

Genesis

Chapter 32



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Genesis 32:1

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

There is not mention of Laban kissing Jacob before he left in pointed contrast to their initial encounter (29:13).

[angels] *mal'ak*, (H4397), *mal-awk'*; from an unused root meaning to *despatch* as a deputy; a *messenger*; specifically of God, i.e. an *angel* (also a prophet, priest or teacher) :- ambassador, angel, king, messenger. Our word angel comes from the Greek *aggelos* which literally signifies a messenger; or, as translated in some of our old Bibles, a tidings-bringer. The Hebrew word *Malach*, from *laach*, to send, minister to, employ, is nearly of the same import;

met by angels. Just as Jacob experienced an angelic theophany as he left the Promised Land (Genesis 28:12), so too he is met by angels on his return. This forms an *inclusio* (a literary device in which the same events or lines occur at the beginning and the end of a literary segment) in the narrative and signals both divine sanction for the treaty just concluded and a reestablishment of direct contact with the covenantal heir.

At this point God's invisible world openly touched Jacob's visible world.

The encounter is described with striking brevity. Four Hebrew words report the meeting: the angels of God met him.

When God's work is involved, the conflict is spiritual, not physical. This was true for Jacob, it was true for Israel, and it is true today. No human effort can be sufficient for these things. The source of defense and the means of victory come from God's ministering angels.

Why did angels of God meet Jacob? In the Bible, angels often intervened in human situations. Although angels often came in human form, these angels must have looked different, for Jacob recognized them at once. The reason these angels met Jacob is unclear; but because of their visit, Jacob knew God was with him.

Torah Class: In order to place what occurs next in the proper context, allowing us to draw the more realistic mental picture as we explore Jacob's life, we need to understand that Jacob was now an elderly man. Depending on who's chronology you adhere to, Jacob was anywhere from a little less than 90 to close to 100 years old.

Now depending on your version, the first 3 verses can be labeled a little differently as to when one verse ends, and the next begins. It doesn't matter, because the text remains essentially the same.

This chapter begins with Laban saying goodbye to his two daughters, Rachel and Leah, and to all his grandchildren. Most bibles will say he kissed his SONS and daughters goodbye. It was common terminology to refer to male grandchildren as sons in those days and that is what is being referred to here.

Then we encounter a strange thing: it says, "The angels of God met him"...they met

Jacob. Now, for sure, the “angels of God” are exactly that, because the original Hebrew is Malachim Elohim.....messengers (plural) of Elohim, God. But, we’re not really given any more information than that. Perhaps this was an assurance that Jacob was back in the Promised Land, or the angels were a more visible presence confirming that God was indeed with him. It is interesting to note that upon Jacob’s journey to LEAVE the land of Canaan, Jacob encountered angels (at Beit-el), so upon his journey to RETURN he also encounters angels. In any case, Jacob was impressed enough to name the place Mahanaim..... meaning..... two camps.¹

Genesis 32:2

And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

[**Mahanaim**] *Machanayim*, (H4266), *makh-an-ah'-yim*; dual of Hebrew 4264 (*machaneh*); *double camp*; *Machanajim*, a place in Palestine :- Mahanaim.

Hebrew: two camps. The hosts of heaven met Jacob to assure him of the promised protection as he entered Canaan (Genesis 28:15). They became visible as two hosts, one on each side of Jacob's company, or one band for each part of his family when they were divided (Genesis 31:7-8).²

The two hosts, if read by the points, the angels forming one, and Jacob and his company forming another; or simply hosts or camps in the plural. There was a city built afterwards here, and inhabited by the priests of God, Joshua 21:38. For what purpose the angels of God met Jacob, does not appear from the text; probably it was intended to show him that he and his company were under the care of an especial providence, and consequently to confirm his trust and confidence in God.

The doctrine of the ministration of angels has been much abused, not only among the heathens, but also among Jews and Christians, and perhaps most among the latter. Angels with feigned names, titles, and influences, have been and still are invoked and worshipped by a certain class of men; because they have found that God has been pleased to employ them to minister to mankind; and hence they have made supplications to them to extend their protection, to shield, defend, instruct, etc. This is perfectly absurd.

1. They are God’s instruments, not self-determining agents.
2. They can only do what they are appointed to perform, for there is no evidence that they have any discretionary power.
3. God helps man by ten thousand means and instruments; some intellectual, as angels; some rational, as men; some irrational, as brutes; and some merely material, as the sun, wind, rain, food, raiment, and the various productions of the earth. He therefore helps by whom he will help, and to him alone belongs all the glory; for should he be determined to destroy, all these instruments collectively could not

¹ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

² Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

save. Instead therefore of worshipping them, we should take their own advice: See thou do it not—Worship God.³

Missler: *Mahanaim* = “Two Camps.” A comparison with Jacob’s earlier encounter with angels at Bethel (28:10-22) when he left the land proves most instructive...“The angels of God” occurs only twice (28:12; 32:1); *Zeh* (“this”) is used four times (28:16-17). “This is the gate of heaven” (28:17) and “This is the camp of God!” (32:2). In both cases Jacob interpreted what he had seen before naming it (28:17; 32:2); the identical expression is used in the naming of both places (28:19; 32:2). *Halak* and *derek* (“to go on one’s way,” “to take a journey”) are used in 28:20; 32:1.⁴

Naming places. Applying names to sites where specific events occur, especially theophanies, is fairly common in the ancestral narratives (see Genesis 16:14; Genesis 21:31; Genesis 26:20, 33; Genesis 28:19). In this way the presence of the deity is established at that site. For instance, Bethel, the location of one of Abraham’s altars and the place where Jacob experienced a theophany, later became a major religious site. The name of the place in this passage, Mahanaim, means “two camps,” but the reference is obscure. Although it has not been located, this is a fairly important city in the tribal territory of Gad (see Joshua 13:26; Joshua 21:38; 2 Samuel 2:8-9).⁵

He had recognized the angels as “the camp (*mahaneh*) of God,” he had named the place *mahanayim* (v. 2), and then (out of fear of Esau who was coming toward him with 400 men) he divided his family into two groups or camps (*mahanot*).⁶

Chrysostom: “A constant reminder of the vision”

You see, once fear of Laban faded and was no more, then fear of his brother took hold of Jacob; so the loving Lord wanted to give the good man heart and drive out all his apprehension. Thus he caused Jacob to see the angels’ camp. “God’s angels accosted him,” the text says, remember. “Jacob said, “This is God’s camp,” and he called that place Camps,” with the result that from the name there was a constant reminder of the vision that occurred to him there. (Homilies on Genesis 58:2)⁷

Chumash: Classic Questions: “Why did angels of God Encounter Jacob?”

Rashi: Angels from the Land of Israel came to greet him, to escort him to the Land. The place was thus called “Double-Camp” – the camp of angels from the Diaspora who came with him up to this point, and those of the Land of Israel who came to greet him.

Ramban: Why would the angels of the Land of Israel have come to greet Jacob, as Rashi writes, since Jacob was still a long way from the Land? Rather, Jacob had a vision of angels here, that come to inform him, “we are more with you than with your enemies,” since he was entering enemy territory.

³Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

⁵ Bible Background Commentary

⁶ Bible Knowledge Commentary

⁷ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intersity Press

Gur Aryeh: In my opinion, Ramban's question is not valid at all. Since Jacob was on his way to the Land of Israel, it was appropriate that the angels of the Land should come and protect him even though he was still some distance away, for it was for the benefit of the Land [that Jacob should arrive safely]. The other angels from the Diaspora protected him from other potential hazards.

Bechor Shor: The angels came to escort Jacob out of respect, not to guard him. Rather, it seems more logical to say that angels from the Diaspora were already protecting him, while additional angels came from the Land of Israel purely to show respect for Jacob – as Rashi appears to stress, that they came “to escort him.”⁸

Ramban: “And the angels of God met him”

Rashi comments: “The angels who minister in the Land of Israel came to meet him. And he called the name of that place *Mahanaim*: the plural form implies two camps, one consisting of the angels ministering outside of the Land of Israel who had accompanied him thus far, the other consisting of those ministering in the Land of Israel who had come forth to meet him.”

Instead, we must say this vision came to Jacob as he arrived in enemy territory in order to inform him that “they that are with him are more than they that are with them. And the name of the place was called “*Mahanaim*” in the plural, for such is the way of Scripture with names. It may be that “*Mahanaim*” refers to His camp and the camp of the higher beings, that is to say that His camp on earth is as the camp of the angels all of them being camps of God, blessing Him and confessing His Unity, may His name be blessed forever.”⁹

Genesis 32:3

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

[**sent messengers before him to Esau**] Jacob sent messengers ahead to make his return known to Esau and to show a desire for reconciliation (Genesis 32:3-6).

Jacob sent messengers— *malachim*, the same word which is before translated angels. It is very likely that these messengers had been sent some time before he had this vision at Mahanaim, for they appear to have returned while Jacob encamped at the brook Jabbok, where he had the vision of angels; see Genesis 32:6, 23.

The land of Seir, the country of Edom—This land, which was, according to Dr. Wells, situated on the south of the Dead Sea, extending from there to the Arabian Gulf, 1 Kings 9:26, was formerly possessed by the Horites, Genesis 14:6; but Esau with his children drove them out, destroyed them, and dwelt in their stead, Deuteronomy 2:22; and there

⁸ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

⁹ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

Esau went from the face of his brother Jacob, Genesis 36:6, 7. Thus we find he verified the prediction, By thy sword shalt thou live, Genesis 27:40.¹⁰

Seir. The land of Seir is generally considered to be the mountainous central region of Edom (elevations generally over 5,000 feet) between Wadi al-Ghuwayr on the north and Ras en-Naqb on the south.¹¹

Retrospectively, this verse recalls Jacob's experience at Bethel on his way to Laban (28:10-22). CF. especially 28:17, "This is none other than the abode of God." Prospectively, the name *Mahanaim*, understood as "two camps," anticipates Jacob's precautionary division of his entourage in 32:8-9.¹²

Torah Class: Now, V3 gives me an opportunity to kind of accent a point that I made a few weeks ago: and that concerns the word "Malach".....messenger. I told you that in strict Hebrew, when Malach is used by itself, it denotes a messenger of some sort.....usually a HUMAN messenger. But, when the word Yahweh, or Elohim, or some other title of God is attached to Malach, then it is speaking of *heavenly* messengers..... spirit beings.....angels. In verse 1, we have heavenly messengers. Here, in V3, we see that Jacob sent some Malachim (messengers) ahead, to find Jacob's brother Esau. And, we can be sure these are HUMAN messengers, because the word Malachim is used without attaching any Hebrew word for God to it.

For Jacob, he has just completed his unpleasant encounter with Lavan, but now he has to face his brother, Esau, who has sworn to kill him for swindling him out of his blessing.

Well, the messengers return to Jacob, but it's a good news, bad news report. The good news is that they indeed found Esau and presented him with Jacob's message. The bad news is that Esau didn't indicate anything more than he was coming to meet Jacob with 400 men. This scared Jacob right to the core. He had not long ago felt Laban's wrath and dealt with it.....but right was on his side in that case. How about his situation with Esau, though? Esau was the recipient of wrong doing by Jacob; deceit of the highest level that robbed Esau of what BOTH of them felt was Esau's birthright... and Jacob had to wonder if time had soothed Esau's desire to kill him.....or not.¹³

Genesis 32:4

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:

Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau—Jacob acknowledges the superiority of his brother; for the time was not yet come in which it could be said, The elder shall serve the younger.

¹⁰ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

¹¹ Bible Background Commentary

¹² The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

¹³ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

Messengers is the same Heb word as “angels” in v.2. The term communicates a premonition that, however fearful the encounter with Esau may seem, God’s protective grace will not depart from Jacob.¹⁴

Chumash: Toras Menachem: “Why did Jacob send actual angels?”

The Midrash cites two opinions, that Jacob either sent human messengers to inform Esau of his arrival, or he sent actual angels. Rashi came to the conclusion that, at the literal level of Torah interpretation, Jacob sent actual angels.

Mizrachi explains that Rashi deduced this fact from the connection between the beginning of our Parsha and the end of the previous Parsha, Vayeitzei: Since the end of Parshas Vayeitzei speaks about actual angels – Jacob went on his way, and angels of God (from the Land of Israel) encountered him” (32:2) – it follows that in our Parsha too the word is to be translated “angels” and not as human “messengers”.

Levush Ha’ohrah argues that Jacob sent angels to Esau to intimidate him, since Esau would be deeply impressed that Jacob had angels under his control.

Rashi: Since Esau was a murderous person and there was a considerable possibility that he still harbored resentment twenty years later, Rashi was troubled by the question ; How could Jacob send messengers to Esau when it is likely that they may have been killed on the spot? Therefore, Rashi concluded that Jacob had sent “actual angels” which of course could not possibly have been harmed by Esau.

Genesis 32:5

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.

