

Genesis 32:2 - 33:17

- Struggling with God and men -

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Foreword

- ❖ Many people have been struggling with God, not only Jacob but also his descendants, the people of Israel, the church, and the individual Christian.
 - An individual Christian can struggle with God in believing, trusting, accepting and finding favour in the eyes of God and Jesus Christ:
The grace of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his mercy, his righteousness, his forgiveness;
The faithfulness of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his goodness;
The love of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his patience, his peace;
The wisdom of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his commands, his guidance;
The assurance of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his protection, his blessing.
- ❖ The reasons for this struggle can be manifold. Christians struggle with God, due to sin, to feelings of guilt, to doubts, to severe problems facing in life, to sickness, to the unfaithfulness of other people, to persecution, due to fear.
 - This struggle is expressed in some Psalms, notably Psalm 42 and 43.
- ❖ The story of Jacob struggling with God is found in Genesis 32:2-33:16. It is a very intriguing story. Jacob returned to his homeland. He feared to meet his brother Esau. After he got the message that his brother was approaching with 400 men(!), he took precautions and sent many gifts to appease his brother. He prayed to God: "Save me." During the night before the encounter with his brother, he struggled with a man, who appeared to be God himself. His life was spared. In the end, Esau approached Jacob not revengeful but as a loving brother. Indeed, the Lord has saved Jacob! The main storyline is found in these passages:
 - Verse 32:1-2: God assured Jacob of his protection by showing him the camps of God, Mahanaim. But Jacob, after giving the site its name, passed by.
 - Verse 32:9-12: Jacob prayed to God: "Save me from the hand of Esau."

- Verse 32:24-30: Jacob struggled with God (and man) and said: “And yet my life was spared.”
- Verse 33:4-11: Jacob was saved from the hand of Esau: “Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him.”
Jacob said: “For to see your face is like seeing the face of God” (33:10).
- ❖ Sidney Greidanus remarked:
 - “This narrative of Jacob wrestling with God provides many challenges for contemporary preachers.
First, it seems such a bizarre story: God being involved in a wrestling match with Jacob. People may wish to solve this problem by spiritualizing the match, but the fact that Jacob walks away from this encounter ‘limping because of his hip’ (32:31) confirms that this was indeed a physical fight.”
 - “A second problem, as the history of interpretation shows, is that this narrative is extremely difficult to interpret. Luther called this passage, ‘one of the most obscure in the Old Testament.’ It raises a host of questions: Why does God attack Jacob? Why does not God prevail against Jacob? Why does he strike him on the hip socket? Why is he concerned about ‘the day is breaking’? What is the meaning of the name ‘Israel’? Why does God not tell Jacob his own name? How can Jacob say that he has ‘seen God face to face’ when the fight took place in a canyon in the dark of night? And why is ‘the dietary taboo not included in the law?’”¹
- ❖ Some of these questions will not be dealt with in this study. Other questions might receive the beginning of an answer.
The most important thing is, this story needs to be told and told again and again so that the listener can identify with the fears of Jacob, his own struggles, and find rest in Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Genesis. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

¹ Greidanus, S. (2007, p. 315, 316).

Context

- ❖ An outline of the Book of Genesis.

<i>THE CREATION</i>	
Genesis 1:1-2:3	"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
<i>THE HISTORY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH</i>	
Genesis 2:4-4:26	"account of the heavens and the earth" (2:4)
Genesis 5:1-6:8	"account of Adam" (5:1)
Genesis 6:9-9:28	"account of Noah" (6:9)
Genesis 10:1-11:9	"account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons" (10:1)
<i>THE HISTORY OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JAKOB – the foundations of Israel</i>	
Genesis 11:10-26	"account of Shem" (11:10)
Genesis 11:27-25:11	"account of Terah" (11:27) > Abram/Abraham
Genesis 25:12-18	"account of Abraham's son Ishmael" (25:12)
Genesis 25:19-35:29	"account of Abraham's son Isaac" (25:19)
Genesis 36:1-	"account of Esau" (36:1)
Genesis 37:2-50:26	"account of Jacob" (37:2)

- ❖ The Book of Genesis consists of three main parts:
 - Genesis 1:1-2:3: In the beginning;
 - Genesis 2:4-11:9: The history of heaven and earth;
 - Genesis 11:10-50:26: The history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
 - The promise given to Abram/Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3) is fundamental to the understanding of the third part of the book of Genesis (12-50):
 - "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
 - The promise of becoming a father of a great nation and of many nations is repeated several times: "I will make your offspring like the dust of the

earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted” (Abraham: Gen. 13:6-17; 15: 5; 17:5-6; 18:18; 22:17-18; Isaac: 26:4; Jacob: 28:14; 35:11).

