appease! We sin and confess, weep and confess, try to think our way out. Oh, the angles, schemes, justifications, excuses, plans — all in vain. We seem powerless against overwhelming needs and desires.

Obedient! Praying! Seeking the truth! Humble! Loving! Kind! God-fearing! But there is still that fly in the ointment! There is still a secret holdout deep in the heart. There is still appeasement, scheming — one idol still standing — not yet totally yielded. Not yet under the total Lordship of Christ.

Let Me Show You What Must Happen at Jabbok!

1. At Jabbok — Religion Gives Way to Spirituality!

One can be very religious and not be at all spiritual. Jacob had had a very religious experience at Bethel. On his way to Padan — aram to find a wife among his own people, he had an amazing religious experience.

"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending it..." (Gen. 28:12).

God appeared and made a covenant with him! It was a promise of material blessings —

"I will give you the land whereon thou liest...I will bless thy seed..."(v. 13,14).

Jacob cried out — "How awesome — the Lord is in this place" (vs. 16,17).

Jacob called the place Bethel, and proceeded to make a deal with God. The blessing part sounded very good to him!

"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God...If you bless me, I will surely give you back the tenth..." (Gen. 28:20–22).

Does this deal have a familiar ring to it? Bless me, Lord! Prosper me in all my ways! Give me plenty to eat! Clothe me well! Take good care of me, Then I'll serve you! Then I'll pay my tithe! Give it to me so I can give it back to you!

Think of it! God is in the place — the heavens are open! Angels appear! God speaks! What a supernatural, religious experience! And all Jacob can see out of it is a deal for land, food, clothes, prosperity, and success in all his ways! It was strictly a religious experience.

Bethel is the popular religion of our day. Like Jacob, our covetous spirits interpret God's promises in materialistic ways. We go so far as to desecrate the precious atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ! In high sounding religious words we talk about the power of Christ's shed blood. But what we are saying is a tragic misinterpretation of what His sacrifice really accomplished.

All some can see is what they can get out of it. To them, the atonement means merely health, wealth, prosperity, and deliverance from the curse of poverty. They are blind to the true meaning of Christ's victory on the Cross. His power over sin! The freedom to sacrifice, suffer, and serve willingly to advance His kingdom on earth! To endure hardship, and suffer the loss of all things, if necessary, to gain an incorruptible crown.

What about the multitudes who worship at Bethel? What about all the preachers and teachers who are stuck at Bethel — claiming the Bethel promises?

I say they are religious people. Some may be very religious. Like Jacob they may have experienced great revelations, seen angels, and perhaps have heard from God. But at Bethel — the flesh is still in control — It is a place of religion — but not true spirituality. It is a partial revelation. It goes for all the blessings while ignoring the deep

inner struggle! It is being in the presence of the Lord without dealing with the Jacob nature! That comes only at Jabbok.

2. Jabbok Is a Place of Absolute Surrender!

It is a place of total victory over every besetting sin! You are not ready for Jabbok until you are desperate! You have to come to the end of yourself. Your burden of sin must bring you to a life or death crisis.

What a crisis Jacob faced. On one side, Esau was closing in on him. On the other side stood the Lord Himself, and a host of heavenly witnesses. He could go no further. It was the absolute end of the line! Outside of a miracle, he was a dead man. His sins had caught up with him. For over twenty years he had been able to bluff his way through. He had survived on his cunning cover ups. He could not go on — even one more day — as in the past.

Jacob was forced to expose himself before the awesome presence of the Lord — and see himself for what he was! All night long the battle raged. This time Jacob meant business! He wanted to be free. He wanted to look the Lord and the world in the eye and know he was honest and holy. He wanted his reproach removed. He wanted deliverance.

"And He said unto him, what is thy name? And he said, Jacob!" (Gen. 32:27).

Jacob knew what his name stood for: "heel grabber" One who cheats his brother, himself, and tries to hide it from God's flaming eyes. What the Lord was saying to Jacob was this:

"Look at yourself — what you've become! No excuses now! For once in your life, face reality! Face the truth — be deadly honest — or there will be no victory!"

Out it all comes — all the pent-up fears and confessions: "Oh, Lord! I'm a phony! I'm so religious outwardly, but inwardly I'm a cheat! I'm a grabber! I've played with fire too long! I've been excusing my actions, justifying my sins. Forgive, O Lord..."

There can be no victory over any besetting sin without facing a final deadline at Jabbok! The fear of God's justice and judgment against your sin must grip you with finality. You must face the reality that you are not a special person, immune to exposure and judgment. You must face the fact that God, in His love, must give you a deadline — a last chance to obey completely!

Not that His grace is withdrawn, or His love and mercy limited. But there comes a time when God can no longer keep back the wages of your sin! There is a law that states "Conceived lust brings death!" Your sin must find you out!

