



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

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## Genesis 32

### The Broken Jacob

All his life Jacob was aware of God's design for him: He was the covenant son; he would inherit the Abrahamic Covenant blessings; he would be the vehicle for God forming a covenant people. Yet, Jacob always did things "his way." He took matters into his own hand and he used whatever means were at his disposal. He was unscrupulous and deceptive. He outwitted his stupid brother twice and he eventually outwitted Laban, leaving Haran a wealthy man. But, as he decided to return to the Land of Promise, he would need to face his brother Esau. And, before he met Esau, he wrestled with an unknown "Assailant." Who was this mysterious Assailant? Why was he fighting Jacob and why was he unable to defeat Jacob? Why did he appear to be afraid of being overtaken by the dawn? Why did he strike Jacob's thigh? Why did he refuse to reveal his own name?

As we study Genesis 32, it is clear that the theme is "wrestling." In the Hebrew, there is an evident and profound word play: We find a man *ya'aqob*, the place *yabboq*, and the action *ye'abeq*. These are all similar sounding words in Hebrew. Before Jacob would cross into the Land, he must cross the river Jabbok and fight. He will once again try to trip up his adversary—in a private encounter in a wrestling match. As a consequence, Jacob will receive a new name, a new status and a new direction to his life. But he will be a crippled man, signifying that he was powerless and dependent before his God.

The context: Genesis 32:1-21 depict Jacob approaching the Land. He meets "two angels of God" (used only here and in Gen. 28:12 at Bethel) and Jacob assumes these angels will accompany back into the Land. He calls the place, Mahanaim, "two camps," one is his and the other is God's. Mahanaim and Bethel were the spots where the heavenly world made contact

with earth, where the invisible was opened to the visible. Jacob then sent messengers to Esau using deferential and apologetic language. When the messengers returned and explained that Esau was coming with 400 men, Jacob panicked. He divided his company into two "companies." Desperately, he prayed to the Lord for deliverance (a key term; see 32:30) from Esau. Typically then, Jacob attempted through his own devices to appease his brother with a gift (550 animals). He improperly used the terms "lord" and "servant" and seemed willing to return the covenant blessing to his brother and ready to nullify his place of leadership in the family. Fear and guilt seemed to dominate Jacob at this point.

### ***The wrestling match, 32:22-25***

There are only four verses that describe the wrestling match. It is night, so the darkness conceals the Assailant's identity. The match lasted until daybreak. The turning point came when the assailant "touched" Jacob's hip. More accurately a blow, it dislocated Jacob's hip. The Assailant now had the advantage.

### ***The Blessing, 32:26-29***

Jacob now understood that his Assailant was not an ordinary human being. He insisted on a blessing. The Assailant then asked Jacob, "What is your name?" In answering, Jacob had to confess his nature as the deceptive, conniving "heal-catcher." The Assailant gave Jacob a new name. This demonstrated the Assailant's authority to impart a new life, a new status to Jacob. His new covenant name will be "Israel," which means "God strives" or "he strives with God." Jacob's new name served to evoke the memory of the wrestling match: God was the object of Jacob's struggle.

### ***Jacob transformed, 32:30-32***

The Assailant could not be mortal: He acted with power and spoke with authority. He had gotten to the bottom of Jacob's identity. Therefore, Jacob wanted to know his name. The response, "Why is it that you ask my name?" seemed to suggest to Jacob, "think, you know"!! But, it could also have indicated that He was unwilling to release His name for Jacob to control. As A.S. Herbert concludes, "The divine name cannot be had on demand or taken in vain; otherwise it could be exposed to magical manipulation." Jacob therefore named the place, "Peniel," he had wrestled with God, seen "the face of God," and been "delivered" (see v. 11). His prayer for deliverance had been answered. Meeting God meant he could now face

Esau! Manifesting his dependence on God, Jacob now limped into the Promised Land (v. 31). Jacob's duplicity, his self-confidence, and his manipulative character had all been broken. His carnal weapons were useless when he wrestled with God. He had finally met Someone against whom it was useless to struggle. Now crippled in his natural strength, he became bold in his faith. His reconciliation with Esau is recorded in Genesis 33.

Jacob then became a metaphor for the nation of Israel. They would win control of the Land not by mere natural strength or craftiness, but through bold faith which would result in God's blessings. Israel would always strive with God, but in their striving, they would increase their faith and God would bless them. So, with us: If we are to accomplish what God wants for us, it must be accomplished by faith in Him and not by the strength of the flesh. If we do not develop our faith, God may bring us to a point, as he did with Jacob, where our perceived self-sufficiency is shown to be insufficient. He broke Jacob of his self-sufficiency; he often does so with us.

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