

## Genesis 32

In the Hebrew text (MT; see introduction), 31:55 is numbered as 32:1. Therefore, we repeat 31:55 here as verse 1 of chapter 32. Jacob is returning home and is afraid how Esau will respond since the last we've heard from the text, Esau wanted to kill Jacob (27:41). The theme of the Bible is the salvation of man, through Jesus Christ, to the glory of God. In order for God to become man, He must have a family, a human mother who will come from the family of Abraham, a Hebrew. Abraham's grandson, Jacob, will have his name changed in this chapter to "Israel." Thus, the family of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, will come to be called "Israelites" or the "sons / children of Israel."

### TRANSLATION - 32:1-13:

**1** Then Laban arose early in the morning and kissed his sons and his daughters and he blessed them and he went and Laban returned to his place.

**2** Now Jacob went on his way and there met him angels of God. **3** Then Jacob said, just as he saw them, "This is the camp of God," and he called the name of the place, "This is Mahanaim." **4** So Jacob sent messengers before his face to Esau, his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. **5** He commanded them saying, "Thus you all will say to my master, to Esau, 'Thus your servant Jacob says, 'With Laban I sojourned and I have delayed until now. **6** And there are to me bull and donkeys, flock and servant and maids and I have sent to announce to my lord to find grace in your eyes.'"

**7** Then the messengers returned to Jacob saying, "We came to your brother, to Esau, and even he is coming to meet you and four hundred men with him." **8** Then Jacob feared much and was distressed to him and he divided the people which [were] with him and the flock and the cattle and the camels into two camps. **9** And he said, "If Esau comes to the one camp, and it is struck down, then there will be the other camp remaining for an escape."

**10** And Jacob said, "The God of my father Abraham and the God of my father Isaac, Jehovah, the one who said to me: 'Return to your land and to your kindred and I will do good to you.' **11** I am too insignificant from all the loving loyalties and from all the truth which you have done with your servant because with my staff I crossed this Jordan but now I am in two camps. **12** Save me please from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau because I fear him! Thus he is coming and he will strike the mother of the sons. **13** But you said, 'I will, in fact, do good to you and set your seed as the sand of the sea which is not able to be counted from its multitude.'"

### WORDS:

"To meet" (verse 2; 46 times) can mean "to fall upon, attack." The word "messengers" (verse 4) is the word translated "angel" (so in verse 2). However, here it clearly refers to human messengers. The verb "to sojourn" (verse 5; 82 times) is the verb related to the word "stranger." "To delay" is used eighteen times and can be translated "to hesitate." "Grace" (verse 6; 69 times) means "favor, grace, charm." The word has been found already in Genesis at 6:8; 18:3; 19:19; 30:27.

"To be distressed" (verse 8; 47 times) can mean to "wrap up, tie up, be restricted, depressed, distressed." "To divide" is used fifteen times. "To strike down" (verses 9, 12; 501 times) is one of the most used verbs in the OT. It can simply mean to strike but also to destroy, or injure. "To remain" (verse 9) is used 133 times and "escape" is a noun.

"To be insignificant" (verse 11) is one word and is the verb form of the adjective "small." "Loving loyalty" was first seen at 19:19; "truth" was first seen at 24:27. "To save" (verse 12; 213 times) means to "save, rescue, snatch away."

### GRAMMAR:

“I will, in fact, do good” (verse 13) is the Hebrew emphatic construction, the infinitive absolute (*hiphil*) and the imperfect form of the same verb.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

Mahanaim cannot be identified.

#### COMMENTS:

After Laban left, Jacob resumed his journey to his brother, but on the way, angels of God met him. Jacob had seen angels in a dream before he entered Padan Aram, in 28:10-17. In that context, God had promised to be with Jacob and to bless him. Remember that chapter 28 happened twenty years before! We do not know why these angels appeared. Jacob sent messengers (the word is the same as “angels”; here is the first use of the word for *human* messengers) to Esau in order to announce Jacob's arrival. Notice how frequently Jacob uses the terms “master” for Esau and “servant” for himself. Jacob simply wants “grace” from his brother.

