

**Jacob or Israel? Which do you long to be? Genesis 32:24-32 FBC Canton Sunday
am July 5, 2026**

Introduction: Who we are is not who God wants us to be! Romans 8:29
...Conformed to the image of His Son!...

The transformation is not optional, it is the intentional work of our God.

Jacob's transformation is not one of perfection.

Struggled before birth.

His sex and his identity firmly established.

Struggled in his young years.

Favorite son status lost.

Favoritism is a family sin.

Stew exchanged for a despised birthright.

Esau hairy and red of the fields.

Jacob smooth skinned of the tents.

Hatred between the brothers around the stolen blessing.

Rapid departure to a foreign land to find a wife of his own faith.

Find a wife, gets bonus wives. Loves one...but has children with them all.

Hoodwinks father in law with sheep and goats.

Quick getaway with blind eye to his loved wife's theft of idols.

His example is good news for all of us!

Except for the self-righteous...

”
GOD DOES NOT CALL
THE PERFECT, HE
CALLS THE WILLING.
HE DOESN'T CALL THE
ONE THAT HAS IT ALL.
HE CALLS THE ONE
THAT WILL
SURRENDER IT ALL.

—
REV. SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ

All the while God appears to him multiple times to confirm blessings=Grace!

Sees the ladder to heaven.

Sees the goats and sheep trick.

Sees God tell him to leave.

Sees the invisible world encamped with him.

You may not realize it, but...

The blessings of God come with stipulations of transformation.

This message is designed to see believers be transformed!

I. God instigates the wrestling. V. 24-32

a. Alone to remove self. V. 24, John 3:30

He must increase, but I must decrease.

i. Self-reliance.

ii. Self-defeat.

1. Elijah, Jonah, Isaiah, John, Paul, Hagar, Mary.

b. All through the night. V. 24, Psalm 22:2

O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent.

c. Hip altered to alter walk. V. 25

i. Night seasons are the best learning seasons. Job.

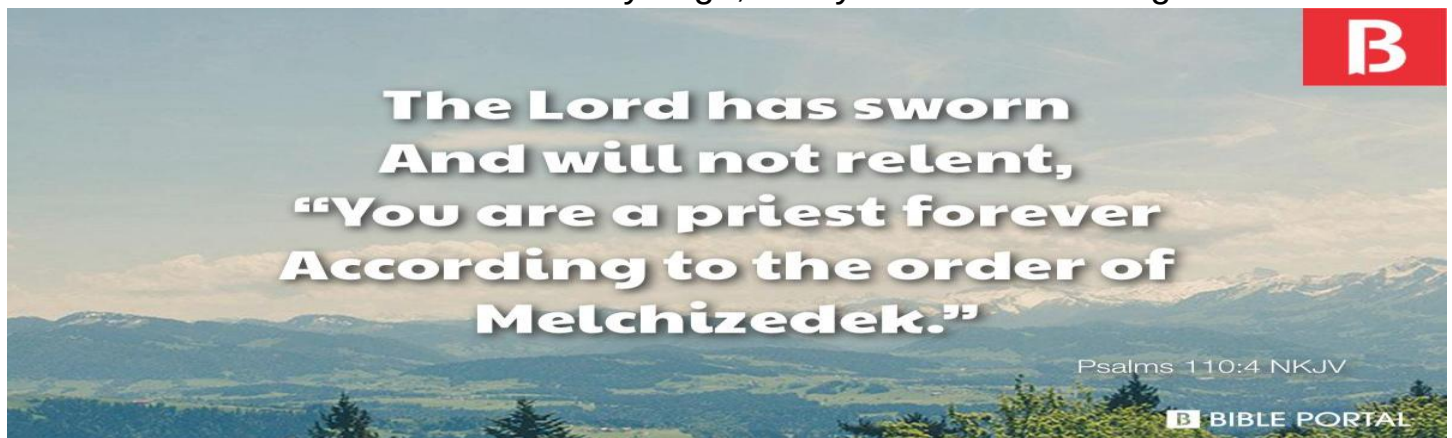
1. To remove dependence on sight. II Corinthians 5:7

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

2. We walk by faith, not by our schemes, our reason, our feelings.

ii. To reinforce persistence of God. V. 26

1. He will not let you go, until you will not let him go.



iii. To produce surrender to his will, not by force. Jeremiah 38:20-22

20 But Jeremiah said, "They shall not deliver you. Please, obey the voice of the LORD which I speak to you. So, it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live. 21 But if you refuse to surrender, this is the word that the LORD has shown me:

d. Changed his name to reflect change in character. v. 27-31

i. Jacob means heel grabber.

ii. Israel means prevailed. In the future his name shifts!!!!

iii. God's name is the one who gives grace to change. Never changes!

iv. Name of place changes to 'face of God.'

1. Jacob saw Jesus preincarnate, not the glory of God.

e. All of his tribe knew the change was real. V. 32

Conclusion: God will wrestle with you to change you!

The Bible Says

Genesis 32:1-2 Meaning

As [Jacob](#), who lived circa 2006 BC to 1859 BC and was the son of Isaac and Rebekah, journeyed away from his uncle Laban, he experienced a divine encounter symbolizing [God's](#) protection and guidance. He had already endured years of conflict and uncertainty, and his departure marked an important shift toward reconciliation and blessing. In [Genesis 32:1](#), we read, *Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him* (v. 1). These messengers signified [God's](#) presence, suggesting that [Jacob](#) was not traveling alone but remained securely in the care of the LORD.

This heavenly meeting offered [Jacob](#) a tangible reminder of the covenant [God](#) made with his grandfather Abraham (around 2166 BC to 1991 BC) and passed down through Isaac (around 2066 BC to 1886 BC). By showing him [angels](#) on his path, [God](#) reaffirmed that the journey undertaken by [Jacob](#) was part of a divine plan. Even though [Jacob](#) had been justified in leaving Laban's domain, his heart still wrestled with fears about reunion with his estranged brother, Esau. The sight of [God's](#) [angels](#) gave [Jacob](#) confidence and hope that the next steps he would take were under divine supervision.

[Genesis 32:1](#) underscores the biblical theme that [God's](#) care often becomes especially apparent at times of transition or vulnerability. Just as [Jacob](#) spent many years unsure of his place in the world, believers today can cling to the reassurance that [God's](#) deliverance and presence may surface when they face unknown challenges. The angelic visitation foreshadows [God's](#) sustaining grace, ultimately pointing to the promise of faithful protection, fulfilled wholeheartedly in Jesus Christ, who assured His followers of His continual presence ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

We then learn in verse 2, *Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp. So he named that place Mahanaim"* (v. 2). Captivated by the inexplicable sight of [God's](#) servants, [Jacob](#) recognized this was more than a fleeting encounter; it was a sacred reality. By calling it [God's camp](#), [Jacob](#) blended his own human experience with the truth that [God](#) had set up a camp of protection and authority in that very location.

