

St. Margaret's Zoom Bible Study
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Wednesday, November 20, 2024

6:30 PM

Genesis

Background

Genesis Chapter 31 recounts Jacob's journey from his father-in-law Laban's home to his native land. It involves divine intervention, familial disputes, changing fortunes, and a resolution established under God's watchful eye. Jacob fled Laban's house secretly, fearing Laban would take his wives. Laban pursued Jacob, but God warned him not to harm Jacob. Jacob's actions delayed his return home, and Laban's sons became jealous of him. The chapter concludes with an amicable agreement between Jacob and Laban.

Genesis Chapter 32 is a chapter that narrates Jacob's encounter with the angels of God, his fear of his brother Esau, his prayer for deliverance, his presence for Esau, and his wrestling with the Angel at Peniel. The chapter highlights Jacob's struggle with his past and transformation into a new name and identity. The chapter also shows God's protection and blessing for Jacob.

Topics for Discussion

Chapter 31:1-21 **Jacob Flees with Family and Flocks**

Chapter 31:22-42 **Laban overtakes Jacob**

Chapter 31:43-55 **Laban and Jacob Makes a Covenant**

Chapter 32:1-21 **Jacob Sends Presents to Appease Esau**

Chapter 32:22-32 **Jacob Wrestles at Peniel**

Jacob Flees with Family and Flocks

Contention with Laban's sons cause Laban to look differently at Jacob. Now *Jacob* heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed, it was not as *favorable* toward him as before. It wasn't that Jacob had taken anything that belonged to Laban. Instead, his wealth increased in proportion to Laban's wealth. The problem wasn't that Jacob stole; Laban's sons were filled with *envy*. Envy will distort the truth. Jacob had not taken anything of Laban's, but envy will lie. Therefore, Laban's sons said, Jacob has taken away all that was our father's. The envy of Laban's sons poisoned Laban's heart against Jacob. Before, Laban was entirely pleased with the agreement.

Envy is destructive not only in its own but also for the company it keeps, *for you are still carnal. Where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?* (1 Corinthians 3:3). *For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and evil are present* (James 3:16). Instead, *Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy* (1 Corinthians 13:4). God wants to deliver us from envy: *For we were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another* (Titus 3:3). Envy is no small sin. It put Jesus on the cross, *For he knew they had handed Him over because of envy* (Matthew 27:18).

Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you." Even if Jacob never knew it, God prepared him for this time. First, God gave him the *desire* to go back home (Genesis 30:25). Then, his *present circumstances became unbearable*. Finally, the LORD gave *Jacob personal directions. Today, God may lead people to follow* the same pattern. This was the most critical aspect. If God were with Jacob, he could be at peace and confident in any difficulty – or at least have the opportunity for peace and confidence. The promise of God's presence meant everything. Jacob explains the situation and his plan to his wives. So, Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, and said to them, "I see your father's countenance, that it is not *favorable* toward me as before, but the God of my father has been with me. And you know that with all my might I have served your father.

Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. If he said thus: ‘The speckled shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: ‘The streaked shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore streaked. So, God has taken away your father's livestock and given *them* to me. Even though Laban tried to cheat Jacob, God always protected him. God showed Jacob that He was more significant and able to overcome what any man might do to Jacob. God’s presence was with Jacob, just as God had promised (Genesis 28:15). *The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?* (Psalm 118:6). Jacob not only believed that he had correctly acted toward Laban, but he also believed that his wives knew of his righteous conduct and Laban’s unfair treatment of him.

And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks *were* streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted. Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘Jacob.’ And I said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks *are* streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I *am* the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar *and* where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.’” Here, we learn that the blessing of blessed production of sheep and goats described in Genesis 30:37-43 was in some way revealed to Jacob in a dream. Jacob not only used clever agricultural methods but also had the blessing of God.

God told Jacob to go back to Bethel, back to the place where he first encountered the LORD in a personal way. This was Jacob’s way of returning to his first love and first works (as would be later described in Revelation 2:4-5). It is good to remember times and places where the LORD did great works for us and has met us in beautiful ways. As we remember them, God reminds us that He is still the same God who met our needs then and wants to meet our needs now. You remember, some of you, perhaps, the first time when pardoning love was revealed to you — when you were brought to see the love of God in the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Well, tonight, the Lord says to you, ‘I am the same God as you have ever found me. I have not changed. I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed, even as your father Jacob was not consumed; for I was even to him the selfsame God.