We do not know how much time passed between verse 3 and verse 6, but the messengers’ news sounds ominous! Esau is coming to meet Jacob and has 400 men with him. Abraham’s fighting force was 318 men in 14:14. Esau’s is considerably larger. At this point, no one knows what Esau plans. Of course, Esau did not know what Jacob had planned, but verse 7 tells us that Jacob is very afraid. When Jacob left home, his mom told him she would let him know when Esau’s anger had passed (27:44-45). Jacob never heard from her! So, Jacob divided his entourage into two large groups hoping that if Esau were to attack one, the other could escape.

Then, Jacob prays. This is one of the earliest examples of personal prayer in the Bible. Jacob encourages himself by “reminding” God that it was God who told Jacob to come back to the land of Canaan (31:3). In verse 11, Jacob acknowledges, with humility, that his blessings have come from God. We are beginning to see a change in Jacob, from a brash, arrogant, scheming man to one who will fully rely on God. “Loving loyalties” is in the plural to denote the abundance of blessings Jacob has received at God’s hand.

Verse 12 is Jacob’s petition. He wants deliverance from the hand of his brother. Jacob fears, especially for the women and children. Jacob reminds God, again, that God had promised to be with Jacob, do him good, and make his seed plentiful, like sand (cf. 22:17). This cannot happen if God allows Esau to kill Jacob.

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Once someone has sinned against God, as Jacob has in deceiving his brother and father, the only thing left to do is to fall in humility at the feet of a merciful God. That is what Jacob does here.

*Contemporaries of Moses* - Israel could learn that new blessings are available from God, loving loyalty and truth, if Israel would be as humble and servile as Jacob is here.

#### TRANSLATION - 32:14-21:

**14** Then he spent there that night and he took from that coming in his hand a gift for Esau his brother: **15** female goats, two hundred, and goats twenty, ewes two hundred and rams twenty, **16** milking camels and their sons thirty, cows forty, and bulls ten, female donkeys twenty and donkeys ten. **17** Then he gave into the hand of his servant flocks [and] flocks except that he said to his servant, “You all cross before me and a space put between the flock and the flock. **18** Then he commanded the head saying, “When Esau my brother encounters you that he will ask you, saying, ‘Who [are] you? And where are you going? And who [are] these before you?’ **19** That you will say, [they belong] to your servant, to Jacob, a gift this [is], to my lord, to Esau, and behold, even he [is] behind us.”

**20** So he commanded both the second and the third even all those coming after him, the flocks, saying, “As this matter, you all will speak to Esau, when he finds you all.” **21** And

you will say, “Even, behold, your servant, Jacob [is] behind us as he spoke, ‘Let me atone his face with a gift going before me and afterward thus I will see his face, perhaps he will lift up his face.’”

#### WORDS:

“Gift” (verse 14) is the same word used of Cain and Abel’s offering to God (4:3-5). It has not been used since then. “To atone” (verse 21; 102 times) was first used in 6:14 for covering the ark with pitch. It has not been used since then. It means, literally, “to cover” but spiritually, to “make atonement.”

#### COMMENTS:

The gift Jacob has offered his brother numbers 550 animals. Some suggest, perhaps correctly, that Jacob is trying to make up for his theft of Esau’s birthright. Certainly this number of livestock would go a long way to make someone wealthy! Jacob divides up the animals and sends them in droves, in groups, with each one repeating the same thing: “This is a gift from your servant, Jacob. He is coming.” The verb “to atone” (verse 21) carries the idea of reconciliation.

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Jacob was certainly being generous with his riches. He wished to reconcile with his brother, whom he has not seen in twenty years.

*Contemporaries of Moses* - God will continue to require His people to share their blessings with others.

*NT writers* - Jesus will command His own disciples to give to their enemies whatever they might ask (Matt. 5:38-48).

#### TRANSLATION - 32:22-33:

**22** So the gift crossed over before his face and he spent that night in the camp. **23** Then he arose in that night and he took his two wives and his two maids and eleven children and he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. **24** And he took and crossed them over the river and he crossed [those] with him. **25** Then Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the rising of the daybreak. **26** And he saw that he was not able [to overcome] him and he touched the inside of his thigh and it was dislocated the inside of his thigh when he wrestled with him.

**27** And he said, “Send me away because the daybreak is rising.” But he said, “I will not send you away unless you bless me.”

**28** And he said to him, “What [is] your name?” And he said, “Jacob.”

**29** Then he said, “Not Jacob will be said your name any more but rather Israel because you have prevailed with God and with men and you were able.”

**30** Then Jacob asked and said, “Announce please your name.” And he said, “What [is] this you ask my name?” And he blessed him there.