[Mahanaim](#), located east of the Jordan River in the region of Gilead, stood as a physical witness to this miraculous reality. The name itself means "two camps," reflecting both Jacob's [camp](#) and the [camp of the angels](#), an acknowledgment that heaven and earth met within that place. In the broader biblical narrative, [Mahanaim](#) later became a significant site during events involving King David, illustrating how memories of divine encounters can shape national and spiritual storylines (see [2 Samuel 17:24](#)).

Through naming this location, [Jacob](#) cemented the truth that [God's](#) providential care is not limited to one span of space or time. It reminds later generations that the same [God](#) who guarded Jacob's steps is still present in every journey, offering hope and divine security. This divine-human overlap stands as a reminder that [God](#) remains intimately involved in earthly affairs, poised to guide and protect those who trust in Him.

Used with permission from TheBibleSays.com.

You can access the original article here: [Genesis 32:1-2 Meaning](#)

Chuck Smith

Verse by Verse Study on Genesis 32-36 (C2000)

Shall we turn in our Bibles to Genesis chapter thirty-two?

Now in the thirty-first chapter we had the parting of Laban, Jacob's uncle as he kisses his grandchildren goodbye, as he sets up the stone and as he gives a heavy-duty charge to Jacob saying, "you take care of my girls and my grandkids. And if you do anything wrong, may God watch over you and take care of you".

And so Laban departed with his host and returned back to Padanaram.

And Jacob [chapter thirty-two] went on his way, and the angels of God met him ([Gen 32:1](#)).

So he's just left the host of Laban and he starts on his way again towards Esau. And the angels of God met him. No doubt this was very encouraging to Jacob at this point to meet the angels of God. Now it is interesting, it doesn't tell us in what form or whatever. We do know that angels did in many cases take on human form in the Old Testament. In what form the angels met him here is not declared, just that the angels of God met him. Angels, it seems, are able to materialize and to speak to people.

Actually in the book of Hebrews, we are told to be careful to entertain strangers. You might be entertaining angels without even knowing it. Now to my knowledge, I have never seen an angel in my whole life. My wife gets upset when I say that but I mean, really, truly angel. She's an angel but not a really truly one, I don't think.

There is a pastor up in Boise, Idaho that declares that Gabriel's been visiting him over a period of time. From the things that Gabriel has supposedly told him, I doubt that it's Gabriel. Now we are told that we are not to believe every spirit but to "try the spirits if they be of God" ([1 John 4:1](#)). And we are told that Satan is able to transform himself into an angel of light in order to deceive. And Paul says, "If

an angel of heaven preaches any other gospel than that which you've already received, let him be accursed" ([Galatians 1:8](#)).

So if an angel would come along and say, "Hey, God loves everybody and it doesn't matter what you might do, God will accept you and receive you, you don't need to pray, you don't need to come by Jesus Christ"; hey, let that angel be accursed. The angels of God would not reveal or say anything that would be contrary to the already revealed word of truth that we have in the Bible. So though I've never seen an angel, I'm open. I would-I would enjoy the experience very, very much, I'm sure.

There are angels, the Scriptures said, "who have been given charge over us to keep us in all of our ways", ([Psalm 91:11](#)), sort of guardian angels. I do believe in them. Mine has been with me on several occasions and has helped me out. I'm very conscious and aware of my angel's presence with me on occasion and of his help. And there have been occasions when I turned and said, "thanks, buddy. Appreciate that one", you know, that was really you know, I don't know how I got out of it myself. But except that the angels of the Lord delivered me and it was very obvious that it was just the hand of the Lord that delivered.

So Jacob met the angels.

And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host ([Gen 32:2](#)):

He just saw Laban's host; they were a rough host. But "this is God's host:"

and he called the name of that place Mahanaim ([Gen 32:2](#)).

"Mahanaim" means the place of two hosts. So it was the host of Laban and the host of angels.

And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall you speak unto my lord Esau; [Tell him] Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: And I have oxen, and asses, and flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight. And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him ([Gen 32:3-6](#)).

So the reception committee with Esau was on their way. So it was the third host now. There was the host of Laban, that was very uncomfortable. There was the host of angels, that was comfortable. There is now the host of Esau coming with four hundred men and that again is uncertain. But it seems to be uncomfortable at the moment because the last time he saw Esau, Esau was threatening to kill him. Why would he want to bring four hundred men with him unless he intended him harm? And so the news is disrupting to Jacob. He doesn't like the news that he hears of the four hundred men that Esau is bringing with him.

Notice, Jacob in his message to Esau is pointing out his own wealth in order to cause Esau to be comfortable not thinking that Jacob is coming back to claim his inheritance. Coming back to claim his birthright. Coming back to take away from Esau or to try to take from Esau. I don't need anything. I'm very rich. I have servants, menservants, maidservants, cattle, oxen, the whole thing, and I'm returning now and the addressing of him as "lord". Though his father said, "And your brother shall be your servants", yet Jacob is addressing him as the lord.

Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that were with him, the flocks, the herds, the camels, into two bands; and he said, If Esau comes to one company, and smites it, then the other company which is left escape ([Gen 32:7-8](#)).

He immediately began to prepare. The first thing was just to divide the whole company into two bands. Figuring if Esau strikes one, while they are fighting and all, it would give the other band an opportunity to escape.

And then Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, the LORD which said unto me, Return to thy country, and to your family, and I will deal well with you ([Gen 32:9](#)):

Now Jacob as he begins to pray is immediately reminding the Lord of what the Lord said to him. How oftentimes in prayer I remind the Lord of what He said. Lord, You said, "Where two or three are gathered together" or "where two or three agree" ([Matthew 18:20](#)). Now the Lord knows He said that and I know He said it but I just like to remind Him that He said it every once in a while, you know. I like to remind the Lord of His promises.

Now Lord, "You promised if we ask anything" and just remind Him that "Lord, this is what You said. I didn't say this, Lord, You said this". And so Jacob is doing much the same thing. He's reminding the Lord of what the Lord said. "Lord, You're the One that said return and I will deal well with you. Now Lord, I'm returning and here comes my brother" and the acknowledgment in verse ten.

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which you have showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I have become two bands ([Gen 32:10](#)).

He is returning now to the area where Jabbok enters into the Jordan river and as he looks down into the valley and he sees the Jordan river before him, he remembers twenty years earlier when he was fleeing from his brother. All he had was just a walking stick, just my staff. Coming back now twenty years later, God has been so good and blessed him so abundantly that he's had to divide his whole group into two companies of people. Two bands. "Lord, I don't deserve anything. I'm not worthy the least of Your mercies. You've blessed me abundantly. When I passed over Jordan, all I had the staff. Now I've become two bands".

Now to give you a little idea of how large a group he had with him, in his present to Esau he sent to him five hundred and fifty animals. Now that was just a small part of one of the bands of animals. So I mean, this was a big drive of cattle, and sheep, servants and all that Jacob is coming back with; a wealthy man. And he attributes the wealth unto God. "I'm not worthy, I'm not deserving. And yet, look what You've done". And then his real request.

Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And you said,[again reminding God what He said] I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude ([Gen 32:11-12](#)).

I do think that there's tremendous value in the promises of God's scripture and as we remind ourselves of what God has said; "Lord, You have said I will supply all your needs according to my riches in glory by Christ Jesus"([Philippians 4:19](#)). The Lord likes you to take Him at His word. Stand upon His promises.

The real prayer is "deliver me from the hand of Esau". Now the honest confession, "I am afraid", and it's an honest confession. It may be a negative confession but it's honest. And I think an honest, negative confession is probably better than a dishonest, positive confession. "Oh, I'm not afraid, everything's all right". And you're trembling; that isn't honest. Jacob is honest with God. "I'm afraid that he's going to come and kill me." Very negative confession but it was true. Jacob was afraid. And it's best to be honest. Honest especially when you're talking with God.

It's who do you think you're kidding when you're not really honest with God? He knows your heart, He knows what's in your heart. You're not fooling God at all. So it's best to be honest with God, totally honest and open. I love a frankness with God. I love being just blunt and frank when I talk with God. I love to tell Him exactly how I feel.

I'm more open with God, I think, than I am with anybody else because I know that I might as well be. I know it's ridiculous for me not to be open with God. I know that there is not any hiding of anything from God. That everything is open and naked before Him. And thus, any endeavor of mine to disguise or to color or to in anywise alter the true feelings of my heart are just absolute folly. It's just deceiving myself. And so a great openness with God, a great honesty.

"Lord, I am afraid. I don't know what I'm going to do. Lord, I'm just really disturbed over this thing. But God, I'm angry, I'm mad, I can't stand what they're doing, Lord." And just be honest with God about your emotions, about your feelings and then God can deal with them.

As long as I'm trying to cover and, you know, try to fool God and say, "Oh, it's all right, Lord, everything's okay, I feel great. Oh, it doesn't bother me, no, no". Then I'm not, then God can't deal with the real issues of my life, until I get just really frank with Him and honest in my dealings with God.

Jacob was honest. And then he reminded as I said God of His promise, "You said 'I will surely do thee good and make thy seed as the sand of the sea.' Now Lord, how can my seed be as the sand of the sea if Esau wipes us all out?" You see, that's the idea, "You made the promise that I'm, you know, my descendants are going to be unnumbered and Lord, that'll never be if Esau comes and wipes me out".

And so he lodged there that same night; and he took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother; two hundred she goats, twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their colts, forty cows, ten bulls, twenty she asses, ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and he said to his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space between the droves and drove. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you, saying, Who are you? and where are you going? Who do these animals belong to? Then you shall say, They are of thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, he is behind us. And so he commanded the second, the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall you speak unto Esau, when you find him. And say moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept me ([Gen 32:13-20](#)).

So Jacob prays and then he does his best to set things up. Now as I told you, one of Jacob's problems was that he felt that God couldn't do His work without his help. In other words, Jacob always was trying to help God out. Jacob wasn't a man to just trust the Lord alone. He was the kind of a fellow who would pray and then do his best to set things up. He was a very wise man and a very clever man.

And he always was scheming, always conniving, always manipulating people, and this is just another one of Jacob's manipulations, having prayed, rather than just leaving it there with God. Then he does his best to help God work out the situation by setting up this whole appeasement program, sending out the servants with all of these droves of cattle and sheep and rams and goats and so forth. So that by the time Esau gets to him, he's sort of just overwhelmed by all of the presents that he has received from Jacob. And he is hoping that the anger of Esau will surely be appeased by all of these gifts.

You say, "Well, God wants us to do something, doesn't He?" Yes, I do not believe that faith is really passive. I think that faith is active and I believe that God does expect us to use our heads and use the wisdom that He has given to us. But I do believe that God wants us to be trusting in Him in His ability to do His work. I think that too many times we get into problems where we shouldn't really get involved at all where we're trying to help God out and God doesn't need my help.

And so he went the present over before him: and he stayed that night in the company. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, [that is, Bildad and Zilpah] and his eleven sons, and he passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over all that he had. And Jacob was left alone ([Gen 32:21-24](#));

I really feel that he sent them all away so he could get a good night's sleep. Others think that he sent them away so he could spend the night in prayer. That doesn't sound like Jacob. He's a practical man and as I say, he really is trusting in himself more than God at this particular point. Yes, he takes God into account, he asked God to help him but then he does his best to help himself.

And so I think that he knew that this has been a rough day. It's been an emotional day. Laban is upset and I can't go back that direction. Esau is coming; I don't know what his attitude is. And so he thinks, I better get a good night's sleep. Get all these little kids out of here, because you remember all and they were eleven boys and how many girls; we don't know. There were girls also and they were all under thirteen years of age.

So a lot of racket, you know, and a lot of cutting up and a lot of playing and a lot of movement in the night. And Jacob felt he needed a good night's rest. And so Jacob was left alone but rather than getting a good night rest,

there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him ([Gen 32:24-25](#)),

That is, this angel that was wrestling with Jacob, Jacob would not give up. He could not prevail against Jacob. Jacob was a strong, iron-willed man, and that was Jacob's weakness was his strength. He was so strong; he was prone to trust and rely upon himself rather than to trust in the Lord completely. And so here is a night in which he really needs rest more than any other night, and rather than being able to get rest, the Lord sends an angel to wrestle with him all night long. But he still wouldn't give up. He still wouldn't surrender. And so when the angel saw that he would not surrender,

he touched the hollow of his thigh; and it went out of joint, as he wrestled with him ([Gen 32:25](#)).

He deliberately crippled Jacob. Using the divine power, he crippled this man. Now Jacob's one thought was always he could flee. He set things up so that Esau would meet the other company. If Esau was still angry and started to smite the company, then he could flee. And always in the back of his mind, if all else fails, run.

Now the Lord has closed out that door of escape. He's crippled, how can he run? And so the angel touched the hollow of his thigh, the thing shriveled, he became a cripple. God shut him off from escaping now. And this is what finally brought Jacob to the place of giving up. "That's it, I've had it".

Jacob finally surrendered. That which God was wanting him to do all along, surrender his life, surrender his will unto the Lord finally came with the crippling. It took the crippling to do it. That's tragic. Sometimes a person's greatest strength can be their greatest weakness.

But Paul the apostle, he was another Jacob in a sense. The guy with an iron will. When Paul wanted to do something, it was almost impossible to stop him. He was preaching in Lystra and the people got angry and they stoned him. They thought they killed him. They dragged him out of town, even as friends thought he was dead and Paul himself doesn't know if he was dead or alive. And his friends were gathering around his body weeping over Paul. Oh, the great soldier of the cross. What a loss you know to the kingdom of God. And pretty soon, Paul began to move, stood up, shook himself. Let's go back into town. Man, how do you stop a guy like that? You don't. That iron will.

But it also became a problem. For Paul was in Galatia and he intended to go over into Bithynia with the Gospel. He had a desire to get into Asia there. "Oh, I want to go into Asia and preach". God didn't want him to go to Asia. But Paul was determined to go to Asia.

