

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “Wrestling With God”

Genesis 32:1-32

2003

### Introduction

Genesis 32 is a pivotal chapter in Jacob’s life. 20 years earlier, Jacob had left his home because his brother had sworn to kill him for stealing his birthright and the blessing of his father. Rebekah had told Jacob “*when your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I’ll send word for you to come back from there.*” Gen 27:45. But since she never sent for him, he had every reason to believe that 20 years had not diminished Esau’s anger.

Prov 18:19 “An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.”

But for Jacob to obey God’s command and to fulfill his divine calling to be a blessing to all nations, he had to go back home and face his brother Esau. As I stated last week, sometimes you have to go back in order to advance.

### I Jacob Had An Angelic Encounter

A. He left Laban and went on to Canaan [Verse 1a]

Jacob did this in obedience to God’s command in Genes 31:3

Gen 31:3 “Then the LORD said to Jacob, “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”

#### Application:

John 14:21 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

B. He was met by the **angels** of God [Verse 1b]

**Angels of God** = Mal'ak 'elohiym = “An angel or messenger of God”

This is the second time that angels appeared to Jacob. The last time was in Bethel when Jacob saw angels “ascending and descending” on a stairway to Heaven (Gen 28:12). Both times the angels were sent to strengthen and encourage Jacob.

#### The strategic role and activity of angels in the life of a believer:

1. Angels are assigned to every believer - Matt 18:10
2. Angels minister to and serve us - Heb 1:14
3. Angels encamp around us and guard us - Ps 34:7; Ps 91:11
5. Angels fight for us - Elijah and Elisha 2 Kings 6:15-17

C. He declared it to be “The Camp Of God” [Verse 2]

*Machanayim* = “Double camp or two camps”

Jacob thought he was alone, but he wasn't! The angels of God were with him!

## II Jacob Prepared To Meet Esau

A. He sent messengers to Esau [Verse 3]

1. He described himself as Esau's **servant** [Verse 4a]

Jacob, in seeking to reconcile himself to his brother, first begins by humbling himself by calling himself Esau's servant.

In his effort to reconcile with his brother, Jacob humbles himself by calling himself Esau's servant.

### Application:

2 Cor 4:5-6 “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.”

2. He informed him of his **situation**: [Verse 4b-5a]

a. He had been staying with Laban

b. He had livestock and servants

Jacob is letting Esau know he is a man of wealth and that he was not coming back in order to place a claim on his father's inheritance.

3. He communicated his **intentions** [Verse 5b]

a. He hoped to find favor with Esau

B. He received the messengers report [Verse 6]

1. “We went to your brother, Esau”

2. “Esau is coming with **400** men to meet you”

Now, it does not appear that Esau was coming with any hostile intentions. He was probably coming to pay his brother honor. But because of Jacob's guilty conscience over the past, he could only assume the worst. After all, Esau's parting comments some 20 years earlier were, “Come back here, and you're a dead man!”

C. He was in great **fear** and distress [Verse 7a]

*Fear* = Yare' = “To dread”

Jacob should have said, “Lord, I don't know what's going to happen, but my eyes are on you (2 Chron 20:12).”

Isa 41:10 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Verses 7-12 record for us Jacob's two-fold response to the frightening report his servants brought back.

D. He prepared for the **worst**

1. He **divides** the people into two groups [Verse 7b-8]

In splitting his family and herds, Jacob resorts to the strategies of man.

Prov 21:31 “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD.”

2. He prayed to God for **protection** [Verse 9-12]

a. He addressed Him as the God of his fathers

Jacob is already a believer in God, but his confidence in God is far from wholehearted. But eventually in Genesis 35, we find that Jacob fully surrenders his life to God. In fact, in Exodus 3:6, God introduces Himself as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”

b. He affirmed God’s **calling** and promises

Jacob isn't appealing to God on the basis of his own performance, but solely on the basis of God promises.