- Genesis 32:2-33:16 is part of the “Account of Isaac.” This account ends with the death of Isaac and his burial by his sons Esau and Jacob (Gen 35:29).



Form and structure

<p>A. Name giving (verse 1-2)</p>	<p>Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, “This is the camp of God!” So he named that place Mahanaim.</p>
<p>B. <i>Jacob prepares to meet Esau</i> (verse 3-21)</p> <p>Favor (verse 6; see also below verse)</p>	<p>Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He instructed them: “This is what you are to say to my master Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.’ ”</p> <p>When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.”</p> <p>Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’ ”</p> <p>He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, “Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds.” He instructed the one in the lead: “When my brother Esau meets you and asks, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?’ then you are to say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.’ ” He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: “You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. And be sure to say, ‘Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’ ” For he thought, “I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.” So Jacob’s gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.</p>

<p><i>C. Jacob struggles with God</i> (verse 22-31)</p> <p>What is your name? Jacob > Israel Tell me your name?</p> <p>Name giving (verse 31)</p> <p><i>Comment</i> (verse 32)</p>	<p>That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.</p> <p>Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob’s hip was touched near the tendon.</p>
<p><i>B’. Jacob meets Esau</i> (verse 1-15)</p> <p>favor (verse 10; see also above verse 32:6) (For seeing the face of God: verse 32:31)</p>	<p>Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked. Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.” Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. Esau asked, “What do you mean by all these droves I met?” “To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said. But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.” “No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it. Then Esau said, “Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.” But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the droves before me and that of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.” Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my men with</p>

	you.” “But why do that?” Jacob asked. “Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord.” So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir.
A'. Name giving (verse 16-17)	Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth.

❖ Structure

- A. The name Mahanaim (verse 1-2)
 - B. Jacob prepares to meet Esau (verse 3-21), finding favour.
 - C. Jacob struggles with God (verse 22-32): the names Jacob / Israel / Penuel
 - B'. Jacob meets Esau (verse 1-15), finding favour.
- A'. The name Sukkoth (verse 16-17).

The story begins and ends with the name of a site. These two names have in a sense opposite meanings. The central passage (verse 22-32) evolves also around names!

- Mahanaim = two camps (the camp of God)
 - Penuel = the face of God
- Succoth = shelters (for livestock)

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

- ❖ The personal history and character of Jacob are important for the understanding of this story.²
 - He was born as the youngest of twins. The two brothers (Esau and Jacob) were already struggling in the womb (Gen. 25:22). The LORD said to Rebecca: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (Gen 25:23). Esau became a man of the field, a hunter. Jacob stayed quietly at home. Esau was the favourite of their father Isaac, while their mother Rebekah loved Jacob more. Esau, the firstborn, would have inherited a double portion and received the blessing of his father, due to his first birthright, but he despised his rights and sold them to Jacob for some red stew.
 - Jacob had a cunning and deceiving character, which is demonstrated in two important events:

² Rigsby, R. (2003). Jacob. In Dictionary of the Old Testament. Pentateuch (pp. 461-467). Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

