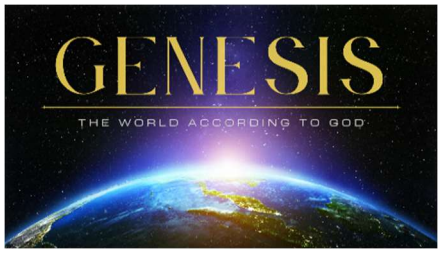

Genesis 32

WRESTLING ACCORDING TO GOD

The life of nature and of dependence on self must be broken and lamed in order that, in the very moment of discovered impotence, we may grasp the hand that smites, and find immortal power flowing into our weakness from it… We overcome Him when we yield. When we are vanquished, we are victors. When the life of nature is broken within us, then from conscious weakness springs the longing which God cannot but satisfy. ***When I am weak, then I am strong****… God prevails when we prevail. His aim in all the process of His mercy has been but to overcome our heavy earthliness and selfishness, which resists His pleading love. His victory is our yielding, and, in that yielding, obtaining power from Him. He delights to be held by the hand of faith, and very gladly yields to the heart's cry, "Abide with me. I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me," is music to His ear, and our saying so, in earnest, persistent clinging to Him, is His victory as well as ours.*
—Alexander MacLaren (1826-1910)

A Rebekah struggles in childbirth—Jacob named (25:19-34)
- **B** *Interlude: Danger in a foreign place (26:1-35)*
  - **C** Jacob's conflict with Esau intensified (27:1-28:9)
    - **D** Jacob encounters Yahweh and His angels (28:10-22)
      - **E** Jacob's arrival in Haran—Laban's deception (29:1-30)
        - **F** Jacob's children are multiplied (29:31-30:24)
          - **G** God remembers Rachel—Joseph's birth (30:25-26)
        - **F** Jacob's flocks are multiplied (30:27-43)
      - **E** Jacob's departure from Haran—Laban's depletion (31:1-55)
    - **D** Jacob encounters Yahweh and His angels (32:1-32)
  - **C** Jacob's conflict with Esau reconciled (33:1-20)
- **B** *Interlude: Danger in a foreign place (34:1-31)*

A Rachel struggles in childbirth—Jacob renamed (35:1-29)

Genesis 32 is one of the most significant chapters in the OT. Everything in Jacob's story leads up to this event…and this event changes Jacob's name, his identity, his focus, and his relationship with God.

Genesis 32 is one of the most unique, mysterious, and variously interpreted stories in the OT. Some see it as a mythical legend; others see it as a strange dream or an allegory on prayer. But when interpreted literally and theologically, it becomes the story of us all.

THE GREAT _____ OF GOD (32:1-2)

- The angels of God meet Jacob as he returns to Canaan (cf. 28:12).
- Jacob calls the place Mahanaim, meaning "two _____."
- God has proven Himself faithful to Jacob—protecting him, providing for him, and blessing him abundantly (cf. 28:13-15).

In this encounter is encapsulated the story of Jacob's life.
—Ian Dugaid.

The Biblical author is not relating a vision, dream, or fantasy; nor is he symbolizing an inner struggle (like prayer); rather, he is relating a real, hand to hand combat. Jacob was actually wrestling with God! Although the plain meaning of the text is very hard for modern man to comprehend or rationalize, there is no justification for forcing it to say something it does not say.
—John T. Allis

Jewish interpretation of Genesis 32 generally sees Jacob as wrestling "Esau's guardian angel" (*Gen. Rabbah*) or wrestling his own "darker side" (Shimon bar Yohai).

"The angels of God" appears only in 28:12 and 32:1 in the whole OT.
—Kenneth A. Mathews

Mahanaim, like Bethel, was a spot where the heavenly world made contact with the earth, where the invisible was opened to the visible. —Allen Ross

THE GREAT _____ OF JACOB (32:3-21)

As Jacob nears Canaan, he sends a message to his brother, Esau, hoping that twenty years has mellowed Esau's violent hatred of him for stealing his blessing (27:41). Esau's response doesn't look good.

- Jacob is greatly _____ and _____.
- Jacob's overwhelming anxiety moves him to several actions:
    - He divides his camp to minimize his losses (32:7-8).
    - He _____ (32:9-12).
    - He prepares a multitude of gifts to appease Esau (32:13-21).

THE GREAT _____ OF GOD vs. JACOB (32:22-32)

Anxious and restless, Jacob sends his family to the other side of the river. Alone in the darkness, he is suddenly attacked.

- **What?**
- **When?**
- **Where?**
- **Who?**
- **How?**
- **Why?** God _____ Jacob in order to _____ him.

Jacob is transformed by this encounter—his name, his focus, and his relationship with God are all changed. This is the birth of new life in Jacob and the birth of the nation of Israel (Gen. 48:15-16; Heb. 11:21).

For the rest of his life, every time he limps, Jacob vividly remembers that God's grace is made perfect in his weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Two thousand years later, the great, great, great grandson of Jacob will wrestle in the Garden of Gethsemane—submitting His will to His Father in order to secure salvation for all those who trust in Him.

Distressed. Hebrew, *yatsar,* "to bind, to be in narrow straits."

Jacob's emotions are a mixture of faith, fear, and doubt.
—Gordon Wenham

Love looks forward, hate looks back, anxiety has eyes all over its head. —Mignon McLaughlin

Appease. Hebrew, *kaphar,* "to cover, to make atonement."

He wrestled. Hebrew, *ya'abaq,* "to grapple, to get dusty."

Touched. Heb., *naga,* "to touch, even to barely touch." (Alter)

Jacob has been wrestling all of his life—in the womb, in the birth-right, with Laban, with his wives. Jacob hasn't been wrestling with these people but ultimately with God. —Robert Alter

The physical struggle symbolized the spiritual struggle between Jacob's self-will and God's will.
—Howard Vos

Israel. Hebrew, "one who wrestles with God" or "God prevails." The name *Israel* has an intentional double meaning. The one who wrestles with God and prevails is the one who is surrendered to God. He is a "God-mastered man."

When I stop telling God what I want, He can freely work His will in me without any hindrance. He can crush me, exalt me, or do anything else He chooses. He simply asks me to have absolute faith in Him and His goodness.
—Oswald Chambers

What Thou wilt, when Thou wilt, how Thou wilt. —John Newton