

# Genesis 32 - Two Camps; Jacob's Message to Esau; Jacob Wrestles with God; Jacob's Name Changed to Israel

II. Epilogue: Patriarchal history (Gen 11:10—50:26)

(3) Life of Jacob (Gen 27:1—36:43)

(D) The preservation of Jacob (Gen 30:25—33:20)

(b) Threat of Esau (32:1—33:20)

(i) Report of Esau's coming (32:1-8)

(ii) Prayer for divine protection (32:9-12)

(iii) Gift sent to Esau (32:13-21)

(iv) Wrestling with the angel of the Lord and Jacob's name changed (32:22-33)

## Genesis 32

(b) Threat of Esau (32:1—33:20)

(i) Report of Esau's coming (32:1-8)

1 Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.

1 Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.

1 As Jacob went on his way, angels from God met him.

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

- Just as earlier (28:12), when angels from God met Jacob as he was leaving the Land, now angels from God meet him as he is returning to the Land

— This shows that that Jacob was under divine escort

— 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 2x (28:12; 32:1)

2 And when he saw them, Jacob said, "**This** is God's camp." So he named that place **Mahanaim**.

2 Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.

2 As he was watching them, Jacob said, "This must be God's camp," so he named that place Mahanaim.

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

- "...This" - *zeh*, used 4x (28:16-17); "This is the gate of heaven" (28:17) and "This is the camp of God!" (here)

- "...Mahanaim" - "two camps"

- The "two camps" were Jacob's camp and God's camp

- In later times, Mahanaim became a border town between the tribes of Manasseh and Gad (Joshua 13:26; 13:30) and it became a capital of Israel under Ishbosheth (2 Sam 2:8)

- It was also the city to which David fled from Absalom (2 Sam 17:24; 17:27), and it was made a district capital under Solomon (1 Kings 4:14)

3 Then Jacob sent **messengers** ahead of himself to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

3 Then Jacob sent messengers ahead of him into the land of Seir (that is, into the territory of Edom) to meet his brother Esau.

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

- Many key ideas and wordplays are in this section

- "...messengers" - the Hebrew 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

- Seir was due south of Gilead, where Jacob was currently located

4 He commanded them, saying, "This is what you shall say to my **lord** Esau: 'Your **servant** Jacob says the following: "I have resided with Laban, and stayed until now;

4 He also commanded them saying, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now;

4 He instructed them, "This is what you are to say to my master Esau: 'Your servant Jacob told me to tell you, "I've journeyed to stay with Laban and I've remained there until now.

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:

- "...lord" - Jacob addressed Esau as "lord," which was the opposite of the patriarchal blessing contained in 27:29,37

- "...servant" - Jacob referred to himself as a "servant" of Esau, another contradiction of the patriarchal blessing

- The messengers were to tell Esau that Jacob had lived with Laban for the past 20 years

5 and I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent *messengers* to tell my lord, so that I may find favor in your sight.""

5 I have oxen and donkeys *and* flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.""

5 I now have cattle, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants. I'm sending this message to you, sir, so that you'll show favor to me.""

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.

6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

6 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

6 Later, the messengers returned to Jacob and reported, "We went to your brother Esau. He's now coming to meet you—and he has 400 men with him!"

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.

- Jacob was afraid because the 400 men coming with Esau seemed to him as an attack force; on the contrary, Esau may have thought that Jacob was coming to conquer him, in accordance with the blessing Jacob received, so Esau was taking his own precautions.

7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks, the herds, and the camels, into two companies;

7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies;

7 Feeling mounting terror and distress, Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, doing the same with the flocks, the cattle, and the camels.

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;

8 for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape."

8 for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape."

8 Jacob was thinking, "If Esau comes to one group and attacks it, then the remaining group may escape."

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*)

— His thinking was that if one of the camps was destroyed, the other would survive

(ii) Prayer for divine protection (32:9-12)

9 Then Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will make you prosper,'

9 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 relatives, and I will prosper you,'

9 Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, O God of my father Isaac, O LORD, you who told me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives and I'll cause things to go well for you.'

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:

- 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

10 I am unworthy of all the favor and of all the faithfulness, which You have shown to Your servant; for with *only* my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.