**31** And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel because “I saw God face to face and my soul was preserved.” **32** So the sun arose for him just as he crossed the Penuel and he limped on his thigh. And he was limping on his thigh. **33** Therefore the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the inside of the hip until today because he touched the inside of the hip of Jacob in the sinew of the hip.

#### WORDS:

“Ford” (verse 23; 10 times) may also be translated a “ravine.” “To be left” (verse 25; 106 times) means to “remain or be left over.” It will eventually refer, in the prophets, to those who remain faithful to God. “To wrestle” is found only here. “To touch” (verse 26) can also mean to “strike.” The word translated “inside” is actually “palm.” “To prevail” (verse 29) is used only here and in the context of Hosea where he refers to this account (12:4-5). “To arise” (verse 32;

18 times) means “to arise, appear, or break out.” This is the only place where “limping” is found. This is the only place “hip” is used. “Sinew” is found half a dozen times.

This is the first use of the expression “sons of Israel”. It will be used frequently for God’s people in the OT, being found 1,280 times.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

“Jabbok” flows about 50 miles west into the Jordan River, twenty miles north of the Dead Sea. It is only found seven times, four in the Law and three in Joshua (12:2) and Judges (11:13, 22).

#### COMMENTS:

The “gift” in verse 22 refers to the droves of animals Jacob was sending ahead of himself for Esau. They crossed the river. Jacob and his family spent the night where they had camped and he crossed the Jabbok River, about twenty miles north of the Dead Sea. Once Jacob helped his family cross, he stayed behind.

All of a sudden, a man (whom Jacob identifies as God in verse 30) shows up who wrestles with Jacob until the rising of the sun. We do not know exactly what they did since the word “wrestle” is not found elsewhere. Since the mysterious wrestler could not overcome Jacob, he used some miraculous power to touch the inside of Jacob’s thigh or hip and was able to strike pain into Jacob and weaken him.

As the sun was closer to rising, the man asks Jacob to release him. Perhaps he needed to allow Jacob to continue with his trip. But, Jacob recognizes in his visitor someone special because he asks him to bless Jacob. The lesser is blessed by the greater. The visitor then asks Jacob what his name was. It is not likely that the visitor was ignorant of this information. More likely, he wanted Jacob to reflect on the meaning or significance of his name and how he had lived up to it: “Jacob, supplanter, deceiver.” There is also a play on several words in the text: Jacob (*y’qwb*), wrestled (*w’bq*), and Jabbok (*yabboq*).

As with Abraham and Sarah, Jacob’s name now changes to “Israel.” This name (*ysr’l*; found 2,506 times) is a play on the verb (*srh*) “to prevail or wrestle” since Jacob has “prevailed” with God and with men. When Jacob asked the man for his name, he demurred and then blessed Jacob.

Then Jacob names that location “Peniel,” which is a play on the noun “face.” The word “face” is found in 32:4, 17, 18, 21 (four times), 22, 31 (three times), 32. This is the third time Jacob names a place: Bethel (28:19) and “Mahanaim” (32:2). Here, in verse 31, Jacob identifies the wrestler as God Himself. When the sun came up, the visitor had left and Jacob had a reminder of his wrestling match; he limped. Then Moses explains to future generations why, up until his generation, the Israelites do not eat the sinew on the hip. No further reference is made to this eating habit, since it was not a theological decision. Verse 33 is the first biblical use of the expression “sons (literally, or “children”) of Israel.”

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Clearly the focus of this paragraph is Jacob’s wrestling match with a divine opponent. While the opponent says that Jacob has prevailed, He also clearly had the superior strength since he was able to immobilize Jacob with the touch of His finger. No other similar event is found in the OT.

*Contemporaries of Moses* - Moses’ contemporaries ought to have been impressed with the fact that God would condescend to wrestle with a man and even to allow him to prevail. What this text teaches is that God can be touched, affected, impacted by man’s needs, hopes, and desires. He will always be in control; God can never relinquish control. But He will allow Himself to be affected by man. No one can see God (Exo. 33:20), so Jacob would have seen some type of muted presence of God.

*Later Hebrew writers* - Hosea will refer to this event in 12:4-5, where, he says that Jacob wrestled with an angel of God.

*NT writers* - The NT is consistent concerning the inability of man to see God: John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12; Col. 1:15.