Missler: Many key ideas and wordplays are in this section. (The Heb. word for “angels” also means “messengers.”) Apparently prompted by the idea in the vision, Jacob sent messengers to Esau in Edom. Jacob had just seen the angels (God’s messengers) and now he sent his own messengers to Esau.¹⁵

Jacob’s communication. Jacob’s communication to Esau is intended to make several points. First, he has not been in hiding or sneaking around the land behind Esau’s back. Second, and more importantly, he has not come to lay claim to inheritance rights. By describing his success and wealth, he insinuates that he has not returned because he is broke and looking to demand what is due him.

Genesis 32:6

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.

¹⁴ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

¹⁵ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

Esau—cometh—and four hundred men with him—Jacob, conscious that he had injured his brother, was now apprehensive that he was coming with hostile intentions, and that he had every evil to fear from his displeasure. Conscience is a terrible accuser.

It does not appear that Esau in this meeting had any hostile intention, but was really coming with a part of his servants or tribe to give his brother honor. If he had had any contrary intention, God had removed it; and the angelic host which Jacob met with before might have inspired him with sufficient confidence in God's protection. But we find that when he needed faith most, he appears to have derived but little benefit from its influence, partly from the sense he had of the injury he had done to his brother, and partly from not attending sufficiently to the assurance which God had given him of his gracious protection.¹⁶

Genesis 32:7

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;

[greatly afraid and distressed] The coming of Esau with four hundred men was hard to understand apart from hostile intentions (Genesis 32:6). Jacob gave evidence of his fear by dividing the family, wrestling all night with God, earnestly pleading His promises, praying in humility for deliverance from Esau, and making a gift to him of several bands as if to mitigate Esau's anger by degrees.

[he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands] He did so as if committing a band to each of the hosts of God which had appeared to him.

He divided the people, etc.—His prudence and cunning were now turned into a right channel, for he took the most effectual method to appease his brother, had he been irritated, and save at least a part of his family. This dividing and arranging of his flocks, family, and domestics, has something in it highly characteristic. To such a man as Jacob such expedients would naturally present themselves.

The mention of Esau's 400 men underscores Jacob's vulnerability: For all his wives, offspring, slaves and animals, he lacks the military might of the brother he has wronged. Things are looking grim for Jacob.

¹⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

Genesis 32:8

And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.

Out of fear of Esau (who was coming toward him with 400 men) he divided his family into two groups or camps (*mahòanot*).

Genesis 32:9

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:

A repetition of a prophecy by God in Genesis 31:3.

O God of my father Abraham, etc.—This prayer is remarkable for its simplicity and energy; and it is a model too for prayer, of which it contains the essential constituents:

1. Deep self-abasement.
2. Magnification of God's mercy.
3. Deprecation of the evil to which he was exposed.
4. Pleading the promises that God had made to him.
5. Taking encouragement from what God had already wrought.

God wants people to remind Him of His word when they pray. This is a motivation to faith.

Chumash: “Jacob's certainty”

According to Rashi, Jacob as certain that at least one of his two camps would be saved: “The remaining camp will survive against Esau's will, for I will wage war with him.”

This begs the question: On what basis did Rashi conclude that Jacob was certain of at least a partial victory. Surely, it would more logical to accept the interpretation of **Ibn Ezra** that Jacob was hopeful that by dividing into two camps, one camp might be saved?

Ramban: suggests that Jacob's certainty was based on the fact that he knew from God's promise that his children would not be completely obliterated by Esau. Therefore, by splitting his family into two camps, at least one must be saved.

The Explanation; Rashi was troubled by the following problem; When a Jew is faced with an approaching enemy, his first reaction is to pray to God and to strengthen his trust that God will save him. But since the person does not know whether God will save him a) miraculously or, b) if he will be assisted from above to fight within the laws of nature, he must also prepare for the latter possibility by making tactical plans.

Nevertheless, by praying to God and strengthening his faith before resorting to tactics, the Jew makes clear that he believes salvation will not come through his own might, but rather, through the help of God.¹⁷

¹⁷ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

Genesis 32:10

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.

[with my staff] This does not mean with his secretary, personal assistant, treasurer, laborers, it means all by himself.

Missler: Jacob addressed God as the God of my father Abraham and of my father Isaac, and reminded God of His command for him to return to his country and of His promise to bless him. God wants people to remind Him of His word when they pray. This is a motivation to faith. Jacob then confessed his unworthiness of God's kindness and faithfulness and material blessings. He had the correct attitude in prayer—total dependency on God.¹⁸

[I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies] The first time Jacob confessed his unworthiness of God's blessings. He had a number of experiences that finally brought him to the point of surrender to God and helplessness without Him. Now it was his privilege to meet God face to face and become a prince of God (Genesis 32:24-32).

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies—The marginal reading is more consistent with the original: *I am less than all the compassions, and than all the faithfulness, which thou hast showed unto thy servant.* Probably Paul had his eye on this passage when he wrote, Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints. A man who sees himself in the light of God will ever feel that he has no good but what he has received, and that he deserves nothing of all that he has. The archangels of God cannot use a different language, and even the spirits of just men consummated in their plenitude of bliss, cannot make a higher boast.¹⁹

[with my staff I passed over this Jordan] He went alone to Haran, without any attendants, as the Chaldee has properly rendered it.

[now I am become two bands] He had become wealthy in his own right; with what he later inherited from Isaac, he was extremely rich.

Genesis 32:11

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.

[Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother] The first time Jacob prayed for deliverance. He had fled from Esau (Genesis 27:41-46; Genesis 28:1-6; Genesis 35:7),

¹⁸ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

¹⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

and Laban (Genesis 31:17-23); now he had to face Esau, depending solely upon God to fulfill His promises (Genesis 28:13-15; Genesis 31:3; Genesis 32:9,12).

[for I fear him] The visions of Genesis 28:12; Genesis 31:3; and Genesis 32:1 did not entirely allay Jacob's fears. Conscience made him a coward. He remembered his past deceits and naturally feared those he had wronged.

And the mother with the children—He must have had an awful opinion of his brother when he used this expression, which implies the utmost cruelty, proceeding in the work of slaughter to total extermination.

(Hosea 10:14) *Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children.*

Chumash: Sparks of Chasidus: “My merits have become small”

When God shows His kindness to a person, it brings that person closer to God, causing his feeling of self-importance to diminish, since “everything is like nothing before God.”

Therefore, it was precisely due to the fact that God had been so kind to Jacob, that he became small in his own eyes – for the kindness brought him closer to God, and so he felt that he was not worthy of God’s promise to be saved. (Based on Tanya, Igeres Hakodesh ch. 2)

How could Jacob the patriarch fear that, “perhaps .. I have become soiled with sin” (Rashi, v.12), when surely he was aware that he had not sinned?

A tzadik (perfectly pious individual) is not static – he constantly grows spiritually from one level to the next. After reaching a higher level, his previous actions are spiritually deficient compared to his current standing. They are thus considered as “sins,” metaphorically speaking. Thus, Jacob was worried that perhaps due to such “sins,” he was not worthy to be saved. (Based on Likutei Sichos vol. 5 p. 396)²⁰

Rashi: In order to prove further that Jacob was certain he would be saved by God, Rashi said that,(Jacob) adjusted himself for three things; for giving a gift, for war , and for prayer.

Ramban: The Torah teaches you proper conduct: a man should not leave all his money in one corner.²¹

Genesis 32:12

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.

²⁰ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

²¹ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

Make thy seed as the sand—Having come to the promise by which the covenant was ratified both to Abraham and Isaac, he ceased, his faith having gained strong confirmation in a promise which he knew could not fail, and which he found was made over to him, as it had been to his father and grandfather.

Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham—In this great emergency, he had recourse to prayer. This is the first recorded example of prayer in the Bible. It is short, earnest, and bearing directly on the occasion. The appeal is made to God, as standing in a covenant relation to his family, just as we ought to put our hopes of acceptance with God in Christ. It pleads the special promise made to him of a safe return; and after a most humble and affecting confession of unworthiness, it breathes an earnest desire for deliverance from the impending danger. It was the prayer of a kind husband, an affectionate father, a firm believer in the promises.²²

How would you feel knowing you were about to meet the person you had cheated out of his most precious possession? Jacob had taken Esau's birthright (Genesis 25:33) and his blessings (Genesis 27:27-40). Now he was about to meet this brother for the first time in 20 years, and he was frantic with fear. He collected his thoughts, however, and decided to pray. When we face a difficult conflict, we can run about frantically or we can pause to pray. Which approach will be more effective?²³

Genesis 32:13

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

Which came under his hand, i.e., what, in the course of God's providence, came under his power.

Jacob's prayer opens and closes with quotations of those promises of God that the looming confrontation with Esau threatens (vv. 10, 13). V. 11 expresses his humility and his gratitude for previous favors, and v. 12 asks for deliverance, appealing to God's mercy. A Talmudic rabbi, however, is critical of Jacob on the grounds that one should never put himself in a dangerous place and then ask that a miracle be preformed (b. Shab. 32a). The danger should be avoided, if at all possible.²⁴

Genesis 32:14

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

²² JFB Commentary

²³ Life Application Notes

²⁴ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

Genesis 32:15

Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals.

[milch camels] Camels of the most valuable kind. Their milk was the principal food of Arabs.

This was a princely present, and such as was sufficient to have compensated Esau for any kind of temporal loss he might have sustained in being deprived of his birthright and blessing. The thirty milch camels were particularly valuable, for milch camels among the Arabs constitute a principal part of their riches, the creature being every way so serviceable that the providence of God appears peculiarly kind and wise in providing such a beast for those countries where no other animal could be of equal service. “The she-camel gives milk continually, not ceasing till great with young; the milk of which,” as Pliny has remarked, “when mixed with three parts of water, affords the most pleasant and wholesome beverage.”²⁵

Ten bulls—The Syriac and Vulgate have twenty; but ten is a sufficient proportion to the forty kine. By all this we see that Jacob was led to make restitution for the injury he had done to his brother. Restitution for injuries done to man is essentially requisite if in our power. He who can and will not make restitution for the wrongs he has done, can have no claim even on the mercy of God.

Genesis 32:16

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.

Genesis 32:17

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?

Geneis 32:18

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.

²⁵ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

[present sent unto my lord Esau]

Jacob's Gifts to Esau: (estimated value)

200 female goats	\$10,000
20 male goats	1,000
200 ewes	20,000
20 rams	2,500
30 milch camels and colts	30,000
40 kine	14,000
10 bulls	8,000
20 female donkeys	10,000
10 foals (young donkeys)	1,500
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TOTAL:	\$ 97,000

Genesis 32:19

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.

Genesis 32:20

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.

Missler: He thought these five herds sent separately would impress Esau and pacify him. Jacob had to learn later, however, that God would have delivered him without such gifts. So too the nation would need to learn that deliverance comes by faith in God, and not by giving tribute to the enemy.²⁶

[appease] Hebrew: *kaphar* (H3722), cover his face, i.e., hide my sin from him—an eastern expression. This was a princely present, more than enough to repay Esau for any wrong done him.

Genesis 32:21

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

gifts for Esau. The generosity of Jacob's gifts can be understood when compared to tribute paid by one nation to another. So, for instance, in the ninth century B.C. the town of Hindanu paid to Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta II some silver, bread, beer, thirty camels, fifty oxen and thirty donkeys. This gift would be sufficient for Esau to get a good

²⁶ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

start on a herding operation of his own or, alternatively, to reward any mercenaries in his employ who may have been anticipating booty.²⁷

This passage closes with a significant wordplay in verse 21 that shows how contrary this gift was to the vision (v. 1) that assured him of protection: The **gifts** (lit., “gift,” *hamminahah*) **went on ahead of him, but he... spent the night in the camp** (*bammahaneh*).²⁸

Genesis 32:22

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.

[**Jabbok**] A stream sixty-five miles long. It begins in the Hauran mountains and empties into Jordan about thirty miles below Lake Galilee. It was the boundary line between the kingdoms of Sihon and Og (Joshua 12:2; Judges 11:13-32). Afterwards it was the boundary between Reuben and Manasseh (Deut. 3:16; Joshua 12:2).

river fords. River crossings or fords function in much the same way as gates. Both are entranceways giving access in and out of territory. Both have strategic value for armies (see Judges 3:28; Judges 12:5; Jeremiah 51:32). As such, they are tied to power, both physical and supernatural. Thus it is not difficult to imagine a link between Jacob’s entrance into the Promised Land and a struggle with a supernatural being beside the fast flowing waters at the ford of the Jabbok River.

ford Jabbok—now the *Zerka*—a stream that rises among the mountains of Gilead, and running from east to west, enters the Jordan, about forty miles south of the Sea of Tiberias. At the ford it is ten yards wide. It is sometimes forded with difficulty; but in summer it is very shallow.²⁹

The word *face* (Heb “*panim*”) occurs seven times in this passage (in some instances, it is translated as ahead and the like). This suggests a connection with *Peniel* (vv. 31-32) and underscores the association of Esau with the mysterious figure with whom Jacob is about to wrestle (cf. 33:10).³⁰

Genesis 32:23

And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

Torah Class: Esau’s response to the messengers must have convinced Jacob that his worst fears would be realized, because Jacob ordered that his family be divided into two

²⁷ Bible Background Commentary

²⁸ Bible Knowledge Commentary

²⁹ JFB Commentary

³⁰ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

groups, and that he would stay with one hoping that if Esau extracted his revenge on Jacob, perhaps the 2nd group (presumably located elsewhere) would survive. It was the dividing of his group into two camps from which the name of this place came: Mahanaim, two camps. And, of course, now that all the deceit and guilt of his life was suddenly manifesting itself in a situation from which there appeared no escape, Jacob falls on his knees before God and prays. How often we have found ourselves running ahead of God or lagging behind, or just plain rebelling or doing wrong, and then asking God to rescue us from the natural consequences of those sins. Jacob was now doing the same.