You must face the reality you cannot go on living a lie. No matter how blessed you are, no matter how anointed, no matter what great things are accomplished in His name — God will not permit an open-ended license to go on sinning! You must obey or be exposed — and begin to reap what you have sown.

Face the truth! Confess it in all its ugly details! "Oh, Lord, I'm an adulterer, a fornicator. I'm no better than the harlots and homosexuals who walk the streets hustling! I'm the worst liar in your church! I've been cheating on my family. I'm not what people think I am. I know I'll be exposed. I know I'll have to pay the price for what I'm doing — so take it, Lord! Take it now! Not one more day of carrying this terrible burden! Set me free! I'm tired of playing a role!"

At Jabbok, Christ delivers us from our besetting sin by changing our very character.

"And he said, thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed..." (32:38).

Prevailing power through a new character! Prevail means, "to gain the upper hand, the victory, superiority." Jacob now knew it was in his power to obey, because the Lord accepted his commitment to surrender.

Our Lord is not interested simply in our getting victory over certain sins. He wants to change us into new people with pure hearts and clean hands. We need a character change.

It took only one desperate night of facing the truth. One night of struggle with the old nature! Jacob had a profound

change in his body and soul, He had had it out with the Lord and prevailed. The Lord saw his desperation, heard his pitiful plea — and touched him! The Lord purposely weakened him! He put his thigh out of joint!

One of the greatest miracles the Lord can perform in our behalf is to cripple all our human efforts and make us totally dependent on Him. You will hobble away from Jabbok, humbled and crippled — crying out, "Oh, Lord, I've made my total surrender. I've laid down all my sins. My idol has been crushed. But I can't keep in victory without supernatural help. You brought me to this place of absolute obedience now sustain my commitment supernaturally. Cause me to both will and do of your perfect will."

3. Jabbok Is the Place of an Open Heaven

God reveals Himself only to those who "get rid of their guile." Guile is deceit, dishonesty, secret sin!

Listen to the glorious promise Jesus gave to Nathaniel, one of the twelve:

"Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile...Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believe thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these..." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man..." (John 1:47–51).

He alone was given this glorious promise — Nathaniel, there is no deceit or dishonesty in you. You are an open book. No hidden works of sin! Nothing to hinder in your life. You will be given an open heaven! You will see things few others see. A full revelation is yours because you have no guile in you!

Our Lord desperately longs to open His heart to us, and lead us into all truth. But our guile hinders it. That is why Jabbok is so necessary! A place to lay down all the final remains of guile, deceit, dishonesty! So the heavens will stay open to us! It is true our sins hide His face from us.

Jacob renamed Jabbok "Peniel". Peniel means "the face of God."

"Because I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved..." (Gen. 32:30).

Jacob is now a spiritual man. No more talk about material blessings — lands, food, clothes, success. He had seen God and he had been touched. It is not cattle now; it is Christ.

The heavens once again opened. The ladder reappeared, with angels ascending and descending. But now he understood the deepest meanings of that open heaven. It means access to the Father! It means getting to know Him. It means sitting in heavenly places. Unspeakable joy. The glow of His presence. The sound of His voice. All spiritual values now!

Jacob had wasted over twenty years. He could have enjoyed years of an open heaven. He could have had unity with his brother and Laban. But the heavens had closed to him — because of his guile. I know I, too, have wasted precious years, with the heavens sometimes like brass. My inner idols — my unsundered guile — closed the heavens. It shut out the revelation of Christ's fullness. I had but a partial vision.

But at Jabbok the Lord heard my cry, and delivered me! I made a commitment to follow Him in total surrender. And then the heavens opened to me again! I am still tempted — at times I fail. But I know that obedience will again open heaven to me.

"...if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine..." (John 7:17).

Is heaven open to you? Is the Lord revealing Himself to you in truth and holiness? If not, you may be shutting it all down by holding on to an idol! Secret sin may be the cause of your spiritual dryness and blindness. And there can be no love and unity in the church until God's people live pure, obedient lives.

Yes, we are loved! But we are also going to be judged! Judgment is beginning in the house of the Lord! The whole church of Jesus Christ is being led to Jabbok! None of us shall escape this crisis.

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that

despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer [more severe] punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, and unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense saith the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God..." (Heb. 10:26–31).

Before you go to Christ's Judgment Seat — go to Jabbok! Judge yourself at Jabbok and you will not be judged! Hear what the Word of the Lord says about obedience:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness..." (Rom. 1:18).

"Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you anymore, except you destroy the accursed from among you..." (Joshua 7:12).

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God..." (2 Cor 7:1).

"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded..." (James 4:8).

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath..." "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls..." (James 1:19, 21).

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