

GENESIS

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Chapter 32 Study Guide

July 4, 2004

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Genesis 32

1. BACKGROUND, CULTURE & EXEGESIS

This chapter is a must for the serious Bible reader. In this chapter, we read of the transformation of Jacob and also something a bit more personal.

Because manipulation is second nature to Jacob, things in this chapter begin as expected: Jacob is doing his best to manipulate the situation. He is trying to figure out a way to appease Esau. Remember, twenty years have passed since the brothers were together and Esau swore that he would kill Jacob! So Jacob devises a plan and starts arranging his gifts, staggering them for dramatic effect. But then Jacob receives word that his brother is not only on his way, but that he has four hundred people with him! This could not have been comforting!

So after starting “in the flesh,” Jacob now turns to God. Beginning in verse nine, he reminds God of what the promise to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. Then comes the reminder of what happened at Bethel – remember, that was a personal encounter. Part of Jacob’s prayer states that he is not worthy of God’s mercy, indicating that something has happened over the last twenty years. This too, should be a reminder for us; the last thing you or I would ever want is God’s justice; we need His mercy!

With his prayer finished, Jacob is now making his final plans. Those he loves the most he places at the end, figuring that Esau will be more lenient after receiving so many gifts (see verse 22).

Now for the drum roll . . . in verse 24, Jacob, now alone, will begin the final transformation of his life. As Jacob crosses the Jabbok, he encounters what Hosea refers to as an Angel (the same being to which Jacob later refers to as God - quite probably the pre-incarnated Christ) and they begin to “have it out.” Up front, this passage raises more questions than answers, but there are a couple things to note. After an entire night of wrestling, Jacob is asked his name and he rightly answers – (it could have been any of the following: Subplanter or Swinderler or Heelgrabber) – but God intervenes and proclaims the name “Israel” to replace the former. The meaning of the word “Israel” has varied meanings. Some define it as “prince” while others define it as literally “one who wrestles with God.” Whatever the case may be, both fit for Jacob back then and also for Israel today! For the former Jacob, it was time for him to no longer rely on knowing God through his grandfather and father- now it was personal!

It is interesting to note that normally when God changes a name, it is a permanent change, like when Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah and when Saul of



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Tarsus became Paul; once the name is changed they are always called by the new name. But there are two interesting exceptions, the first being Jacob; as the careful reader goes on, he will note that when Jacob reacts in the flesh, he is called Jacob, but when he walks with God, he is called Israel. The other exception is Peter in the New Testament. When Peter lapses back into his flesh, he is always called Simon. And in modern day Israel, we are able to see both a prince and a continual wrestling with God. By the way, the final round of this match will persist until Hosea 5:15 comes to pass!

(Look it up!)

In closing, Jacob's pilgrimage is common for the believer of today. Take a look and see if you can find common ground between yourself and Jacob: before Jacob could cross to the land of blessing, he had to wrestle with God. The problem for today's believer is not the issue of life after death, but the issue of life after birth!

Soul-Winner So What

Die to yourself so that you may live a victorious life in Christ!

Small Groups Question

1. What about that Hosea 5:15 passage?
2. Have you ever wrestled with God? Have you had a name change? Are you walking with a limp?

2. THEME & AUTHORSHIP

Themes

A couple predominate themes are found in Genesis. First is that this is a Book of Beginnings, the great introduction to the drama of redemption.

Second, God is preparing a people – God chooses and tests. Whether it is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Noah, God chooses and then begins to winnow and purge. Remember, the goal is to create a people who would fulfill Genesis 3:15. This is the initial step for man's redemption by a divine covenant made with a chosen race whose early history is here portrayed.

Author – Moses / **Date** - 1450 – 1410 BC

3. WORD STUDIES

Vs. 28 “Then the man said, Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with Men and have overcome.”

Word: Israel “One who struggles with God”



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Jacob no longer was named by his negative scheming but rather for his faithful diligence and perseverance with God. He then enjoyed God's favor and his blessing. He not only strived with men but he also strived for God and it was then that he was blessed.

Soul-Winner So What

Consider the parallel between earthly and heavenly relationships. It seems most evident that the condition of our human relationships often equals our relationship with God. Those who are dialed in with God, who grasp His Love and grace usually enjoy earthly relationships that flow out of this primary Heavenly relationship. What a hurdle it must be to attempt investing into people God's love without having much of it to give from. Most likely, good clear communication with the Lord will naturally lead to good and clear communication with God's people.