At the same time, we see how time and his experience of walking with God have changed Jacob. He acknowledges that he deserves nothing of the wondrous bounty and protection that the Lord God has provided for him.

The area that Jacob encamped is well known, today. It is called the “Jabbok”, and it lies east of the Jordan River, at about a midpoint between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee; the Jordan was clearly visible in the distance from the bank of the Jabbok where Jacob was standing. It is a beautiful place: green, lush, and fertile. The Bible tells us that Jacob sent several flocks ahead of him accompanied by his messengers, his emissaries that were to offer these flocks as a gift of repentance to Esau. The amount of the gift was enormous, as it consisted of 550 animals. It was truly a gift fit for paying tribute to a king. Then, Jacob took his immediate family, crossed the Jabbok, and then parted company with them, apparently planning to face Esau alone.³¹

Genesis 32:24

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

[left alone] Six Men Left Alone with God

1. Jacob (Genesis 32:24)
2. Moses (Exodus 24:2)
3. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 15:17)
4. Daniel (Daniel 10:7-8)
5. Jesus (Luke 9:18)
6. Paul (1 Thes. 3:1)

[until the breaking of the day] It's uncertain how long the struggle lasted. It wasn't all night as is generally believed, for he had retired for the night. He later became restless and arose to move his family over Jabbok (Genesis 32:21-22). How long this took is not known. Perhaps it was near morning when God began wrestling with him.

The reference to time indicates both the length of the struggle between Jacob and the divine being and serves as an indicator of Jacob's lack of perception during the fight. Daybreak or “cock's crow” are often found in folklore as the moment when powers and creatures of the dark lose their power to affect humans, though this is not a familiar

³¹ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

element in ancient Near Eastern literature. In this case the issue is not one of potency, but one of supremacy (as indicated by the naming) and discernment (see Genesis 32:29).³²

Dake: Nine Proofs of Physical Wrestling

1. The Hebrew word (' abaq (HSN-79)) for "wrestled" means to grapple or struggle with. See note, "Genesis 24.
2. If Jacob struggled in prayer only, as the wrestling referred to in Ephes. 6:12, then it was with something invisible and intangible. But since a Man grappled with his human body, as stated, invisibility must not be the idea. The word for "Man" here is the Hebrew ' iysh (HSN-376) which is used of God in Exodus 15:3; Joshua 5:13; Daniel 10:5; Daniel 12:6-7; Zech. 1:8; etc. It was not Jacob grappling with a man, but a Man approaching and grappling with him first (Genesis 24), which surely speaks of more than an invisible presence.
3. It is clear from Hosea 12:3-4 that prayer was only a part of Jacob's experience. Not only does this passage say "he wept, and made supplication unto him," but also that he "had power over the angel." Like Daniel he was touched by a hand and was affected bodily (Genesis 32:25-26,30; Daniel 10:10,16,18).
4. The Hebrew ' abaq (HSN-79), meaning "to grapple" or "to wrestle," also means "to stir up dust"; i.e., to raise dust by wrestling, proving a physical struggle between the Man and Jacob.
5. When the Man saw that He hadn't prevailed against Jacob, He touched (Hebrew: naga ' (HSN-5060), to lay a hand upon, strike, smite) the hollow of his thigh and dislocated it. What did the Man touch him with if not His hand—a bodily part? The word "touch" is used 48 times and only of literal, bodily contact (Genesis 3:3; Genesis 20:6; Exodus 19:12-13; etc.).
6. The only other place in the Old Testament where wrestling is mentioned is Genesis 30:8 where a different Hebrew word is used which probably refers to a mental struggle. With Jacob, however, a bodily struggle is clearly meant, for when the Man touched the hollow of his thigh, his thigh was out of joint. This was a physical handicap, not the outcome of a spiritual struggle.
7. The Man said, "Let me go!" and Jacob replied, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26). How could Jacob have such a hold on another if not bodily? An invisible presence could go without being "let go" as requested here, but a bodily presence could not.
8. The One whom Jacob was "left alone" with could wrestle (Genesis 32:24), see (Genesis 32:25), touch (Genesis 32:25), speak, think, discern, reason, and exercise power (Genesis 32:27-29), proving both personality and body parts. It is only logical then to believe that the wrestling was physical, as recorded.
9. Jacob saw the Man face to face (Genesis 32:30). This means that he wrestled with a physical form that had a face. Others have seen God face to face, as men speak with men (Genesis 4:14; Exodus 33:11; Numbers 14:14; Deut. 34:10; Judges 6:22; Daniel 10:6; etc.). All people will see God's face eventually (Rev. 22:4). It is logical

³² Bible Background Commentary

therefore to believe the record as written, which shows God and Jacob wrestling as Man with man. See Forty-four Appearances of God.³³

And there wrestled a man with him—This was doubtless the Lord Jesus Christ, who, among the patriarchs, assumed that human form, which in the fullness of time he really took of a woman, and in which he dwelt thirty-three years among men. He is here styled an angel, because he was (see the Septuagint, Isaiah 9:7), the Messenger of the great counsel or design to redeem fallen man from death, and bring him to eternal glory; see Genesis 16:7.

But it may be asked, Had he here a real human body, or only its form? The latter, doubtless. How then could he wrestle with Jacob? It need not be supposed that this angel must have assumed a human body, or something analogous to it, in order to render himself tangible by Jacob; for as the soul operates on the body by the order of God, so could an angel operate on the body of Jacob during a whole night, and produce in his imagination, by the effect of his power, every requisite idea of corporeity, and in his nerves every sensation of substance, and yet no substantiality be in the case.

If angels, in appearing to men, borrow human bodies, as is thought, how can it be supposed that with such gross substances they can disappear in a moment? Certainly they do not take these bodies into the invisible world with them, and the established laws of matter and motion require a gradual disappearing, however swiftly it may be effected. But this is not allowed to be the case, and yet they are reported to vanish instantaneously. Then they must render themselves invisible by a cloud, and this must be of a very dense nature in order to hide a human body. But this very expedient would make their departure still more evident, as the cloud must be more dense and apparent than the body in order to hide it. This does not remove the difficulty. But if they assume a quantity of air or vapor so condensed as to become visible, and modified into the appearance of a human body, they can in a moment dilate and rarefy it, and so disappear; for when the vehicle is rarefied beyond the power of natural vision, as their own substance is invisible they can instantly vanish.

From Hosea 12:4, we may learn that the wrestling of Jacob, mentioned in this place, was not merely a corporeal exercise, but also a spiritual one; He wept and made supplication unto him.

(Hosea 12:4) Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us;

Genesis 32:25

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.

The hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint—What this implies is difficult to find out; it is not likely that it was complete luxation of the thigh bone. It may mean no more than he received a stroke on the groin, not a touch; for the Hebrew word *naga* often

³³ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

signifies to smite with violence, which stroke, even if comparatively slight, would effectually disable him for a time, and cause him to halt for many hours, if not for several days. I might add that in this place—the groin, a blow might be of fatal consequence; but as the angel gave it only as a proof of his power, and to show that he could not prevail because he would not, hence the blow was only disabling, without being dangerous; and he was probably cured by the time the sun arose.³⁴

Six Acts of God

1. Wrestled (Genesis 32:24-25)
2. Saw—understood by experience (Genesis 32:25)
3. Touched—causing Jacob's thigh to be out of joint (Genesis 32:25)
4. Said—talked (four times; Genesis 32:26-29)
5. Changed Jacob's name (Genesis 32:28)
6. Blessed Jacob (Genesis 32:29)

The fateful encounter at the Jabbok is one of the best-known episodes in the life of Jacob, but also surely the most enigmatic.

Jacob, struggling with his life and purposes, waited alone at the border of his old home. Suddenly he was confronted with a messenger with whom he struggled for hours. Only later did He realize the messenger was more than another man. He was God. The Hebrew prepares for this surprise by using “man” only once (v. 24), and there the word may mean “someone.” Jacob left town as an arrogant, insensitive young man. He returned to Israel a limping leader who had come face to face with his Maker and had become a man with purpose. He would become a nation. Here we see God’s ability to use a messenger to interact with and convey the divine message to His chosen servant. For the recipient, revelation was unexpected and difficult, resulting in physical injury as well as spiritual growth. To struggle with God’s messenger was to struggle and see the God of the messenger. Compare 16:7-13; 18:1-19:29; 32:1-2.³⁵

God allowed Himself to be overcome by Jacob, though He crippled him (whether temporarily or for the rest of his life is not stated). His limp, however, was proof that this was no mere dream. The Lord wanted to depart before daylight lest Jacob see Him (cf. Ex. 33:20), but Jacob insisted on being blessed first. So God changed his name from *Jacob* (see note on 25:26) to *Israel*, which means “he fights or persists with God” (in prevailing prayer).³⁶

Genesis 32:26

And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

³⁴ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

³⁵ Disciple’s Study Bible

³⁶ The Ryrie Study Bible

[for the day breaketh] It wasn't that He couldn't stand the sun (as some imagine concerning spirits) but He was testing Jacob's sincerity by reminding him of his daily duties and responsibilities. Jacob's faith triumphed. The sun could rise and duty call but he would have the blessing. Most appearances of God and angels (note, Hebrews 13:2) have been in the open day.

Let me go, for the day breaketh—Probably meaning, that as it was now morning, Jacob must rejoin his wives and children, and proceed on their journey. Though phantoms are supposed to disappear when the sun rises, that could be no reason in this case. Most of the angelic appearances mentioned in the Old and New Testaments took place in open day, which put their reality out of question.³⁷

Jacob continued this wrestling match all night just to be blessed. He was persistent. God encourages persistence in all areas of our lives, including the spiritual. Where in your spiritual life do you need more persistence? Strong character develops as you struggle through tough conditions.

The Angel's concern about the breaking of day may have been that it would have allowed Jacob to see His face (cf. Ex 33:20). Jacob's reply indicated that he had learned that the cause of his well-being would be God's blessing rather than his own deceptive resourcefulness. His change of name (vv. 27, 28) reflects this change of character (cf. 25:26; 27:36).³⁸

Genesis 32:27

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

[Jacob] Hebrew: *ya'aqob* (H3290), heel-catcher, supplanter, cheater, deceiver. Used of his natural seed 150 times.

Genesis 32:28

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.

[Israel]

Israel Defined

The Hebrew word *Yisra'el* (H3478) comes from *sar* (H8269), "prince" (*sarah* (H8282), "princess"), meaning prevailed or ruled as a prince; and *'El* (H410), God, Strength, Mighty, the Almighty. It means Prince with God "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:28). He had prevailed with man (Genesis 25:29-34; Genesis 27:1-31:55); now he prevailed with God (Genesis 32:29-32). Used 2,575 times, this name was given to Jacob (Genesis

³⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

³⁸ Believer's Study Bible

32:28; 2 Kings 17:34; Hosea 12:3-4), his descendants (Exodus 9:7), and Christ (Isaiah 49:3).

The Old Testament is largely a record of the history of Israel and God's revelation to them—their beginning as a nation (Genesis 29:21-30:43); their 430 years of sojourn (Genesis 12:1-Exodus 12:40); journeys and wanderings for over 41 years (Exodus 12 - Deut. 34); conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1-24); experiences under 16 judges (Judges 1:1-1 Samuel 7) and under 42 kings (1 Samuel 8-2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36); the captivities (2 Kings 25; Ezra 1); and the restoration as a nation under Ezra and Nehemiah. Scripture contains hundreds of prophecies concerning Israel.

[**prince**] Hebrew: *sar* (H8269), prince, head, commander.

Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel *Yisrael*, from *sar*, a prince, or *sarah*, he ruled as a prince, and *el*, God; or rather from *ish*, a man, (the **ש** aleph being dropped), and *raah*, he saw, el, God; and this corresponds with the name which Jacob imposed on the place, calling it *penile*, the faces of God, or of Elohim, which faces being manifested to him caused him to say, Genesis 32:30, “I have seen the *Elohim* faces to faces, (i.e., fully and completely, without any medium), and my soul is redeemed.” We may learn from this that the redemption of the soul will be the blessed consequence of wrestling by prayer and supplication with God: “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” From this time Jacob became a new man; but it was not till after a severe struggle that he got his name, his heart, and his character changed. After this he was no more Jacob the supplanter, but Israel—the man who prevails with God, and sees him face to face.³⁹

And hast prevailed—More literally, Thou hast had power with God, and with man thou shalt also prevail. *With the strong God; with weak, feeble man*. There is a beautiful opposition here between the two words: Seeing thou hast been powerful with the Almighty, surely thou shalt prevail over perishing mortals; as thou hast prevailed with God, thou shalt also prevail with men: God calling the things that were not as though they had already taken place, because the prevalency of this people, the Israelites, by means of the Messiah, who should proceed from them, was already determined in the Divine counsel. He has never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain. He who wrestles must prevail.⁴⁰

Augustine: “When he was overcome, he overcame”

Believing Jews and unbelieving Jews. Where were they first condemned?” In the first of them, in the father of all of them, Jacob himself, who was also called Israel. Jacob means “supplanter” or “heel”; Israel means “seeing God.” When Jacob returned from Mesopotamia with his children, an angel wrestled with him, though the angel surpassed Jacob in strength, he still seemed to succumb to him, and Jacob to prevail. In the same sort of way the Lord Christ too succumbed to the Jews; they prevailed when they killed

³⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴⁰ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

him. He was overcome by superior strength; precisely when he was overcome, he overcame for us. What's that – when he was overcome, he overcame for us? Yes, because when he suffered he shed the blood with which he redeemed us.