**Application:** Pray the Word

Many of our prayers fall short because there is none of God’s Word within them, and there is often none of God’s Word in them because there is so little of God’s Word in us.

Rom 4:20-21 “Yet [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

c. He acknowledged his unworthiness

This is a huge step for Jacob! The arrogant self-confidence is gone and he finally acknowledges that he is completely unworthy of God’s abundant kindness and faithfulness.

Sometimes we have to hit bottom before we can see our true condition.

**Illustration:** The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:18-19 “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.”

d. He humbly acknowledged God’s blessings

Ps 16:2 “I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.”

James 1:17 “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.”

e. He cried out for deliverance

“Save me from the hand of my brother, for I am afraid ...”

Ps 142:6 “Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.”

f. He reminded God of the **covenant** promises

Gen 28:13-15:

“I will give you and your descendants the land of Canaan.”

“Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth”

“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.”

“I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go”

“I will bring you back to this land.”

“I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

3. He prepared **gifts** for Esau [Verse 13-21]

Why did Jacob send such an impressive gift to Esau?

As a bribe or payoff for his sin of deception and theft? Maybe!

Prv 21:14 “A gift given in secret soothes anger and pacifies great wrath.”

But it could also have been an act of restitution and reconciliation.

Ezek 33:14-16 “... if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right -- if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.”

### Principle:

Restitution is critical reconciliation. It is the surest evidence of a truly changed heart. A person who wants to reconcile, but does not want to make restitution for sin, is not really repenting.

In Luke 19 we read the story of Zacchaeus. One of the evidences of his conversion was when he said, “if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount. Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house.” (Luke 19:8-9)

a. He assigned a servant to each herd (550 animals)

This was a very generous gift! He wasn't going to skimp in his effort to be reconciled with Esau. He truly wanted to make things right with Esau.

b. He instructed them in what to do and say

**Your servant** = `ebed = “A bondservant”

It is not hard to see that Jacob is still quite cowardly and self-serving. He sends his servants, his children and his wives before him. He wants

them to protect him when he should have been the one at the head of the procession protecting them and putting his trust in God.

c. He hoped to **appease** Esau

**Illustration:** Abigail and David

1 Sam 25:18-25 “Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

### III Jacob Wrestled With God

A. Jacob got up in the **night** [Verse 22-23]

1. He sent his family across the Jabbok
2. He sent all his possessions over as well

B. Jacob was left alone and **wrestled** a man until daybreak [Verse 24-26a]

**Application:** I find that it can be difficult to hear the Lord in the midst of the busyness of life. But when I am alone with God in the morning, with His Word open before me, His voice is becomes audible.

#### Who was this man?

1. First, we know that he was an angel.  
Hos 12:4 “[Jacob] struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor.”
2. Second, this man is described as being God.  
Hosea 12:3 “In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God.”  
Gen 32:30 “I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”  
Yet the Bible clearly teaches that no one has ever seen God (John 1:18).  
So how can Jacob claim to have seen God?

The solution to this mystery is resolved in understanding this appearance as a Christophany – an OT, preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ:

1. He appeared to Moses in the burning bush - Ex 3:2
2. He appeared to Gideon when he was threshing wheat - Judg 6:11-12
3. He appeared to Manoah and his wife when they were promised a son named Samson – Judge 13:1-25

1. The man could not overpower Jacob

How could it be that God did not immediately prevail over Jacob, a man now almost 100 years old?

Obviously, as will see in a moment, this man had the power to defeat Jacob at will. But he allowed Jacob to wrestle through the night until Jacob was

absolutely exhausted. The question is why? For the very simple purpose of bringing Jacob to the end of himself and to faith in God alone.

2. The man **touched** the socket of Jacob's hip

Dislocation: This is a devastating injury to a wrestler.

Jacob had wrestled with all his strength and yet, with one touch, God had crippled him. Jacob was rendered helpless. All he could do now was to cling defensively in desperation.