So God had to make Paul so sick he couldn't get out of bed until He got Paul's attention. Paul said, "Where is it You wanted me to go, Lord? Over to Greece? Oh, but I wanted to go to Asia, Lord". "Greece, Paul". But he was so sick he couldn't go on into Asia. The Lord just put-had, but he had to put him in bed; he had to, you know; that's sad. But Paul probably could never have endured all of the things that he endured unless he had that great will. It was a great strength but yet so many times the natural abilities are the very things that get in our way in our attempt to serve God.

And God has to deal and bring us to a dependence upon Him in all things. He doesn't want me to depend upon my natural abilities. He wants me to depend totally upon Him. And with Jacob, it took the crippling in order to bring Jacob to the place of surrender, in order that God might really do all for Jacob He wanted to do. He couldn't do it as long as he was this clever, conniving kind of a guy. God couldn't do what He was wanting to do. And so He brings him to the place of weakness. Brings him to a crippling situation.

Jacob is surely not a good example for us. It's just a good illustration and demonstration of what God has to do to some people to bring them into a complete surrender of themselves to God, so that then God can take them and begin to work through them. And they have that understanding, that deep understanding that I have to depend upon the Lord. And so the angel crippled him. And Jacob, at this point, defeated according to Hosea, began to weep and plead with the angel.

You know, you have to hear a person's tone of voice many times to know what they're really saying. You cannot put the tone of voice in words on a page. You've got to hear it. And as we read the words

on the page, it sounds like Jacob is demanding, coming from a position of victory or power saying, "I'll not let you go except you bless me".

As the day was breaking,

The angel said, Let me go, the day is breaking. And Jacob said, I will not let you go ([Gen 32:26](#)),

It sounds like he's coming from a position of power and all. Not so. Hosea says he was at this point broken. He was weeping. He was crying. He was pleading. He was actually saying in essence, "please don't go without blessing me. I can't let you go".

unless you bless me ([Gen 32:26](#)).

I've had it. I'm destroyed. I can't run. I've had it. Please don't go without first of all blessing me.

And so the angel said unto him, What is your name ([Gen 32:27](#))?

Reminding him of his character. For his name was a reflection of his character.

My name is Jacob ([Gen 32:27](#)).

"My name is heel catcher because I caught my brother's heel and I've been at everybody's heel. I've been clever. I've been able to get by because of my dogged determination. I don't give up. I'm a self-governed man. I'm the master of my destiny. I'm the master of every situation. My name is Jacob."

Your name ([Gen 32:28](#))

And here's the blessing; the blessing is just the change of a name.

Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel ([Gen 32:28](#)):

But the name change indicates the change of nature. You're no longer to be a self-governed, clever heel catcher; but you're now to be a man whose life is governed by God, Israel. And it indicates the change of character. Actually it is the new birth; it's being born again. No longer being mastered by self, by the flesh. And now being mastered by the spirit of God. Living now a life after the Spirit. What a beautiful blessing. The greatest blessing he could ever receive. It was the blessing that was to last the rest of his life.

God wants to bless you. He wants to change your nature from a self-governed, independent, self-sufficient individual into a person who is relying and trusting in God whose life is governed by the spirit of God. And so the change in Jacob, the blessing was the change of nature that God gave to him.

for as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed ([Gen 32:28](#)).

God is changing your nature, making you a prince. Giving you power with God and power with men.

And Jacob said to him, What is your name? And he said, Why do you ask me my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for he said I have seen God face to face ([Gen 32:29-30](#)),

"Peniel" means the face of God.

and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he [was limping or] halted upon his thigh ([Gen 32:30-31](#)).

He was crippled. The crippling was an experience that lasted.

Therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank ([Gen 32:32](#)).

CHAPTER 32

THEME: *Crisis in the life of Jacob; wrestling at Peniel; Jacob's name changed to Israel*

Chapter 32 is the high point in the life of Jacob and can be called the turning point in his life. However, this is not Jacob's conversion, by any means. In spite of the fact that he was living in the flesh, this man was still God's man. This is the reason that we are told to be very careful about judging folk as to whether they are Christians or not. There are a lot of people who do not look like they are Christians, but I am almost sure that they are. Whether they are or not is in the hands of the Lord. They just don't act like Christians—that's all; they give no evidence that they are. And this man Jacob gave no such evidence, except in very faint instances when God appeared to him and he did respond in a way.

Jacob, who is God's representative and witness in the world, has been a bad witness, but he cannot continue that way, and so God is going to deal with him. To tell the truth, God will cripple him in order to get him. The Lord also disciplines us: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth ..." (Heb. 12:6). That is His method. He disciplines in that way. Lot also did not look like he was a child of God—but he was, for Peter says that Lot "vexed his righteous soul" (see 2 Pet. 2:7–8). But I tell you, Lot certainly was put through the fire. He escaped the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, but the Lord put him through the fires of testing. This is Jacob's experience also. He got his college degree at the college of hard knocks. Uncle Laban was president and dean of the school. At graduation, this boy Jacob gave a pitiful valedictorian address. It took him twenty years to get his degree, and he certainly worked for it. Old Laban changed the requirements ten times. Every two years, Jacob had a new contract with Uncle Laban, and it was always to Jacob's disadvantage. This was the experience of this man.

We come now to this test in which God is going to have to deal with Jacob because he is going to represent God. God will deal with him and will move in on him in this thirty-second chapter. At the beginning, I would like to write this verse of Scripture over this chapter: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isa. 40:29). This is the experience of Jacob.

CRISIS IN THE LIFE OF JACOB

And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim [Gen. 32:1–2].

God is beginning to deal with Jacob directly in order to bring him into the place of fruit bearing and of real, vital service and witness for Him.

And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now:

And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight [Gen. 32:3–5].

This fellow Jacob is still clever, isn't he? He just cannot let go, even after his experience with Laban. He is returning back to the land, and he remembers the last time he saw Esau twenty years ago, when Esau was breathing out threatenings against him. Notice that Jacob sends servants and instructs them, saying, "When you get to Esau my brother, say to him, 'My lord Esau.'" Of all things! And then he has them refer to himself as "Thy servant Jacob." That's not the way Jacob had spoken before. He had manipulated for the birthright and had stolen the blessing. He had been a rascal, but *now* his talk is different. I guess he had learned a few things from Uncle Laban. "My lord Esau ... thy servant Jacob."

And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him [Gen. 32:6].

This message absolutely frightened poor Jacob because he didn't know what all that meant. Esau did not indicate his intentions to the servants at all. I suppose that Jacob quizzed them rather thoroughly and said, "Did you detect any note of animosity or bitterness or hatred toward me?" And I suppose that one of the servants said, "No, he seemed to be glad to get the information that you were coming to meet him, and now he's coming to meet you." But the fact that Esau appeared glad was no comfort to Jacob. It could mean that Esau would be glad for the opportunity of getting revenge. Anyway, poor Jacob is upset.

Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands;

And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape [Gen. 32:7–8].

Jacob is in a bad way, he thinks. With this brother of his coming to him, he divides up his group. He is being clever. He reasons that if his brother strikes one group, then the other one can escape.

Notice what Jacob does now. He appeals to God in his distress:

And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:

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. 32:9–10].

This man now appeals to God and cries out to Him on the basis that He is the God of his father Abraham and the God of his father Isaac. I begin now to detect a little change in Jacob's life. This is the first time I have ever

heard him say, “I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies.” For the first time, he is acknowledging that he might be a sinner in God’s sight. Do you know that there are a great many “Christians” who do not acknowledge that they are sinners? For years I knew a man who was incensed that I would indicate that he was a sinner. He told me all that he had done and that he had been saved and now was not a sinner. My friend, he is a sinner. We are all sinners, *saved by grace*. As long as we are in this life, we have that old nature that isn’t even fit to go to heaven. And do you know that God is not going to let it go to heaven? Vernon McGee cannot go there. That is the reason God had to give me a new nature; the old one wasn’t even fit to repair. This fellow Jacob is beginning now to say that he is not worthy. When any man begins to move toward God on that basis, he will find that God will communicate with him.

Jacob makes this very interesting statement: “for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.” He went over the Jordan with just his walking stick, his staff—that’s all he had. Now he is coming back, and he has become two companies. This is Jacob for you.

Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.

And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude [Gen. 32:11–12].

Jacob really cried out to God. That night was a very difficult night for him, and he didn’t have any aspirins he could take.

And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother;

Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams,

Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals [Gen. 32:13–15].

Jacob is pretty generous with his stock now.

And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove [Gen. 32:16].

This is Jacob’s tactic. He will send out a drove, a very rich gift, for his brother, and when that first drove arrives, Esau will say, “What is this?” The servants will reply, “We are bringing you a gift from your brother Jacob.” Esau will receive that gift and then ride on a little farther to meet another drove of the same size. He will ask the servants, “Where are you going?” They will say, “We’re going to meet Esau with a gift from his brother Jacob.” And he will say, “I am Esau.” Believe me, by the time Esau gets down where Jacob and the family are, he will be softened.

Jacob has prayed to God and has reminded the Lord, “You told me to return to my country. You said You would protect me.” But does he believe God? No. He goes right ahead and makes these arrangements, which reveals that he isn’t trusting God at all. I am afraid that we are often in the same position. Many of us take our burdens to the Lord in prayer. We just spread them out before Him—I do that. Then when we get through praying, we get right up and put each little burden right back on our back and start out again with them. We don’t really believe Him, do we? We don’t really trust Him as we should.

And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee?

Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob’s; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us.

And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him.

And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me [Gen. 32:17–20].

Esau will be met by one drove after another like that. This is the plan that Jacob is working on.

So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company.

And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.

And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had [Gen. 32:21–23].

This is the night of the great experience in Jacob's life. The land where he crossed the Brook Jabbok is very desolate. When I was there, I purposely got away from my group and took a walk across the bridge that is there today. The United States built a very lovely road through that area for the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan. There are several things in that area which you would not be able to see if there wasn't that good road, because it is quite a wilderness area. I took pictures of sheep that were drinking down at the Brook Jabbok. The crossing there is a very bleak place, right down between two hills, in that very mountainous and very rugged country. Here is where Jacob came that night. He is not a happy man, and he is filled with fear and doubts. You see, chickens are coming home to roost. He had mistreated Esau. God had never told him to get the birthright or the blessing in the way he did it. God would have gotten it for him. That night Jacob sends all that he has across the Brook Jabbok, but he stays on the other side so that, if his brother Esau comes, he might kill Jacob but spare the family. And so Jacob is left alone.

WRESTLING AT PENIEL

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day [Gen. 32:24].

There are several things I would like to get straight as we come to this wrestling match. I have heard it said that Jacob did the wrestling. Actually, Jacob didn't want to wrestle anybody. He has Uncle Laban in back of him who doesn't mean good at all, and he has his brother Esau ahead of him. Jacob is no match for either one. He is caught now between a rock and a hard place, and he doesn't know which way to turn. Do you think he wanted to take on a third opponent that night? I don't think so.

Years ago *Time* magazine, reporting in the sports section concerning the votes for the greatest wrestler, said that not a vote went to the most famous athlete in history, wrestling Jacob. Lo and behold, the magazine received a letter from someone who wrote asking them to tell something about this wrestler Jacob. The writer of the letter had never heard of him before! And evidently he had never read his Bible at all. Jacob is no wrestler—let's make that very clear here at the beginning. That night he was alone because he wanted to be alone, and he wasn't looking for a fight.

This is the question: Who is this one who wrestled with Jacob that night? There has been a great deal of speculation about who it is, but I think He is none other than the preincarnate Christ. There is some evidence for this in the prophecy of Hosea: "Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him. He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him:

he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us; Even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is his memorial" (Hos. 12:1–5). "The LORD is his memorial"—or, "the Lord is His name." It was none other than Jehovah, the preincarnate Christ, who wrestled with Jacob that night.

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. 32:25].

Old Jacob is not going to give up easily; he is not that kind of man—and he struggled against Him. Finally, this One who wrestled with him crippled him.

And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me [Gen. 32:26].

What happens now? Jacob is just holding on; he's not wrestling. He is just holding on to this One. He found out that you do not get anywhere with God by struggling and resisting. The only way that you get anywhere with Him is by yielding and just holding on to Him. Abraham had learned that, and that is why he said amen to God. He believed God, and He counted it to him for righteousness. Abraham reached the end of his rope and put his arms around God. My friend, when you get in that condition, then you trust God. When you are willing to hold on, He is there ready to help you.

JACOB'S NAME CHANGED TO ISRAEL

And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

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 [Gen. 32:27–28].

He is not Jacob anymore—the one who is usurper, the trickster—but Israel, "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Now the new nature of Israel will be manifested in the life of this man.

And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved [Gen. 32:29–30].

Jacob had seen the Angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Christ.

And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank [Gen. 32:31–32].

God had to cripple Jacob in order to get him, but He got him. This man Jacob refused to give in at first—that was typical of him. He knew a few holds, and he thought that after awhile he would be able to overcome. Finally, he found out he couldn't overcome, but he would not surrender. And so what did God do? Certainly, with His superior strength, in a moment God could have pinned down Jacob's shoulders—but He wouldn't have pinned down his *will*. Jacob was like the little boy whose mama made him sit in a corner in his room. After awhile she heard a noise in there, and she called to him, "Willie, are you sitting down?" He said, "Yes, I'm sitting down, but I'm standing up on the inside of me!" That is precisely what would have happened to Jacob. He would have been standing up on the inside of himself—he wasn't ready to yield.