So then, is what is written: Jacob prevailed over him. And yet Jacob himself, who was wrestling, acknowledged the mystery involved. A man, wrestling with an angel, prevailed over him; and when he said, "Let me go," the one who had prevailed said, "I am not letting you go, unless you bless me." O grand and splendid mystery! Overcome, he blesses, just as having suffered, he set us free; that is when the blessing was completed." "What are you called?" he said to him. He replied, "Jacob." "You shall not be called Jacob," he said, "but you shall be called Israel." The imposition of such a great name is a great blessing. "Israel," as I said, means "seeing God"; one man's name, everyone's reward. Everyone's, provided they believe and are blessed, Jews and Greeks. Greeks, you see are what the apostle calls all nationalities, the reason being that the Greek language has such prestige among the nations. "Glory," he says, "and honor" – they are the apostle's words – glory and honor and peace to everyone doing good, to Jew first and Greek; wrath and indignation, trouble and distress on every soul doing evil, to Jews first and Greeks." Good for good Jews, bad for bad ones; good for good Gentiles, bad for bad ones. (Sermon 229F.2)⁴¹

Genesis 32:29

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.

The word **Israel** can be translated *he who striveth with God*, or *God Striveth*, or *he who persevereth*; or, it may be associated with the word *sār*, "prince." Both ideas may be combined in the name as the *princely wrestler* with God.

Tell me, I pray thee, thy name—It is very likely that Jacob wished to know the name of this angel, that he might invoke him in his necessities: but this might have led him into idolatry, for the doctrine of the incarnation could be but little understood at this time; hence, he refuses to give himself any name, yet shows himself to be the true God, and so Jacob understood him; (see Genesis 32:28); but he wished to have heard from his own lips that name by which he desired to be invoked and worshipped.

Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?—Canst thou be ignorant who I am? And he blessed him there—gave him the new heart and the new nature which God alone can give to fallen man, and by the change he wrought in him, sufficiently showed who he was. After this clause the Aldine edition of the Septuagint, and several MSS., add *which is wonderful*; but this addition seems to have been taken from Judges 13:18.⁴²

(Judges 13:18) *And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?*

⁴¹ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

⁴² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

The identity of the man is as unclear as his reason for attacking Jacob (cf. Exod. 4:24-26). In the Tanakh, God and angels can appear in human form, as in 18:2 (cf. 19:1); Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 13:6, 10. Jacob's mysterious adversary is surely supernatural, and most traditional Jewish commentators have taken him to be angelic. A well-known Midrash sees him as the "patron angel of Esau" and thus interprets this episode as a warning to all future enemies of the Jewish people: "Your patron angel could not withstand him [i.e., Jacob / Israel] and you seek to attack his descend draw attention to its underlying rationale (m. Hul. 7:6). In other words, the prohibition did not come into force until the revelation on Sinai.⁴³

The Angel's response means, "You know who I am." This is shown by Gen 32:30.

Genesis 32:30

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

[Peniel] Meaning, face of God.

[I have seen God face to face]

Six Proofs that Jacob Wrestled with God

1. Jacob recognized Him as the Blesser (Genesis 32:26).
2. The sinew shrank miraculously (Genesis 32:25).
3. God Himself acknowledged that Jacob had prevailed against Him (Genesis 32:28).
4. The blessing upon Jacob was one which God alone could bestow (Genesis 32:28-30).
5. Jacob claimed that he had seen God's face (Genesis 32:30).
6. Jacob claimed salvation by this experience (Genesis 32:30). The Hebrew word for "life" in Genesis 32:30 is *nephesh* (HSN-5315), meaning "soul"; and the word for preserved is *natsal* (HSN-5337), to snatch away, deliver, rescue, or save. The passage could read, "My soul is redeemed." From this time Jacob was a new man with a new name, a new heart, and a new character. He was no more a supplanter, cheater, or deceiver, but "Israel"—the man who prevailed with God and saw Him face to face. It was an ancient belief that if one saw God then he would die. This seems to be what Jacob had in mind when he said that his life was preserved (Genesis 32:30; Judges 6:22-23; Judges 13:22).

Name changing. There is, of course, an etiological (explaining how things came to be) aspect to name changes (e. g., Abram to Abraham in Genesis 17:5, which reenforces the covenantal promise of fathering many nations). When the angel asks Jacob his name, this provides the opportunity to highlight the change to Israel. Thus the change serves both an etiological purpose (memorializing this event at Peniel), but it also marks the Jacob/Israel shift from an outcast and usurper to the heir of the covenant and the chosen leader of God's people. Name changing was also a way to exercise authority over an individual.

⁴³ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

When a suzerain put a vassal on the throne, he sometimes gave him a new name, demonstrating his power over that vassal.⁴⁴

Peniel is on the north bank of the Jabbok (the wadi Zerka). Why Jacob returned there after fording his wives and children is unclear. In the Talmud, it is suggested that he had returned to retrieve some little jars he had forgotten there (b. Hul. 91a). In any case, his solitude and lack of property recall his status when he first fled his brother's wrath, before God had showered His bounty upon him (28:11).⁴⁵

Here Jacob had his greatest test and finest hour. Though he had been absent for 20 years (31:38, 41), he still feared Esau and the tension at home from which he had fled (27:42, 43). In his distress, Jacob had learned to turn to YAHWEH (32:7-12). The experience at Peniel prepared Jacob to go victoriously into the presence of Esau. He was no longer Jacob the "supplanter" and schemer (27:36), but had the assurance from God of victory by faith. He had "prevailed" (v. 28) in that he had finally acquired that humble submission that God required, and he had come to see that victory must come from God alone. The name "Israel" means "he contends with God."⁴⁶

Torah Class: It is here that we encounter one of the stranger episodes in the entire Bible: suddenly, Jacob finds himself wrestling with some "man". The Hebrew for this word "man" is "ish", which can mean man, or husband, or even a mighty or great man. But, the thing to get here is that this man SEEMED, to Jacob, to be flesh and blood. We are told this wrestling match went on all night long, and when "the Man" concluded Jacob was not going to give up, he dislocated Jacob's hip with but a touch.

So, in verse 25, it says Jacob wrestled with an "ish", a man. But, in verses 29 and 31, it is made clear that this being is divine, because Jacob says, "I have seen Elohim face to face". Hosea 12:4 speaks of this encounter, and clearly states that this was a heavenly being that Jacob fought with. So, why this reference first saying Jacob's opponent was a man, and then saying it was Elohim?

Let's talk about angels for just a moment. There has been so much confusion in Christianity as to just what an angel is, what the appearance of one portends, and so on. The first thing to understand is that in its most foundational meaning, an angel is first and foremost a bearer of the divine word. An angel *brings* a divine message from God, OR, he *carries out* a divine command from God. Today, we have the expression "don't kill the messenger"; meaning, look, the person who is telling me something of importance isn't presenting me with his own words, or even his own view; he's just been hired to bring to me the instruction from someone higher than himself. He's not responsible for the content of the message, other than his duty to carefully and accurately deliver it. That's an angel.

Yet, the Bible will use the word in a number of contexts, and I think, often, metaphorically. For instance, in the Bible prophets and priests were at times called "angels of the Lord"....or more aptly, MESSENGERS of the divine word. In fact Haggai

⁴⁴ Bible Background Commentary

⁴⁵ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁴⁶ Believer's Study Bible

and Malachi are referred to in the Scriptures as what is usually translated as “angels of the Lord”. Now, were Haggai and Malachi divine, spiritual beings? No. But, as men who were simply passing on to others God’s instructions to mankind, they certainly qualify as being messengers of God.

We’ll also see, in Holy Scripture, the distinctions between the bearer of the divine message (an angel of the Lord), and Yehoveh Himself, being blurred. We see that in the Burning Bush episode, and with Hagar who was spoken to by an angel, but she responded directly to God, and in a number of other scenes as well.

But, that shouldn’t surprise us, or seem strange. Because we followers of Yeshua find ourselves faced with a similar blurred distinction in trying to comprehend just who Yeshua is. He is a man, but he is also God. We find that exact scenario here with Jacob as the being he wrestles with is alternately called a man, an “ish”, and God, Elohim. Think of this as well: is not Jesus also called “the Word”; or, in it’s most complete Biblical sense, “the divine Word of God”. Jesus was the *bearer* of the divine word (as an angel), he WAS the divine word (God), and he was also a flesh and blood human (a man). Now if you can fully comprehend that, see me after class so I can meet the first person that could. So all these blurred distinctions of where God leaves off and angels begin, we find in Yeshua, the man/god/angel.

Now disabled by this divine messenger, Jacob STILL wouldn’t quit, saying, “I will not let you go till you bless me”. Obviously, Jacob came to know that this was no ordinary man he was grappling with.

Over the years, I have heard many teachings on this event. I have also heard that this never actually happened, that it was just a fairy tale. I’ve heard that this was added to the Holy Scriptures many centuries later. I’ve heard that this is just allegory.

But, I am quite convinced that this is none of the above; that it was quite real. What we have here is a scene that is at once literal and symbolic; symbolic because all Believers must go through a time when we must wrestle with God over control of our lives. And, if we are to truly apprehend that life which God has for us, a time must come when, by our own choice, through absolute surrender, we must leave our tattered history behind and start a new history with God as Lord of our lives. Yet, invariably, the scars of the past will come with us, and we’ll have to deal with it. Even more, sometimes we will pay a price to leave behind our rebellious ways, and go forward into new life. Thus was the case with Jacob, as he now inherited a permanent disability as he crossed over from a foreign place into the Promised Land.

How I wish it was so, that when we first recognize our salvation, or when after years of having been saved we finally decide to live it out, that our earthly past could be as dead as our old natures. Too often well-meaning Pastors tell converts that their slates have been cleaned; what they forget to tell them is that though spiritually we are forgiven, that does not end the natural consequences of what our sin natures have caused. In some way or another, we will live out the rest of our lives regretting our foolishness. Jacob will walk with a limp for his remaining days; an inescapable testament to his having fought with God for almost a hundred years, until he finally submitted instead of attempting to achieve a balance of power.

Jacob had always won against men, before, with his own skills and cunning, often mixed with deceit. But, when he recognized that what he was wrestling was far more than flesh and blood, he knew he could not win as he always had.....and so, instead, gave up

and asked to be BLESSED. And, like most of us, we cannot seem to arrive at this point until we are broken and disabled. If we take the most literal possible sum of Jacob's name it means "the cunning self-helpful supplanter", and how well it characterized Jacob's life up till now. But, because Jacob yielded to God, he was to have a new destiny and it would be reflected in his new name: "Israel".....a prince with God. From here on in the Biblical narrative, we see a new Jacob. No more does he rely on himself, his fleshly ways, he rests in God's strength. And, he will be called Israel.

I cannot help but recall my Ishmaelite brother in Christ Tass's story about his coming to Lord. About how as a Palestinian, fighting against Israel, they could never seem to defeat the Jews. That, like the average Muslim Arab living today, there was the deepest frustration and anger that leads to irrational hatred over Israel because it was incomprehensible that 200 million Arabs could not defeat 6 million Jews. That the combined Arab armies that dwarfed Israel's were defeated time after time, and brought nothing but humiliation to the Arab world. After coming to Christ, Tass suddenly realized Muslims who thought that their enemy was the Jews..... had actually been fighting God. And, when we fight God, there is absolutely no chance of victory on our terms. In the most ironic way, our victory in God must occur by the defeat of ourselves.

This is exactly what was happening in this scene with Jacob, and it has happened, or WILL happen, to every Believer who finally surrenders his will to Yehoveh's.

Let me end this chapter by pointing out something that is in some ways obvious, but in others we slide right over it. Verse 33 starts by saying: "that is why the children of Israel *to this day*....." and then goes on to explain why the sciatic nerve (called sinew in our Bibles) is removed from animals and not eaten as meat. The observation is that redaction has taken place. The writer of these passages.....traditionally said to be Moses....is looking BACK. At least part of this was written from the perspective of a time future to when the events of Jacob and the wrestling with this angel took place. And, from the viewpoint of a time when a Tradition had been developed to remove the sciatic nerve from animals to be eaten and or sacrificed, in honor of this day when Jacob had his hip dislocated, as he was given a new name that described his new NATURE.....Israel.