10 I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff *only* I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.

10 I'm unworthy of all your gracious love, your faithfulness, and everything that you've done for your servant. When I first crossed over this river, I had only my staff. But now I've become two groups.

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

- Jacob then confessed his unworthiness of God's kindness and faithfulness and material blessings

- When Jacob left the Land for Haran, all he had was his staff; when he returned, he had two camps
- He had the correct attitude in prayer—total dependency on God

11 Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me *and* the mothers with the children.

11 Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me *and* the mothers with the children.

11 Deliver me from my brother Esau's control, because I'm terrified of him, and I'm afraid that he's coming to attack me, the mothers, and their children.

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.

- Jacob confessed his unworthiness and acknowledged God's faithfulness to him

12 For You said, 'I will assuredly make you prosper and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be counted.'"

12 For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.'"

12 Now, you promised me that 'I'm certainly going to cause things to go well with you, and I'm going to make your offspring as numerous as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

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.

- The basis for Jacob's petition to God was His promise at Bethel

— If Esau destroyed his family, then this promise could never be fulfilled

— Jacob's petition was based on God's covenantal promise to him (28:13-15)

This prayer was the first recorded by Jacob since his encounter with God at Bethel en route to Laban (28:20-22). There are seven key points in this prayer:

- (1) Praise (v9a)
- (2) Remember God's Word (v9b)
- (3) Confession (v10a)
- (4) Thanksgiving (v10b)
- (5) Pray specifically (v11a)
- (6) Pour heart out to God (v11b)
- (7) Believe (claim) God's promise (v12)

(iii) Gift sent to Esau (32:13-21)

**13** So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a gift for his brother Esau:

**13** So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau:

**13** Jacob spent the night there. Out of everything that he had brought with him, he chose a gift for his brother Esau—

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

14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

14 200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams,

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

15 thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, *and* twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

15 thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

15 30 milking camels with their young, 40 cows with ten bulls, and 20 female donkeys with ten male donkeys.

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

- The gift totaled 580 animals; the fact that this is only a portion of what Jacob owned showed the extent of how God had blessed him

16 Then he placed *them* in the care of his servants, every flock by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me, and put a space between flocks."

16 He delivered *them* into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between drives."

16 He entrusted them into the care of his servants, one herd at a time. Then he told his servants, "Go in front of me, making sure there's plenty of space between herds."

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.

- There were to be five groups of animals gifted to Esau

— Jacob ordered space between each group so Esau would not see everything at once, but receive five sets of gifts, step by step

17 And he commanded the one in front, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these *animals* in front of you belong?'

17 He commanded the one in front, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these *animals* in front of you belong?'

17 To the first group he said, "When you meet my brother Esau, if he asks, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And to whom do these herds belong?'

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?

- Following the parade of gifts would be groups of people

18 then you shall say, '*These* belong to your servant Jacob; it is a gift sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.'

18 then you shall say, '*These* belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.'

18 then you are to reply, 'We're from your servant Jacob. The herds are a gift. He's sending them to my master, Esau. Look! There he is, coming along behind us.'

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.

19 Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the flocks, saying, "In this way you shall speak to Esau when you find him;

19 Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, "After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him;

19 He issued similar instructions to the second and third group, as well as to all the others who drove the herds that followed: "This is how you are to speak to Esau when you find him.

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.

20 and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.'" For he said, "I will **appease** him with the gift that goes ahead of me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me."

20 and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me."

20 You are to tell him, 'Look! Your servant Jacob is coming along behind us.'

Jacob was thinking, "I'll pacify him with the presents that are being sent ahead of me. Then, when I meet him, perhaps he'll accept me."

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.

- "...appease" - pacify, "cover the face" so the sin isn't visible; same Hebrew word for "atonement"

— This shows that Jacob was seeking Esau's forgiveness

— 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

In the future, Israel would need to learn that deliverance comes by faith in God, and not by giving tribute to the enemy.

21 So the gift passed on ahead of him, while he himself spent that night in the camp.

21 So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp.

21 So the presents went ahead of him, while he spent that night in the camp.

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

- While the waves of gifts went ahead toward Esau, Jacob spent the night in camp

— This was an additional night to the night in v13, so the division and planning took an entire day following Jacob's prayer (v9-12)

(iv) Wrestling with the angel of the Lord and Jacob's name changed  
(32:22-33)

**22** Now he got up that same night and took his two wives, his two female slaves, and his eleven children, and crossed the shallow place of the Jabbok.