In this previous dream, God told Jacob to return to the land that was your family's, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by covenant. Leah and Rachel support Jacob's desire to return to Canaan. Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us and completely consumed our money. For all these riches which God has taken from our father are ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it." Rachel and Leah noted that their father, Laban, had already used any potential inheritance they may have received (also completely consumed our money). This meant they were happy to leave their homeland with Jacob and return to Bethel and the land promised to Jacob. Their support of Jacob in a costly and perhaps dangerous move was significant. It was a huge undertaking to move such a large family so far. If not for the support of his wives, Jacob perhaps would not have done what the LORD had told him to do.

This may be the first time in quite a while that the sisters Leah and Rachel agree on anything. They could agree to unite against a common enemy—their father, Laban. Jacob leaves without saying goodbye. Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. He carried away all his livestock and all his possessions, which he had gained, and his acquired livestock, which he had gained in Padan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's. And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, because he did not tell him that he intended to flee. So, he fled with all that he had. He arose, crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead.

Jacob intended a quick departure, traveling as fast as possible. Jacob was wealthy enough so that his entire family could travel on camels.

b. Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian: God already told Jacob to go and had promised him safe passage. Jacob's fear and deceptive departure showed that he lacked confidence in God and His promise and relied more on his wisdom and ability. He could have announced his departure and gone in the glory of an army with banners. But fear made it impossible to reap the full measure of blessing. He sneaked away into the will of God instead of departing in triumph. Rachel stole her father's household idols (*teraphim*). There are many potential reasons why Rachel did this.

- Perhaps she worshipped these idols and did not want to be without them.
 - Perhaps she did not want her father to inquire of them, to use them as tools of divination to catch them (as he may have previously done, as in Genesis 30:27).
 - Perhaps it was because such idols were often used as deeds to property, and she thought that by taking the idols she took whatever inheritance might be left to Laban's children.
 - Perhaps Rachel stole the *teraphim* to get back at her father, whom she felt had mistreated her, her husband, and her whole family.
 - According to some Jewish traditions, Rachel took the *teraphim* because she wanted to keep her father Laban from idolatry.
- It was nearly 300 miles (482 kilometers) from Haran to the mountains of Gilead, but the journey was longer and more difficult psychologically than it was physically for Jacob. He left the place of safety, where he lived in a comfortable servitude, to go to a place where God called him, but there were many dangerous enemies (such as his brother Esau, who had sworn to kill him).

Laban overtakes Jacob

On the third day, Laban was told that Jacob had fled. Then he took his brethren with him and pursued Jacob for a day's journey, overtaking him in the mountains of Gilead. But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night and said to him, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad." This shows that Jacob and his family lived some distance from Laban. He didn't notice their departure for three days. Apparently, Laban *did* have an evil intention against Jacob. Yet God protected Jacob through this dream by night, telling Laban to be careful in his dealings with Jacob. So, Laban overtook Jacob.

Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead. "What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives *taken* with the sword? Why did you flee away secretly, steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, timbrel and harp? And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now, you have done foolishly in so doing. It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.'

And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father's house, *but* why did you steal my gods?" At this point, Jacob was not far from the Jordan River and the Promised Land. This shows that he traveled quickly, and that Laban was determined to pursue him this far.

b. Why did you flee away secretly: Laban first tried to shame Jacob with kindness, suggesting that they would have a celebration at his departure. Apparently, that idea was met with an unsympathetic response, so Laban threatened Jacob (it is in my power to do you harm). My sons and my daughters, in this context, mean Laban's grandsons and granddaughter. Laban ended his words to Jacob with an accusing question. He knew that his *teraphim* were missing and he had reason to believe that Jacob had stolen them. Laban's question shows the foolishness of idolatry. It is sad and strange to have a god that can be stolen.

Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.' With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take *it* with you." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. Jacob replied with an explanation for their secret departure (because I was afraid) and a firm belief that he and his family had not taken Laban's household idols. With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live: Jacob, not knowing his beloved wife Rachel stole the household idols, proclaimed his innocence, and pronounced a harsh curse on the thief, not knowing that he invited judgment on his wife.