Further, from a historic viewpoint, it is at this moment.....in Genesis 32 verse 29, that the nation of Israel is established.⁴⁷

Genesis 32:31

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

Peniel: = "The face of God": The *i* and the *u* are mere connecting vowels joining the substantive *pen* and *el*. [Penuel: older form?] Face to face: cf. Genesis 16:13; Exodus 14:11; 33:20; Judges 6:22; 13:22; Isaiah 6:5. The wrestling occurred when Jacob was at the threshold of the land of promise. Jacob was named Israel; the place name, Peniel, was given in response to Jacob's new name.

[halted upon his thigh] Limped upon his thigh.

⁴⁷ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

The sun rose upon him—Did the Prophet Malachi refer to this, Malachi 4:2: Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings? Possibly with the rising of the sun, which may here be understood as emblematical of the Sun of righteousness—the Lord Jesus, the pain and weakness of his thigh passed away, and he felt both in soul and body that he was healed of his plagues.⁴⁸

(Malachi 4:2) *But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

halted upon his thigh—As Paul had a thorn in the flesh given to humble him, lest he should be too elevated by the abundant revelations granted him [2 Cor. 12:7], so Jacob's lameness was to keep him mindful of this mysterious scene, and that it was in gracious condescension the victory was yielded to him. In the greatest of these spiritual victories which, through faith, any of God's people obtain, there is always something to humble them.⁴⁹

Chumash: “Classic questions; “Why is the place named “*Peniy’ail*” in verse 31 then called “*Penu’ail* in verse 32?

Ohr HaChayim: Only Jacob himself called the place *Peniy’ail*. Thus when the Torah mentions the place inverse 32 it changes the name to *Penu’ail*.

Bachaye: Of the ten different levels of angels the highest level of angel is called an ish, (man). This is the term which with the Torah refers to the angel that fought with Jacob. The difference between *Peniy’ail* and *Penu’ail* is that the letter *yud* is swapped for *vav*. When Jacob was fighting the angel, and his mind was fixed in the spiritual realms, he called the place *Peniy’ail* with a *yud*, hinting to his involvement with the angel of the tenth level (*yud* = 10). However, later when he came back “down to earth” he changed the *yud* for a *vav* (=6) representing the physical world which consists of the six directions: north, south, west, east, up and down.⁵⁰

Genesis 32:32

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.

This story also results in a dietary restriction for the people of Israel. Orthodox Jews still refuse to eat the tendon of the hindquarter of animals.

[sinew which shrank] Not only was his thigh dislocated (Genesis 32:25), but the sinew shrank (Genesis 32:32). The hip bone perhaps went back into place and the sinew stayed shrunken enough to cause the limp of Genesis 32:31.

⁴⁸ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴⁹ JFB Commentary

⁵⁰ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

The emphasis of the narrative is certainly on the wrestling; but its purpose was the changing of Jacob into Israel. One cannot ignore the context of Jacob's life here. The connection is strengthened by the plays on the names. At the outset are *ya 'aqob* ("Jacob"), the man; *yabboq* ("Jabbok"), the place; and *ye 'abeq* ("he wrestled"), the match. These attract the Hebrew reader's attention immediately, because of the similarity of the consonants *y*, *q*, and *b* in the words. Before Jacob (*ya 'aqob*) could cross the Jabbok (*yabboq*) to the land of blessing, he had to wrestle (*ye 'abeq*). *He was to try once more to trip up an adversary, for at this point he was met by Someone wishing to have a private encounter with him, and he was forced to struggle.*⁵¹

etiological comments. An etiological comment is one that provides an origin for a name, characteristic or practice. In folklore etiological comments are often fanciful (how the camel got its hump), while in ethnic or national traditions they tend to be legendary. While such fanciful or legendary accounts can often be entirely fabricated, etiological comments need not be only the consequence of a creative imagination but may preserve an accurate story of a tradition. The naming of the place where Jacob/Israel wrestled with God draws its name from his exclamation of surprise at "seeing God face to face" (a clear parallel to his earlier encounter at Bethel, Genesis 28:16-19). The final notation in this episode provides an explanation for a unique dietary law, which does not appear elsewhere in Jewish law. However, the legal value in forbidding the consumption of the "tendon attached to the socket of the hip" (possibly the sciatic nerve) is found in its memorializing of Jacob/Israel's struggle at the Jabbok—in that sense comparable to the institution of circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14)—marking a significant covenantal reaffirmation.⁵²

Adam Clarke's Summary of Chapter 32:

THE serious reader must meet with much instruction in this chapter.

1. After his reconciliation with Laban, Jacob proceeds on his way to Canaan; and as God, who was continually watching for his welfare, saw the trials to which he would shortly be exposed, therefore he provided for him the instructive vision of angels, that he might see that those who were for him were more than those who could be against him. A proper consideration of God's omniscience is of the utmost advantage to every genuine Christian. He knows whereof we are made, he remembers that we are but dust, he sees our trials and difficulties, and his eye affects his heart. Hence he is ever devising means that his banished—be not expelled from him.
2. Jacob's recollection of his unkindness and injustice to his brother, when he hears that he is coming to meet him, fills his soul with fear, and obliges him to betake himself to God by prayer and supplication. How important is the office of conscience! And how necessary are times of trial and difficulty when its voice is loudest, and the heart is best prepared to receive its reproofs! In how many cases has conscience slumbered till it pleased God to send some trial by which it has been

⁵¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

⁵² Bible Background Commentary

powerfully awakened, and the salvation of the sinner was the result! Before I was afflicted I went astray.

3. Though salvation be the free gift of God, yet he gives it not to any who do not earnestly seek it. The deeper the conviction of guilt and helplessness is, the more earnest the application to God for mercy is likely to be. They whose salvation costs them strong crying and tears, are not likely (humanly speaking) to part with it lightly; they remember the vinegar and the gall, and they watch and pray that they enter not into temptation.
4. In the strife and agony requisite to enter in at the strait gate, it is highly necessary that we should know that the grace and salvation of God are not purchased by our tears, etc.; for those things which are only proofs and arguments that we have sinned, can never remove the iniquity of our transgressions. A sensible and pious man observes on this subject, "That prayer and wrestling with God should be made as though no other means were to be practiced, and then the best means be adopted as though no prayer or wrestling had been used." God marks even this strife, though highly pleasing in his sight, with such proofs of its own utter insufficiency, that we may carry about with us the memorial of our own weakness, worthlessness, and slowness of heart to believe. God smote the thigh of Jacob, 1. That he might know he had not prevailed by his own strength, but by the power and mercy of his God. 2. That he might, have the most sensible evidence of the reality of the Divine interposition in his behalf. 3. That he might see God's displeasure against his unbelief. And 4. That men in general might be taught that those who will be the disciples of Christ must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and mortify their members which are upon the earth. Those who have not cut off a right hand or foot, or plucked out a right eye, for the kingdom of heaven's sake, are never likely to see God. The religion that costs us nothing, is to us worth nothing.⁵³

⁵³ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament



Edersheim, Bible History

WE are now nearing what may be described as the high point in the spiritual history of Jacob. Quite different as the previous history of Abraham had been from that of Jacob, yet, in some sense, what Mount Moriah was to Abraham, that the fords of Jabbok became to his grandson: a place of trial and of decision, - only that while the one went to it, the other only left it, with a new name, and all that this implied.

One dreaded meeting was past, and its apprehended dangers averted. Jacob had in his fear "stolen away" from Laban. He had been pursued as by an enemy, but God had brought peace out of it all. Standing by his "Mizpah," he had seen Laban and his confederates disappearing behind the range of Gilead, their spears and lances glistening in the sunlight, as they wound through the pine and oak forests which cover the mountain side. One enemy was now behind him; but another and far more formidable had yet to be encountered. In dealing with Laban, Jacob could justly plead his long service and the heartless selfishness of his employer. But what could he say to Esau in excuse or

palliation of the past? How would he meet him? and did his brother still cherish the purpose of revenge from which he had fled twenty years ago? To these questions there was absolutely no answer, except the one which faith alone could understand: that if he now returned to his own country, and faced the danger there awaiting him, it was by the express direction of the Lord Himself. If so, Jacob must be safe. Nor was he long in receiving such general assurance of this as might strengthen his faith. Leaving the mountains of Gilead, Jacob had entered the land of promise, in what afterwards became the possession of Gad. A glorious prospect here opened before him. Such beauty, fruitfulness, freshness of verdure, and richness of pasturage; dark mountain forests above, and rich plains below, as poor Palestine, denuded of its trees, and with them of its moisture - a land of ruins - has not known these many, many centuries! And there, as he entered the land, "the angels of God met him." Twenty years before they had, on leaving it, met him at Bethel, and, so to speak, accompanied him on his journey. And now in similar pledge they welcomed him on his return. Only then, they had been angels ascending and descending on their ministry, while now they were "angel hosts" to defend him in the impending contest, whence also Jacob called the name of that place Mahanaim, "two hosts," or "two camps." And if at Bethel he had seen them in a "dream," they now appeared to him when waking, as if to convey yet stronger assurance.

Such comfort was, indeed, needed by Jacob. From Mahanaim he had sent to his brother Esau a message intended to conciliate him. But the messengers returned without any reply, other than that Esau was himself coming to meet his brother, and that at the head of a band of four hundred men. This certainly was sufficiently alarming, irrespective of the circumstance that since Esau was (as we shall presently show) just then engaged in a warlike expedition against Seir, the four hundred men with whom he advanced, had probably gathered around his standard for plunder and bloodshed, just like those wild Bedouin tribes which to this day carry terror wherever they appear. Even to receive no reply at all would, in itself, be a great trial to one like Jacob. Hitherto he had by his devices succeeded in removing every obstacle, and evading every danger. But now he was absolutely helpless, in face of an enemy from whom he could neither retreat nor escape. It is said in the sacred text: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed." The measures to which he resorted prove this. He divided his caravan into two bands, in the hope that if Esau attacked the one, the other might escape during the fray. The result thus aimed at was very doubtful, and, at the best, sad enough. Jacob must have deeply felt this, and he betook himself to prayer. Mingling confession of his utter unworthiness with entreaty for deliverance from the danger before him, he successively pleaded before God His express command to return to Canaan, His past mercies, and His gracious promises, at the same time addressing God as Jehovah, the covenant-God of Abraham and of Isaac. Not one of these pleas could fail. That cry of despair was the preparation for what was to follow: Jacob was now learning to obtain, otherwise than by his own efforts, that which Jehovah had promised to give.

We know, with almost perfect certainty, the exact spot where the most important transaction in the life of Jacob took place. It was at the ford of Jabbok, the confluence of the two streams which flow from the East into Jordan, between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, and almost midway between these two points. Indeed, there is only one ford of

Jabbok "practicable," "and even here," as a recent traveler records, "the strong current reached the horse's girths."*

* See the description in Canon Tristram's Land of Israel, pp. 470-563.

The beauty and richness of the whole district is most striking - park-like scenery alternating with sweet glades, covered with rich crops; "trees and shrubs grouped in graceful variety;" then peeps into the great Jordan valley, with its almost tropical vegetation, and of the hills of Palestine beyond. Looking down upon the ford, the brook Jabbok is almost invisible from the thicket of oleander which covers its banks; while on the steeper sides, up either way, forests of oak and of evergreen oak merge into the darker pine. It was night in this solitude. Overhead shone the innumerable stars - once the pledge of the promise to Abraham. The impressive silence was only broken by the rushing of Jabbok, and the lowing of the flocks and herds, as they passed over the brook, or the preparations for transporting the women, children, and servants. Quite a large number of the cattle and sheep Jacob now sent forward in separate droves, that each, as it successively came to Esau as a gift from his brother, might tend to appease his feelings of anger, or satisfy the cupidity of his followers. At last they were all gone, each herdsman bearing a message of peace. The women also and children were safely camped on the south side of Jabbok. Only Jacob himself remained on the northern bank. It was a time for solitude - "and Jacob was left alone," quite alone, as when first he left his father's house. There on the oleander banks of Jabbok occurred what has ever since been of the deepest significance to the church of God. "There wrestled with him a man till the breaking of day." That "Man" was the Angel of Jehovah in Whom was His Presence. "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." The contest by wrestling must now have become impossible. But a far other contest ensued. "And He said, Let Me go, for the day breaketh. And he (Jacob) said, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Jacob had now recognized the character of his opponent and of the contest, and he sought quite another victory, and by quite other means than before. He no longer expected to prevail in his own strength.

He asked to be blessed by Him with whom he had hitherto only wrestled, that so he might prevail. That blessing was given. But first the Lord brought before him what had been his old name as expressive of his old history - Jacob, "the cunning, self-helpful supplanter;" then He bestowed on him a new name, characteristic of his new experience and better contest by prayer: Israel, "a prince with God." In that new character would he have "power with God and men," and "prevail" against all enemies. But the mysterious name of the Angel he must not yet know; for "the mystery of godliness" was not to be fully revealed till all the purposes for which Jacob was to become Israel had been fulfilled. And now "He blessed him there." "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel (the face of God): for I have seen God face to face, and my soul has recovered.* 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." And "to this day," literally, is this custom observed among "the children of Israel."