- he acquired the birthright of the firstborn (Gen. 25:29-34);
 - he deceived his own father Isaac to procure the blessing for the firstborn (Gen 27). In this situation, he didn't hesitate to misuse the name of God for his own sake. "Isaac asked his son, 'How did you find it (game) so quickly, my son?' 'The LORD your God gave me success,' he replied" (Gen.27:20).
 - He had to flee from his father's house because he feared his brother Esau's revenge. He was sent by his mother to her brother, his uncle Laban. During his journey, he had an important encounter with the LORD God at Bethel (Gen. 28:10-22), where he received the promises of the covenant (see above), first given to Abraham.
 - During his whole life, Jacob continually wrestled with God and his promises, a struggle which culminated in the fight during the night with the angel of the LORD God at Mahanaim. Afterwards, he called this site "Pniel – Face of God", for he said: "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30). Jacob knew God and his promises, but he wanted to arrange the course of life by himself, often by means of deceit.
- ❖ Sidney Greidanus remarks:
- "Bethel and Peniel have much in common."
 - 'Jacob stayed in Bethel 'because the sun had set' (28:11), and when he left Penuel, 'The sun rose upon him' (32:31).
 - At both places Jacob is granted a revelation of God at night, in both of them God blesses him and Jacob names both of them on the basis of the revelation he has experienced.'
 - Moreover, 'The encounter at Bethel ends with Jacob's recognition of the divine aspect of the event in 28:17; and the encounter at Peniel ends with the patriarch's recognition of the divine character of the event in 32:30.
 - After each encounter there is a reference to a particular Israelite custom; in 28:22 it is tithing and in 32:32 it is the refrain from eating the hip sinew.' The structure of the Jacob narratives can be sketched geographically as follows:³
 - A. Jacob in Canaan
 - B. Bethel (Gen 28:10-22)
 - C. Jacob in Haran (Gen 29:1-32:1)
 - B'. Penuel (Gen 32:22-33)
 - A'. Jacob in Canaan"

³ Greidanus, S. (2007, p. 317).