And Laban went into Jacob's tent, Leah's tent, and the two maids' tents, but he did not find *them*. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find *it*. And she said to her father, "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is with me." And he searched but did not find the household idols. Laban was confident that his idols had been stolen. He did a thorough search of Jacob's tents. Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them: Rachel learned the ways of deception well from her father – and perhaps also from her husband. She succeeded in deceiving her father about the idols. "Amid much that is sad and even sordid in this story... amid craft, deceit, and lying on almost every side, we cannot fail to see the hand of God overruling and making even the wrath of man to praise Him." (Griffith Thomas, cited in Barnhouse)

“What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set *it* here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both! These twenty years I *have been* with you, your ewes and female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. That which beasts tore I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, *whether* stolen by day or night. *There* I was! In the day, the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. Thus, I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked *you* last night.”

Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban: This anger likely built up in Jacob for a long time – perhaps 20 years. Probably in his mind, he practiced this speech repeatedly. Jacob rebuked Laban and made the case for his own innocence with several examples. After searching, Laban found no evidence of the stolen gods he accused Jacob of taking. Jacob’s twenty years of faithful service proved his integrity. This demonstrated Jacob’s care for the success of Laban’s herds. Jacob didn’t feed or enrich himself at the expense of what belonged to Laban.

- That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you: It was an ancient custom that a shepherd could bring the torn carcass of a sheep to his owner as evidence that he was brave enough not to let the wolf devour it or take it away, and thus the shepherd would be excused. Jacob explained he didn’t follow this custom, and for every animal that was attacked or stolen, he replaced out of his herd.

- Drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed: Jacob worked hard and sacrificed for the success of Laban’s enterprise.

- You have changed my wages ten times: Jacob endured repeated unfairness from Laban as his employer.

c. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed: Jacob claimed that it was God’s protection that sent him away in a way that prevented Laban from taking what belonged to Jacob.

i. It was good that Jacob saw God's presence and protection in all this. Unfortunately, nowhere did Jacob claim God as *his* own; he referred to God as the Fear of his father Isaac and the God of his grandfather Abraham.

Laban and Jacob Makes a Covenant

And Laban answered and said to Jacob, “*These* daughters *are* my daughters, and *these* children *are* my children, and *this* flock *is* my flock; all that you see *is* mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? Now, therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.” So, Jacob took a stone and set it up *as* a pillar. Then Jacob said to his brethren, “Gather stones.” And they took stones and made a heap and ate there on the heap. Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. And Laban said, “This heap *is* a witness between you and me this day.” Therefore, its name was Galeed, also Mizpah, because he said, “May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent from one another. If you afflict my daughters, or if you take *other* wives besides my daughters, *although* no man is with us—see, God *is* witness between you and me!”

Laban boldly said that everything Jacob had belonged to *him*. Yet, in a supposed act of generosity, he said to Jacob, “It is mine, but out of the kindness of my heart, I’ll let you have it.” Laban expressed how suspicious he was of Jacob in this covenant. The idea of Mizpah (*watch*) is, “If you do wrong, God will see it, and may He punish.” “In effect, the pillar of Mizpah meant, ‘If you come over on my side of this line, the pact is void, and I will kill you.’ The covenant breaker would need God to take care of him because the other would shoot to kill” (Barnhouse). Mizpah was never meant to be a lovely sentiment – despite what a Mizpah coin shared between two people might say. Then Laban said to Jacob, “Here is this heap, and here is *this* pillar, which I have placed between you and me. This heap *is* a witness, and *this* pillar *is* a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.” Jacob swore because of his fear of his father, Isaac. Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain. And early in the morning, Laban arose, kissed his sons and daughters, and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

The best solution for Jacob's in-law problems was for him to separate from Laban. Therefore, they set up a pillar to be a barrier between them. There is wisdom in having some separation from in-laws. The Bible says, *therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife* (Genesis 2:24). Laban and Jacob seemed to have more problems than most families, so their separation was extreme. After a proper goodbye, Laban saw his daughters and grandchildren for the last time. Jacob took his family to Canaan and never returned to where Laban lived. "This is the last we hear of Laban in the Bible, and it is good that this is the end of him. Laban is of the world, and Jacob needed to be freed from this world to live wholeheartedly for the God of his fathers. "Rather than seeking to follow the truth of God's plan as witnessed by Jacob, he merely resented and coveted the blessing of God on Jacob. He finally ended up with neither. His life constitutes a sober warning to many semireligious but fundamentally self-worshipping and self-seeking men and women today." Rachel and Leah were wrong to look to their father, Laban, for their *portion or inheritance* (Genesis 31:14) once they were married to Jacob. He now was their portion and inheritance. "Since you are saved and joined to Christ, appraise the world and ask, 'Is there yet any portion for me?' If you think there is, you are mistaken." (Barnhouse)

So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim. We don't exactly know what this means. In some way, angelic beings that are usually unseen were now made visible to Jacob, and they met him. Perhaps God wanted Jacob to know how great His care was for him and his family. This incredible revelation of God's presence and care came *after* Jacob finally separated from Laban, the worldly man. Separation from the world brings greater insight to the believer. "Our Mahanaims occur at much the same time as that in which Jacob beheld this great sight. Jacob was entering upon a more separated life.