* So the words are rendered by one of the ablest German critics.

Now what was the meaning of this solemn transaction? Assuredly, it was symbolical - but of what? It was a real transaction, but symbolical of Jacob's past, present, and future. The "man" who wrestled with Jacob "until the breaking of day" was Jehovah. Jacob had, indeed, been the believing heir to the promises, but all his life long he had wrestled with God - sought to attain success in his own strength and by his own devices. Seeming to contend with man, he had really contended with God. And God had also contended with him. At last farther contest was impossible. Jacob had become disabled, for God had touched the hollow of his thigh. In the presence of Esau Jacob was helpless. But before he could encounter his most dreaded earthly enemy, he must encounter God, with Whom he had all along, though unwittingly, contended by his struggles and devices. The contest with Esau was nothing; the contest with Jehovah everything. The Lord could not be on Jacob's side, till he had been disabled, and learned to use other weapons than those of his own wrestling. Then it was that Jacob recognized with whom he had hitherto wrestled. Now he resorted to other weapons, even to prayer; and he sought and found another victory, even in the blessing of Jehovah and by His strength. Then also, truly at "the breaking of day," he obtained a new name, and with it new power, in which he prevailed with God and man. Jacob, indeed, "halted upon his thigh;" but he was now Israel, a prince with God. And still to all ages this contest and this victory, in despair of our own efforts, and in the persevering prayer, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," have been and are a most precious symbol to the children of God. May we not also add, that as the prophet Hosea pointed to it as symbolical of Israel's history (Hosea 12:4), so it shall be fully realized when, *"they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn?"* (Zechariah 12:10)⁵⁴

GLEANINGS IN GENESIS – ARTHUR PINK
JACOB AT MAHANAIM
GENESIS 32

IN our last article we contemplated Jacob, in obedience to the word of the Lord who bade him "return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee" (Gen. 31:3), as then leaving Padan-Aram and starting out for Canaan. We also paid some attention to Laban's pursuit of our patriarch, and of the affectionate leave taking which eventually ensued. Here we are to consider another important incident which befell Jacob by the way.

"And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." (Gen. 32:1.) Jacob was now in the path of obedience and therefore God favored him with another revelation to strengthen his faith and inspire him with courage for what lay before him—the meeting with Esau and his four hundred men. While in the path of obedience we must expect to

⁵⁴ Alfred Edersheim, Bible History, Old Testament, studylight.org

encounter that which will test our faith, and not the least of such trials will be that to all outward appearances God Himself is against us; yet as we *start out* along any path He has appointed God in His grace, usually encourages us with a plain revelation from Himself, a token of His approval, a strengthener to faith; and at *the end* we find the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. So it proved with Jacob.

“And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God *met* him.” The word “met” here suggests a beautiful thought. It is not that the angels “appeared” to him, but they “met” him. Jacob is returning from his long exile, returning to the land given to his fathers (and later to himself) by Jehovah. These angels then came forward to greet him, as it were. God sent these messengers of His in advance to *welcome* his servant home, and to express to him His goodwill. On his journey out from Canaan to Padan-Aram the Lord Himself met Jacob and gave him a vision of the angels; and here, now that he is on his way back from Padan-Aram to Canaan, the angels met him, followed immediately afterwards by the Lord appearing to him.

“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 Slahanaim,” (Gen. 32:1, 2.) Once again we note how *timely* are God’s interventions. Jacob had just escaped from one company of his enemies (Laban and his brethren—Gen. 31:22, 23), and another was now advancing to meet him, namely, Esau with his four hundred men. But at this juncture God’s host made its appearance, as though to show him to whom he owed his recent escape, and as if to further assure him that He who *had* delivered, *did* deliver, and he might safely trust *would* deliver him. It is to be remarked that the angels (32:1) which appeared on this occasion were termed by Jacob “God’s host” in the singular number, but from the name which Jacob gave to the place—Mahanaim—it is evident they were divided into two companies, for Mahanaim signifies *Ho hosts*. It would seem, then, there was one host of these “angels” of God, but divided into two companies, probably encompassing him both before and behind. Was not this God’s provision for the two hosts of Jacob’s adversaries, which at the same time, and no doubt with the same violent designs, were coming against him! The one had already been sent back without striking a blow (Laban and his company), and the other should yet also be. While this was not expressly revealed to Jacob, nevertheless, this host of angels before him, as well as the one behind, was most evidently a comforting assurance from God that He was with His child and would preserve him whithersoever he went. How it reminds us of the experience of the Children of Israel in the wilderness, centuries later, when the Pillar of Cloud went before them by day, and the Pillar of Fire protected their rear by night.

“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 women-servants and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.” (Gen. 32:5.) As yet Jacob had heard nothing of his brother Esau, save that he was now settled in the land of Seir; but recalling the past, remembering the angry threat of the man, he was plainly apprehensive of the consequences of meeting him again. He, therefore, decided to send messengers before him, much as an army which is marching through an enemy’s country sends on spies in advance. These messengers were evidently instructed to sound Esau (for

they returned to Jacob with their report), and if needs be to appease his anger. These messengers were carefully instructed what they should say to Esau, how they should conduct themselves in his presence, and the impression they must aim to make upon him—all designed to conciliate. While they were coached to say nothing but what was strictly true, nevertheless, the *craftiness* of Jacob comes out plainly in the words he puts into the mouths of his messengers:

“And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Turban, and staved there until now; and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men servants, and women servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.” (Gen. 32:4, 5.) Jacob does not insist on the fulfillment of the blessing which he had obtained from his father. Isaac had said, “Be lord *over* thy brother, and let thy mother’s sons bow down *to thee*.” But here Jacob refuses to press the claim of his precedency, and instead of requiring that Esau should “bow down” unto him, he refers to Esau as “*his* lord” and takes the place of a “servant!” Note, too, nothing is said of the reason why he had fled to Padan-Aram—all reference to his outwitting of Esau is carefully passed over—instead, he naively says, “I have *sojourned* (not found refuge) with Laban, and stayed there until now.” Once again be it remarked, Jacob would have Esau plainly to understand that he had not come to *claim the double portion*, nor even to seek a division of their father’s inheritance—he had no need for this, for God had given him plenty of this world’s goods. How plainly the native shrewdness of our patriarch comes out in all this needs not be argued.

“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.) It would seem from the sequel that the messengers sent out by Jacob never delivered their message, but only went far enough to discover that Esau was advancing toward them accompanied by four hundred men—to them, no doubt, with hostile intentions. It must have come upon Jacob as a terrible shock to learn that his brother was already acquainted with his movements. It could only be about a fortnight at most since Jacob had left his uncle’s farm, and as his journey had been conducted with all possible secrecy (in order to escape from Laban), how could Esau have learned of it at all, Was his thirst for revenge upon his brother so great that he had had him watched all these years? Was there some spy of his in the employ of Laban, who had now secretly communicated with Esau? Someone must have informed him, and the fact that Esau was now advancing upon him was disquieting news indeed. “*Then* Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed” (32:7)—a guilty conscience needs no accusing.

“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.” (32:7, 8.) There seemed no time to be lost, so Jacob acted promptly, and with accustomed shrewdness. First he divided his people and his flocks into two bands, so that if Esau came up with one and smote it, the other at least might escape. Second he betook himself to prayer. Ere condemning Jacob here, let us examine our own hearts and remember our own ways. How often we come to God only as a *last resort*! How often we scheme and plan, and not until *afterwards* do we cry unto God. Alas, how often we act on the principles of that Goddishonoring proverb that “God helps those who help themselves”—as though anybody was sufficient to “help himself” without God first helping him! The truth is rather, and how blessed, that God is ever

ready to help those who have learned by sad experience that they are quite *unable* to “help themselves.” His promise is “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.” (Isa. 40:29.)

There is not a little in the prayer of Jacob which is worthy of close attention, the more so as it was a prevailing prayer, and that it is the *first* recorded real prayer in the Bible. “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 stair I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. 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 midst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” (32:9–12.) Notice first the God to whom he prayed. He approached God not merely as God the Creator, but as “the God of his father Abraham and the God of his father Isaac.” It was God in *Covenant relationship*. This was laying hold of the Divine faithfulness; it was the prayer of faith. It means much to approach God thus; to appeal to Him on the ground of a sure and established relationship. We come before God not as the God of our forefathers, but as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore our “God and Father.” It is as we plead *this* relationship He is pleased to bless us.

Second, Jacob *cast himself on the sure Word of Jehovah*, pleading before Him His promise. He humbly reminded the Lord how He had said, “Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and *I will* deal well with thee.” Here again we do well to learn from Jacob. The Scriptures contain many promises given to believers in general, and it is our individual privilege to plead them before God in particular, the more so when, like our patriarch, we encounter difficulties and opposition in the way wherein He has directed us to walk. Jacob pleaded a definite promise; so must we. In 2 Cor. 12:9 we read, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Come to the Throne of Grace at the beginning of each day, reverently and believingly remind the Lord of this declaration of His, and then say with one of old, “Do as Thou hast said.” (2 Sam. 7:25.) Again, we read in Phil. 4:19, “My God shall supply all your need.” Tell the Lord of this in the hour of emergency, and say, Lord “Do as Thou hast said.”

Third, Jacob *fully acknowledged his own utter lack of desert*. He confessed that the Lord was in no wise *his* debtor. He took a lowly place before the Most High. He owned that “*he was riot worthy of the least* of all God’s mercies.” Mark this well, dear reader, for very little teaching is heard in these days that leads to self-abasement. It has become a rarity to hear a saint of God confessing his *unworthiness*. There is so much said about living on a high plane of spirituality, so much Laodicean boasting, that many are afraid to acknowledge before other believers that *they* are “not worthy of the least of God’s mercies.” One sometimes wonders if this is the chief reason why so few of us have any real power in praise today. Certain it is that we must get down into the dust before God if we would receive His blessing. We must; come before Him as empty-handed supplicants, if He is to fill us. We must own our ill deserts, and be ready to receive from Him on the ground of grace *alone* if we are to have our prayers answered

Finally, notice *the motive* which actuated Jacob in presenting the petition he did. That for which he made request was expressed as follows: “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.” At first glance it would appear that our patriarch was moved by nothing higher than the natural affections of the human heart. It would seem that this was the petition of a kind husband and a tender father. But as we reread this request of Jacob in the light of the closing words of his prayer, we shall discover he was prompted by a far worthier and higher motive. He at once added “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.” In this conclusion to the prayer we may see not only a further pleading of God’s promise, but an eye to *God’s glory*. Jehovah had promised to make Jacob’s seed as the sand of the sea, but if his wife and children were slain how then could God’s promise be fulfilled! Now it is natural, and by no means wrong, for us to be deeply concerned over the salvation of our loved ones; but our chief concern must center itself not in the well-being of those who are united to us by the ties of blood or intimate friendship, but for *the glory of God*. “*Whatsoever ye do (in prayer, as in everything else) do all to the glory of God*”—to this everything else must be subordinated. Here, then, is a searching test: Why am I so anxious to see certain ones saved? —simply because they are near and dear to me? or that God may be glorified and Christ magnified in their salvation? May Divine grace purge us of selfishness and purify our *motives* in prayer. And may God use these few words and cause both writer and reader to cry, with ever increasing fervor, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

34

JACOB AT PENIEL

GENESIS 32

IN our last article we contemplated Jacob as he continued on his way home from Padan-Aram where he had lived as an exile for so long. As Jacob went on his way “the angels of God met him,” apparently in two distinct companies or “hosts,” probably one of them to his rear and the other before him. It was suggested that there was a symbolic meaning to this ordering of the angels; that as God had just delivered our patriarch from Laban and his company? who were now left behind, so would he deliver him from Esau and his company which were ahead of him. After the angels had disappeared, Jacob sent out messengers to meet Esau, to pacify him with friendly overtures, and thus prepare for their meeting. Shortly afterwards these messengers returned to Jacob bringing with them the discomfiting news that Esau was advancing, accompanied by no less than four hundred men. Jacob was “greatly afraid and distressed,” and after dividing his party and possessions into two bands, he at once betook himself to earnest prayer. We considered this prayer at some length, and sought to point out some of its striking and suggestive features. It was a prayer of faith, and one which, in its general principles, we do well to copy.

What followed Jacob’s prayer is now to engage our attention. A striking contrast is immediately presented to our notice, a contrast which seems unthinkable but for the sad fact that it is so often repeated in our own experiences. Jacob at once turns from the exercise of faith to the manifestation of unbelief, from prayer to scheming, from God to his own fleshly devices. “And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother.” (32:13.)