But if Jacob was defeated, why did the man indicate that Jacob had overcome?

**Because Jacob won by losing!**

That is the way in which men have always prevailed with God — by recognizing their own inadequacy, by trusting in the revealed Word of God and His promises, and by clinging to God alone to do what He has promised (cf. I John 5:14-15).

Luke 9:24-25 “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

**Application:**

Every believer's self-confidence, self-reliance, self-dependence must be conquered by God if we are to fulfill His purposes in our lives.

My personal defeat: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

3. The man requested to be released

C. Jacob spoke to the man **[Verse 26b-29]**

1. He refused to let the man go

Jacob has been reduced to the place where all he can do is hold on to the Lord with everything he has. Jacob can't fight anymore, but he can hold on, which isn't such a bad place to be.

**Illustration:** The persistent widow before the ungodly judge - Luke 18:1-8

2. He requested that the man **bless** him

Jacob, the schemer, had finally come to realize that the blessing of God must be obtained from God himself, and this must be done by clinging to Him in helpless dependence, not by trying to manipulate Him.

1 Chron 4:10 “Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory!”

3. He was asked for his name

Now this may seem like a strange question coming from this man!

Didn't he know who Jacob was? Of course he did?

The last time Jacob was asked for his name, the question had come from his earthly father, Isaac. Jacob had lied on that occasion and said, "I am Esau," and he stole the blessing.

Now, 20 years later, he was seeking the blessing of his Heavenly Father. This time he answered truthfully, "My name is Jacob" (which meant "schemer or deceiver"). It is really a confession of who he really is. He had to acknowledge the truth about himself, before God could make him into a new man.

**Application:** Acknowledging out true identity, our true character, our true condition before God, is a prerequisite to a new identity in Christ.

4. He was given a **new** name, Israel  
*Israel* = "Governed or ruled by God"

**Application:**

Part of the new life in Christ is that we are blessed with a new identity!!  
 As believers, we are no longer sinners but saints!  
 We are no longer enemies of God, but friends of God.  
 We are no longer orphans, but adopted sons and daughters of God.  
 We are no longer rejected, but "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." (1 Peter 2:9)  
 And God isn't finished! In Rev 2:17, He promises to give a new name written on a white stone to believers who overcome. A name so wonderful that it would seem preposterous to you now if you were to hear it, but our Almighty God will make you adequate for it.

5. He inquired as to the man's identity  
 Why did the man refuse to tell Jacob His name? Jacob already knew Him.  
 Judg 13:17-19 "Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?" He replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding."
6. He was **blessed** by the man  
 What was the blessing given to Jacob?  
 Probably a reaffirmation of the covenant promises of God recorded for us in Genesis 28:13-15.

D. Jacob called the place Peniel **[Verse 30-32]**

1. He saw God face to face and **lived**  
**Peniel** = "Face of God"

**Application:**

2 Cor 3:18 "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

2. He had a permanent **limp**

God had crippled him and made him weak so that God might be Jacob's strength and that God's power might be perfected in Jacob's weakness. It was a lesson that Jacob would remember with every step he took for the rest of his life.

**Illustration:** Paul's thorn in the flesh

2 Cor 12:7-10 "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

**Conclusion:**

Maybe you're a bit like Jacob:

1. Maybe you need to reconcile a broken relationship from the past:
  - a. Humble yourself
  - b. Prepare to make restitution if necessary
  - c. Go to that person acknowledging your sin and seeking forgiveness
  - d. Leave it under the blood of Jesus Christ.
2. Maybe you need to be reconciled to God.
 

Perhaps you have exhausted yourself trying in your own strength to be good enough to make up for your past sins – to somehow be right with God.

  - a. Acknowledge Him and admit your need (humble yourself before Him)
  - b. Believe/receive his provision for your restoration through faith in Christ.
  - c. Cling to and confess Jesus as your Savior and Lord.