He was leaving Laban and the school of all those tricks of bargaining and bartering which belong to the ungodly world." (Spurgeon) Jacob saw he was in a *double camp*. He was not alone; God had a camp of angels to be with him at Mahanaim. It was not as if God's angels just joined Jacob. They were with him the entire time. Now, Jacob could *see* God's angels with him, and it provided great encouragement. Angels, though "higher" beings than us, are ordained by God to be our servants (Hebrews 1:14), and they serve God's people even as they served Jesus (Matthew 4:11).

In 2 Kings 6:15-17, Elisha's servant had his eyes opened to see the tremendous angelic host surrounding them. I do not ask that you may see angels: still, if it can be, so be it. But what is it, after all, to see an angel? Is not the fact of God's presence better than the sight of the best of his creatures? Perhaps the Lord favored Jacob with the sight of angels because he was such a poor, weak creature as his faith. Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau, his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, "Speak thus to my lord Esau, 'Thus your servant Jacob says: "I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants, and I have sent to tell my lord that I may find favor in your sight."'" Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men *are* with him."

Jacob, seeking to reconcile with his brother (who had sworn to kill him 20 years before), began by humbling himself and beginning his message with "your servant Jacob. "I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants: Jacob wasn't boasting. He wanted Esau to know that he was a man of wealth and that he did not come to take anything from Esau. Jacob tried to anticipate his brother's thinking and to answer Esau's concerns. When the messengers returned, Jacob heard the news that gave him great concern – Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Because Jacob could not bring himself to think the best of Esau (for understandable reasons), he was convinced the 400 men were an army intending to destroy him and his family. So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed, and he divided the people that *were* with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies. He said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company that is left will escape." When Laban confronted Jacob with a hostile militia, Jacob boldly stood up to him and spoke his mind (Genesis 31:36-42); yet Jacob was afraid to meet Esau. This was because Jacob knew he was in the right with Laban, but he knew he was in the wrong with Esau.

"Jacob had just been delivered from Laban, but another load oppressed him: the dread of Esau was upon him. He had wronged his brother; you cannot do wrong without being haunted by it afterward." Shakespeare was right when he wrote, "Conscience does make cowards of us all," (*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 1). As Jacob had no strength before Esau because of guilt, many Christians today are also hindered by the memory of their past sins and failings.

Before Jacob left home, after his brother swore to kill him, Rebekah told Jacob *until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there* (Genesis 27:45). Rebekah never sent for Jacob; therefore, he had every reason to believe that Esau was still angry with him 20 years later. But Jacob also had every reason to believe God would protect him. He seems to have forgotten God had a special camp of angels there to protect him (Genesis 32:1-2). His great fear and distress were not appropriate for someone under God's protection.

- Jacob's fear was wrong because it followed a great deliverance.
- Jacob's fear was wrong because he had just had a remarkable divine visitation.
- Jacob's fear was wrong because it probably arose from remembering his old sins.

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

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

"Jacob is the type of a believer who has too much planning and scheming about him; he is a wise man according to the judgment of the world... Abraham never descended to any tricks by which Jacob sought to increase his flocks; he lived, like a princely man, in simple, childlike confidence in God, willing to be injured rather than to seek his interests." (Spurgeon)
Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.

Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me *and* the mother with the children. For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" Then Jacob said: After first reacting in fear and unbelief, Jacob did the right thing.

He went to the LORD and prayed a good prayer, humble, full of faith, thanksgiving, and God's Word.

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

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

The LORD said to me, "Return to your country and your kindred, and I will deal well with you." Jacob's prayer had *God's word* (what God said in Genesis 31:3). He also quoted God's promises, "I will surely treat you well" (remembering God's words in Genesis 28:13-15). Many of our prayers fall short because there is none of God's Word within them. Often, there is none of God's Word in them because there is little of God's Word in us. Jacob *remembered* what the LORD had said to him. He said to God, for You said. "Beloved, I say to you, one and all, study much the promises of God's word! Have them at your fingers' ends. Remember what things God has said to men, and when he has said them, and to what kind of men he has said them, and discover by this means how far he has said them to you."

