



## Genesis – 32:1-32 A Divine Wrestling Match (Lesson #41)

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### Outline for this week:

- Prior to entering the Promised Land Jacob encounters a camp of angels (32:1)
- Jacob sends messengers to Esau (32:2-5)
- The messengers return with an alarming report (32:6)
- Jacob takes steps to prepare to meet Esau (32:7-12)
- Jacob prepares a massive gift for Esau (32:13-21)
- Jacob sends his family ahead (32:22-23)
- Jacob wrestles with a “man” all night long (32:24-32)
- Although specifically unstated Jacob catches up with his family in preparation to meet Esau

### Jacob’s Timeline

Event	Jacob’s Age	Genesis
Jacob’s grandfather Abraham dies	15	25:7
Jacob sent to Laban in Haran	77	28:5
Jacob marries Leah and Rachel	84	29:21-30
Jacob fathers Joseph with Rachel	91	30:22-24
Jacob flees from Laban to Canaan	97	Ch. 31
Jacob’s son Joseph is sold into slavery	108 / Jos -17	37:12-36
Jacob’s father Isaac dies	120 / Is - 180	35:28-29
Jacob reunites with Joseph and moves his family to Egypt	130 / Jos -39	47:28
Jacob dies	147	47:28

### OK, the stage is set. A couple of things by way of housekeeping:

- 1) **Jacob left Canaan 20 years ago.**
- 2) We remember the circumstances that led to Jacob have to flee Canaan (Gen 27:42-45). The call from Rebekah to come back home **would never arrive**. Jacob would never see **Rebekah alive again**.
- 3) It would be **God who would call Jacob to go back home**:  
*“Then the LORD said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.”” (Ge 31:3 ESV)*
- 4) As the story **unfolds** today, it seems that there has been at least **some information exchange** over the **last 20 years**, for as you will see it is evident that **Jacob knows the general location** where Esau is living.
- 5) I **suspect Jacob knows** that his **mom has passed away**, last week we read what Moses wrote in Gen 31:17-81) that implies only Isaac is alive.
- 6) Lastly, Jacob has gotten **one problem fixed**, but he has a **larger one still looming**, namely the issue **involving his brother** and his brother’s threats to kill him.

**APPLICATION:** Jacob is coming out of one valley only to walk into another, but as we will see and as we have learned, God is with him. The same is true for all believers.

**32:1-2 - Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 And when Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!” So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.**

**Vs 1-2** - We left Jacob on the east side of the Jordan, in the area of Gilead. It was there, 10 days after Jacob had fled from Laban, that Laban caught up with him, it was there, after a bit of a dust-up that Laban and Jacob entered into a covenant.

Here we read Jacob went on his way, went on his way from meeting with Laban, went on his way from the interaction and covenant he made with Laban. Jacob went on his way and: *the angels of God met him*.

This **takes us by surprise!** Moses is very **nonchalant**. Jacob went on his way and the **“angels of God”** met him.

As best we can tell only Jacob **saw these angels**. If that is true, then this was likely a gift from God meant to **encourage and strengthen** our brother against what lay ahead.

We live in a day and age when there is a great deal of confusion about angels, and it goes from almost worshipping the angels, to rejecting their involvement in our world, to an errant belief that people can become angels.

Since we are here, for a moment focused on angels, I do want to say a few things (a few relevant to the text before us and a few much broader about angels in general):

**First**, we learned from Jacob’s encounter at Luz, which he would rename Bethel, that angels are **active in our world**. In Bethel, Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending on this massive staircase, seemingly doing the **bidding of God**. This idea fits in line with what we read in Hebrews chapter 1:

*“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?” (Heb 1:14 ASV)*

**Second**, the phrase **“angels of God”** is only mentioned twice in the entire book of Genesis:

*“And he dreamed; and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” (Ge 28:12 ASV)*

*“And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.” (Ge 32:1 ASV)*

Of course, **angels** are mentioned in other verses and the **“angel of Yahweh”** is mentioned multiple times, but the **“angels of God”** are only mentioned **twice**. This brings me to the third point.

**Third**, as you think about this, it means that recorded in the Scriptures, Jacob had an interaction with angels as he **left the promised land** and an interaction with angels as he **reentered the Promised Land**.