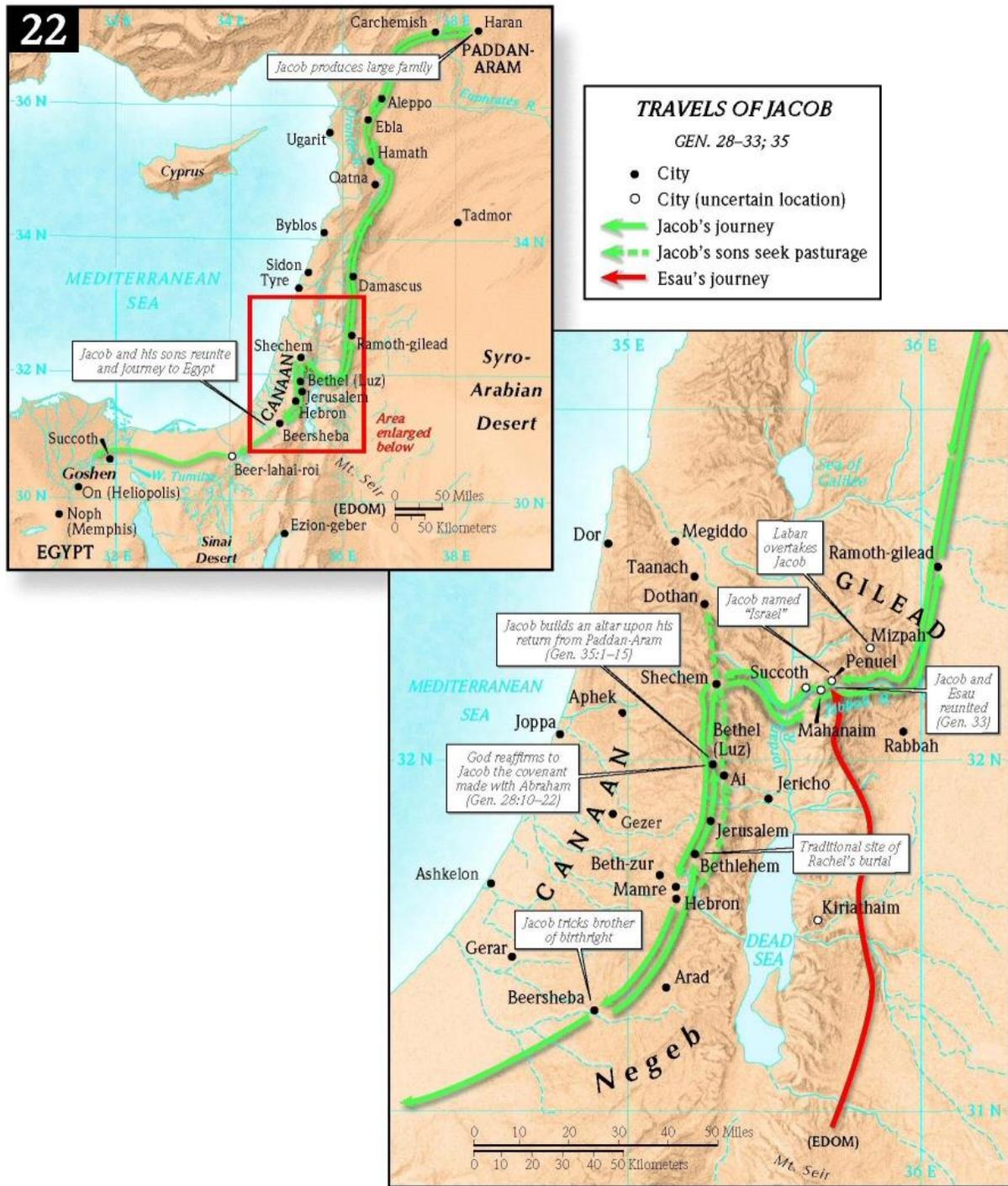


Figure 1. Travels of Jacob. Brisco, T. V. (1998, p. 48).

❖ Note the proximity of Mahanaim, Penuel and Succoth.

Exposition

Central passages

- ❖ Verse 32:1-2: Jacob met the army of God, the two camps. God gave this as a sign of his power and protection. The number two (camps) will play an important role in the following events.
- ❖ Verse 32:9-12: Jacob prayed to God: “Save me from the hand of Esau.”
- ❖ Verse 32:24-30: Jacob struggled with God and said: “And yet my life was spared.” Jacob receives a new name: Israel.
- ❖ Verse 33:4-11: Jacob was saved (by God) from the hand of Esau: “Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him.” And: “For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably.” This verse
- ❖ Verse 33:16-17: Finally Jacob (Israel) settled at Succoth. He is not moving farther south to meet his father. He wanted to keep some distance and to live in the proximity of his brother Esau.

Verse 32:1-2

- ❖ **“Jacob also went on his way”** After the threat of Laban, Jacob is facing a new threat. He feared to meet his brother whom he has deceived.
 - Reyburn and Fry comment: “It is important that the expression **went on his way** has the **sense of going forward with a destination in mind**, not just walking aimlessly about.”⁴
 - According to the word of God: “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.”
 - It is interesting to notice that Jacob didn’t return to Bethel (Gen 35).
- ❖ **“and the angels of God met him.”** This reminds the reader of Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Gen 28:12-15).
 - At Bethel, “he had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and **the angels of God were ascending and descending on it**. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. **I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.**”

⁴ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 746–748).

- Jacob is brought back to this land by the Lord. The Lord has promised Jacob not to leave him!
- ❖ **“When Jacob saw them, he said, “This is the camp of God!” So he named that place Mahanaim.”**
 - Mahanaim = “מַחֲנַיִם”⁵: “double camp”⁵ or twin camp.
 - It is probably an exclamation!
 - Compare Genesis 28:16-19:

“When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” (...) He called that place Bethel”
 - In verse 7 and 8, the same word for “camp” (ESV) is used; NIV translates “group”:
 - “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, thinking, ‘if Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape.’” (ESV)
 - This (twin) camp of God shows God’s faithfulness to his covenant and his promises. At the same time, Jacob fails to trust the promises of God and creates his own camps.

Verse 32:3-21

- ❖ **“Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.”**
 - Esau moved from Beersheba (Gen 26:32-34) to Seir (Gen 36:6-8).
 - Messenger = “מַלְאָכָיו”; the same word is used in verse 2, referring to the angels of God.
- ❖ **“....that I may find favor in your eyes.”**
 - Jacob had deceived his father and his brother Esau: “Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’” When Jacob returned to the land of Canaan, Isaac is still alive (Gen 35:27-29).
 - Jacob addressed his brother as “my lord”. When he actually meets his brother, his whole stance is subservient: “Your servant Jacob says”. But, see also Genesis 25:23:
 - “message” is not a letter. The messengers will speak the words exactly as Jacob has told them to say to Esau.

⁵ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 570).

- “Jacob ‘clearly feels that matters have not improved at all during his twenty-year absence’ (von Rad). He has settled accounts with Laban and is now anxious to do the same with his brother.”⁶
- When the messengers came back, they told Jacob nothing about how Esau received the message, only that he is on his way with four hundred men! They are already nearby Jacob, at a distance less than twenty-four hours of travel. This report caused great distress. Four hundred men are equal to an army!
 - **At this point, the reader must remember that Mahanaim, the camp of God, is still nearby!** See the map above.
 - Distress = “צָרָר”: to **be cramped, constricted**: he became fearful, anxious (Gen 32:8).⁷ **“It pictures Jacob as immobilized by fear.** This is sometimes expressed in English as being ‘scared stiff.’”⁸
- At first, Jacob took precautions and divided his flock into two camps. Remember at this point Genesis 32:1, 2: the twin camps of Gods angels. Jacob was still afraid. Then he started praying for deliverance, instead of the other way around. Did he eventually realise himself that dividing his flock was not enough to escape from four hundred men? How could he ever escape?
 - His prayer is based on the covenant with Abraham. At the same time, the content of the prayer reveals great fear! This fear shows already the struggle (32:28) of Jacob with God and man.

	Then Jacob prayed,
<i>A. The promise of the covenant</i>	“O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’
<i>B. The pleading of God’s faithfulness</i>	I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups.
<i>B’. The Prayer for mercy</i>	Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.
<i>A’. The promise</i>	But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will

⁶ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 751).

⁷ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1058).

⁸ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 752).

<i>of the covenant</i>	make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’ ”
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- Dividing the flock into two camps was not enough. Jacob wanted to pacify Esau by sending him a gift, not one, but more than three gifts. All the servants got the same instruction.
 - “He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: ‘You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. **And be sure to say,** “Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.”’ For he thought, ‘I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.’”
 - **“And be sure to say,”** Jacob wanted to control everything.
 - **“For he thought.”** This thought reveals again great fear and distress.
 - **“pacify”:** “translates the expression meaning to ‘cover his face’ and is used figuratively to mean ‘pacify,’ ‘calm,’ ‘sooth angry feelings.’ The gifts are to cover Esau’s face (pacify him) so he cannot see the guilt in Jacob, the wrong that Jacob had done to him in stealing his blessing. “ Other translations: ‘I will calm his anger,’ ‘I will soften his anger,’ ‘... put him in a favorable mood’ ‘I will win him over.’ Many languages have idiomatic ways of referring to the giving of presents and other actions that are intended to influence another person’s feelings and attitude; for example, ‘grease him up,’ ‘make his thinking sweet,’ ‘make his insides good toward me.’”⁹
 - Wenham suggests that the cultic terms Jacob used, including ‘gift’ (*minhâ*, cereal offering), ‘atonement’ (*kippēr*), and ‘accepted’ (*rāšâ*, 33:10), implies that Jacob makes peace with God by reconciling with Esau (cf. Matt 5:23–24; 18:15–35).¹⁰

Verse 32:22-32

❖ Verse 22-24

- **“That night”.** **This is the night before he will meet Esau.**

⁹ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p.759). See also: Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. (1994–2000, p. 494).

¹⁰ Mathews, K. A. (2005, Vol. 1B, p. 554).

- **“He took them and sent them across the stream.”** Jacob himself did not go across the river.¹¹ ESV: “He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.”
- **“So Jacob was left alone.”** All his relatives and his servants, his possessions were on the other side of the Jabbok. Jacob was alone, with God.
 - Psalm 139:5-7: “You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? **Where can I flee from your presence?**”
- **“and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.”** Who is this man? He suddenly appeared without a word. **It might be Esau seeking for revenge!** He was already nearby. The fight was lit by the stars and perhaps the moon. It was really dark.

This man stands for men and God (verse 28). Jacob has been wrestling constantly with men (and women). He has struggled with his brother Esau, his father Isaac, his uncle Laban, his wives Leah and Rachel. He has been struggling with the promises of God, always taking his own course. And God from his side was gently pushing him in the right direction by dreams and being faithful to his promises, he protected Jacob.

- **The sudden appearance stands in contrast with the preceding actions Jacob took in the view of meeting his brother Esau.**
- **“A man”** translates the ordinary Hebrew word for a man in contrast with a woman. Although Jacob clearly understands in verse 30 that this person is supernatural, the text at this point calls him **a man**, not an angel or God.”¹²
- It is only after Jacob received the blessing and a new name, and after the refusal of the man to tell him his own name, that he realized that he has been wrestling with God himself.
- **“Wrestled:”** the particular Hebrew word is used only here and in the next verse. It is related to a word for ‘dust,’ ‘get dusty,’ as two people do when wrestling on the ground. **There is a play on words between “he wrestled” (ye’abeq), Jabbok (yabboq) and Jacob (yàaqob).**¹³

❖ Verse 25

- **“When the man saw that he could not overpower him he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip...”** Because of this, Jacob was limping (verse 31). Probably, because of this, he had to give up the struggle.

❖ Verse 26-31

¹¹ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 762).

¹² Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 763).

¹³ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 763).

- **“Let me go, for it is daybreak.”** “Jacob’s opponent does not want to be seen. This request is enough to let Jacob know that his opponent is no ordinary man.”¹⁴
- **“I will not let you go unless you bless me.”**
 - Jacob wants to be blessed. The writer of Hebrews comments: **“And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater”** (Heb 7:7). Jacob is asking this blessing with the encounter with his brother in view.¹⁵

“Bless me”	
<p>“Bless/blessing” has been most frequently understood in terms of benefits conveyed—prosperity, power, and especially fertility. This focus on the content of the benefit is now being viewed as secondary. The primary factor of blessing is the statement of the relationship between parties. God blesses with a benefit on the basis of the relationship. The blessing makes known the positive relationship between the parties, whether a single individual (Gen 12:1–3) or a group (Deut 7:14–16). The recipient and others become aware of the value of the relationship and hence its desirability (Job 42:12). Human blessings portray the goodwill between parties and find their basis in the human-divine relationship. Just as with God’s blessing, they may either convey benediction (Num 6:24–26) or benefaction (Gen 33:11).¹⁶</p> <p>An overview:</p>	
Gen 12:2-3 God > Abraham	“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” (See also Gen 22:17-18.)
Gen 26:23-24 God > Isaac	“I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.”
Gen 27:28-29 Isaac > Jakob	May God give you of heaven’s dew and of earth’s richness— an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed

¹⁴ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 764).

¹⁵ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 764).

¹⁶ Richards, K. H. (1992). *Bless/Blessing*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.) (Vol. 1, p. 754).

	and those who bless you be blessed.”
Gen 28:3-4 Isaac > Jacob	“May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham.”
Gen 28:13-15 God > Jacob	“I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”
Gen 32:29 Man (God) > Jacob	“Jacob said, ‘Please tell me your name.’ But he replied, ‘Why do you ask my name?’ Then he blessed him there.”

- **“What is your name?”**
 - Reyburn and Fry comment: “The contrast between this straightforward question and that used by Jacob in verse 29 shows that Jacob’s status is inferior to that of his opponent.”¹⁷
- **“Jacob.”** The name **Jacob** sounds like the Hebrew word for ‘cheat’ and refers to his character as a deceiver. See Genesis 27:36.¹⁸
- **“You have struggled with God.”** This explains why Jacob’s name is to be changed to Israel. “In the Hebrew **you have striven** (struggled) is *sarita*, and the first part of this Hebrew verb is linked in sound to *Isra* in ‘Isra-el.”¹⁹
 - This name is more than a symbolic name for Jacob. **It is a prophetic name** and reflects the history of Israel, the people of God constantly struggling with God. It also reflects the history of the church, and of individual Christians.

¹⁷ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p 765).

¹⁸ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p 765).

¹⁹ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 766).

- **“Jacob said, ‘Please tell me your name.’ But he replied, ‘Why do you ask my name?’”**
 - “He does not give his name but rather answers with his own question. **There are two ways to understand this question: as a true question or as a rhetorical question.** If Jacob took it for a question to be answered, he did not give a reply. Therefore **there is reason to believe that the question is a way of saying ‘You should not ask my name.’** For a similar asking for the name of an angel, see Judges 13:17–18: 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.’”** The rhetorical question seems to fit the context better.²⁰
- **“So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.’”**
 - **Face** translates the Hebrew word *peni*, which is followed by the word for God, *’el*. **“Yet my life was spared:”** “in spite of Moses’ desire to see God’s glory, he was told by God ‘You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live’ (Ex 33:20; See also Judges 13:22)”²¹
- **The following is Important!**
 - In verse 11, Jacob prayed to God: “Save me.” After he has struggled with God, Jacob said: “Yet my life was spared.” In both verses, the verb **“נָצַל”** is used.²² He was saved by God himself, although he had seen the face of God. **Jacob prayed. This struggle with the man/God is God’s first answer to his prayer.** Now the life of Jacob was spared by God himself, he surely will save Jacob from the hand of Esau!
 - After Esau has embraced Jacob, he said: **“For to see your face is like seeing the face of God”** – Esau has spared the life of Jacob and his family. This is God’s **second** answer to the prayer of Jacob.

Verse 32:32

- ❖ **“Therefore to this day.”** This is a comment of the writer to explain a custom among the Israelites. We do not know when this comment was inserted into the story. It has also a literary function. It creates a pause between this part of the story and the actual encounter between the two brothers.
 - This custom reminded the Israelites of two things:
 - The struggle of Jacob with the divine being.
 - The life of Jacob has been spared.

²⁰ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, 766-767).

²¹ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 767).

²² Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 717).

Verse 33:1-15

- ❖ **“Jacob looked up and there was Esau.”** After a short pause in telling the story, Esau is immediately introduced: **“there was Esau.”** What will he do? Immediately, Jacob took several actions, dividing his women and children and placing himself ahead.
 - Reyburn and Fry comment: “The more reasonable understanding is that of Westermann, namely, that this family arrangement ‘has nothing to do with protective measures... **The division into three groups (vv. 1b–2) corresponds to the order of rank, as in the court ceremonial....**’ The first to place themselves in submission to Esau will be the servants, and the last to do so will be Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel.”²³
- ❖ **“He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.”** Note the contrast with Esau: **“But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him.”** Jacob approached Esau as a servant, Esau met Jacob as a brother!
 - Then Esau inquired about Jacob’s family and about the herds, he has met while he was on his way to meet Jacob. “Esau’s conciliatory spirit matches his earlier show of emotions, impressing the reader that Esau is not the archenemy Jacob had feared. If anything, his magnanimous attitude made Jacob’s past wrongs appear more insidious.”²⁴
- ❖ **“If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably.”**
 - Jacob is passionately looking the favour of Esau. In accepting this gift, Esau will accept Jacob. In verse 11, Jacob used a different word “present” instead of “gift”. “Present”= **“בְּרִכָּה”**: **4. gift connected with a blessing.**²⁵
 - **“For to see your face is like seeing the face of God.”** Jacob bears in mind what happened last night. He was afraid, he struggled with God, and yet he was spared by a gracious God. Jacob was afraid of Esau, trying to find favour in his eyes, and yet he was spared by a gracious brother.
- ❖ **“Then Esau said, ‘Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.’”**
 - Esau supposed probably that Jacob wanted to travel farther to the south, where Isaac was still living in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed (Gen 35:27).

Verse 33:16-17

- **“Succoth”** Instead of moving to the southwards, Jacob travelled a bit to the north. See the map. He still wanted to keep some distance from his brother. And, he didn’t go the Bethel as he had promised God (Gen 28:20-21; 35:1).

²³ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 772).

²⁴ Mathews, K. A. (2005, Vol. 1B, p. 569).

²⁵ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 161).

Application

Remark

- ❖ There are some difficulties in applying this story to Christ and to the church.
 - “From Justin Martyr (ca. 150) to modern times, Christian preachers have identified Jacob’s attacker as the Angel of the Lord (see Hos 12:4), who, in turn, is identified with the preexistent Logos, that is, Christ.” But this is speculation, as Sidney Greidanus remarked.²⁶ Christ revealed himself in the last days as Hebrews 1:1–2 puts it, “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.”
 - How to apply this story to the church today? Is it a conversion story? Charles Wesley made it in his “Wrestling Jacob’ into a kind of evangelical conversion he and his brother John had undergone a few years earlier. “Before we start applying this narrative to people today, it would be well if we asked first how the narrator intended Israel to respond to this narrative. In other words, what was the narrator’s goal for Israel?”²⁷
 - The name “Israel” has a double meaning.
 - It refers to this historical event, where Jacob was struggling with God and men.
 - The name Israel has also a prophetic meaning. Israel as a people will be struggling with God and men. And what about the church today? Isn’t the church often struggling with God and his promises and with men?

Tell the story of Jacob

- ❖ Give a short summary of the life of Jacob, highlighting:
 - The birth of Esau and Jacob; the prophecy concerning the elder serving the younger brother (Gen 25:21-26)
 - How he acquired the right of the firstborn (Gen 25:27-34).
 - How he stole the blessing of the firstborn, deceiving his father and Esau (Gen 27:1-40).
 - How he received a vision and the promise from God at Bethel (Gen 27:41-28:22).
 - How he stayed for twenty years with his uncle Laban, deceiving each other (Gen 29-31).
 - Pay special attention to the promise Jacob made to God at Bethel (Gen 28:20-22) and the call of God to return to his own land (Gen 31:3).
 - Jacob was afraid of Esau. He never got a message from his mother Rebecca (See Gen 27:41-45).
 - This summary exemplifies the word of the man: “you have struggled with man and God.”

²⁶ Greidanus, S. (2007, p. 316).

²⁷ Greidanus, S. (2007, p. 316).

Pay attention to the struggle of Jacob with God

- ❖ **In his fear of Esau**, Jacob is struggling with God (Gen 33:11) and with himself.
 - Verse 32:1-2: Jacob met the army of God. God showed him his protection!
 - Verse 32:9-12: Jacob prayed to God: “Save me from the hand of Esau.” Help me!
 - Verse 32:24-30: Jacob struggled with God (and man) and said: “And yet my life was spared.”
 - “Only gradually, through the increasing awareness of Jacob, do the readers discover the identity of this ‘man’: ‘I have seen *God* face to face’ (verse 30). In retelling this narrative, it would be well to keep the same suspense.”²⁸
 - **This discovery must have been shocking to Jacob.**
 - **The change of the name Jacob to Israel.**
 - “God knocks the self-sufficiency out of Jacob. But, according to God’s promise at Bethel, God also strives *for* Jacob, never forsaking him (28:15).²⁹”
 - Verse 33:4-11: Jacob was saved from the hand of Esau: “Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him.” Apparently, Esau has forgotten his vow to himself (Gen 27:41-45).
 - Verse 33:16,17: Jacob settled at Succoth, keeping distance between Esau and himself as far as possible.

Apply this struggle and character of Jacob to present-day life

- ❖ Take as an example the prophecy of Hosea.
 - Hosea prophesied:

“The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he grasped his brother’s heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there— the Lord God Almighty, the Lord is his name of renown! But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” (Hos 12:2-6).
 - This prophecy is an example. It shows how the prophet addressed the people of Judah, referring to Peniel, and he called the people of Judah to return to God.
- ❖ Jacob was struggling with man and with God. The people of Israel, the church, the individual Christian often struggle with man and with God.
 - An individual Christian can struggle with God in accepting:

The grace of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his mercy, his righteousness, his forgiveness;

The faithfulness of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his goodness;

²⁸ Greidanus, S. (2007, p. 319).

²⁹ Greidanus, S. (2007, p. 319).

The love of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his patience, his peace;
The wisdom of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his commands, his guidance;
The assurance of God and Jesus Christ our Savior, his protection, his blessing.

- Christians can struggle with God, due to sin, due to doubts, due to severe problems, due to sickness, due to the unfaithfulness of other people, due to persecution.

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