When God gave his promise, he did, as it were, put himself in the power of those who know how to plead the promise. Every promise is so much strength given to the man who has faith in the promise, for he may with it overcome even the omnipotent God himself. His prayer had the *humility* and *thanksgiving*. Jacob understood he was not worthy of what God did for him or what he asked God to do, but he relied on what God promised and not upon his worthiness. "Notice that while Jacob thus pleads his unworthiness, he is not slow to plead God's goodness." (Spurgeon) His prayer had *faith*. He boldly asked God to do something and gave humble grounds for why the LORD should fulfill His word. George Mueller, a great man of faith and prayer, was once asked what the most essential part of prayer was. He answered: "The 15 minutes after I have said, 'Amen.'" No matter how great Jacob's prayer was, his faith would be seen in what he did *afterward*.

Jacob Sends Presents to Appease Esau

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

He took what came to his hand as a present for Esau, his brother. Jacob sent such an impressive gift because he wanted to make it completely clear to Esau that he did not need or want anything from him. It also was probably an attempt to *buy* his brother's good favor. I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward, I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me. Jacob seems to be an excellent example of the principle, "When all else fails, pray." As soon as he finished praying, he took up his strategies again. After all, if Jacob trusted God, he would be at the *head* of the procession to meet Esau, not at the *back*. Jacob hoped, "Perhaps he will accept me," but in Jacob's mind, perhaps not. Jacob also thought, "Perhaps he will kill me just like he said he would."

This gift is a good example of the way we trust in our ability to do things and make things happen apart from trusting God. A popular traditional Christian song says:

*All to Jesus, I surrender, all to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.
I surrender all, I surrender all,
All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.*

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

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

Jacob Wrestles at Peniel

And he arose that night, took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. This demonstrated his faith because Jacob left himself no retreat. If Esau wanted to attack his group, they would quickly be backed up against the river. Jacob spent the night alone. This was his last night on the east side of the Jordan River, and he probably spent the night in prayer. God had to get Jacob alone before He dealt with him. While all the activity of the vast entourage surrounded Jacob, he could busy himself with a thousand different tasks. Once he was alone, God commanded his attention. Think of all Jacob had to pray about thanking God, remembering all that the LORD did for him, and wondering how God would fulfill His work in him. This was a significant turning point in Jacob’s life, and he knew it.

Then Jacob was left alone, and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now, when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip, and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. A Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day: Jacob didn’t wrestle with the Man. Instead, a Man wrestled with him. Jacob didn’t start out wanting anything from God; God wanted something from him. God wanted Jacob’s proud self-reliance and fleshly scheming, and God came to take it by force if necessary. “It does not say that he wrestled with the man, but ‘there wrestled a man with him.’ We call him ‘wrestling Jacob,’ and so he was, but we must not forget the wrestling man — or, rather, the wrestling Christ — the wrestling Angel of the covenant, who had come to wrestle out of him much of his strength and wisdom.” (Spurgeon)

As the following verses show, this was no mere man. This is another special appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament before His incarnation in Bethlehem. This was God in human form.

“I suppose our Lord Jesus Christ did here, as on many other occasions preparatory to his full incarnation, assume a human form, and came thus to wrestle with the patriarch.” We can only imagine what this scene looked like. Perhaps sometimes it looked like a barroom fight, and perhaps at other times it looked like an intense wrestling match. “How did Jacob ever manage to keep up his struggle throughout the night? I do not know. But I do know that his determination to hang in there was no greater than our frequent determination to have our own way and eventually win out over God.” (Boice) “It was brave of Jacob thus to wrestle, but there was too much of self about it all. It was his sufficiency that was wrestling with the Godman, Christ Jesus.” He saw that He did not prevail against him: As the fight progressed, it seemed Jacob was somewhat evenly matched against the Man, but the match was only evenly matched in appearance. The Man could have won easily at any time, using supernatural power.