**Forth**, angels are **not normally visible**, but at times God has made them visible to humans (II Kin 6:15-17).

**Fifth**, you saw this from the last text, but it is also clearly stated elsewhere that angels are **extremely powerful beings**. Much more powerful than humans (II Thes 1:7; Ps 103:20)

**Sixth**, and finally as least for now, some other **miscellaneous things** we know about angels:

- 1) They are **created beings** and they are **not**:
  - a. Omniscient
  - b. Omnipotent
  - c. Omnipresent
  - d. To be worshipped
- 2) They do not **grow old and die**.
- 3) They do not **procreate**.
- 4) There appears to be a **fixed number**, and we have no indication new ones are being added into the angelic ranks (refer to above item).
- 5) They are a different kind of being than humans.
- 6) Using the number as presented in the book of The Revelation, 1/3 of the angels fell with Satan when he rebelled against Yahweh.

Back to the story, Jacob moved out from this interaction with Laban and he was met by multiple angels of God.

**Vs 2 -** As I stated, it is **not normal for men to be able to see angels**. Maybe God felt like **Jacob needed to see these angels!**

**APPLICATION:** Have you ever turned on the radio, and you ended up hearing a **sermon about exactly what you needed** to hear at that time in your life? Have you ever arrived at church and the **Sunday School lesson** or the **Pastor's sermon** was **exactly what you needed to hear that day?**

**Jacob is seeing exactly what he needed to see.** The angles are ministering spirits, they are likely always around. But Jacob needed to see them and I believe God often does the same thing in our lives in a myriad of ways!

When Jacob saw them, he immediately responded: This is God's camp, the Hebrew word translate camp is **מַחֲנֶה** (**machaneh**). This is **God's place of encampment**.

As he was leaving Canaan, he stayed a night in **God's house**. Here as he is getting ready to reenter Canaan he encounters the place of **God's encampment**.

So Jacob named the place **מַחֲנֵי יַעֲקֹב** (**Machanayim**), this is a dual form of the prior word, it means **literally two camps**. We can assume he is thinking of **His camp** and **God's camp**.

**But what a vision!** What is interesting is that were not told that Jacob did anything more than name this place.

*3 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, 4 instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. 5 I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"*

**Vs 3 -** Jacob is at the border of the Promised Land, but he does not cross the Jordan, instead he sends messengers to his brother Esau in the land of Seir in the country of Edom.

Now the last time Jacob was with Esau they lived in Beersheba, so it appears that Esau has moved, and Jacob is at least somewhat familiar with where Esau is now living.

*Vs 4-5 - instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. 5 I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"*

Let's deal with the first and **obvious points:** Jacob refers to **Esau as Lord**, while he refers to himself **as a servant**.

I do not want to read too much into what could have been standard customs of the day. But I do want to remind us of two things here:

First, God had already been clear as to who is the servant:

*"And the LORD said to her (Rebekah), "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger." (Ge 25:23 ESV)*

What Jacob is saying is the opposite of the **patriarchal blessing:**

*"Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!" (Ge 27:29 ESV)*

*"Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?"" (Ge 27:37 ESV)*

Notice what the servants were to say on behalf of Jacob: It seems the critical message that Jacob is trying to convey is that I have not returned to claim anything that might rightly be mine to claim. This is an important message. For the birthright blessing belongs to Jacob.

Equally, Jacob says, I have sent, that I mind find favor in your (Esau's) sight. So, Jacob is not coming back looking for a fight.

So nice and kind, Jacob takes the position of a servant. Almost like he is bowing, in the welcome to his older brother. It is likely as you watch this unfold that Jacob is **kissing up** to Esau, Jacob is trying to **smoother Esau in kindness**. Jacob is hoping if he is nice to Esau, Esau will respond in kind.

**6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, 8 thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape."**

**Vs 6** - Last week I made the joke that I bet you could hear **Rachel swallow** when Jacob said to Laban, with whomever you find your gods that person shall not live.

Now, when the **messengers return to Jacob**, you can imagine that Jacob is **listening intently**, he is seeking to understand if his brother is still angry at him. He is dialed in to what the messengers have to say, here is what he hears: **"We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him."**

First, it seems that Esau had learned that Jacob was coming home. And he is coming out to meet him. He is **coming with 400 men!** Esau had under his command, in some form or fashion 400 men!

What if you were Jacob what would you be thinking? If you were Jacob what is going through your mind?

What about what God had very recently told Jacob?