**22** Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

**22** Later that night, he woke up, quickly took his two wives, his two women servants, and his eleven children, and forded the river at Jabbok.

**22** 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.

- Jacob crossed the Jabbok river, which was the border between Gilead and what later became Ammon

23 He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.

23 He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.



23 He took them across the river, along with all his possessions.

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

- They were now closer to, but not yet in, the Promised Land

24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man **wrestled** with him until daybreak.

24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

24 And so Jacob was left alone, and he struggled with a man until daybreak.

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

- After crossing over to the south side of the Jabbok with his family, Jacob crossed back over to the north side (Gilead) alone

— The river separated him from the rest of his family; this isolation sets the stage for God's third appearance to Jacob

- "...wrestled" - from the root *avak*, meaning "dust" or "to get dusty while wrestling"

— There are three similar-sounding words in Hebrew: Jacob, Jabbok and "he wrestled" (*yaaveik*)

25 When *the man* saw that he had not prevailed against him, he **touched** the socket of Jacob's hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

25 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

25 When the man realized that he hadn't yet won the struggle, he injured the socket of Jacob's thigh, dislocating it as he wrestled with him,

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 "Man" did not overcome Jacob—not because He could not have; He limited His own strength so that He did not overcome Jacob and Jacob was able to hang on.

- "...touched" - means He gave the thigh a blow; it was a supernatural touch (Cf. Is 6:7)

— The "touch" resulted in the dislocation of Jacob's hip

26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

26 and said, "Let me go, because the dawn has come."

"I won't let you go," Jacob replied, "unless you bless me."

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

27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

27 Then the man asked him, "What's your name?"

"Jacob," he responded"

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

28 Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but **Israel**; for you have contended with God and with men, and have prevailed."

28 He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."

28 "Your name won't be Jacob anymore," the man replied, "but Israel, because you exerted yourself against both God and men, and you've emerged victorious."

**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" - *Yisrael*, a combination of two Hebrew words: *sarah* and *el*; it literally means "he who strives with God"

— The basic meaning is: "God has fought for Jacob, and God will fight for Israel" (Cf. Hosea 12:3)

- Jacob's life was dominated by struggles:

— with his brother Esau (Gen 25-27)

— with his father (Gen 27)

— with his father-in-law Laban (Gen 29-31)

— with his wives (Gen 30)

— with God at Peniel (32:22-26)

29 And Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

29 Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

29 "Please," Jacob inquired, "Tell me your name."

But he asked, "Why are you asking about my name?" And he blessed Jacob there.

**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 Man's answer was: think on it and you will know what My Name is

— This is a similar instance as Manoah, the father of Samson (Judges 13:17-18)

- The angel blessed Jacob there (Cf. Hosea 12:4)

30 So Jacob named the place **Peniel**, for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been **spared**."

30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."

30 Jacob would later call that place Peniel, because "I saw God face to face, but my life was spared."

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

- "...Peniel" - "the face of God" (Cf. Judges 8:8,17; 1 Kings 12:25)

— This shows that Jacob recognized the angel as God Himself

— Face to face: Cf. Gen 16:13; Ex 14:11; 33:20; Judges 6:22; 13:22; Is 6:5

- "...spared" - meaning, after the experience of seeing God, and preserved from Esau

31 Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over **Penuel**, and he was limping on his hip.

31 Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh.

31 The sun was rising above Jacob as he crossed over from Peniel, limping due to his wounded thigh.

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

- "...Penuel" - a slight variation in spelling from v30; this shows that the new name was already being used

32 Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the **tendon of the hip** which is on the socket of the hip, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the tendon of the hip.

32 Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

32 Therefore, to this day the Israelis do not eat the hip tendon that connects to the thigh socket, because he had injured the socket of the thigh where the tendon connected to Jacob's hip.

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.

- 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

- "...tendon of the hip" - this refers to the sciatic nerve

— 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; however, this practice was never incorporated into rabbinic Jewish law and is not considered part of kosher law today.

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.