There was nothing inherently wrong in thus sending a present to his advancing brother; it was the *motive* which actuated him which is censurable, and which is “written *for our admission*.” (1 Cor. 10:11.) In the verses which follow the Holy Spirit lays bare for us the heart of Jacob, that we may the better become acquainted with our own deceitful and wicked hearts. Had Jacob’s motive been a righteous and praiseworthy one there was no need for him to have been at so much care and trouble in arranging his present for Esau. First he divided his extravagant present into three parts, or droves (for it consisted of cattle), putting a space between each and thus spreading them out to the best advantage, with the obvious intention of making as great an impression as possible upon his brother. Next, he commanded the servants who were entrusted with the care of his present, that when they should meet Esau and he enquired who these flocks and herds belonged to, they should say, “these be thy *servant’s* Jacob’s; it is a present sent unto my *lord* Esau.” Clearly, the message which Jacob sent to Esau was utterly beneath the dignity of a child of God; such fawning phrases as “my lord Esau” and “thy servant Jacob” tell their own sad tale. This obsequious servility before a man of the world evidenced the state of his heart. (clearly, Jacob was *afraid* of Esau, and was no longer exercising confidence in God. Finally, Jacob’s real design is made still more evident when we note his own soliloquizing—“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.” (32:20.)

Instead of trusting in the Lord to work in him a spirit of conciliation, he undertook himself to propitiate Esau—“I” will appease him. But mark carefully, dear reader, that after all his scheming and devising he could say only “*peradventure* he will accept of me!” So it is still; after all our fleshly extorts have been put forth there is *no confidence* begotten thereby, nothing but an uncertain “peradventure” for our pains. How different from the way of faith, and the calm but certain assurance which is the blessed fruit of resting on the Divine promise and trusting God to undertake *for its*?

Ere proceeding further we would pause to consider a pertinent and pressing question which naturally arises out of what we have seen above: How was it possible for Jacob to turn to fleshly scheming and efforts of his own to appease Esau when just before he had prayer with such earnestness? to God, and had not failed to plead the Divine promises? Was Jacob after all an unbeliever? Surely not—God’s dealings with him previously dispel the idea. Had he then “fallen from grace” and *become* an unbeliever? And again we must reject any such suggestion, for the Scriptures are plain and explicit on the point that one who has been born again cannot be unborn—an unfaithful and unworthy of God I may be, but I am still *His child*, nevertheless. The gifts and calling of God are “without repentance”—“without change of mind.” (Romans 11:29.) Once a sinner has been called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light, and once God has given to him light and salvation, he never undoes that calling or withdraws His gift, for the sinner did nothing whatever of himself to *merit* God’s gift, and he can do nothing to *demerit* it. The basis on which God bestows His gifts is not that of works and human desert, but that of sovereign grace alone. This does not argue that we shall therefore be careless and free to sin as much as we want, for that would only go to prove that *we* had never received God’s “gift” of salvation; rather shall we become more careful and have a greater hatred of sin, not because we are afraid of the consequences of wrong doing, but because we are delirious of showing our deep gratitude to God, by a life which *is* pleasing to Him, in return for His abounding mercy and goodness to us.

But this still leaves unanswered our question concerning Jacob. Jacob *was* a believer in God—a careful study of his prayer as recorded in Genesis 32:9–12 evidences that. But though Jacob was a believer there still remained the “flesh,” the old evil nature in him. And to this he gave way. The flesh is ever unbelieving, and where it is not constantly judged breaks forth in God-dishonoring activities. The clearest exemplification and demonstration of the two natures in the believer is to be seen in the history of Jacob recorded faithfully by the Holy Spirit not for our emulation but for our “warning.” The same two natures are in every child of God today, the spiritual and the carnal, the one which believes God and the other which disbelieves. It is because of this we need to cry daily, “Lord, I believe; *help Thou* mine unbelief.” (Mark 9:24.)

“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 women-servants, 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 hail. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” (32:21–24.) This passage introduces us to a most important crisis in the life of Jacob. The book of Genesis presents our patriarch in two characters, as he is exhibited to us as Jacob and as Israel; the one looking at the natural man, and the other at the spiritual man the one telling of how Divine grace found him and the other of what Divine grace made him—this will become clearer as we continue these studies, if the Lord will. We are now to consider the memorable occasion when Jacob formally received his new name of Israel, when he who was rightly termed “the supplanter” became known as “God commands.”

The circumstances under which Jacob formally received his new name are worthy of the closest attention. He was, as we have seen, in great distress. News had come to hand that *luau*, accompanied by four hundred men, was on the way to meet him. That for which he had labored so hard and so long to obtain in Padan-Aram seemed about to be wrested from his hands; his wives and his children appeared to be in imminent danger, and his own life in peril. As a precautionary measure he had sent his family over the brook Jabbok,* and now he was left alone more desolate than when twenty years before he had left his father’s house. Night had fallen, when suddenly a mysterious stranger appeared, and in the darkness grappled with him. All through the night this strange conflict continued.

“And Jacob was left alone.” In this sentence we have the first key to the incident we are now considering. On these words it has been well said, “To be left alone with God is the only true way of arriving at a just knowledge of ourselves and our ways. We can never get a true estimate of nature and all its actings until we have weighed them in the balances of the sanctuary, and there we may ascertain their real worth. No matter what we may think about ourselves, nor yet what man may think about us, the great question is What does God think about us? And the answer to this question can only be learned when we are ‘left alone.’ Away from the world, away from self, away from all the thoughts, reasonings, imaginings, and emotions of mere nature, and ‘alone with God,’—thus, and thus alone, can we get a correct judgment about ourselves.” (C. H. M.)

* *Jabbok* signifies “emptying”—appropriate name, for it emphasizes the fact that Jacob was “left alone.”

“And there wrestled a man with him.” In Hos. 12:4 this “man” is termed “the angel;” that is, we take it, “the Angel of the Covenant,” or, in other words, the Lord Jesus Himself in theophanic manifestation. It was the same One who appeared unto Abraham just before the destruction of Sodom. In Genesis 18:2 we read of “three men,” but later in the chapter one of them is spoken of as “the Lord.” (18:13.) So here in Genesis 32, at the close of the conflict between this “plan” and our patriarch, Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have *seems God* face to face.” (32:30.)

“And there wrestled a Man *with him*.” Note we are not told that Jacob wrestled with the mysterious Visitor but “there wrestled a Man *with him*,” that is, with Jacob. This incident has often been referred to as an illustration and example of a saint’s power in prayer, but such a thought is wide of the mark. Jacob was not wrestling with this Man to obtain a blessing, instead, the Man was wrestling with Jacob to gain some object from him. As to what this object is the best of the commentators are agreed—it was to reduce Jacob to a sense of his nothingness to cause him to see what a poor, helpless and worthless creature he was; it was to teach us through him the all important lesson that in recognized weakness lies our strength.

“And there wrestled a Man *with him till the breaking of the day*.” From dark till dawn the mysterious conflict continued. There are those who have taken exception to the view set forth above, and who argue that if it was God who was wrestling with Jacob for the purpose of bringing him to a sense of his impotency He would have taken a shorter cut and arrived at the designed end much quicker. But such an objection loses sight of the wondrous patience which God ever exercises toward His own. He is “*long suffering* to usward.” Long does He bear with our fleshly struggling, but in the end He accomplishes His purpose and grace triumphs. The delay only serves to provide opportunity for Him to display His infinite forbearance.

“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.” This shows us how quickly and how easily God could, when it so pleased Him, bring to an end Jacob’s resistance and reduce him to helplessness; all He had to do was but to “*touch* the hollow of his thigh,” and in a moment Jacob’s power to continue wrestling was gone! And here we get the second key to the incident. Jacob was now brought to the end of his own resources. One swift stroke from the Divine hand and he was rendered utterly powerless. And *this* is the purpose God has before Him in His dealings with us. One of the principal designs of our gracious heavenly Father in the ordering of our path, in the appointing of our testings and trials, in the discipline of His love, is to bring us to the end of ourselves, to show us our own powerlessness, to teach us to have no confidence in the flesh, that His strength may be perfected in our conscious and realized weakness.

“And He said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” (32:26.) Here is the third key which unlocks to us the precious contents of our narrative. Here we see the object of the Heavenly Wrestler accomplished. No longer could Jacob wrestle; all he could do was *cling*. The mysterious Stranger brought Jacob to the point where he had to *lean his entire weight on Him!* Hitherto Jacob had sought to order his own life, planning, scheming and devising; but now he was “left alone” he is shown what a perfectly helpless creature he was in himself. “The seat of his strength being touched, he learnt to say, ‘I will not let *Thee go*’—‘*other* refuge have I none; cling my helpless soul to Thee.’ This was a new era in the history of the

supplanting, planning, Jacob. Up to this point he had held fast by his own ways and means, but now he is brought to say ‘I will not let *thee* go.’” But mark carefully, it was not until “the hollow of his thigh was touched” that Jacob said this; and, it is not until we fully realize our own helplessness and nothingness that we are brought to cling to God and really *seek* His blessing, for note, not only did Jacob say “I will not let Thee go,” but he added “except Thou *bless me*.”

“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 *host thou* power with God and with men, and *hast* prevailed.” (32:27, 28.) We cannot but feel that these verses have been generally misunderstood by most of the commentators. Why should the Divine Wrestler ask our patriarch his name, if not to emphasize and press upon the conscience of Jacob the force of it, namely, supplanter or contender. And in the new name here given him, it seems to us Jacob received *a rebuke*, though its meaning also well sums up the central teaching of this incident which describes the occasion when he received it. But what is the significance of “Israel,” his new name? The marginal reading of the R. V. gives “God striveth” which we believe conveys the real thought, though “God *commandeth*” would probably be a happier alternative. One who was a profound Hebrew scholar tells us that “names compounded with ‘El’ have that of the nominative when the other part of the name is a verb as here. Out of some forty Hebrew names compounded with ‘El’ or ‘Jah,’ God is always the Doer of what the verb means. Thus, Hiel = God liveth; Daniel = God judgeth; Gabriel = God is my strength.” Israel would, therefore, be “God commandeth.” Does not this furnish a most appropriate significance to the name of the Nation which were and will be again the center of God’s *governmental* dealings on earth—Israel, “God commandeth!”

“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.” (32:28.) “*As a prince*”—as a deposer, orderer (see the various renderings of the Hebrew word: rendered “ruler” thirty-three times); used not to dignify but to reproach. “*Hast thou power*”—hast thou contended (the Hebrew cognate is translated “rebellion,” “revolt,” etc.); Jacob had contended with Esau in the womb and thus got his name “Jacob.” And long had Jacob, “the orderer” of his life *contended* “with God and with men.” “*And hast prevailed*” or succeeded. To quote from the Companion Bible: “He had contended for the birthright and had succeeded. (25:29–34.) He had contended for the blessing and succeeded. (27.) He had contended with Laban and succeeded. (31.) He had contended with ‘men’ and succeeded. Now he contended with God (the Wrestler), and fails. Hence his new name was changed to Israel, God *commands*, to teach him the greatly needed lesson of dependence upon God.” Jacob had arranged everything for meeting and appeasing his brother Esau. Now, God is going to take him in hand and order all things for him. To learn this lesson, and take this low place before God, Jacob must be humbled. He must be lamed as to his own strength, and made to limp. Jacob’s new name was to be henceforth the constant reminder to him that he had learned, and was never to forget this lesson; that it was not he who was to order and arrange his affairs, but God; and his *new name*, Israel, henceforth to be, him, that “God commandeth.” As Jacob *he* had “prevailed,” but now as Israel *God* would command and prevail.

In the above incident then—together with its setting and sequel—we have a most striking and typical picture of the “flesh” in a believer, its vitality and incurability, God’s

marvelous forbearance toward it and dealings with it and victory over it. First, in choosing and arranging the present for Esau we see the *character* and *activities* of the “flesh”—devising and scheming. Second, in Jacob’s experience we are shown the *worthlessness* and *helplessness* of the “flesh.” Third, we learn that *our nothingness* can be discovered only as we get “alone” with God. Fourth, in the Man coming to wrestle with Jacob we see *God subduing* the “flesh” in the believer, and in the prolongation of the wrestle all through the night we have more than a hint of the patience He exercises and the *slowness* of His process—for only *gradually* is the “flesh” subdued. Fifth, in the touching of the hollow of Jacob’s thigh we are enabled to discern the *method* God pursues, namely, the bringing us to a vivid *realization* of our utter helplessness. Sixth, in the clinging of Jacob to the Godman we discover that it is not until He has written the sentence of death on our members that we shall *cast ourselves* unreservedly on the Lord. Seventh, in the fact that Jacob’s name was now changed to Israel we learn that it is only after we have discovered our nothingness and helplessness that we are *willing and ready for* God to command and order our lives for us. Eighth, In the words, “and He blessed him *there*,” we learn that when God “commands” *blessing* follows. Ninth, behold the lovely sequel—“And as he passed over Penuel *the sun rose upon him*.” (32:31.) Does not this define or rather describe (symbolically) the spiritual nature of the “blessing!” Tenth, note how accurate is the picture—“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*.” (Ge 32:31, 32.) The sinew only “shrank,” it was not removed. Nor is the “flesh” eradicated from the believer!