Sometimes we feel man really *can* contend with God. A man or woman in rebellion against God might seem to do well. The match appears even in appearance only. God can turn the tide at any moment, allowing the game to go on for His purposes. It isn't hard to imagine Jacob working so hard and feeling he is getting the best of his opponent until finally; the Man changes the nature of the struggle in a moment. Jacob must have felt very defeated. And He said, “Let Me go for the day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” The Man let Jacob know this would not last much longer. Even though Jacob clung to him desperately, Jacob had lost. A better, greater Man defeated Jacob. This is an invaluable place for everyone to come to where God conquers us. There is something to be said for every man doing his wrestling with God and then acknowledging God's greatness after having been defeated. We must know we serve a God greater than us, and we cannot conquer much of anything until He conquers us. I will not let You go unless You bless me: This wasn't Jacob dictating terms to God as he did on previous occasions. God overcame Jacob here, and we know from Hosea 12:3-5 that Jacob sought this blessing with weeping. He knew he was defeated, yet desperately wanted a blessing from this Greater One.

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

Throughout his past, Jacob was always clever and sneaky enough, so he never felt the need to trust in God alone. Now, he could *only* rely on the blessing of God. Jacob was reduced to a place where all he could do was hold on to the LORD with everything he had. He could not fight anymore, but he could hold on. That is not the wrong place to be. Here, God has answered Jacob's prayer in Genesis 32:9-12. Yet before Jacob could be delivered from his brother's hand, he had to be delivered from his own self-will and self-reliance. "It is evident that, as soon as he felt that he must fall, he grasped the other 'Man' with a kind of death grip and would not let him go. Now, in his weakness, he will prevail. While he was so strong, he won not the blessing; but when he became an utter weakness, he conquered." Jacob thought the real enemy was outside of him, Esau. The real enemy was his own carnal, fleshly nature, which God had not conquered.

4. (27-29) Jacob's name is changed, and he is blessed.

So, he said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and men and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell *me* Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why *do* you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. Jacob must have felt a sense of shame, admitting his name was Jacob, with all its associations of deception and cheating. Yet this was *who he was*, and Jacob had to admit to it. We all want to name ourselves favorably. We say, "I am firm; you are stubborn; they are obstinate fools." God wouldn't allow Jacob to cover up his name because, in his case, it reflected his true nature.

Sarah (meaning fight, struggle, or rule) and el (meaning God). Some take the name Israel to mean *He who struggles with God* or *He who rules with God*. But in Hebrew names, sometimes God is not the object of the verb but the subject. *Daniel* means *God judges*, not *he judges God*. This principle shows us that Israel likely means *God rules*.

From this point on, this son of Isaac will be called Jacob twice as often as he is called Israel. There was still plenty of the old man left in Jacob. "Dear friends, I am afraid that the lives of many of the Lord's chosen people alternate between 'Israel' and 'Jacob.' Sometimes, we are 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,' and at another time, we cry, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Like princes, we prevail with God and are true Israelis; but perhaps ere the sun has gone down, we limp with Jacob, and though the spirit be willing, the flesh is weak.

We are Jacob before we are Israel, and we are Jacob when we are Israel; but blessed be God, we are Israel with God when we cease to be Jacobs among men.” (Spurgeon) For you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed: Jacob prevailed in the sense that he endured through his struggle until God thoroughly conquered him. When you battle with God, you only win by losing and not giving up until you know you have lost. This is how Jacob prevailed. The Man probably refused to tell Jacob His name because He figured Jacob should already know it, and it turned out that Jacob *did* know exactly who this was. Surely, this was the blessing of being defeated by God. It was the blessing of the passing of the old (Jacob) life and the coming of a new (Israel) life. It may also have had to do with the great idea of the blessing of Abraham, and meeting Jacob’s immediate needs for security amid fear. Whatever Jacob needed; God’s blessing provided now.

We note that He blessed him *there* – at that place.

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

Two memorials of this event.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” Just as he crossed over Penuel, the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. Therefore, to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob’s hip in the muscle that shrank. The first memorial was a name. Jacob named the place Peniel (*Face of God*) because he knew the name of the *Man* who wrestled with him. He was the same One who wrestled with Jacob all his life. Jacob also understood it was only by God’s grace and mercy that he escaped from this episode with his life. No man should be allowed to wrestle with God and live, but God was gracious. The second memorial was a perpetual limp. Jacob would remember his being conquered by God with every step he took for the rest of his life. This was a small price to pay for such a great gift. “The memorial of his weakness was to be with him if he lived... How pleased would you and I be to go halting all our days with such weakness as Jacob had if we might also have the blessing that he thus won!”