Notice how God deals with him. He touches the hollow of Jacob's thigh. Just a touch of the finger of God, and this man becomes helpless. But you see, God is not pinning down his shoulders. Now Jacob holds on to Him. The Man says, "Let Me go," and Jacob says, "No, I want Your blessing." He's clinging to God now. The struggling and striving are over, and from here on Jacob is going to manifest a spiritual nature, dependence upon God. You will not find the change happening in a moment's notice. Psychologists tell us that certain synaptic connections are set up in our nervous systems so that we do things by habit. We are creatures of habit. This man will lapse back into his old ways many times, but we begin to see something different in him now. Before we are through with him, we will find that he is a real man of God.

First, we saw him at his home and then in the land of Haran where he was a man of the flesh. Here at Peniel, at the Brook Jabbok, we find him fighting. After this, and all the way through down into Egypt, we see him as a man of faith. First a man of the flesh, then a man who is fighting and struggling, and finally a man of faith.

In the New Testament another young man, a son of Jacob by the name of Saul of Tarsus, tells us his struggle in chapter 7 of Romans. There were three periods in his life. When he was converted, he thought he could live the Christian life. That's where I made my mistake also. When I became a Christian, I frankly thought I could live the Christian life. After all, Vernon McGee didn't need any help. I thought it was easy, but I didn't *do* it, and that was the hard part. That is where Paul had his problem: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19).

Paul found out that not only was there no good in the old nature, but there also was no strength or power in the new nature. Finally we hear him crying out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). Then something happened, and in verse 25 he says, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord...." It is through Him that you will have to do all your thanking, because that is where your help is going to come—through Him. "... So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom. 7:25). That is the way that it is with all of us. We have that old nature, and it cannot do anything that will please God. In fact, Paul went on to say that it was against God.

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7–8). We cannot please God in the flesh. Finally, Paul found victory by yielding to the Spirit of God. What the law could not do, the Spirit now is able to do in our lives. How does one do it? It is not until you and I yield to Him that we can please Him. *Yield* means that it is an act of the will of a regenerated person submitting himself to the will of God. And that is exactly what Jacob did. Jacob won, but he got the victory, not by fighting and struggling, but by *yielding*. What a picture we have here in him, and we are told that all these things happened unto them as examples to us (see 1 Cor. 10:11).¹

Matthew Henry Commentary on Genesis 32

Chapter 32

We have here Jacob still upon his journey towards Canaan. Never did so many memorable things occur in any march as in this of Jacob's little family. By the way he meets,

- I. With good tidings from his God ([v. 1, 2](#)).

¹ J. Vernon McGee, [Thru the Bible Commentary: The Law \(Genesis 16-33\)](#), electronic ed., vol. 2 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 169–179.

- II. With bad tidings from his brother, to whom he sent a message to notify his return ([v. 3-6](#)). In his distress,
 - 1. He divides his company ([v. 7, 8](#)).
 - 2. He makes his prayer to God ([v. 9-12](#)).
 - 3. He sends a present to his brother ([v. 13-23](#)).
 - 4. He wrestles with the angel ([v. 24-32](#)).

David Guzik

Study Guide for Genesis 32

JACOB PREPARES TO MEET ESAU

A. Jacob hears of Esau's approach.

1. ([Genesis 32:1-2](#)) Jacob meets the angels of God at Mahanaim.

So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This *is* God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

a. **The angels of God met him:** We don't exactly know what this means. In some way, angelic beings that are normally unseen were now made visible to Jacob, and they **met him**. Perhaps God wanted Jacob to know how great His care was for him and his family.

- i. This wonderful revelation of God's presence and care came **after** Jacob finally separated from Laban, the worldly man. Separation from the world brings greater insight to the believer.
- ii. "Our Mahanaims occur at much the same time as that in which Jacob beheld this great sight. Jacob was entering upon a more separated life. He was leaving Laban and the school of all those tricks of bargaining and bartering which belong to the ungodly world." (Spurgeon)

b. **This is God's camp:** Literally, Jacob observed he was in a **double camp**. He was not alone; God had a camp of **angels** to be with him at **Mahanaim**.

- i. It was not as if God's angels just joined Jacob. They were with him the entire time. Now, Jacob could **see** God's angels with him and it provided great encouragement.
- ii. Angels, though "higher" beings than us, are ordained by God to be our servants ([Hebrews 1:14](#)) and they serve God's people even as they served Jesus ([Matthew 4:11](#)). In [2 Kings 6:15-17](#), Elisha's servant had his eyes opened to see the tremendous angelic host surrounding them.
- iii. John Paton, a missionary to the New Hebrides Islands, told of how one night hostile natives surrounded his mission's headquarters, intent on driving the Patons out of their home and killing them. He and his wife prayed through the entire night, and when daylight finally came, their attackers were gone. A year later, the chief of the tribe became a Christian, and Paton asked the man about that night. The chief replied, "Who were all those men you had

with you there?” The missionary explained only he and his wife were there. The chief insisted he had seen hundreds of big men with shining garments and swords circling the mission headquarters, so the natives were afraid to attack (Billy Graham in *Angels, God’s Secret Agents*, page 3). That night in the New Hebrides Islands, there certainly was a “double camp,” a group of angels to help and serve the missionary family.

iv. Spurgeon thought about the great multitude of angels that God has available for His people’s help: “It may be that every star is a world, thronged with the servants of God, who are willing and ready to dart like flames of fire upon Jehovah’s errands of love. If the Lord’s chosen could not be sufficiently protected by the forces available in one world, he has but to speak or will, and myriads of spirits from the far-off regions of space would come thronging forward to guard the children of their king.”

v. “I do not ask that you may see angels: still, if it can be, so be it. But what is it, after all, to see an angel? Is not the fact of God’s presence better than the sight of the best of his creatures? Perhaps the Lord favored Jacob with the sight of angels because he was such a poor, weak creature as to his faith.” (Spurgeon)

2. **(Genesis 32:3-6)** Jacob’s message to Esau.

Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, “Speak thus to my lord Esau, ‘Thus your servant Jacob says: “I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.”’” Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

- a. **Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother**: Jacob, seeking to reconcile with his brother (who 20 years before swore to kill him), first began by humbling himself and beginning his message with “**your servant Jacob**.”
- b. **I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants**: Jacob wasn’t boasting. He wanted Esau to know that he was a man of wealth and that he did not come to take anything from Esau. Jacob tried to anticipate his brother’s thinking and to answer Esau’s concerns.
- c. **He also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him**: When the messengers returned, Jacob heard news that gave him great concern — Esau was **coming to meet** him with 400 men. Because Jacob could not bring himself to think the best of Esau (for understandable reasons), he was convinced the 400 men were an army intending to destroy him and his family.

3. **(Genesis 32:7-8)** Jacob’s fear and panicked preparation.

So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies. And he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape.”

a. **Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed**: When Laban confronted Jacob with a hostile militia, Jacob boldly stood up to him and spoke his mind ([Genesis 31:36-42](#)); yet Jacob was afraid to meet Esau. This was because Jacob knew he was in the right with Laban, but he knew he was in the wrong with Esau.

i. “Jacob had just been delivered from Laban, but he was oppressed by another load: the dread of Esau was upon him. He had wronged his brother; and you cannot do a wrong without being haunted by it afterwards.” (Spurgeon)

ii. Shakespeare was right when he wrote, “Conscience does make cowards of us all,” (*Hamlet*, [Act 3](#) Scene 1). As Jacob had no strength before Esau because of guilt, many Christians today are also hindered by memory of their past sins and failings.

b. **Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed**: Before Jacob left home, after his brother swore to kill him, Rebekah told Jacob *until your brother’s anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there* ([Genesis 27:45](#)). Rebekah never sent for Jacob; therefore, he had every reason to believe that Esau was still angry with him 20 years later.

i. But Jacob also had every reason to believe God would protect him. He seems to have forgotten God had a special camp of angels there to protect him ([Genesis 32:1-2](#)). His great fear and distress was not appropriate for someone under God’s protection.

- Jacob’s fear was wrong, because it followed after a great deliverance.
- Jacob’s fear was wrong, because he had just had a remarkable divine visitation.
- Jacob’s fear was wrong, because it probably arose out of a remembrance of his old sins.

ii. Jacob could have said, “I don’t know if Esau is coming to me in peace or in war. I hope for peace, but if it is war, I trust God will protect me.”

c. **He divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies**: In splitting his company, Jacob used human wisdom and schemes to prepare for Esau’s coming. He should have trusted that God could protect all he had. Jacob forgot about God’s two camps ([Genesis 32:2](#)) and tried to make his own **two companies**.

i. “Jacob is the type of a believer who has too much planning and scheming about him; he is a wise man according to the judgment of the world... Abraham never descended to any of the tricks by which Jacob sought to increase his flocks; he lived, like a princely man, in

simple, childlike confidence in God, willing to be injured rather than to seek his own interests.” (Spurgeon)

4. ([Genesis 32:9-12](#)) Jacob’s prayer.

Then Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you’: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, ‘I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”

a. **Then Jacob said:** After first reacting in fear and unbelief, Jacob did the right thing. He went to the LORD and prayed a good prayer, humble, full of faith, full of thanksgiving and God’s Word.

i. “Depend upon it, it will go hard with any man who fights against a man of prayer.”
(Spurgeon)

- Jacob’s fear was good, because it led him to prayer.
- Jacob’s fear was good, because it led him to take a review of his life.
- Jacob’s fear was good, because it led him to seek out a suitable promise from God.

b. **The LORD who said to me, “Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will deal well with you”:** Jacob’s prayer had God’s word (what God said in [Genesis 31:3](#)). He also quoted God’s promises, **“I will surely treat you well”** (remembering God words in [Genesis 28:13-15](#)).

i. Many of our prayers fall short, because there is none of God’s Word within them. Often there is none of God’s Word in them, because there is little of God’s Word in us.

Jacob remembered what the LORD had said to him. He said to God, **for You said**.

ii. “Beloved, I say to you, one and all, study much the promises of God’s word! Have them at your fingers’ ends. Remember what things God has said to men, and when he has said them, and to what kind of men he has said them, and discover by this means how far he has said them to you.” (Spurgeon)

iii. “When God gave his promise, he did, as it were, put himself in the power of those who know how to plead the promise. Every promise is so much strength given to the man who

has faith in the promise, for he may with it overcome even the omnipotent God himself.”
(Spurgeon)

c. **I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies**: His prayer had humility and thanksgiving. Jacob understood he was not worthy of what God did for him or what he asked God to do, but he relied on what God promised and not upon his own worthiness.

i. “Notice that while Jacob thus pleads his own unworthiness he is not slow to plead God’s goodness.” (Spurgeon)

d. **Deliver me, I pray**: His prayer had faith. He boldly asked God to do something, and gave humble grounds for why the LORD should fulfill His word.

i. George Mueller, a great man of faith and prayer, was once asked what was the most important part of prayer. He answered: “The 15 minutes after I have said, ‘Amen.’” No matter how great Jacob’s prayer was, his faith would be seen in what he did after his prayer.

5. (Genesis 32:13-21) Jacob sends many gifts to Esau.

So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals. Then he delivered them to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves.” And he commanded the first one, saying, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose are these in front of you?’ then you shall say, ‘They are your servant Jacob’s. It is a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also is behind us.’” So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, “In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; and also say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.’” For he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.” So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp.

a. **Took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother**: Jacob sent such an impressive gift, because he wanted to make it completely clear to Esau that he did not need or want anything from him. It also was probably an attempt to buy his brother’s good favor.

b. **I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me**: Jacob seems to be a good example of the principle, “When all else fails, pray.” As soon as he finished praying, he took up his own strategies again.

i. After all, if Jacob really trusted God, he would be at the head of the procession to meet Esau, not at the back.

ii. Jacob hoped, “**perhaps he will accept me**,” but in Jacob’s mind, perhaps not. Jacob also thought, “Perhaps he will kill me just like he said he would.”

c. **So the present went on over before him**: This gift is a good example of the way we trust in our ability to do things and make things happen apart from trusting God. A popular traditional Christian song says:

All to Jesus, I surrender, all to Him I freely give;

I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.

I surrender all, I surrender all,

All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

i. But we, so often like Jacob mean, “I surrender all the goats. If that isn’t enough, I will surrender all the sheep. If that isn’t enough, I will surrender all the camels...” To this point, what Jacob refused to do was to surrender **himself**, truly trusting in God’s promise of protection.

ii. “What care he takes about the whole affair! We cannot blame him, under the circumstances, yet how much grander is the quiet, noble demeanour of Abraham, who trusts in God, and leaves matters more in his hands!” (Spurgeon)

B. Jacob wrestles with God.

1. **(Genesis 32:22-23)** Jacob sends all his possessions over the river.

And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had.

a. **He took them, sent them over the brook**: This was a demonstration of his faith, because Jacob left himself no retreat. If Esau wanted to attack his group, they would quickly be backed up against the river.

b. **Sent over what he had**: Jacob spent the night alone. This was his last night on the east side of the Jordan River, and he probably spent the night in prayer.

i. God had to get Jacob alone before He dealt with him. While all the activity of the huge entourage surrounded Jacob, he could busy himself with a thousand different tasks. Once he was alone, God commanded his attention.

ii. Think of all Jacob had to pray about: thanking God, remembering all that the LORD did for him, wondering how God would fulfill His work in him. This was a significant turning point in Jacob’s life and he knew it.

2. **(Genesis 32:24-25)** A **Man** wrestles with Jacob.

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.

a. **A Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day**: Jacob didn't wrestle with the **Man**. Instead, **a Man wrestled with him**. Jacob didn't start out wanting anything from God; God wanted something from him. God wanted all of Jacob's proud self-reliance and fleshly scheming, and God came to take it, by force if necessary.

i. "It does not say that he wrestled with the man, but 'there wrestled a man with him.' We call him 'wrestling Jacob,' and so he was; but we must not forget the wrestling man, — or, rather, the wrestling Christ, — the wrestling Angel of the covenant, who had come to wrestle out of him much of his own strength and wisdom." (Spurgeon)

b. **A Man wrestled with him**: As the following verses show, this was no mere man. This is another special appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament before His incarnation in Bethlehem. This was God in human form.

i. "I suppose our Lord Jesus Christ did here, as on many other occasions preparatory to his full incarnation, assume a human form, and came thus to wrestle with the patriarch."
(Spurgeon)

c. **Until the breaking of the day**: We can only imagine what this scene looked like. Perhaps sometimes it looked like a barroom fight, and perhaps at other times it looked like an intense wrestling match.

i. "How did Jacob ever manage to keep up his struggle throughout the entire night? I do not know. But I do know that his determination to hang in there was no greater than our frequent determination to have our own way and eventually win out over God." (Boice)

ii. "It was brave of Jacob thus to wrestle, but there was too much of self about it all. It was his own sufficiency that was wrestling with the God-man, Christ Jesus." (Spurgeon)

d. **He saw that He did not prevail against him**: As the fight progressed, it seemed Jacob was somewhat evenly matched against the **Man**, but the match was only evenly matched in appearance. The **Man** could have won easily at any time, using supernatural power.

i. Sometimes we feel man really **can** contend with God. A man or woman in rebellion against God might seem to do pretty well. The match seems even in appearance only. God can turn the tide at any moment, and He allows the match to go on for His own purposes.

ii. It isn't hard to imagine Jacob working so hard and feeling he is getting the best of his opponent, until finally the **Man** changed the nature of the struggle in a moment. Jacob must have felt very defeated.

3. ([Genesis 32:26](#)) Jacob's plea to the **Man**.

And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

a. **Let Me go, for the day breaks**: The Man let Jacob know this would not last much longer. Even though Jacob clung to him desperately, Jacob had lost. A better, greater Man defeated Jacob.

i. This is an invaluable place for everyone to come to: where God conquers us. There is something to be said for every man doing his wrestling with God, and then acknowledging God's greatness after having been defeated. We must know we serve a God who is greater than us, and we cannot conquer much of anything until He conquers us.

b. **I will not let You go unless You bless me**: This wasn't Jacob dictating terms to God as he did on previous occasions. God overcame Jacob here, and we know from [Hosea 12:3-5](#) that Jacob sought this blessing with weeping. He knew he was defeated, yet desperately wanted a blessing from this Greater One.

i. *He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; he wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us; that is, the LORD God of hosts. The LORD is His memorable name.* ([Hosea 12:3-5](#))

c. **Unless You bless me**: Through his past, Jacob was always clever and sneaky enough so he never felt the need to trust in God alone. Now he could only rely on the blessing of God.

i. Jacob was reduced to the place where all he could do was to hold on to the LORD with everything he had. Jacob could not fight anymore, but he could hold on. That is not a bad place to be.

ii. Here, God has answered Jacob's prayer in [Genesis 32:9-12](#). Yet before Jacob could be delivered from the hand of his brother, he had to be delivered from his own self-will and self-reliance. "It is evident that, as soon as he felt that he must fall, he grasped the other 'Man' with a kind of death-grip, and would not let him go. Now, in his weakness, he will prevail. While he was so strong, he won not the blessing; but when he became utter weakness, then did he conquer" (Spurgeon).

iii. Jacob thought the real enemy was outside of him, being Esau. The real enemy was his own carnal, fleshly nature, which had not been conquered by God.

4. (**Genesis 32:27-29**) Jacob's name is changed, and he is a blessed man.

So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there.

a. **What is your name**: Jacob must have felt a sense of shame, admitting his name was **Jacob**, with all its associations of deception and cheating. Yet this was who he was, and Jacob had to admit to it.

i. We all want to name ourselves favorably. We say, "I am firm; you are stubborn; they are obstinate fools." God wouldn't allow Jacob to cover up his name, because in his case it reflected his true nature.

b. **Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel**: The name **Israel** is a compound of two words: sarah (meaning, fight, struggle, or rule) and el (meaning, God). Some take the name Israel to mean, He who struggles with God or He who rules with God. But in Hebrew names, sometimes God is not the object of the verb but the subject. Daniel means God judges, not he judges God. This principle shows us **Israel** likely means, God rules.

i. From this point on, this son of Isaac will be called **Jacob** twice as often as he is called **Israel**. Apparently, there was still plenty of the old man left in Jacob.

ii. "Dear friends, I am afraid that the lives of many of the Lord's chosen people alternate between 'Israel' and 'Jacob.' Sometimes we are 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,' and at another time we cry, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Like princes we prevail with God, and are true Israels; but perhaps ere the sun has gone down we limp with Jacob, and though the spirit be willing, the flesh is weak. We are Jacob before we are Israel; and we are Jacob when we are Israel; but blessed be God, we are Israels with God when we cease to be Jacobs among men." (Spurgeon)

c. **For you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed**: Jacob **prevailed** in the sense that he endured through his struggle until God thoroughly conquered him. When you battle with God, you only win by losing and by not giving up until you know you have lost. This is how Jacob **prevailed**.

d. **Why is it that you ask about My name**: The Man probably refused to tell Jacob His name because He figured Jacob should already know it, and it turned out that Jacob did know exactly who this was.

e. **And He blessed him there**: Surely, this was the blessing of being defeated by God. It was the blessing of the passing of the old (**Jacob**) life, and the coming of a new (**Israel**) life. It may also have had to do with the great idea of the blessing of Abraham, and meeting Jacob's

immediate needs for security in the midst of fear. Whatever Jacob needed, God's blessing provided at the moment.

i. We note that **He blessed him there** — at that particular place.

- The place of special trial and testing.
- The place of intense pleading to God.
- The place of seeing the face of God.
- The place of conscious weakness.

5. (**Genesis 32:30-32**) Two memorials of this event.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank.

a. **Jacob called the name of the place Peniel**: The first memorial was a name. Jacob named the place **Peniel** (*Face of God*), because he *did* know the name of the *Man* who wrestled with him. He was the same One who wrestled with Jacob all his life.

i. Jacob also understood it was only by God's grace and mercy he escaped from this episode with his life. No man should be allowed to wrestle with God and live, but God was gracious.

b. **He limped on his hip**: The second memorial was a perpetual limp. Jacob would remember his being conquered by God with every step he took for the rest of his life. This was a small price to pay for such a great gift.

i. "The memorial of his weakness was to be with him as long as he lived... How pleased would you and I be to go halting all our days with such weakness as Jacob had, if we might also have the blessing that he thus won!" (Spurgeon)

©2018 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission

References:

1. Boice, James Montgomery "Genesis: An Expository Commentary" Volumes 1, 2, and 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987)
2. Spurgeon, Charles Haddon "The New Park Street Pulpit" Volumes 1-6 and "The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit" Volumes 7-63 (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1990)

Updated: August 2022