Many are the important lessons taught in the Scripture we have been examining, but for lack of space we can but barely name some of them: (1) It is *natural* to the “flesh” to plan and scheme and to desire the ordering of our lives. (2) The mind of the flesh deems itself fully competent to *order our* life. (3) But God in His faithfulness and love determines to correct this habit in His child. (4) Irony does He bear with our selfconfidence and self-sufficiency, but He must and will bring us to the end of ourselves. (5) To accomplish this He lays *His hand on us*, and makes us conscious of our utter helplessness. (6) This He does by “withering” us in the seat of our creature strength, and by writing the sentence of death on our flesh. (7) As the result we learn to *cling* to Him in our weakness, and seek His “blessing.” (8) What a lesson is this! The “flesh” cannot be subdued, but must be “withered” in the very sinew of its power—“because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, *neither indeed can be*.” (9) That which hinders us in our growth in grace is not so much our spiritual weakness as it is confidence in our natural strength! (10) Not until these truths are apprehended shall we cease to be “contenders,” and shall we gladly take our place as *clay* in the hands of the Potter, happy for Him to “command” and order our lives for us. (11) Then will it be with us, as with Jacob—“And He *blessed* him *there*.” (12) And so will the sequel, too, prove true of us—“The sun rose upon him,” for “the path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (286). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Book of Jasher: Chapters 31 and 32:

(Laban sends his son)

54 And he hastened and sent off his son Beor, who was seventeen years old, with Abichorof the son of Uz, the son of Nahor, and with them were ten men.

55 And they hastened and went and passed on the road before Jacob, and they came by another road to the land of Seir.

56 And they came unto Esau and said unto him, Thus saith thy brother and relative, thy mother's brother Laban, the son of Bethuel, saying,

57 Hast thou heard what Jacob thy brother has done unto me, who first came to me naked and bare, and I went to meet him, and brought him to my house with honor, and I made him great, and I gave him my two daughters for wives and also two of my maids.

58 And God blessed him on my account, and he increased abundantly, and had sons, daughters and maid servants.

59 He has also an immense stock of flocks and herds, camels and asses, also silver and gold in abundance; and when he saw that his wealth increased, he left me whilst I went to shear my sheep, and he rose up and fled in secrecy.

60 And he lifted his wives and children upon camels, and he led away all his cattle and property which he acquired in my land, and he lifted up his countenance to go to his father Isaac, to the land of Canaan.

61 And he did not suffer me to kiss my daughters and their children, and he led my daughters as captives taken by the sword, and he also stole my gods and he fled.

62 And now I have left him in the mountain of the brook of Jabuk, him and all belonging to him; he lacketh nothing.

63 If it be thy wish to go to him, go then and there wilt thou find him, and thou canst do unto him as thy soul desireth; and Laban's messengers came and told Esau all these things.

64 And Esau heard all the words of Laban's messengers, and his anger was greatly kindled against Jacob, and he remembered his hatred, and his anger burned within him.

65 And Esau hastened and took his children and servants and the souls of his household, being sixty men, and he went and assembled all the children of Seir the Horite and their people, being three hundred and forty men, and took all this number of four hundred men with drawn swords, and he went unto Jacob to smite him.

66 And Esau divided this number into several parts, and he took the sixty men of his children and servants and the souls of his household as one head, and gave them in care of Eliphaz his eldest son.

67 And the remaining heads he gave to the care of the six sons of Seir the Horite, and he placed every man over his generations and children.

68 And the whole of this camp went as it was, and Esau went amongst them toward Jacob, and he conducted them with speed.

69 And Laban's messengers departed from Esau and went to the land of Canaan, and they came to the house of Rebecca the mother of Jacob and Esau.

70 And they told her saying, Behold thy son Esau has gone against his brother Jacob with four hundred men, for he heard that he was coming, and he is gone to make war with him, and to smite him and to take all that he has.

71 And Rebecca hastened and sent seventy two men from the servants of Isaac to meet Jacob on the road; for she said, Peradventure, Esau may make war in the road when he meets him.

72 And these messengers went on the road to meet Jacob, and they met him in the road of the brook on the opposite side of the brook Jabuk, and Jacob said when he saw them, This camp is destined to me from God, and Jacob called the name of that place Machnayim.

73 And Jacob knew all his father's people, and he kissed them and embraced them and came with them, and Jacob asked them concerning his father and mother, and they said, They were well.

74 And these messengers said unto Jacob, Rebecca thy mother has sent us to thee, saying, I have heard, my son, that thy brother Esau has gone forth against thee on the road with men from the children of Seir the Horite.

75 And therefore, my son, hearken to my voice and see with thy counsel what thou wilt do, and when he cometh up to thee, supplicate him, and do not speak rashly to him, and give him a present from what thou possessest, and from what God has favored thee with.

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76 And when he asketh thee concerning thy affairs, conceal nothing from him, perhaps he may turn from his anger against thee and thou wilt thereby save thy soul, thou and all belonging to thee, for it is thy duty to honor him, for he is thy elder brother.

77 And when Jacob heard the words of his mother which the messengers had spoken to him, Jacob lifted up his voice and wept bitterly, and did as his mother then commanded him.

CHAPTER 32

1 And at that time Jacob sent messengers to his brother Esau toward the land of Seir, and he spoke to him words of supplication.

2 And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye say to my lord, to Esau, Thus saith thy servant Jacob, Let not my lord imagine that my father's blessing with which he did bless me has proved beneficial to me.

3 For I have been these twenty years with Laban, and he deceived me and changed my wages ten times, as it has all been already told unto my lord.

4 And I served him in his house very laboriously, and God afterward saw my affliction, my labor and the work of my hands, and he caused me to find grace and favor in his sight.

5 And I afterward through God's great mercy and kindness acquired oxen and asses and cattle, and men servants and maid servants.

6 And now I am coming to my land and my home to my father and mother, who are in the land of Canaan; and I have sent to let my lord know all this in order to find favor in the sight of my lord, so that he may not imagine that I have of myself obtained wealth, or that the blessing with which my father blessed me has benefited me.

7 And those messengers went to Esau, and found him on the borders of the land of Edom going toward Jacob, and four hundred men of the children of Seir the Horite were standing with drawn swords.

8 And the messengers of Jacob told Esau all the words that Jacob had spoken to them concerning Esau.

9 And Esau answered them with pride and contempt, and said unto them, Surely I have heard and truly it has been told unto me what Jacob has done to Laban, who exalted him in his house and gave him his daughters for wives, and he begat sons and daughters, and abundantly increased in wealth and riches in Laban's house through his means.

10 And when he saw that his wealth was abundant and his riches great he fled with all belonging to him, from Laban's house, and he led Laban's daughters away from the face of their father, as captives taken by the sword without telling him of it.

11 And not only to Laban has Jacob done thus but also unto me has he done so and has twice supplanted me, and shall I be silent?

12 Now therefore I have this day come with my camps to meet him, and I will do unto him according to the desire of my heart.

13 And the messengers returned and came to Jacob and said unto him, We came to thy brother, to Esau, and we told him all thy words, and thus has he answered us, and behold he cometh to meet thee with four hundred men.

14 Now then know and see what thou shalt do, and pray before God to deliver thee from him.

15 And when he heard the words of his brother which he had spoken to the messengers of Jacob, Jacob was greatly afraid and he was distressed.

16 And Jacob prayed to the Lord his God, and he said, O Lord God of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, thou didst say unto me when I went away from my father's house, saying,

17 I am the Lord God of thy father Abraham and the God of Isaac, unto thee do I give this land and thy seed after thee, and I will make thy seed as the stars of heaven, and thou shalt spread forth to the four sides of heaven, and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

18 And thou didst establish thy words, and didst give unto me riches and children and cattle, as the utmost wishes of my heart didst thou give unto thy servant; thou didst give unto me all that I asked from thee, so that I lacked nothing.

19 And thou didst afterward say unto me, Return to thy parents and to thy birth place and I will still do well with thee.

20 And now that I have come, and thou didst deliver me from Laban, I shall fall in the hands of Esau who will slay me, yea, together with the mothers of my children.

21 Now therefore, O Lord God, deliver me, I pray thee, also from the hands of my brother Esau, for I am greatly afraid of him.

22 And if there is no righteousness in me, do it for the sake of Abraham and my father Isaac.

23 For I know that through kindness and mercy have I acquired this wealth; now therefore I beseech thee to deliver me this day with thy kindness and to answer me.

24 And Jacob ceased praying to the Lord, and he divided the people that were with him with the flocks and cattle into two camps, and he gave the half to the care of Damesek, the son of Eliezer, Abraham's servant, for a camp, with his children, and the other half he gave to the care of his brother Elianus the son of Eliezer, to be for a camp with his children.

25 And he commanded them, saying, Keep yourselves at a distance with your camps, and do not come too near each other, and if Esau come to one camp and slay it, the other camp at a distance from it will escape him.

26 And Jacob tarried there that night, and during the whole night he gave his servants instructions concerning the forces and his children.

27 And the Lord heard the prayer of Jacob on that day, and the Lord then delivered Jacob from the hands of his brother Esau.

28 And the Lord sent three angels of the angels of heaven, and they went before Esau and came to him.

29 And these angels appeared unto Esau and his people as two thousand men, riding upon horses furnished with all sorts of war instruments, and they appeared in the sight of Esau and all his men to be divided into four camps, with four chiefs to them.

30 And one camp went on and they found Esau coming with four hundred men toward his brother Jacob, and this camp ran toward Esau and his people and terrified them, and Esau fell off the horse in alarm, and all his men separated from him in that place, for they were greatly afraid.

31 And the whole of the camp shouted after them when they fled from Esau, and all the warlike men answered, saying,

32 Surely we are the servants of Jacob, who is the servant of God, and who then can stand against us? And Esau said unto them, O then, my lord and brother Jacob is your lord, whom I have not seen for these twenty years, and now that I have this day come to see him, do you treat me in this manner?

33 And the angels answered him saying, As the Lord liveth, were not Jacob of whom thou speaketh thy brother, we had not let one remaining from thee and thy people, but only on account of Jacob we will do nothing to them.

34 And this camp passed from Esau and his men and it went away, and Esau and his men had gone from them about a league when the second camp came toward him with all sorts of weapons, and they also did unto Esau and his men as the first camp had done to them.

35 And when they had left it to go on, behold the third camp came toward him and they were all terrified, and Esau fell off the horse, and the whole camp cried out, and said, Surely we are the servants of Jacob, who is the servant of God, and who can stand against us?

36 And Esau again answered them saying, O then, Jacob my lord and your lord is my brother, and for twenty years I have not seen his countenance and hearing this day that he was coming, I went this day to meet him, and do you treat me in this manner?

37 And they answered him, and said unto him, As the Lord liveth, were not Jacob thy brother as thou didst say, we had not left a remnant from thee and thy men, but on account of Jacob of whom thou speakest being thy brother, we will not meddle with thee or thy men.

38 And the third camp also passed from them, and he still continued his road with his men toward Jacob, when the fourth camp came toward him, and they also did unto him and his men as the others had done.

39 And when Esau beheld the evil which the four angels had done to him and to his men, he became greatly afraid of his brother Jacob, and he went to meet him in peace.

40 And Esau concealed his hatred against Jacob, because he was afraid of his life on account of his brother Jacob, and because he imagined that the four camps that he had lighted upon were Jacob's servants.

41 And Jacob tarried that night with his servants in their camps, and he resolved with his servants to give unto Esau a present from all that he had with him, and from all his property; and Jacob rose up in the morning, he and his men, and they chose from amongst the cattle a present for Esau.

42 And this is the amount of the present which Jacob chose from his flock to give unto his brother Esau: and he selected two hundred and forty head from the flocks, and he selected from the camels and asses thirty each, and of the herds he chose fifty kine.

43 And he put them all in ten droves, and he placed each sort by itself, and he delivered them into the hands of ten of his servants, each drove by itself.

44 And he commanded them, and said unto them, Keep yourselves at a distance from each other, and put a space between the droves, and when Esau and those who are with him shall meet you and ask you, saying, Whose are you, and whither do you go, and to whom belongeth all this before you, you shall say unto them, We are the servants of Jacob, and we come to meet Esau in peace, and behold Jacob cometh behind us.

45 And that which is before us is a present sent from Jacob to his brother Esau.

46 And if they shall say unto you, Why doth he delay behind you, from coming to meet his brother and to see his face, then you shall say unto them, Surely he cometh joyfully behind us to meet his brother, for he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth to him, and after this I will see his face, peradventure he will accept of me.

47 So the whole present passed on in the hands of his servants, and went before him on that day, and he lodged that night with his camps by the border of the brook of Jabuk, and he rose up in the midst of the night, and he took his wives and his maid servants, and all belonging to him, and he that night passed them over the ford Jabuk.

48 And when he passed all belonging to him over the brook, Jacob was left by himself, and a man met him, and he wrestled with him that night until the breaking of the day, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint through wrestling with him.

49 And at the break of day the man left Jacob there, and he blessed him and went away, and Jacob passed the brook at the break of day, and he halted upon his thigh.

50 And the sun rose upon him when he had passed the brook, and he came up to the place of his cattle and children.

51 And they went on till midday, and whilst they were going the present was passing on before them.

52 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold Esau was at a distance, coming along with many men, about four hundred, and Jacob was greatly afraid of his brother.

53 And Jacob hastened and divided his children unto his wives and his handmaids, and his daughter Dinah he put in a chest, and delivered her into the hands of his servants.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT