

“Why We Wrestle With God”

Genesis 32:24-25

July 25, 2021

INTRO:

- Have you ever found the Bible to be confusing?
- Ever realized that **CONTEXT is usually the key?**
 - Saturday w/ India: Jesus' words & Psalm 22
 - Me with the proper view of David & Goliath
- *Today we'll clear up some more confusion*

PRAAYER

CONTEXT:

- 3 wk. **harmony** (Jordan, Pastor Charlie & Elder Daniel)
 - Secret to being content is Christ!
 - Jesus Christ ALONE is God and Savior!
 - Word has Author, Ambassador & Audience
- *Show And Tell* series.... (see our “*Bible Cloth*”)
- Today we will refocus on Jesus thru Jacob (week 4)

VIDEO: “Jacob” per Spoken Word Ministries

- Today:
 - Jacob “*wrestled with God*”
 - Simple – Complex – Simple
 - Jacob *Informs* per **ILLUSTRATION**
 - Jacob *Inspects* via **EXPLANATION**
 - Jacob *Inspires* our **APPLICATION**

BIG IDEA: God alone saves & sanctifies His sinners!

PREVIEW:

- I. Simple: Jacob Informs per **ILLUSTRATION**
- II. Complex: Jacob Inspects via **EXPLANATION**
- III. Simple: Jacob Inspires our **APPLICATION**

TEXT:

Genesis 32:24-25

22The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.

24***And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. 25When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.***

26Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for ***you have striven with God*** and with men, and have prevailed." 29Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" ***And there he blessed him.*** 30So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." 31The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

I. Simple: Jacob Informs per **ILLUSTRATION**

1. Jacob was born into a promised part of God's plan
2. Jacob was born into a family of the fallen & faithful
3. Jacob was torn apart by his strengths & selfishness
4. Jacob was blessed by God in spite of his sinfulness
5. Jacob was trying to balance disobedience & blessing
6. Jacob was always up to something & manipulating
7. Jacob was not trustworthy, nor a man of integrity

*If you don't have integrity ALL the time,
you don't have integrity.* - JDP

8. Jacob was a worldly winner but unworthy witness
9. Jacob was shallow and seemingly never satisfied...
10. Yet, Jacob was used of God to point us to Jesus!

T/S: **Jacob is the Old Testament's prodigal son...** in the same way that you and I are modern day prodigals... - JDP

II. Complex: Jacob Inspects via **EXPLANATION**

A. CONTEXT

- a. **Genesis 25 - 36...**
- b. **Hosea 12:2-6** *The LORD's Indictment of Israel and Judah*

B. CONNECTION

- a. **Chiastic** arches & architecture
 - i. **The Jacob Cycle** (Genesis 25-36)
 - ii. S.D. Walters: "**The Jacob Narrative**"

The cycle breaks into 2 equal halves at Gen 30:24–25, each having 7 matching segments, presented thematically in exact reverse order. The entire cycle is bracketed at beginning and end by genealogies of the 2 sons who stand outside the line of promise, Ishmael (25:12–18) and Esau (chap. 36), so that Jacob’s role as the bearer of the promise is unmistakable.

- b. **Chiastic** connections & parallels
 - i. God encounters...
 - ii. Leaving & Returning... Promised Land
 - iii. **Full of Self... Empty of Self**

- c. **Chiastic** clarity...

The Jacob Cycle Chiastic Arch

The Unchosen Son (Ishmael) (25:12–18)

- A. Beginnings. Birth, prediction, early conflict between Jacob and Esau (25:19–34)
- B. Relations with indigenous population (26:1–22)
- C. Blessing obtained [“He took away (*lāqah*) my *bērākā*” (27:35–36)] (27:1–40)
- D. Jacob’s flight from Esau (27:41–28:5)
- E. Encounter with God’s agents (28:10–22)**
 - F. Arrival in Haran: Rachel, Laban (29:1–30)
 - G. Children: Jacob acquires a family (30:1–24)
Jacob’s return to Canaan begins as soon as Joseph is born
 - G’ Flocks: Jacob acquires wealth (30:25–43)
 - F’ Departure from Haran: Rachel, Laban (31:1–32:1—Eng 31:1–55)
- E’ Encounter with God’s agent (32:2–3—Eng 32:1–2)**
 - D’ Jacob’s approach to Esau (32:4–33—Eng 32:3–32)
 - C’ Blessing returned [“Accept (*lāqah*) my *bērākā*” (33:11)] (33:1–20)
 - B’ Relations with indigenous population (chap. 34)
- A’ Endings. Death, fulfillment, Jacob and Esau together (chap. 35)

The Unchosen Son (Esau) (chap. 36)

C. CONTENT

a. **Definitions matter!**

b. The divine is in the details... **Dig in!!!**

1. **“man/angel/God”** (came to Jacob)

- i. Angel of The Covenant...
- ii. God is self-described here

2. **“with”**

- i. Assumption = “against”
- ii. Context = “along side”

3. **“wrestle”**

- i. Only used here in Bible
- ii. Means: from the dust...
- iii. Play on words: “Jabbok”
- iv. Play on words: “Jacob”

“Wrestling with... to hold on to... not letting go until given a blessing...” all sounds like fighting against his sin nature and struggling to faithfully obey, all the while striving to cleave to the blessing Giver... - JDP

People have forgotten how to blush AND wrestle. - JDP

4. **“strive/contend”**

- i. Seek to gain power
- ii. Apply intense urgency
- iii. Desire to reign

5. **“against”**

- i. Preposition...
- ii. Could be: **with, in, from...**

6. **“prevail”**

- i. To acquire power...
- ii. The transfer of power...
- iii. Not necessarily adversarial

Hosea 12:2-6 *The LORD’s Indictment of Israel and Judah*

The LORD has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds. 3In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. 4He strove with the angel and prevailed; **he wept and sought his favor**. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us— 5the LORD, the God of hosts, the LORD is his memorial name: 6**“So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.”**

T/S:

Jacob’s not fighting for a coup, he’s fighting to surrender
(just like many of us have done)!

III. Simple: Jacob **Inspires our APPLICATION**

1. See how Jacob got alone with God... (God did that!)
2. See how Jacob came to the end of himself (God did that!)
3. See how God will give you only so much rope...
4. See The Gospel in Jacob's conversion to Israel...
 - a. The Gospel is ALWAYS God's Gospel of GRACE!!!
 - b. **m M m**
 - i. MIRACLE of mercy
 - ii. MIRACULOUS Messiah
 - iii. MISSIONAL mercy from the Miraculous Messiah
 - c. See in Israel what we should see in the mirror:
 - i. Miraculous Grace
 - ii. Messianic Mercy
 - iii. Missional Multiplication
5. See both Jacob AND Jesus in yourself (I pray)
 - a. See the Christophany here... Jesus comes to Jacob.
 - b. **Jesus has to come to EVERY true Christian!**

We ALL have a burning bush - it's The Bible!

- JDP

6. See what happens when we "Surrender To VICTORY"
 - a. We are Miraculously Graced by Almighty God
 - b. The LORD elects, selects, chooses, & draws His own
 - c. We offer God our true Repentance
 - d. We live out genuine, Biblical-Belief
 - e. We change from Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter, etc.
 - f. We become Work-in-Progress-FRUIT-producers

7. See how God's patience AND our prayers are related...
 - a. Both salvation & sanctification call for wrestling!
 - b. **Biblical worship is both wrestling & warfare!** - JDP
 - c. We're to tenaciously press-in & persevere in prayer

8. See how God ALWAYS keeps His promises...

9. See how God broke Jacob to give life to Israel!
 - a. ***Most biblical believers have to be biblically broken before they will biblically believe.*** - JDP

- b. Surrender is an unnatural act that tends to be resisted by pride OR, on the other extreme, it will be prematurely accepted due to rationalized compromise and/or disgraceful cowardice...

By contrast, surrendering to victory in Christ and His Gospel is a supernatural act and attitude that comes with the indwelling work & wonder of God's Holy Spirit. Ironically, biblical surrender to Christ brings with it His promised power to live as an overwhelming overcomer, as He is with you until the end of the age, in ALL that you experience, locally, regionally, and globally – no matter what!

- JDP

- c. See **Acts 1:8!**

If you're not possessed you're not empowered! - JDP

(cf. Isa. 43:10-11 & Acts 1:8)

10. Notice that *Purified does not = Perfected (yet)*
- i. *“Strives with God”* = man Israel
 - ii. *“Strives with God”* = people of Israel
 - iii. *“Strives with God” = Invisible Church!*
 1. See The Church is not “national Israel”
 2. See The Church is “spiritual Israel”
 3. See BOTH Israels have a special place in God’s plan and purposes!

*Many of God’s mercies & miracles are found
in the mud of our faith.* - JDP

(cf. the Prodigal; Gideon; Peter walking on water; doubting Thomas; etc)

REVIEW:

- I. Simple: Jacob *Informs* per ILLUSTRATION
- II. Complex: Jacob *Inspects* via EXPLANATION
- III. Simple: Jacob *Inspires* our APPLICATION

CLOSE:

- I pray that you see the simple-complex-simple...

God save AND sanctifies His sinners!

- See God’s mercy, grace, truth, love, & power here

Let God's mercies become some of your greatest motivators.

- JDP

- See the reflection of the Christian cross...
- See the work of Almighty Christ...
- See Jesus in Jacob... see Jesus here today I pray!
- Closeness to God requires humble surrender!

Don't stop striving with Christ until you've fully surrendered and prevailed (received Gospel power) in His grace, mercy, truth, & love!

Frederick Buechner, *characterizes Jacob's divine encounter at the Jabbok River as the "magnificent defeat of the human soul at the hands of God."*

When your wrestling turns to worship you'll find peace!

- JDP

God's gospel of grace & mercy is the ultimate message of Jacob/Israel's life... may the same be said of us!

PRAYER

WORSHIP:

1. *"Truth Be Known"* (Matthew West)
2. *"If We're Honest"* (Francesca Battistelli)
3. *"Different"* (Micah Tyler)
4. *"Clean"* (Natalie Grant)

Research & Study Notes:

JACOB NARRATIVE. Jacob was the younger son of Isaac and Rebekah, twin brother of Esau, and father of the 12 sons after whom were named the 12 tribes of Israel. He is the central figure in the cycle of stories in Gen 25:19–35:29 and reappears as a lesser figure in the Joseph stories (Genesis 37–50). **In separate popular etymologies, the Heb name *yaʿăqōb* is connected with Heb *ʿāqēb*, “heel,” because Jacob was born clutching the heel of his brother Esau (Gen 25:26), and with the verb *ʿāqab*, “cheat,” because Esau said that Jacob had cheated him twice (27:36).** The name may be a shortened form of Heb *yʿqb-ʿl*, “God protects,” a name known from extrabiblical sources (Noth 1953). **Jacob later received the name “Israel” as a mark of his struggle (32:29) and piety (35:10), and his descendants were later identified by this name (“children of Israel”).**

Biblical Jacob is unknown outside the Bible, although the general congruence of the patriarchal narratives with customs and artifacts known from archaeology to belong to the 2d millennium (especially the material from Nuzi and Mari) has sometimes been used to support his historicity. Later scrutiny called much of that argument into question (Van Seters 1975; Thompson 1974) on the grounds that the alleged parallels were inexact or unrepresentative, or had been misunderstood. For example, the claim that possession of household idols (Gen 31:19) helped constitute the family of Jacob as a legitimate clan has been given up (Selman 1980: 110).

Some writers have refused even to attempt historical reconstructions (*HAIJ*, 79). Where historical questions remain open, Jacob has been dated to the 1900s B.C.E. (Bimson 1980: 84), and a number of extrabiblical customs are seen to retain their pertinence (Selman 1980: 125–229; see also Morrison 1983).

A. Structure of the Jacob Cycle

The stories of the Jacob cycle have been artfully arranged to gather around Jacob's return to the land of his birth, Canaan, after a hasty flight and long residence abroad to avoid his brother's revenge.

They are thus informed by a dual tension:

(1) How can the duplicitous Jacob become the father of God's people?

and

(2) How can he inherit the promise made to Abraham and Isaac if he leaves the land which God has given to them?

The fundamental theme of the cycle has to do with the life and character of "Israel," that is, the people of God.

The Jacob stories are about the essence and meaning of a people (Thompson 1987: 39–40). The biblical text presents the Jacob stories in a concentric pattern which has been independently observed by several scholars (Fishbane 1975; see also Fokkelman 1975: 240; Gammie 1979; otherwise Hendel 1987: 144, n. 20) and which is signalled both by

cross-references in vocabulary and by thematic similarities.

The cycle breaks into 2 equal halves at Gen 30:24–25, each having 7 matching segments, presented thematically in exact reverse order. The entire cycle is bracketed at beginning and end by genealogies of the 2 sons who stand outside the line of promise, Ishmael (25:12–18) and Esau (chap. 36), so that Jacob’s role as the bearer of the promise is unmistakable.¹

The Unchosen Son (Ishmael) (25:12–18)

- A. Beginings. Birth, prediction, early conflict between Jacob and Esau (25:19–34)
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The Unchosen Son (Esau) (chap. 36)

The 2 segments on Esau’s wives which frame segment C (26:34–35; 28:6–9) seem to stand outside the above topical descriptions.

Some of the thematic correspondences are especially clear. For example, segments B/B’ both deal with relations between the people of the promise and the indigenous residents of Canaan, in sharply contrasting modes. In terms of narrative sequence, however, B is out of order (since the twins have not yet been born, 26:11), and belongs to the 20-year period of Rebekah’s

¹ Walters, S. D. (1992). [Jacob Narrative](#). In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 3, p. 599). New York: Doubleday.

barrenness (25:20, 26); its chronological dislocation was necessary for it to function topically in the cycle. *Placement and juxtaposition are among the writer's major techniques.*

This topical match between the segments in each of the halves is confirmed by several striking cross-references in writing. The numinous experiences in E/E' each feature God's "agents" (or "angels"), an expression recurring nowhere else in the Bible. The same 2 sections also use the Hebrew verb *pāqa'*, "encounter," which occurs nowhere else in the sense of "reach a place," suggesting that the writer chose the unusual verb at 28:10 in order to effect the linkage with E'. Again, the occurrence of *bērākā* "blessing" in the antonymic expressions "he took away your/my blessing" and "accept my blessing," both with the verb *lāqah*, "take," is the thread connecting segments C/C'.

Thus the cycle is not only a narrative sequence with its own inner movement, but an artful arrangement which invites the reader to compare each segment with its complement later (or earlier) in the sequence.

To illustrate: segments A/A' clearly open and close the cycle. Certain information is repeated from earlier in Genesis in order to give the cycle a proper beginning: Isaac's birth (21:1–5), marriage (24:67), and Rebekah's family (24:15, 29), adding the characterization "Aramean." An oracle predicts that Rebekah's children will become two "nations," one submissive to the other. The twins are born, and both their prenatal struggle (v 22) and Jacob's manipulation of Esau (vv 27–34) prefigure Jacob's character as a loner who lives by his wits at the expense of other people, as well as the bad blood between the twins (chap. 27) and the later hostility between Israel and Edom (36:1, 8–9, 19; cf. Ps 137:7; Ezekiel 35).

A' echoes the theme of A in conclusion: the deaths of Isaac, Jacob's wife Rachel, and Rebekah's nurse Deborah; Jacob's 12 sons are listed by name and mother, a "nation"; the twins, having come together (chap. 33), stand at their father's grave; and Jacob appears as a religious reformer (vv 1–7) and recipient of the full divine promise (vv 9–25).²

B. The Cycle's Stories

Segment A (25:19–34). Jacob and Esau were born as a result of Isaac's intercession with God, because Rebekah (like Sarah before her and Rachel after her) was barren; offspring are the gift of God. Among the Bible's several husbands of barren wives, only Isaac prayed for a change (contrast Jacob in Gen 30:2), marking him as a man of piety and intimating a synergism which runs throughout the whole cycle.

Rebekah's only words in this section arise out of the prenatal jostling of the twins, but the Hebrew sentence is incomplete: "If so, why am I ...?" The text leaves Rebekah musing uncertainly about the events which her pregnancy portends; hers is an unfinished question, a verbless and ambiguous reflection which prefigures her incomplete and partial role in the cycle as a whole, just as the jostling forecasts enmity between the twins.

The oracle which she sought disclosed that her children would become separate peoples of unequal power, and that the nation springing from the older would be submissive to the younger.

² Walters, S. D. (1992). [Jacob Narrative](#). In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 3, p. 600). New York: Doubleday.

By identifying the sons with the peoples who sprang from them, the oracle at once implies a collective as well as an individual reading of the stories that follow: They recount the outward and inner movements of Jacob, the son of Isaac and Rebekah; but they refer also to the movements, the calling, and the character of the people named “Israel” after him. A collective reference is also suggested by the allusions associated with the naming of Esau: His hirsute appearance at birth (Heb *śē’ār*, 25:25; 27:11) alludes to his country Seir (33:16), while his ruddy color (Heb *’admônî*, v 25) and preference for red stew (Heb *hā’ādōm*, v 30) refer to his region Edom. By contrast, the name Jacob is explained with reference to personal behavior, since the collective reference belongs especially to his second name, Israel.

The narrative moves from the birth of the twins directly to an event showing that their relationships as adults realized the conflict portended by prenatal and birth events. Jacob took advantage of Esau’s fatigue and hunger by requiring him to trade his birthright for some food. The cycle has thus barely opened when Esau has ceded to Jacob the *běkōrâ*, his inheritance rights as firstborn. In a rare show of appraisal, the text says that Esau “spurned” his birthright. Yet, Jacob’s behavior was hardly exemplary: His hand was clearly on Esau’s heel, and the pairing of this episode with the birth story types Jacob’s character as the grasping and manipulative.

This falls short of expectations, as compared with Abraham and Isaac and in view of Jacob’s subsequent role as the father of the Israelite people. The dissonance is even in the text, for in the parallel description of the twins’ way of life (25:27), opposite the assessment “Esau was a skillful hunter,” we read, “Jacob was a blameless man” (Heb *’iš tām*, exactly as Job 1:8; 2:3). Translations use attenuated words (“plain” KJV, “quiet” RSV, “mild” JPS), but *tām* clearly implies moral excellence. This, then—moral excellence—is to be Israel’s vocation; and the same story which asserts it so boldly goes on to show Jacob as something other than blameless. The disparity introduces a tension at the beginning of the cycle which is not fully relaxed until the end.

Segment B (26:1–33). This story belongs chronologically to the time before the twins were born, but its placement within the cycle gives it pertinence to him. It opens with a direct reference to Abraham’s behavior in an earlier famine (v 1: the reference is thematic, not chronological, since a minimum of 64 years in narrative time separates the 2 [10 years 16:3; 14 years 16:16 and 21:5; 40 years 26:20]). As Abraham had done, Isaac started out for Egypt, but in the “Philistine” city of Gerar, God appeared to warn against leaving the land and to reiterate to Isaac the Abrahamic promise of land and progeny (vv 2–5).

Isaac’s anxiety over their safety in Gerar proved to be unfounded (vv 6–11), and the juxtaposition of this episode to v 5’s prolix “my charge, my commandments, my laws, my teachings,” suggests that residence in the land also required obedience to the divine pattern for life. To “remain in the land” is synonymous with obedience to Torah (Ps 37:3).

The use of “Philistine” suggests the story’s rise at a time when relations with the Philistines were a problem to Israel. In the cycle, however, they typify the land’s indigenous residents, because Isaac visits them as a stranger and is subject to pressure from them.

Isaac’s prosperity under divine blessing led to envy and to contention over water rights; he had to move several times, thereby surrendering valuable excavated wells in the process, before finding “space” (vv 12–22; “Rehoboth” is symbolic). Following this sacrificial determination to occupy the land amicably, another divine appearance (at the pilgrim site of Beer-sheba) reiterated the promise of progeny, and added the promise of God’s presence (v 24, unique to the Jacob cycle, see also 28:15, 20; 35:3).

A final threatening approach of the Philistines resulted in a treaty (Heb *bĕrît* “covenant”) between the 2 groups, sealed with a feast and the exchange of oaths (vv 23–33). The treaty episode interrupts the account of digging one more well (vv 25b, 32), so that the servant’s report, “We have found water,” takes on symbolic importance: Water is life, especially in the arid Negeb where Beer-sheba is located, and so also is the treaty life. Isaac has shown that it is possible to occupy the land of promise, to observe Torah, to prosper, and to maintain good relations with the other residents. He has found life. The other treaty, between God and Abraham, is also in the background: Although the word *bĕrît* is not used in the promise reports of chap. 26, it has been used in the earlier promises which are now being extended to Isaac (15:8; chap. 17); it, too, is life.

This segment on indigenous relations stands between 2 sections (A and C) on relations between Jacob and Esau, which are marked as a pair by common themes (e.g., Jacob outwits Esau to his own advantage) and by similar key words, such as *bĕkōrâ* and *bĕrākâ* (“birthright” and “blessing”). These words not only sound alike but are visually similar on the written page—*bkrh* and *brkh*—being distinguished only by the transposition of the middle 2 consonants.

This placement both links Isaac’s example with the subsequent B’, a different mode of engagement with the people of the land, and unmistakably juxtaposes Isaac’s style of relationship to Jacob’s. The juxtaposition announces, “Jacob may be living by strife and deceit, but if you want to see life under the promise, in the middle of all the ambiguity of threatening sociopolitical relationships, take a look at Isaac.” The story also stresses the need for the recipients of the promise to maintain residence in the land, something which will add additional tension in segment C.

Segment C (27:1–40). In the second of the paired stories of dealings between Jacob and Esau, Rebekah led Jacob to deceive his father into bestowing the patriarchal blessing—*bĕrākâ*—on him instead of on Esau the firstborn. Jacob disguised himself as Esau, and, although the blind Isaac was never free from suspicion, the ruse worked: The father ate his favorite dish and conferred on Jacob a promise of agricultural prosperity and hegemony over other people, including his brother (vv 28–29). Only when Esau actually showed up to receive the blessing did Isaac discover the trick; the blessing was already Jacob’s, but Isaac gave Esau a similar promise of bounty along with the promise that he should eventually free himself from Jacob’s yoke (vv 39–40).

This detailed and extended story—7 times as long as the *bĕkōrâ*—shows Jacob firmly in the legal and financial position of the firstborn. Both stories involve manipulation, and both involve meals, to which Isaac’s amicable covenant meal with Abimelech is a pointed contrast. They offer complementary explanations of Jacob’s priority, the shorter being more favorable to Jacob (there is no outright deception, and Esau “spurns” his birthright), the latter being marked by a deliberate and callous duplicity involving Rebekah as prime mover (the verbs in vv 14–17 have Rebekah, not Jacob, as their subject). Jacob’s impersonation of Esau symbolizes his priority: He dresses in Esau’s clothes and simulates Esau’s tomentose appearance (vv 15–16); he smells of the outdoors (v 27); he twice says, “I am your firstborn” (vv 19, 24). He has taken Esau’s place.

The Masoretic editors of the Hebrew text have signalled this in another way in Isaac’s reply to Jacob’s address in v 18. Isaac says “Yes?” (Heb *hinnenni*), a common locution normally spelled *hinnēni*, but with 2 doubled “n”s only here and in Gen 22:7 where Isaac’s address to Abraham and the father’s reply are in the identical words. In both stories the father replies to the younger but favored son.

This linkage also highlights the tension which the second episode of cheating introduces into the cycle. In Gen 22:7 Isaac was the obedient and compliant son, enquiring about sacrificial procedures; but in Gen 27:18 Jacob—equally born by divine intervention—says, “I am Esau, your firstborn.” How can such mendacity inherit and bear the promise? And indeed, the fathers’ replies in each case signal this, for Abraham said to Isaac, “Yes, my son,” but Isaac said to Jacob, “Yes, *who are you*, my son?” Thus, one of the central themes of the whole cycle of stories comes to expression—the unclear identity of Jacob.

The story expresses this ambiguity in other ways. In talking to Rebekah about the deception, Jacob offered descriptions of both himself and Esau (v 11), in which there are wordplays pointing beyond the immediate situation. Esau, said Jacob, is a hairy man (Heb *ʾiš śāʾir*). The adjective is a homophone of *śāʾir* “he-goat, buck,” and thus alludes playfully to Esau’s outdoor life and to the skins of kids with which Jacob disguised himself (v 16). I, said Jacob, am a smooth man (Heb *ʾiš ḥālāq*). The same adjective occurs elsewhere of deceptive speech (Prov 5:3; 26:28). Who are you, Jacob? By his own mouth, he is not a “blameless man” (25:27), but a “slippery man.”

Although Isaac could give the patriarchal blessing to only one of his sons, he also gave Esau a promise very similar in that it predicted the same agricultural boons—the fat of the land and the dew of heaven (in reverse order, vv 28 and 39). Translations usually obscure this similarity, since the preposition *min* can mean both “have a share in” and “be far from,” but the reader of the story in Hebrew may wonder if there is still a chance for Esau to recoup his position, especially since Isaac told him he would throw off Jacob’s yoke.

Segment D (27:41–28:5). Esau’s anger at a second supplanting (v 36) made it necessary for Jacob to flee, and his mother arranged his departure for her own country where he could stay with her brother Laban (vv 41–45), representing the trip to Isaac as required so that Jacob should not marry a local woman (27:46–28:5). Classical literary criticism has seen these two sets of arrangements as duplicate accounts from different sources: The former, which calls Rebekah’s homeland “Haran,” from JE, and the latter, using “Paddan-aram” from P. But each paragraph plays its own role in the movement of the narrative.

This sly provision for Jacob’s sudden need to leave home is the cycle’s final glimpse of Rebekah. Her last words follow the “if ... then ...” pattern of her first (25:22), but here the sentence is complete: *lāmmâ lî ḥayyîm* “What good will life be to me?” (v 46). These 2 sentences—freighted with import by their position—show Rebekah preoccupied with her own feelings and well-being. Her single significant action has been to engineer the deception by which her second-born son Jacob, instead of Esau her firstborn, received Isaac’s blessing. Her way of life has affinities with that of her brother Laban (29:15–30; 31:6–7, 14–15, 41–42), and Jacob’s own slippery character displays a family resemblance.

This way of life is new in the Genesis narratives. Apart from their lies about their wives (chaps. 12, 20, 26), both Abraham and Isaac are exemplary persons, and in chap. 26 Isaac is conscientious and sacrificial in his relations with the herdsmen of Gerar. The term “Aramean,” found first in Rebekah’s genealogy (25:20; 28:5) and elsewhere applied to Laban alone (31:20, 24), while obviously denoting the N Syrian region of their origin as “Aram,” seems also to connote this behavioral pattern in the Haran side of the family; “Aramean” is new in the Jacob cycle, even though all the other genealogical information of 25:20 is already found in 24:15, 28.

It is thus a central tension within the cycle whether Jacob will actually become the chosen leader which later Israelites knew him to be. His departure from Canaan raises the possibility that

he has abandoned the land promised to Abraham and which Isaac has resolutely occupied at great cost (chap. 26), and has adopted another way of life altogether. Deut 26:5 describes him as “an Aramean given up for lost.”

Before Jacob left, Isaac gave another blessing, this one clearly linked to earlier traditions in Genesis by the words “fertile and numerous” (28:3), alluding to Gen 1:28 and 9:1: Like Adam and Noah, Jacob is to be the start of something new and big, becoming “an assembly of peoples.” Isaac went on (28:4) to link Jacob with the Abrahamic promise and possession of the land, something new in the narrative and especially incongruous in view of his imminent departure. Unlikely as it seems, Jacob has been marked as the bearer of the promise.

At this point, Esau does not look as bad as later tradition painted him (especially Heb 12:16, which called him “irreligious”), since he has been victimized in both stories of rivalry with Jacob. His rehabilitation is further suggested by the 2 snippets of information about his wives which frame the deception story (26:34–35 and 28:6–9). The first reports that his Hittite wives “were a source of bitterness” to his parents; the second notes that he married Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Isaac’s half-brother. Moreover, Esau remains in Canaan, and the promise concerns the land (28:4).

This, then, is the situation: Jacob has spurned the Abrahamic promise and has decamped the land which the promise conveyed to Abraham’s offspring; Esau has received a patriarchal promise only slightly less complete than Jacob’s, and has married within the Abrahamic family in order to please his parents; he is on the land. The narrative retains Esau more as a peer than as a subordinate, and everything points toward his regaining his lost privileged position. Naturally, the informed reader knows that this did not happen, but the story’s willingness to let this prospect arise heightens the tension which Jacob’s moral deficiencies and his flight have already raised.

Segment E (28:10–22). In a brief but pivotal episode—the only event from his journey to the north—Jacob dreamed of a stairway between earth and heaven, with God’s agents going up and down on it. The Lord stood beside him and promised him the land, innumerable offspring, and the divine presence to protect and return him to the land (vv 13–15). Jacob awoke, recognizing the numinous character of both the place and his experience, and responded by setting up a stone pillar and naming the site Bethel, “God’s House” (vv 16–19). He reciprocated the promise by a conditional vow, “the Lord shall be my God” (v 21).

The stairway (traditionally “ladder”; the word does not occur elsewhere in the Bible) is a symbol of the accessibility of God’s help and presence, a theme distinctive to the Jacob stories. It is not a means for human ascent; God’s agents go up and come down. The stairway is like a fireman’s pole: when people are in need, helpers come down to render it. Their place is not in heaven, but on earth, where the divine presence is required.

In Jacob’s life, this event is epochal because (a) it is the first time that the divine promise which had come to both Abraham and Isaac now comes to Jacob, directly from God (earlier only from Isaac in Gen 28:3–4), and because (b) it is the first time that Jacob shows any interest whatsoever in the religious side of his family tradition (previously only focusing on priority over Esau). The divine initiative arrested him as he was in flight from his land and his people, and Jacob was sufficiently moved to acknowledge God’s presence and to perform religious acts.

The sections 28:6–9 and 10–22 interrupt what would otherwise be a summary account of Jacob’s trip to Haran (28:5 plus 29:1; 28:10 duplicates 28:5), suggesting that each element had

an earlier and different context. The genealogical interests of vv 6–9 have led many scholars to associate it with P, and the use of “Elohim” in segment E’ connects it with E. The Bethel story certainly functions as an etiology of a sacred place and location of a sanctuary where the faithful later came to worship and pay tithes (v 22). But its incorporation into the Jacob cycle has enlarged its function and meaning. Particularly the use of “YHWH” (vv 13, 16, 21) shows the story’s links with Israel’s distinctive religion, and gives to Jacob’s words in v 21 a confessional character which marks the event as a kind of conversion, occurring just as he seems firmly to have closed the door on becoming what later generations knew he became: the ancestor of Israel, God’s people.

At the same time, Jacob’s vow falls short of hearty embrace of the promise. Its conditionality (“If ...” v 20) is confirmed by its content. In reiterating it (vv 20–21a), Jacob omits all references to the land, progeny, expansion, and the families of the earth—essential to the patriarchal promise (vv 12–14); he is preoccupied with personal well-being (he adds food and clothes), and he alters (v 21) the promise of v 15 in subtle ways (e.g., “I [the Lord] will bring you back” becomes “if I [Jacob] return,” and “this land” becomes “my father’s house”), all of which shows that Jacob wishes to retain the initiative and is more interested in the family estate than the land. In short, although the Bethel event marks Jacob’s awakening to God and to the promise, he is still a “smooth man,” and his vows appear to be as much a bargain as a commitment.

Segment F (29:1–30). Jacob’s 20-year residence in Haran (31:38, 41) is recounted in the stories of Segments F–G and G’–F’. He married, serving his mother’s brother 14 years as a bride price; 11 sons and a daughter were born to him by 4 women; and he eventually became wealthy in livestock and servants. His relationships with Laban (in whom Jacob almost met his match in craftiness) dominate these sections. The initial encounter was apparently cordial (vv 13–14), and the final scene is of a covenant meal between them (31:51–54), but in between the 2 men circle warily, each looking to his own advantage.

Jacob’s first contact with his mother’s people was at a well where shepherds were gathered with their flocks. As they spoke, Laban’s daughter Rachel arrived with his flock. The well (v 2) introduces a double entendre (Prov 5:15; Cant 4:15): The large stone on the mouth of the well intimates that Rachel will be hard to get; when Jacob, singlehanded, rolls the stone from the mouth, we have not only a show of masculine strength, but also an intimation that Jacob will marry her. There is no other example in the Bible of a man kissing a woman (v 11).

Jacob stayed with Laban, and after a month proposed to work 7 years in order to marry Rachel. Laban agreed, but when the time was up he substituted his older and less-attractive daughter Leah, a deception Jacob did not discover until the next morning. When Jacob protested, Laban pled local custom, and offered to give him Rachel at the same time, in exchange for another 7 years of work. Thus Jacob came to have 2 wives, each of whom had a maid.

There is an ironic fitness in Laban’s deception. Jacob’s reach for the rights of the firstborn son (Esau, Heb *běkōr* 27:32) got him the firstborn daughter (Heb *běkîrâ* 29:26), as well. He, eschewing the place of the younger son (*sā’îr* 25:23) was at first denied the younger daughter (*śe’îrâ* 29:26). The man who imposed this sentence was the brother of the woman who led Jacob to deceive Isaac. Jacob’s befuddlement is so complete that he did not discover the substitution even in intercourse.

Jacob and Rachel initially have a romantic and tender relationship. She was shapely and beautiful (v 17), and Jacob’s first 7 years’ work seemed like only a few days because of his love for her (v 20). To fall in love is to become vulnerable, and in this relationship the loner began to

emerge from his private world of wit and manipulation. As the stairway dream signalled a new direction in Jacob's relation to God and the promise, so does his love for Rachel in his relationships with other people.

His relationship with Laban was more complex. The uncle embraced and kissed the nephew (v 13), as Jacob and Esau were to do later (33:4), and regarded Jacob as an insider who might suitably marry his daughter (v 19). But Laban's exclamation, "You are truly my bone and my flesh" (v 14) has as much to do with Jacob's duplicity as it does with blood, since Laban said this after Jacob had told him all that had happened (v 13), presumably including the reason for his flight from home. The young Laban had been remarked for his cupidity (Gen 24:22, 30–31); the fact that Jacob brought no rich gifts with him did not save him from the mature Laban's canny eye. Fourteen years' work would buy many gold bracelets.

Segment G (29:31–30:24). The narrative next turns to the building up of Jacob's family through the birth of 12 children (including his daughter Dinah). The names of the 11 sons have popular etymologies attached to them which, for the most part, have to do with the wives' standing with one another or with Jacob. The sense of rivalry and even hostility is very strong (Levi 29:34, Naphtali 30:8, Joseph 30:23), reflecting the reality of a polygamous household and perhaps also of tribal rivalries in later years. None of the names is distinctly theophoric, but God/the Lord is mentioned in most of the explanations.

The Lord favored Leah because she was unloved, and consequently she bore 4 sons. Rachel became envious and burst out at Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die," a peremptory demand which recalls Rebekah's brusque rhetoric (25:22; 27:46). Jacob's response (v 2) was in kind, and Rachel then offered him her maid Bilhah, using identical words to Sarai's (Gen 16:2), "that I also may acquire a family through her" (v 3). The story thus compares her not only with Leah but tacitly with her husband's grandmother, Israel's primal progenitress, as well. Two sons were born to Jacob through Bilhah, and 2 more through Leah's maid Zilpah. Rachel sought fecundity with an aphrodisiac (v 14), the only result of which was that Jacob returned to Leah, who bore him 2 more sons (vv 15–20).

Rachel thus remained childless, although Jacob had 10 sons by the other 3 women of the household. The birth of her son Joseph marks the midpoint of the Jacob cycle, and came about because "God remembered Rachel" (v 22). The expression is rich in associations (Noah, at the height of the flood [Gen 8:1], or the subsequent birth of the prophet Samuel in answer to Hannah's prayer [1 Sam 1:19]), and implies God's redemptive attention to people's needs, especially in connection with the covenant (Exod 2:24). With 12 children, Jacob has grown into a complete family. (Dinah is the 12th; the 12th son, Benjamin, was born later on Canaanite soil [35:16–19] although the concluding summary of the cycle lists him as one of the 12 sons born in Paddan-Aram [35:22b–26]). Jacob can now return home.

Segment G' (30:25–43). But before Jacob was actually to go back, his growth as a family must be matched by his wealth. This and the preceding section—the 2 innermost sections of the cycle—match each other well: The competitiveness and trickery (30:15) of the wives is matched by Laban's new tricks; the growth of both groups does not come without difficulty, but in the end is ample. Since the Israelite people were later often known as a "flock" under God's care (e.g., Ezekiel 34; Pss 77:21; 78:20–22; 79:13; 96:6–7; 100:3), the collocation is especially apt; *figurally the 2 groups are the same*.

Jacob asked Laban's permission to go back to his homeland: The required time had been more than served (v 26). But when Laban urged him to stay in his service and to name his wages, Jacob proposed to take all the irregularly colored animals out of Laban's flocks as a nuclear flock of his own. The wily uncle agreed, but at once culled and moved those animals, so that Jacob still had nothing. Jacob responded with certain obscure procedures by which Laban's good flocks bred miscolored offspring; these then became Jacob's, in accordance with the agreement. In the end, his large family was equalled by his enormous holdings of servants and livestock (v 43).

Segment F' (31:1–32:1—Eng 31:1–55). Jacob once more decided to return home. Although his mother had told him that she would send for him, the story is silent about her. There were 3 reasons for his decision: hostility from Laban's sons (v 1), a change in Laban's attitude toward him (v 2), and instructions from the Lord to do so (v 3). The synergism of human motives and divine direction is striking. He discussed it secretly (v 4) with Rachel and Leah, referring to Laban's guile, crediting God with his wealth, and reporting a dream in which "God's agent" had directed him to return home (vv 7–13). The wives supported Jacob's decision, describing themselves as "outsiders" in their own clan, since Laban had "sold us and used up our purchase price" (v 15).

It was not only Jacob who credited God with his wealth; the angel said the same thing (v 12), and the wives also, adding that the wealth was justly theirs (v 16). The story thus responds to the brothers' charge that Jacob had grown rich at Laban's expense.

Both here and in his earlier wish to return, Jacob spoke of his "land" (30:25; 31:3, 13), as does the summary of his departure (v 18). This language goes beyond that of his previous vow, which spoke only of returning to his "father's house" (28:21); Jacob will now do more than possess the estate; he will occupy the land. (Laban speaks only of "your father's house" [v 30], since he knows nothing of the promise.) Moreover, although Jacob was Rebekah's favorite, he left "to go to his father Isaac" (v 18). Where is Rebekah?

This time Jacob did not ask permission, but left while Laban was away shearing sheep. Unknown to Jacob, Rachel stole the household idols (v 19), perhaps for their religious and financial value. When Laban learned what had happened, he pursued, overtaking them near Canaan. Warned by God not to mistreat them, Laban nevertheless berated Jacob and accused him of stealing the household idols. Swearing death to anyone having the idols, Jacob invited Laban to find them. He searched all the tents, finally coming to Rachel's. She had hidden them, and, by a ruse, prevented Laban from finding them.

It was Jacob's turn to berate Laban, and he did so, more harshly than Laban deserved under the immediate circumstances, but not more so, considering the past 20 years. In a speech (vv 38–42) summarizing their relations during that time, Jacob accused his shifty uncle and cited his own conscientious service and God's protection. In exile, the "slippery man" of Canaan was learning to be a "blameless man."

Laban proposed a treaty (Heb *bērit*, "covenant"), marking the boundary between them by a heap of stones; each swore by his own deity (v 53), and sealed the agreement with a sacrifice and a meal. Within the story, it is the first meal that Jacob has ever eaten with anyone, and a distinct contrast to the 2 meals which he had arranged and used to get the better of Esau. The narrative thus does not allow Jacob to leave Haran without a reconciliation with Laban—unsought by Jacob—which put an end to 2 decades of mistrust.

Segment E' (32:2–3—Eng 32:1–2). Parting amicably from Laban, Jacob continued his journey to face a similar encounter with Esau in which he has no blamelessness to plead. In a matching

spiritual event to the stairway dream, God's agents encountered him. Jacob said, "This is God's camp," and named that site Mahanaim, "Doublecamp." The name is or resembles a Hebrew noun (dual number), a form used for objects which occur naturally in pairs, such as hands and ears. His own entourage is one camp (cf. 32:8—Eng 32:7), and God's agents form the other—a natural pair. He can go on to meet Esau in tandem with the same divine company that he met at Bethel and that have been with him ever since (see 31:11).

Segment D' (32:4–33—Eng 32:3–32). The cycle returns to Esau, who has not appeared since the end of segment D, and who is now mentioned together with the two geographical names to which the cycle early made allusion (segment A). Expecting Esau to attack, Jacob broke his retinue into 2 camps so that at least half might escape. (He is now a "people" [v 7], a term never applied to Abraham or Isaac.)

He then prayed for help, another first (vv 9–12). First, his *address* to God reaches back in time by speaking of the "God of Abraham and Isaac," and forward by using "Yahweh," the distinctive name of Israel's deity. Second, as *grounds* he quotes the divine directive (from 31:3) pursuing which he had come to the present hazardous moment, substituting "deal bountifully with" for "be with." His return to the promise at the end of the prayer uses words ("offspring as the sands of the sea") which have not appeared in the cycle applied to Jacob (28:14 spoke of the "dust of the earth"); the narrative telescopes the promises here, drawing this line from Gen 22:17—the promise to Abraham—and identifying Jacob with the promise in its historical depth. Third, he *acknowledges* God's gifts. He had left Canaan in naked flight, and was now two camps. His words "I am unworthy" (v 10), literally, "I am too small" (Heb *qāṭōntî*), express more than unworthiness; they also allude to Jacob's being the younger (*qāṭōn* 29:15, 24) and to the reversal of primogeniture (Brueggemann 1982). Fourth, the *petition* beseeches rescue from Esau, specifically mentioning the mothers and children; the language is that of the biblical psalms (e.g., 31:16; 59:2–3; 142:7; 143:9). The absence of any acknowledgement of wrongdoing is noteworthy.

"A man wrestled with him until dawn" (v 24). This best-known of the Jacob stories remains mysterious. In their southward march they had reached the river Jabbok and were camped on its N bank. During the night after Jacob had dispatched the gifts to Esau, he got up and took his family over to the S bank; he did the same with his possessions—no motive for this is given. Jacob remained alone in the camp. There is no "angel" in this story (an interpretation found in Hos 12:4), and the introduction of an adversary is abrupt and unexpected. Is it Esau, taking revenge in kind by a sneak attack in the dark? The match was even, but the adversary managed to wrench Jacob's hip at its socket before asking for release as the dawn broke. Jacob refused, "unless you bless me." The adversary required him to say his name—"Jacob"—and then changed it to "Israel," giving a popular etymology by which it means "he strives with God." When Jacob asked his adversary's name, he was told, "You must not ask my name," and they parted (see Gen 35:9–15). Jacob named the place "God's Face," and went his way, limping, as the sun rose. A dietary etiology concludes the story.

In its present form and position, the story concerns struggle with people and with God (see also Kodell 1980). The unnamed "man" symbolizes every person with whom Jacob struggled—Esau, Isaac, Laban—and yet, the "man" at the beginning of the story is certainly God at the end, for who else is it whose name cannot be spoken? When else did Jacob strive with God? The story, therefore, in an overt polyvalence, blends Jacob's conflict with people and with God into one

event. The larger narrative also suggests this identification. First, Jacob prayed, “Rescue me (Heb *haṣṣîlênî*) from my brother” (v 11), then he named the wrestling-site “God’s Face,” saying, “My life has been rescued” (Heb *wattinnāšēl*, v 30). Second, after wrestling, he said, “I have seen God face to face” (v 30), and when he met Esau, he said, “To see your face is like seeing God’s face” (33:10).

To utter his name was to speak his character—“cheat”—making good the lack of any confession in the prayer, and acknowledging that his alienation from Esau was not an episode but a way of life. The story is thus made psychologically and theologically profound by superimposing on one another Jacob’s need to face his own character, his relations with people, and his relation with God.

The limp suggests the costliness of the lonely struggle. It also shows Jacob advancing to meet Esau in a painful vulnerability; whatever he might have thought previously of victory in struggle or of escape (v 8) is now quite impossible. He limps. But the sun is rising, and he is on his way to becoming a new man, a process begun as the sun was setting (28:11).

Segment C’ (33:1–20). The story moves immediately to the encounter between the 2 brothers. Jacob now leads his entourage, having previously followed it from behind. His elaborate obeisance before Esau (v 3) is without parallel in the Bible. But Esau does not want a fight: they embrace, kiss, and weep.

In the next segment (B’) the text plays on two Hebrew words similar in appearance and sound: *maḥāneh* “company” (32:3, 8–9, 11, 22 [—Eng 32:2, 7–8, 10, 21]), and *minḥâ* “gift” (32:14, 19, 21–22 [—Eng 13, 18, 20–21]; cf. *bĕrākâ* and *bĕkōrâ* in segments A and C). Now in 33:8, 10, the *maḥāneh* has become the *minḥâ*; Jacob urges Esau to accept the company/gift as a sign of the acceptance of his person. Then comes the jolt (Fishbane 1975), “Please take,” Jacob urged, “my blessing (*bĕrākâ*)” (v 11). Dropping *minḥâ*, he utilizes the same noun and verb used by Esau and Isaac when Jacob took the blessing which was not his (27:35–36). The pairing of *minḥâ* with *maḥāneh* throughout these 2 sections makes the use of *bĕrākâ* particularly obtrusive, and the reference to segment C is very clear.

Yet, this is as far as the narrative can go in describing the reconciliation, for Jacob did not actually return the right of primogeniture, and historically Israel never conceded Edom’s priority. Dramatically and symbolically, Jacob’s acceptance by Esau could have been marked by a meal; its absence suggests that the reconciliation fell short of the solidity which Israel felt with the Syrian homeland of Rebekah and Rachel, and the narrative expresses this overtly by Jacob’s wariness of Esau’s two offers of company and assistance (vv 12–16).

They went their separate ways, Esau to Seir and Jacob to Canaan. His first act there was to buy land and set up an altar; by naming it “El, the God of Israel,” he identified himself with the land and with the God who wrestled with him and gave him the name which became that of the people of God. Apart from the etiology of 32:33 it is the cycle’s first use of the name “Israel” since it was given.

Segment B’ (34:1–31). Jacob’s family settled on land that Jacob bought near Shechem. Dinah, his daughter by Leah, was raped by Shechem (his name is the same as the city’s), son of the city’s chief, Hamor. Jacob’s involvement in the episode which followed is minimal, being restricted to the notice that he was silent about the rape until his sons came in from the field (v 5), and to his protest against his sons’ subsequent actions (v 30).

Shechem wished to marry Dinah. His father's negotiations were entirely with Jacob's sons; Hamor even referred to their sister as "your [plural] daughter" (v 8). He proposed intermarriage between the family of Jacob and the Shechemites, to include full and free rights in the land. The brothers agreed, provided the Shechemite men accepted circumcision (already a mark of the Abrahamic tradition, Genesis 17). Then the newcomers would mingle and become "one people" with them (vv 16, 22). The Shechemites agreed. But on the third day, Dinah's uterine brothers Simeon and Levi attacked the city by surprise, killing all its men, including Hamor and Shechem, and taking Dinah away. The other brothers followed and pillaged the town, taking the women and children and all its wealth. The story closes with Jacob's effete protest that Simeon and Levi have made him "odious" in the land; he fears an attack which his small forces could not resist. The sons say only, "Should he treat our sister like a whore?"

The violence and duplicity of this story surpass anything ever done by Jacob, Rebekah, or Laban. Jacob's protest—feeble and motivated by fear of revenge rather than by moral outrage—and his silence at the outset raise the question whether we have here the new or the old Jacob; indeed, the new name is not used at all in the story (except in the anachronistic national sense in v 7).

To be sure, the threat was great and the accommodation proposed by Hamor ("one people," vv 16, 22) went far beyond the treaty designed by Abimelech (Gen 26:29 [segment B]); to "intermarry" (*hithattēn*) was forbidden (Deut 7:2–3; Josh 23:12; Ezra 9:14); and the Shechemites were clearly seeking their own advantage at Jacob's expense: "Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours." The story is a justly sharp warning against sexual irregularity and against assimilation. But the circumcision proposal was a ruse from the beginning; the brokers spoke "with guile" (Heb *bēmirmâ*, v 13) and never intended intermarriage.

The cycle, therefore, presents 2 paradigms for relationships with the residents of the land: First, a sacrificial self-giving which leads to "space" and to mutual acceptance and respect; second, a murderous and vindictive exclusivism. In segment B (Gen 26:1–33), Isaac's way resulted in God's blessing and agricultural prosperity: He found water. There is but one word of evaluation in B': "guile" (*mirmâ*). But, given the larger Israelite religious context, that is quite enough. It is the same word already used of Jacob's deceit of Isaac (27:35), and otherwise occurs 37 times, always negatively, exclusively in the Prophets and Wisdom literature (except 2 Kgs 9:23). Jer 9:5 (—Eng 9:6) uses *mirmâ* twice, and also alludes to Jacob by using the verb *'āqab* (also twice, in 9:3—Eng 9:4). The word *mirmâ* is almost a code word for social evil, and particular condemnation falls on guileful speech (Ps 52:6; Dan 8:25; 11:23). Note its use in Hos 12:1, 8, enclosing a passage which refers to Jacob.

Thus Jacob found that it was not easy to shed a whole way of life; more was yet needed before the promise (segment A) can be realized.

This chapter has long been a textbook example for source critics, who see in some of its internal confusions evidence that 2 versions have been combined—one from J (Hamor speaks) and one from P (Shechem speaks).

Segment A' (35:1–29). The last chapter of a cycle of stories should be highly important, especially in an "anatomy," where the ideas are as important as the stories. Chap. 35 has generally puzzled scholars because it comprises discrete and diverse fragments, a feature which may find a parallel in early Arabic biographies (Delitzsch), and because parts of it duplicate earlier material (Jacob becomes Israel, he names Bethel). But everything here plays a role, either in

bringing some of the cycle's themes to a conclusion or in echoing something in segment A. There are 7 fragments to consider.

1. Vv 1–7. Responding to God's direction, Jacob led a pilgrimage to Bethel, preceded by religious reforms involving his own household and (in the context of chap. 34) the Shechemite captives. The language of Jacob's appeal to the people, especially "Rid yourselves of the alien gods in your midst" (v 2), makes him the prototype of later reformers who called on God's people to repent: Joshua (Josh 24:23) and Samuel (1 Sam 7:3). Who are you, Jacob? The sly loner of segment A has become the zealous religious leader of a people (vv 2, 6).

2. Vv 9–15. God appeared, not only to bless Jacob, but also to change his name to "Israel," and to reiterate the twofold promise of progeny and land previously given to Abraham and Isaac. The cycle knows 2 traditions of Jacob's name-change, one associated with the wrestling in Transjordan (segment D') and one here with Bethel in Canaan. The former is a personal episode in which Jacob struggled to lay aside his fractious and estranging way of life; the latter follows his engagement in the religious life of his people, showing that the story of Jacob as person was also read and told of Jacob as national progenitor. Accordingly, the Heb *wayēbārek 'ōtô* (v 9) should be translated "he blessed him" but at 32:30 "he took leave of him" (so JPSV), since the blessing and promise come only after Jacob shows this collective concern. The story can now call him "Israel" (v 21), which it has not done previously.

The promise uses the words "be fertile and increase," which Isaac had also used (28:3, see segment D). The hint there of Jacob as the first man—who, like Adam and Noah, initiates something new and big and who can justly inherit the promise of the land—can now be seen enfleshed in the chastened and returned Jacob. Now the new beginning can occur, because Jacob cares about his people.

The cycle also knows two traditions of the naming of Bethel, one on Jacob's flight (segment E), and one here upon his return. The pair of duplicate name-givings in A', therefore, link it specifically with the 2 previous epochal religious experiences of Jacob's life: when God arrested his attention and obtained a preliminary if wary response (28:10–22), and when God brought Jacob to face himself and his wider relationships with both people and the divine (32:22–32). It forms itself a third, in which Jacob's development comes to the necessary stage of religious leadership in a distinctly Israelite context. The placement of vv 9–15 at the close of the cycle is necessary in view of the process through which Jacob passed, but it also nicely balances segment A's giving of the name "Jacob" with the giving of the new name "Israel."

3. V 8. Verses 1–15 form a unity enclosed by references to Bethel at beginning and end. Verse 8 is geographically appropriate, but intrusive in every other way. It may be understood in connection with segment A's hint that Rebekah's role in the cycle will be incomplete. When A' reports 3 deaths—two of them expected through the passage of time—the absence of any word about Rebekah becomes noticeable. What *has* happened to her?

Rebekah's unfinished question (25:22) finds its complement here in 35:8, which is not so much the notice of Deborah's death as a non-notice of Rebekah's. As far as the cycle goes, Rebekah's life is an unfinished story. After her complaint, "What good will life be to me?" (27:46) we never hear of her again. She had told Jacob, "When your brother's anger subsides, I will bring you back from Haran" (27:44–45), but Jacob's return has its own motives (31:1–3). Rebekah disappears from the story without a trace. The necrology of v 8 is positioned anomalously between 2 paragraphs showing the new Jacob at his best: He leads a religious reform, and he

receives a new name and the divine promise. Its obtrusive position is hermeneutic: The Aramean way of life is gone; Israel—both person and people—will put away alien gods and will occupy the land of promise.

4. *Vv 16–21*. As they travelled from Bethel, Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob's sons now number 12, and the death of the beloved wife signals that the cycle is drawing to a close. But it closes on a note of hope: Rachel's name for the infant—Ben-oni "Son of my suffering"—looks backward, to her untimely death and to the rivalries and disappointments of the years in Haran; but Jacob's alternate name "Son of the right hand," looks forward by suggesting his own favor and by evoking the right hand of God which saves (Isa 41:10; Pss 20:7; 118:15–16).

5. *V 22a*. The brusque notice that Reuben slept with Bilhah, who is called Israel's concubine rather than Rachel's maid, also suggests the passing of the old order. Reuben was Jacob's firstborn; to sleep with a man's women is to lay claim to his position.

6. *Vv 22b–26*. Segment A had said that 2 peoples would issue from Rebekah. The list of the 12 sons, grouped by mother, matches this prediction, in that one of these peoples (the 12 tribes of Israel) sprang from one of Rebekah's sons.

7. *Vv 27–29*. Finally Jacob reaches his father Isaac, at the ancestral residence of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 13:18; 23:2; 25:9). There Isaac died, and the story which began with prenatal jostling closes with the brothers Jacob and Esau joined in burying the father who prayed for their birth.

The divine plan for Jacob has been achieved, against human custom (primogeniture) and against human suitability (Jacob is the one who seeks his own advantage at others' expense, in flight from intimacy). Yet it has come about without any divine overriding of Jacob's "free will"; all human actions have adequate human motivation, including the pivotal decision to return to Canaan. In and through these actions, the sovereign will guides human thought and choice in a gracious interplay both reasonable and mysterious.³

ISRAEL

The name Israel means "he who strives with God" (cf. Ge 32:28). It was first applied to Jacob as a name of honor and then came to be applied to the nation formed from the descendants of his twelve sons (e.g., Ex 1:7).

³ Walters, S. D. (1992). [Jacob Narrative](#). In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 3, pp. 600–607). New York: Doubleday.

With the division of the kingdom of Israel following Solomon's reign, Israel became the name for the Northern Kingdom of the ten tribes centered in Ephraim, in distinction to the kingdom of Judah (which included the tribe of Benjamin) in the south (e.g., 1 Sa 11:8), although, the term Israel could still be used for all of the covenant people even after the divided monarchy (e.g., Is 5:7).

The nation of Israel in the OT was peculiarly formed by God as His special people in covenant relationship with Him (cf. Ex 19:5–6). The Gospels continue this same use of the term Israel for the OT covenant people.

With their rejection of the Messiah as a nation, some interpreters understand that God has established the church as a new spiritual Israel (cf. Ga 6:16) in which the remaining prophecies concerning Israel's restoration and blessing to all people will be fulfilled. Others, however, **understand Israel to retain the OT ethnic and national meaning throughout all Scripture and the prophecies concerning Israel yet to be fulfilled through this special people (cf. Ro 11:24–29).**

uses of term ♦ name of Jacob: Ge 32:28; 35:10, 21; Ex 32:13; 1 Ki 18:31; 2 Ki 17:34 ♦ descendants of Jacob which later formed the nation of Israel: Ex 1:7; Is 5:7 ♦ Northern kingdom (after divided monarchy): 1 Sa 11:8; 1 Ki 12:16 ♦ southern kingdom (after division): Mi 3:1 ♦ Messiah: Is 49:1–6 ♦ spiritual or believing Israel: Jn 1:47; Ro 9:6; Ga 6:16; (cf. Jn 1:47)

descriptions of ♦ holy nation: Ex 19:6 ♦ holy people: De 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19 ♦ God's own (or special) possession: Ex 19:5; De 7:6; 26:18 ♦ God's portion: De 32:9 ♦ Priestly kingdom: Ex 19:6 ♦ a separate people: Ex 33:16; Le 20:24, 26; 1 Ki 8:53 ♦ God's inheritance: Ex 34:9; De 4:20; 9:26, 29; 2 Sa 21:3; 1 Ki 8:51, 53; Ps 33:12; 68:9; Je 10:16

purpose of ♦ blessing to the world: Ex 19:5–6; Is 2:2–3; 19:24; 27:6; 60:1–3; Mi 5:7; Zec 8:13, 20–23; Jn 4:24; Ro 11:12, 15 ♦ means of God's revelation to world: De 4:5–6; Ps 102:13–15; Is 2:2–4; 43:10–12, 21; 52:8–10; Je 33:7–9; Eze 39:7, 21–23, 27; Ro 3:2

significant historical events of ♦ in Egypt: Ex 1:1–7; 12:40–41; De 10:22; 26:5 ♦ first passover: Ex 12 ♦ Exodus from Egypt: Ex 12:31 ♦ passing through Red Sea: Ex 14:19–22; De 11:4; Ps 78 ♦ wilderness wanderings: Nu 14:20–39 ♦ covenant at Sinai: Ex 19, 20 ♦ idolatry of golden calf: Ex 32 ♦ entrance to promised land: Jos 1–4 ♦ government by judges: Jdg 2:16–19; Ac 13:20 ♦ establishment of monarchy: 1 Sa 8; 10; 11:12–15 ♦ David made king: 1 Sa 16:13–14; 2 Sa 2:4, 11; 5:1–5 ♦ division of kingdom: 1 Ki 11:11, 31; 12; Zec 11:14 ♦ Assyrian captivity of Israel: 2 Ki 17 ♦ Babylonian captivity: 2 Ki 25; 2 Ch 36; Je 39; 52

prophecies concerning ♦ judgment (including dispersion): Le 26:27–33; De 28:49–68; 2 Ki 20:17–18; 21:12–15; 22:16–17; 23:26–27; Is 1:24–25; 3; 5:1–6; 6:9–13; 7:17–25; 29:1–4; Je 4:5–31; 6; 9:7–11; 15:1–14; 19; 25:8–11; 30:4–7; Eze 5; 15; 16:35–52; 20:33–39; Da 9:26–27; 12:1; Hos 9:17; Joe 2:1–17; Am 2:4–8; 9:7–10; Zep 1:2–18; Zec 11:1–13:9; Mal 4:1; Mt 23:37–39; 24:2, 15–22; Mk 13:1–20; Lu 13:34–35; 19:43–44; 21:5–24; 23:28–31; Ro 11:25 ♦ restoration of: Le 26:40–45; De 30:1–10; Is 2:1–4; 4:2–6; 11:10–16; 25; 26; 27:13; 30:18–26; 32:15–20; 33:13–24; 35; 40:2, 9–10; 44:1–5; 49:13–23; 51:11; 52:1–12; 60; 61:4–9; 62; 66:7–22; Je 12:14–16; 16:14–15; 23:5–8; 24:6; 30:2–11, 18–22; 31:23–40; Eze 11:14–21; 16:60–63; 17:22–24; 20:33–44; 34:11–31; 36, 37; 39:25–29; Da 12:1; Joe 2:18–32; 3:1; Am 9:11–15; Ob 17–21; Mi 2:12–13; 4:5; Zep 3:14–20; Zec 1:14–21; 2:8; 10:6–12; 12; 13; 14; Mal 3:4; 4:2–6; Mt 19:28; Ro 11:24–29; Re 7:4–8⁴

ISRAEL—the name conferred on Jacob after the great prayer-struggle at Peniel (Gen. 32:28), because “as a prince he had power with God and prevailed.” (See JACOB.) This is the common name given to Jacob’s descendants. The whole people of the twelve tribes are called “Israelites,” the “children of Israel” (Josh. 3:17; 7:25; Judg. 8:27; Jer. 3:21), and the “house of Israel” (Ex. 16:31; 40:38).

This name Israel is sometimes used emphatically for the true Israel (Ps. 73:1; Isa. 45:17; 49:3; John 1:47; Rom. 9:6; 11:26).

After the death of Saul the ten tribes arrogated to themselves this name, as if they were the whole nation (2 Sam. 2:9, 10, 17, 28; 3:10, 17; 19:40–43), and the kings of the ten tribes were called “kings of Israel,” while the kings of the two tribes were called “kings of Judah.”

After the Exile the name Israel was assumed as designating the entire nation.⁵

What is the meaning of Jacob wrestling with God?

To best answer this question, **it helps to know, among other things, that deep-seated family hostilities characterized Jacob’s life. He was a determined man; some would consider him to be ruthless. He was a con artist, a liar, and a manipulator. In fact, the name Jacob**

⁴ *The NASB Topical Index*. (1992). (electronic ed.). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁵ Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (p. 350). New York: Harper & Brothers.

not only means “deceiver,” but more literally it means “grabber.”

To know Jacob’s story is to know his life was one of never-ending struggles. Though God promised Jacob that through him would come not only a great nation, but a whole company of nations, he was a man full of fears and anxieties.

At a pivotal point in his life, Jacob was about to meet his brother, Esau, who had vowed to kill him. All Jacob’s struggles and fears were about to be realized. Sick of his father-in-law’s treatment, Jacob had fled Laban, only to encounter his embittered brother, Esau. Anxious for his very life, Jacob concocted a bribe and sent a caravan of gifts along with his women and children across the River Jabbok in hopes of pacifying his brother. Now physically exhausted, alone in the desert wilderness, facing sure death, he was divested of all his worldly possessions. In fact, he was powerless to control his fate. He collapsed into a deep sleep on the banks of the Jabbok River. With his father-in-law behind him and Esau before him, he was too spent to struggle any longer.

But only then did his real struggle begin. Fleeing his family history had been bad enough; wrestling with God Himself was a different matter altogether.

That night an angelic stranger visited Jacob. They wrestled throughout the night until daybreak, at which point the stranger crippled Jacob with a blow to his hip that disabled him with a limp for the rest of his life.

**It was then that Jacob realized
what had happened:**

*"I saw God face to face,
and yet my life was spared"*

(Genesis 32:30)

In the process, Jacob the deceiver received a new name, Israel, which likely means: "He struggles with God." However, what is most important occurred at the conclusion of that struggle. We read that God "blessed him there" (Genesis 32:29).

In Western culture and even in our churches, we celebrate wealth, power, strength, confidence, prestige, and victory. We despise and fear weakness, failure, and doubt.

Though we know that a measure of vulnerability, fear, discouragement, and depression come with normal lives, we tend to view these as signs of failure or even a lack of faith. However, we also

know that in real life, naïve optimism and the glowing accolades of glamour and success are a recipe for discontent and despair. Sooner or later, the cold, hard realism of life catches up with most of us. The story of Jacob pulls us back to reality.

Frederick Buechner, one the most read authors by Christian audiences, **characterizes Jacob's divine encounter at the Jabbok River as the "magnificent defeat of the human soul at the hands of God."**

It's in Jacob's story we can easily recognize our own elements of struggle: fears, darkness, loneliness, vulnerabilities, empty feelings of powerlessness, exhaustion, and relentless pain.

Even the apostle Paul experienced similar discouragements and fears: "We were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within" ([2 Corinthians 7:5](#)). But, in truth, God does not want to leave us with our trials, our fears, our battles in life. What we come to learn in our conflicts of life is that God proffers us a corresponding divine gift.

It is through Him that we can receive the power of conversion and transformation, the gift of not only

surrender, but freedom, and the gifts of endurance, faith, and courage.

In the end, Jacob does what we all must do. He confronts his failures, his weaknesses, his sins, all the things that are hurting him . . . and faces God. Jacob wrestled with God all night. It was an exhausting struggle that left him crippled. It was only after he came to grips with God and ceased his struggling, realizing that he could not go on without Him, that he received God's blessing (Genesis 32:29).

What we learn from this remarkable incident in the life of Jacob is that our lives are never meant to be easy. This is especially true when we take it upon ourselves to wrestle with God and His will for our lives. We also learn that as Christians, despite our trials and tribulations, our strivings in this life are

never devoid of God's presence, and His blessing inevitably follows the struggle, which can sometimes be messy and chaotic. Real growth experiences always involve struggle and pain.

Jacob's wrestling with God at the Jabbok that dark night reminds us of this truth: though we may fight God and His will for us, in truth, God is so very good. As believers in Christ, we may well struggle with Him through the loneliness of night, but by daybreak His blessing will come.

5 Important Lessons from Jacob's Wrestling Match with God

BibleStudyTools.com.

24 Sep 2020

How Did Jacob End Up Wrestling God?

Before we can really understand the significance of Jacob's wrestling match, we should review his life up to that point. Jacob was the son of [Isaac and Rebekah](#), and the grandson of Abraham, whom God promised to make a father of many nations.

Jacob had a twin brother, Esau, who was the first-born, but Jacob grabbed him by the heel during their birth. The name Jacob means “the Supplanter” or “to grab another’s heel.” Literally speaking, it means to take what belongs to someone else. God even told Rebekah that her older son would serve the younger.

When Jacob and Esau were grown, Jacob tricked his brother out of his birthright with a meal. Later, Rebekah conspired with Jacob to trick Isaac and steal Esau’s blessing. This resulted in Esau wanting to kill his younger brother, so Jacob fled. On his journey to his mother’s homeland, he had a vision of angels and a ladder to [heaven](#).

When Jacob reaches Haran, he meets his match in his uncle Laban. Though Jacob is in love with Laban’s younger daughter, Rachel, he is tricked into marrying her older sister, Leah. Jacob persists, however, and is finally able to marry the object of his affections. Jacob worked many years for Laban. Because of God’s protection and Jacob’s intelligence, Jacob was able to take much of Laban’s herd for himself. Finally, God directs Jacob to return to the land of his father. The problem with that is it means Jacob will have to face Esau. Will his brother’s rage still burn after all of these years?

As he approaches home, Jacob sends messengers to Esau. They return to tell him that Esau is approaching them with 400 men. Things don’t look good for Jacob. He strategically divides his people and possessions and sends them across the Jabbok river. He stays behind and prays.

It is then that he encounters a man whom he wrestles with through the night. The man injures Jacob’s hip, but still, Jacob will not let go until the man blesses him. Jacob knew that he wasn’t wrestling a man, but God himself, and refused to let go until He blessed him. Jacob names the place where the wrestling match happened “Peniel” which means “Face of God.”

Here are five lessons we can learn from Jacob’s wrestling match with God.

1. We Need Forgiveness, and it Only Comes by the Mercy of God

Jacob was guilty of what he did to Esau—and he knew it. Up until this point, Jacob had relied on his own wits for his success, but now he didn’t know what would happen. His survival was dependent on his brother’s forgiveness of his wrongdoings.

Jacob had no control over his brother’s heart, but there was One who did.

“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak” ([Genesis 32:24](#)).

It's significant that the wrestling match happened at night. During the day we can be distracted by the busyness of life. The quiet and solitude of night makes us face the fears we hold in our heart. It was time for Jacob to see that he could no longer depend on his own [strength](#). The forgiveness he needed to survive was out of his control.

If we are to follow God, we need to come to the point of recognizing our wrongs and our weaknesses. It is only through God's mercy that we can be forgiven, and his grace that sees us through to the other side of the night.

2. God Honors Perseverance, Especially in Our Seeking of Him

“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’” ([Genesis 32:25-26](#)).

Jacob had two admirable qualities. One was a spiritual sensitivity. This was seen when he fled from his brother and had the vision of the ladder to [heaven](#), and again when he followed the voice of the Lord telling him to return to his homeland.

The second quality was his determination. [Jacob was not a quitter](#). **His perseverance is highlighted in his pursuit of Rachel and his patience in serving Laban to have her hand in marriage.** Jacob exemplifies both qualities in his wrestling with the mysterious man. **He knew it was God he wrestled with, and he refused to give up until God blessed him.**

What makes this even more impactful was the moral consequences Jacob was up against. He didn't deserve the blessing but was willing to face whatever judgment or consequence was necessary to receive it.

The consequence was not insignificant. The wrestling match left him lame, but Jacob had his blessing.

3. Our Identity Is in Christ

“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 humans and have overcome’” ([Genesis 32:27-28](#)).

Jacob had an interesting heritage. By way of His grandfather’s [faith](#), he was in the lineage of those who would multiply into many nations. He had inherited some of his grandmother Sarah’s jealousy, some his mother’s unscrupulous wit, and some of his father’s loyalty. He was named “supplanter” at birth and lived up to his name.

Jacob in his early years was a selfish man. His [love](#) for Rachel and his loyalty to her family changes him partially, but it’s in his wrestling with God that Jacob reaches a turning point. He is given a new name: Israel, the Prince of God.

What is the significance of a new name? It is a new identity. God does this many times throughout the Bible. Jesus does the same for every new believer.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” ([1 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

As we keep reading Genesis, we see that Jacob’s name switches back and forth from his old name to his new throughout his life. In [Genesis 35:10](#), God reminds Jacob of his new name once again. This often happens with us. God gives us a new name — His beloved, a new creation in Him — but we forget who we are. Once we have wrestled with God, we should hold tightly to our new identity. We may stumble and forget who we are, but we can always come back to what God has called us to be.

4. God Wants Us to Know Him Intimately

“Jacob said, ‘Please tell me your name.’ But he replied, ‘Why do you ask my name?’ Then he blessed him there” ([Genesis 32:29](#)).

Jacob knew who God was. He knew God was the God of his father and grandfather. But the God Jacob wrestled with by the Jabbok was God in the form of man; the part

of the trinity who would come to earth and who would bear "...our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness...." ([1 Peter 2:24](#).) During the wrestling match, God became the God of Jacob's heart.

Many people know *about* God, but never have a true, life-changing encounter with Him. Knowing what God has done for others isn't the same as understanding what He has done for you. God cares less about how successfully we appear to be living a righteous life and much more about the condition of our hearts. The only way to have a relationship with God is to spend time with Him. Reading the [Bible](#), praying and worshipping with our hearts and minds fully focused on God brings us to a closer, more intimate relationship with Him.

Sometimes the biggest obstacle to spending time with God is ourselves. Our priorities get mixed up. I know that when I start my day by spending time in God's word and/or praying, the rest of the day goes better. The actual events in my day don't change, but my attitude does because the [peace](#) of God is with me.

5. Closeness to God Requires Humility

"The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip" ([Genesis 32:31](#)).

Jacob was made lame by his wrestling match with God. For the proud, self-sufficient, quick-witted Jacob, this physical disability was a sign of his new humility.

Humility, as defined by Merriam-Webster, means, "freedom from pride or arrogance." In our world, humility seems counter-culture and counter-success. But in God's world, we become better people when set aside our pride and rely on Him. Jacob wasn't the only biblical person who was humbled by God. We see the same kind of stories in Simon Peter and in the conversion of Saul to Paul. In fact, Paul would later write about a thorn in his flesh:

"Because of the surpassing greatness of the [revelations](#), for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me — to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with

distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" ([2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)).

No one would *want* to go through life with a disability or ailment to keep them humble, but God knows what we need and that our dependence on Him instead of ourselves is our greatest [strength](#).

The sun was rising on Jacob as he limped away. He had a new ailment, but also a new identity, a new name, and a new intimacy with God.

The End of the Story

After Jacob's wrestling match, he saw his brother Esau. Instead of killing him, his brother met him with an embrace and tears of joy. Esau had forgiven his brother. Jacob's life was spared. Esau didn't even want any of the possessions that Jacob offered him (though he accepted them at Jacob's insistence). He only wanted to be right with his brother.

The rest of Jacob's story isn't a happily-ever-after. He would end up losing his beloved wife, Rachel, in childbirth. His favorite son would be betrayed by his older brothers and sold into slavery. Jacob's life ends in a foreign land. Through it all, God reminds him time and again that He is with him and His promises hold true, even if Jacob can't see how they are possible at the time.

As you read the account of Jacob's wrestling match, what parts of his story can you identify with? Where do you need to seek forgiveness? Are you persevering in your pursuit of a relationship with God? How can you draw closer to Him and be humble? When we take the lessons God has for us from the stories in his Word, we can grow, have more [peace](#), and be the man or woman God has called us to be.

The Structure of the Jacob Narrative (Genesis 25:19-35:29)

Posted by [Zac Wyse](#) on Oct 5, 2017



Isaac Blessing Jacob, by Govert Flinck (c. 1638)

What follows is the way I believe that the Jacob Narrative unfolds.

Again, it follows a chiasmic pattern (see the explanation in the aforementioned article), just like the narratives of the Flood and of Abraham. The turning point of the chiasm is the birth of Joseph (Gen. 30:24), who will become the central figure in the final “book” of Genesis (ch. 37-50) and receive Jacob’s birthright and blessing (1 Chr. 5:1-2).

- A Genealogy: Sons born to Isaac; Jacob’s calling foretold (25:19-34)
- B God’s appearance & promise to Pilgrim-Isaac (26:1-5)
- C Relations with Canaanites; woman unharmed; peaceful covenant (26:6-33)
- D Jacob’s takes Esau’s blessing; enmity & danger (26:34-28:9)
- E Nighttime vision of the Lord; “Bethel” named (28:10-22)
- F Jacob serves for Leah & Rachel; cheated/dishonored (29:1-30)
- G Jacob is blessed with children (29:31-30:24)
- G’ Jacob is blessed with prosperity (30:25-43)

- F' Jacob departs w/ Leah & Rachel; cheats/plunders (31)
- E' Nighttime wrestling with the Lord; "Israel" named (32)
- D' Jacob gives Esau blessing; protected & reconciled (33)
- C' Relations with Canaanites; woman harmed; enmity & warfare (34)
- B' God's appearance & promise to Pilgrim-Jacob (35:1-15)
- A' Genealogy: Sons bury Isaac; Jacob's calling fulfilled (35:16-29)

Hosea 12:4-5

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

12:1-6 Ephraim feeds himself with vain hopes of help from man, when he is at enmity with God. The Jews vainly thought to secure the Egyptians by a present of the produce of their country. Judah is contended with also. God sees the sin of his own people, and will reckon with them for it. They are put in mind of what Jacob did, and what God did for him. When his faith upon the Divine promise prevailed above his fears, then by his strength he had power with God. He is Jehovah, the same that was, and is, and is to come. What was a revelation of God to one, is his memorial to many, to all generations. Then let those who have gone from God, be turned to him. Turn thou to the Lord, by repentance and faith, as thy God. Let those that are converted to him, walk with him in all holy conversation and godliness. Let us wrestle with Him for promised blessings, determined not to give over till we prevail; and let us seek Him in his ordinances.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible

He wept and made supplication unto Him - Jacob's weeping is not mentioned by Moses. Hosea then knew more than Moses related. He could not have gathered it out of Moses, for Moses relates the words of earnest supplication; yet the tone is that of one, by force of earnest energy, wresting, as it were, the blessing from God, not of one weeping. Yet Hosea adds this, in harmony with Moses. For "vehement desires and earnest petitions frequently issue in tears." "To implore means to ask with tears". "Jacob, learning, that God Himself thus deigned to deal with him, might well out of amazement and wonder, out of awful respect to Him, and in earnest desire of a blessing, pour out his supplication with tears." Herein he became an image of Him, "Who, in the days of His flesh, offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared" [Hebrews 5:7](#).

: "This which he saith, 'he prevailed,' subjoining, 'he wept and made supplication,' describes the strength of penitents, for in truth they are strong by weeping earnestly and praying perseveringly for the forgiveness of sins, according to that, "From the days of John the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Whosoever so imitates the patriarch Jacob, who wrestled with the Angel, and, as a conqueror, extorted a blessing from him, he, of whatever nation he be, is truly Jacob, and deserveth to be called Israel." : "Yea, herein is the unconquerable might of the righteous, this his wondrous wrestling, herein his glorious victories, in glowing longings, assiduous prayers, joyous weeping. Girt with the might of holy orison, they strive with God, they wrestle with His judgment, and will not be overcome, until they obtain from His goodness all they desire, and extort it, as it were, by force, from His hands."

What do you find to be the most confusing part of the Bible?

- Saturday with India... My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?
- Context is critical...
- Hosea is key to Jacob...

Jacob is the Old Testament's prodigal son... in the same way that you and I are modern day prodigals... - JDP

See Saul-to-Paul & King David's comeback as well...

Simple... Complex...Simple sermon flow

(Genesis 32:24 & Hosea 12:3-4)

> See Matthew Henry's commentary

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges

24. *And Jacob ... alone*] It is natural to suppose that Jacob remained behind to think and to pray at this crisis of his life. He was given over to anxious fears; the darkness and loneliness intensified them. The thought that God had left him, or was opposed to him, overwhelmed him.

there wrestled a man] The brevity of the account leaves it unexplained, who the man is, how he appeared, and how the contest began.

The word for “wrestled,” *yêâbêk*, is very possibly intended to be a play on the name of the river Jabbok as if it meant “twisting.” In [Genesis 32:28](#), and in [Hosea 12:4](#), a different word, “to strive,” is used for the “wrestling” of Jacob. It is this scene of “wrestling” which has become, in the language of spiritual experience, the classical symbol for “agonizing” in prayer.

Dissecting the “miracle” of salvation...

- Be unapologetic with your apologetics. - JDP
- Don't make small what God makes big... and don't make big what God calls small. - JDP

We ALL have a burning bush... it's called The Bible! - JDP

Where, when, how, & to what extent was Jesus powerfully present in your life today, this week, this month, this year, this decade... AND where, when, how, & to what extent have you been proclaiming Christ & His Gospel???

An unbiblical view and understanding of The Church will lead to & produce an unbiblical view & understanding of Christ. - Pastor Charlie (per JDP)

- Sermon via Isaiah 43:10-11

Jacob wrestled with God:

- 3 keys to focus on
- 1. Participants
- 2. Definitions (define “wrestle”)
- 3. Assumptions

> See potentially bad assumptions born out of potentially bad definitions...

>> Define “with” in context:

>>> “against”?

>>> “along side”?

- “wrestling with... to hold on to... not letting go until given a blessing...” all sounds like fighting against his sin nature and struggling to faithfully obey, all the while striving to cleave to the blessing Giver...

- See here [The Gospel... and its Prelude](#) (God initiates by coming to His chosen); its Purifying (repentance and biblical believing are an eternal battle); its Promise (God & His Gospel saves sinners); its Power (God & His Gospel sanctify saved sinners); its People (God & His Gospel send out His saved sinners as servants of the living God!); its Purpose (ALL this is to display, distribute, & to disciple by God's grace & for God's glory.
- JDP

If you're not possessed you're not empowered! - JDP (cf. Isa. 43:10-11 & Acts 1:8)

Let God's mercies become some of your greatest motivators.
- JDP

People have forgotten how to blush AND wrestle. - JDP

Christ-like motivation, messaging, & methodology, coupled with Christ's miraculous grace, are all together at the cleansing core of missiology. - JDP