*"Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you." (Ge 31:3 ESV)*

**Vs 7-8** - Then Jacob was **greatly afraid...**

- 1) **I love how brutally honest the Bible is!** Jacob, this man of God, when he heard that Esau was coming with 400 men, was **not simply afraid** he was (**exceedingly**) (**afraid**) and **distressed!**
- 2) Do you sense this message keeps coming back around? **Do not fear** men, do not fear people, do not fear circumstances, we should not fear what men can do to us.
- 3) **Now I know we do not fear.** But I **suspect** that is because we have created much less **convicting words** to describe our **emotions**.
  - a. We are not afraid, we are just sometimes a little anxious.
  - b. We are not afraid, we are just sometimes a little worried.
- 4) **But God is telling us, not be afraid, to not be anxious, not to be worried** (II Tim 1:7; Phil 4:6-7, Mat 6:31-33):

**Here Jacob is extremely afraid, and he is distressed!** So like most men in this room, **Jacob takes action.** In the back half of verse 7, we see **he divides everything he has into two camps.**

**Vs 8** – We are even told what he was thinking.

*9 And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.*

**Vs 9** - Having first responded by doing what seemed the most logical, by taking immediate reasonable action. Now our brother does the **best thing**. Our brother **cries out to God!** Let's walk through his prayer:

**ADDRESSES GOD:** He acknowledges God as both the אֱלֹהִים ('**elohiym**) the powerful creator God of his father and grandfather as well as Yahweh יְהוָה (**Y<sup>c</sup>hovah**), the covenant keeping God!

**REMINDS GOD OF HIS PROMISES:** You are the ONE who said to me: *'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,'*

Now the truth is **God does not need reminding** what He has said, but often **we do** need reminding.

**APPLICATION:** When you are I am **afraid, anxious or worried**, the place to go to draw strength is what **God has said** about a matter.

**PAST BLESSINGS: Vs 10** – Having reminded God, what God had said, our brother says: I am **unworthy**, God, you do not **owe me anything**. I am not worthy of what you **have already done for me**. I am not worthy of your **lovingkindness** that you have already shown me (**your servant!**)!

**This is how our mindset should be with God.** When we understand, what we should be getting, and what we are now getting through Christ, we should be **humble people** who recognize even if I check out today, I have received much more than I deserve.

**11 Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. 12 But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'**"

**PETITION: Vs 11** - The petition, the ask... Please **deliver me** and my family, please **rescue us** from my brother.

Jacob acknowledges, before the One who knows anyway what he is fearing. He openly tells God I am afraid he is going to come and kill everyone!

**BACK TO GOD'S PROMISES: Vs 12** – **Yahweh**, you told me, I will do you good, and I will make your offspring as the sand of the sea which cannot be numbered.

God had indeed told Jacob this, praying this back to God, **honored God** and I suspect **strengthened Jacob**.

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*13 So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 16 These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove."*

**Vs 13-15** - After rising from prayer, Jacob decides to send a gift to Esau, and not just any gift, but a substantial gift. Here is what he sends in **five separate "droves"**:

<b>Animals</b>	<b>Number</b>
200 female goats + 20 male goats	220
200 lambs + 20 rams	220
30 milking camels + 30 calves	60
40 cows + 10 bulls	50
20 female donkeys + 10 male donkeys	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>580</b>

**Three things:**

- 1) This is a substantial gift! Five droves of different animals totaling 580.
- 2) Second, imagine how large Jacob's flock is, imagine how much God has blessed him.
- 3) Keep in mind, this is only a picture of the spiritual blessings you have in Christ!

**Vs 16** – So, he gave these in groups to his servants, five groups of five droves total. He directed them to pass over in front of him. To head off to meet Esau first. They were to maintain spacing between themselves so that each one would meet up with Esau as a separate group, that would be separated by some amount of time.

*17 He instructed the first, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?' 18 then you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.'"*

**Vs 17-18** - He instructs the first servant, who is leading the drove of 220 goats, what he is to say when he encounters Esau.

*19 He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, "You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, 20 and you shall say, 'Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he thought, "I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me." 21 So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.*

**Vs 19** - He gave the same instructions to those leading droves 2 and 3.

Imagine what this would have looked like, these five droves of animals separated by some amount of space meeting up with Esau, as Esau is approaching Jacob.

**Vs 20** - Each servant was also to say Jacob is behind me. Then we are told what Jacob was thinking: I will appease him with gifts that way when he sees my face, he will accept me.

The Hebrew word for **appease** is the word for **atonement** (to cover, to purge, to make reconciliation). It seems Jacob was seeking Esau's forgiveness.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum in his commentary: *"All this shows that Jacob was willing to relinquish the patriarchal blessing, as seen in the title Jacob applied to Esau, Lord; and Jacob referred to himself as Esau's servant."*

**Vs 21** - So that evening he sent the droves, the gifts on their way, they would go ahead of him and be sure to reach Esau before the main bodies (which included 2 wives, 2 handmaids, and 11 male children).

Then it seems they bedded down for the night.

*22 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.*

**Vs 22** - Likely, unable to sleep, in that same night, Jacob encamped by the river Jabbok, a stream which flows west into the Jordan, entering it about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

Esau was likely approaching from the south and during the night Jacob decided to move his entire company across the river to the other side. He arose and (notice carefully what Moses says) and Jacob “took them” Jacob further “sent them” across the stream.

