

Did God Cripple Jacob for Life?

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*And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, **he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.** (Gen. 32:24-25)*

Due to our belief that God does not directly (or uses His omnipotent power to) inflict anyone with sickness, disease, handicaps, death, destruction or tragedy, there are questions that are brought to us from time to time concerning Bible passages that appear to contradict this premise. God placing Jacob's hip out of joint is one of them.

There are a number of people whose agenda is to prove that God is a dispenser of life's difficulties. Among several reasons for this is their desire to protect their precious ideology of what it means for God to be sovereign (to exercise ultimate control over every event that occurs in the life and destiny of every single human being in existence). These individuals are desperate to find any passage to make their case. Naturally, they believe that the incident in Genesis 32 where Jacob wrestles with God and has his thigh placed out of joint provides them ample proof that God is behind sicknesses such as osteoporosis.

Avoid Private Interpretations

You will often hear or read commentaries on this passage telling us that God cripple Jacob for life. Is this a truth derived from Scripture or is it a biased interpretation influenced by an ideology that has a sickness and tragedy inflicting deity at its center?

Peter writes, "*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any **private interpretation***" (2 Pet. 1:20). When we study Scripture we must never interpret it based on our assumptions, which are often influenced by our theological ideology. We must interpret Scripture with Scripture. Scripture is its best commentary and dictionary. It defines its own words better than the best Greek and Hebrew Bible dictionaries written by scholars and no commentary written by men can match the accurate perspective on Scripture than other divinely inspired passages of Scripture.

Allowing Scripture to interpret itself also means that we should never read into the Bible what is not there. If the Bible itself does not teach a particular (or popular) understanding of a situation recorded in Scripture then we must reject that understanding. To do so is to offer a private interpretation, one not backed by divine revelation. In the case of Jacob, one must be able to

show from clear Scripture that God crippled him for life. Otherwise, one is offering a private interpretation that has no divinely inspired basis of authority.

Some of us have engaged in wrestling matches or some other intense sport. You engage in these sports to win and sometimes winning means doing something to hurt your opponent. However, most of us never intend to *permanently* damage our opponent or cripple them for life. In a wrestling match one may possibly do something to dislocate a shoulder or some other part of the body but we know that it will heal in time. Jacob chose to wrestle with God and took the risk of such a thing happening. That is the risk of engaging in this type of sports activity.

But check any online medical site and you will learn that “out of joint” does not mean “crippled for life.” Bones and parts of the body that are “out of joint” are known to heal in time. In Jacob’s case, there is nothing in Scripture that indicates that this was a permanent condition that afflicted him for the rest of his life. As far as any we can tell from the Biblical evidence, Jacob only suffered this conditioned immediately after the wrestling match. We are told nowhere in Scripture that Jacob spent the rest of his days as a cripple. Not only is Scripture lacking on this but even medical science would not confirm such an idea.

Jacob Leaned on His Staff

But one might say, “Woah, hold on there brother. The Bible talks about Jacob having to lean on his staff.” It certainly does:

*By faith Jacob, **when he was a dying**, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, **leaning upon the top of his staff**. (Hebrews 11:21)*

At this time Jacob was 130 years old (Gen. 47:8-9) and we are told that he was close to death (Gen. 48:1; 49:33). At that age and in that condition, it would be necessary to have something to support you when you decide to come off of your sick bed, stand and worship God after ministering blessings to your grandchildren. The very context of the passage tells us that Jacob was leaning on the staff due to being near to death and not because he had been crippled for life.

But why did Jacob need a staff in the first place? The same reason that ***all of the Israelite men had staffs*** (Exodus 12:11, 32). Jacob and his descendants were shepherds (Gen. 46:32-34; 47:3). Shepherds managed the sheep with a staff (Psalm 23:1-4). It is interesting that, just before Jacob’s famous wrestling match with God, we are told that he ***already possessed a staff***:

*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; **for with my staff** I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. (Gen. 32:10)*

Therefore, Jacob did not have a staff because he was crippled. He already possessed a staff because he was a shepherd. The belief that Jacob had to use a staff because God crippled him for life is a private (and dishonest) interpretation of Scripture and should be rejected.

Conclusion

Jacob's situation was a unique one in which he engaged in a wrestling match with God and suffered one of the possible consequences of that sport. Many wrestlers, football players, boxers and other athletes have suffered temporary injuries that left some part of their body temporarily out of joint. Most have healed and continued to participate in their sporting event.

To conclude that Jacob was crippled for life because he suffered an injury is to go beyond Scripture. To use such a passage to claim that God is the author of crippling sicknesses, diseases, and handicaps is to go beyond proper Bible application. It is a dishonest intent to support a bias theological perspective. Worst of all, it is a denigration of the kind, loving, gentle, and good character of God who heals and delivers rather than inflicts with sickness, disease and pain.

Reject such views of God. He is the Lord *“Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases”* (Psalm 103:3). He is not the Lord *“who inflicteth thy sicknesses and crippleth thee.”*

To learn more lookout for the soon coming revised edition of our book,

Does God Send Sickness?

A Study of God's Character in Relation to Sickness and His Victory Over It