Small Groups Question

Read Ecc. 4:12 Can you identify how your relationships with others depend on your relationship God. Do you see the importance of having God at the center of all your relationships? When both human parties strive for a better relationship with God, they not only move upwards but also closer together as if they were climbing up a triangle. Closer upwards means closer together. The example of marriage best illustrates this parallel of relationships.

4. GOSPEL/PROPHECY/PICTURES OF CHRIST

Gen 32:24-28

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. 25Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. 26And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" 27So He said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

We have seen that Christ as *Angel of the Lord* was very active among His people in Old Testament times. He provided for those in need, comforted the suffering, guided believers in the path of God's will, protected His people from their enemies, carried out God's providential plan, and enjoyed fellowship with those obedient to His word.

As we reflect on what we have learned about Christ as *Angel of the Lord*, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that he was in the business of changing lives. Here we see that Jacob's life was changed from that of a cheater to that of a prince.

Prayer is often a battle. Sometimes the "opponent" is our old self, which continues to wage war against the law of [our] mind, and [makes us] a prisoner of the law of sin which is in [our] members (Romans 7:23).



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What do we wrestle with in prayer today? Hint: It is contrary to God and His nature.

- What does Jacob's "wrestling match" tell us about Jacob?
- What significance does Jacob's name change have in light of this wrestling?

Read Hosea's commentary on this event in Hosea 12:3-5.

- With whom did Jacob struggle?
- What was the result of the wrestling match?

As you look at Jacob's life – the good the bad, and the ugly – how do you identify with God's breaking of Jacob?

Read: Romans 8:29

- What does God promise to do with you as a follower of Jesus Christ?
- This is known as the "prize of the upward call." Have your group read Eph. 4:13, Col.1: 28, Phil. 3:20-21 and 1 John 3:2.
- How willing are you to wrestle against sin and the flesh to allow God to work out His holiness in you?

Soul-Winner So What

How do the life of Jacob and his name change to *Israel* help you share Christ from the Old Testament?

5. Attributes of God

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God sends angels to represent Himself.

*¹ So Jacob went on his way, **and the angels of God met him.** ²When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.¹*

God can deliver us.

*¹¹**Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children.***

God allows us to wrestle with Him.

*²⁴Then Jacob was left alone; and **a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.***

God sometimes wants us to fight for our blessings.

*²⁴Then Jacob was left alone; and **a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.***



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God's blessings sometimes come with a cost.

*²⁵Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; **and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.***

*³¹Just as he crossed over Penuel the sun rose on him, **and he limped on his hip.***

Soul-Winner So What

God could have easily killed Jacob when they were wrestling, yet He did not. God encourages us to fight for the blessings He has for us

Small Groups Question

Verse 24 says a "Man" wrestled with Jacob. Some say that "Man" was Jesus, and some say it was an angel. Who do you say that it was?

6. BIBLE DIFFICULTIES / PROBLEM PASSAGES

Did Jacob really see God face to face?

Yes and no. In Hebrew, seeing one's face often means being in the presence of that person. God said that no one could see or be in His unmasked presence and live. Jacob was in the presence of God, who was masked as an angel or human being.

What is the significance of changing Jacob's name to Israel?

Names had great significance in biblical times and were intended to communicate the nature/character of the person. Thus, the change of Jacob's name (which meant heel-grabber or deceiver) to Israel clearly had great significance, not only for him, but for the people who took his name as their own.

What does the name Israel mean?

"God perseveres" or "He perseveres with God." Despite personal and national flaws and failures, God never gave up on his Old Testament people, and despite serious lapses of faith, Israel as a covenant people struggled to maintain its relationship with Him.

Soul-Winner So What

God's plan will get done with us or without us. Our actions only determine the arrival time of our blessings and the level of development of our character. To God, it doesn't matter how long it takes because He has all the time in the word – He has all of life. And if we take too long, He'll use someone or something else. Why? Because God's faithfulness supersedes our sinfulness 100% of the time. The bottom line is that God will not give up on you no matter what. Understand that God's sovereignty does not give us license to live ungodly lives. Our goal should be to live lives obedient to God, so we can enjoy the fullness of God's blessing as opposed to consolation blessings.



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7. Additional Questions

Soul-Winner So What

In the Old Testament, a changed name indicates a changed nature. The transformed nature gives a new spiritual basis for facing future anxieties and fears. Seeing God face to face does not necessarily change the future, but it does change the nature of the one who faces the future.

Small Groups Question

How has God changed your nature? What fears continue to give you struggles?