Jacob sent his family, and all the remaining animals, and everything else that he had in his possession and sent all of it over the stream Jabbok. It seems getting his family and all his holdings across the river crossing before reaching Esau became important to Jacob. But it also appears that for reasons we are not told, Jacob himself did not cross, but he sent them.

**OHHH, one more thing.** The Hebrew word Jabbok means wrestling. Tuck that away.

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*24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."*

**24a** – Here, by his own choice, Jacob is left alone. One might guess that he desires to be alone to pray. I suspect that Jacob knows how far away Esau is. He knows his family is safe for tonight.

It seems, and we cannot know his thoughts for sure, but it seems he is very afraid of what is going to happen with Esau, he chooses to stay on the other side of the river, ALONE.

**24b** - The abruptness of verse 24b is **brehtaking**. We expected to read **that he prayed (I suspect he did)**, that he **cried out to God (I suspect he did)**, that he was **afraid (I suspect he was)**, that he **worried what to do next (I suspect he did)**, or that **sleep evaded him (I suspect it did)**.

But somewhere in his prayer, it shifted to a real encounter, a wrestling match with this “man” that lasted all night long!

**Who** is this “man”, **what** does this have to do with our story, **why** is he wrestling with Jacob, and **where** did he come from? **So many questions.**

Please hold these questions and let the story unfold, and once we get through verse 32, then we will circle back and answer the questions (who, what, why, and where).

**Vs 25** - So this “man” is wrestling with Jacob, throughout the night, but this man is not able to prevail against Jacob. Then this “man” touched Jacob’s hip socket and put Jacob’s hip out of joint.

Now if he could touch his hip and put it out of joint, all of a sudden it begins to appear that this “man” has enough power to easily overcome Jacob, but is choosing not to.

**Vs 26** - Then this “man”, says to Jacob: *"Let me go, for the day has broken."* But Jacob replies to this “man”: *"I will not let you go unless you bless me."*

Who does Jacob think this man is? What type of blessing could this “man” give Jacob? They have wrestled all night, the man has told Jacob to let him go, Jacob responded, I will not let you go unless you bless me!

**Vs 27** - Then this “man” asked Jacob what his name is. Now before we go any further, we suspect this is a rhetorical question. We would believe that this “man” who came to Jacob would know who he is.

Jacob replies and provides his name, meaning **heal grabber** with a secondary meaning of **supplanter**.

**Vs 28** - Then this man, says to Jacob, you shall no longer be called Jacob, but your new name from here out shall be called Israel. **יִשְׂרָאֵל (Yisra'el)**. This is where we get the name and Israel.

As you might imagine, this is the first use of **יִשְׂרָאֵל (Yisra'el)** (Israel) in the Bible. This word is two Hebrew words brought together:

**שָׂרָה (sarah)** – which means to contend, to persevere, or to have power.

**אֵל ('el) (ale)** – The abbreviated name of God.

Israel means literally **“One who struggles with God”** or **“One Who Strives with God.”**

Notice, this “man’s” explanation of why He has remained Jacob to Israel is because: *you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.*

*29 Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. 30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh."*

**Vs 29** - The “man” has renamed from Jacob to Israel. Then Israel asked this “man” for his name.

This story is very similar to when Manoah had an encounter with the Angel of Yahweh, in Judges 13:17-18.

Then the “man” **blesses Israel** (formally known as Jacob)! **WOW!** OK, but we are not done yet!

**Vs 30** - Now Israel (formally known as Jacob), see, even Moses is having trouble keeping up. Then Israel calls the place (Peniel).

Peniel is again two Hebrew words brought together:

**פָּנָה (panah)** - Which means **to look on** or **regard**

**אֵל ('el)** - the abbreviated form of **God**

Peniel means – **Looking at God** or **facing God**

OK, who do you think the “man” was that wrestled with Jacob, blessed him, and renamed him Israel?

**Vs 31** - The sun rises as Israel leaves Penuel, although he is limping from the encounter, we can imagine that he has a newfound bounce in his step.

I suspect Jacob knows, regardless of what happens next, that everything is going to be OK!

**APPLICATION:** The same is true for us. If you have placed faith in Jesus. If you have turned to the Savior for free forgiveness there is one looming in your future, his name is death, but you can face even that foe, knowing that everything is going to be OK!

**Vs 32** - Then Moses provides us with some additional commentary, that even when he wrote this the people of Israel, do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket.

**PONDERING:** Jacob persevered in that contest clinging to God all the while crying out for God to bless him. I suspect there are some good lessons for you and I in that.

After this encounter Jacob is ready to meet Esau.