

“Unfinished Business” (Genesis 32:1-32)

What would you say is the greatest victory in the world? Would you think of some military victory with some famous general, or would you think of D-Day, or when Germany finally surrendered to the Allied Forces? Would you think of the Gulf War? Would you think of a political victory or sporting achievement such as the Seahawks winning the Super Bowl? Maybe you are thinking in terms of a financial success or of an emotional breakthrough? What would you think in terms of personal achievement that would be a great victory?¹

Everyone enjoys a great victory because everyone wants to be a winner. But very few people want it badly enough to endure the discipline and struggle that is required. In Genesis 32, Jacob experiences the greatest victory of his life. But it occurs in a most unusual fashion. The great schemer comes to the realization that in order to truly win you must lose.

Our story begins in 32:1-2: **“Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.² Jacob said when he saw them, ‘This is God’s camp.’ So he named that place Mahanaim.”** Jacob left Laban and went on to Canaan. He did this in obedience to God’s command (see 31:3). As he was traveling along, **“the angels of God met him.”** These angels must have resembled the angels Jacob had seen at Bethel (28:12) for him to have recognized them as angels.³ They joined Jacob’s company of travelers for his protection (cf. Ps 34:7). This is the reason for the name **“Mahanaim”** (i.e., “double host” or “double camp”). These angels were apparently intended to reassure Jacob of God’s protective presence.⁴

As a result of this angelic encounter, Jacob becomes aware of his need to make things right with Esau. For 20 years he has lived with the memory of how he cheated his brother—not once, but twice. For 20 years he has wondered whether Esau still plans to kill him (cf. 27:41). For 20 years he has dreamed of going home, but each time his dream becomes a nightmare when he thinks of Esau.⁵ But now Jacob’s conscience is awakened and the wrong he did is made clear. It is time to mend the relationship that has been torn through his deception.

Through various circumstances, followers of Christ are driven by God’s Spirit to make right relationships that are wrong. It may involve an apology, an act of restitution, or a simple phone call. Is there a name that has popped into your head again and again? Is this someone with whom you have a fractured relationship? If so, I suggest that God is giving you an assignment...He is calling you to attempt to be reconciled with this person.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus told his disciples, “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.” Jesus is suggesting that our fellowship with God can never be complete until we have done what we can to be reconciled with people we have wronged.⁶

Paul fleshes this principle out further in Romans 12:18, where he writes, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Our attempts at reconciliation are usually successful when both parties are seeking to be aligned in Christ. But not everyone we’ve offended is a believer. Sometimes there will be people who will not be satisfied until they have made us “pay.” They don’t want a renewed relationship...they want revenge. In these cases we can only do what God has called us to do. We can seek reconciliation, we can admit our wrongdoing, and we can seek to make restitution where it is appropriate, and if that is not enough we must go on and entrust that person to God. We will be set free even if the other remains in bondage.⁷

In 32:3-21, Jacob makes preparations for meeting Esau. In 32:3-8, Jacob focuses on physical concerns. Moses writes, **“Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He also commanded them saying, ‘Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.’”** In seeking to reconcile himself to his brother, Jacob first humbles himself by calling himself Esau’s **“servant.”** He also calls Esau **“lord.”** Jacob also hopes to impress Esau with his greatness. He wants it made known that he is wealthy and is not returning for the inheritance.

In 32:6-8: **“The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, ‘We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.’⁸ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; for he said, ‘If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.’”** In spite of the angels of God traveling with Jacob and serving as his bodyguards, Jacob falls back into fear. So he divides his people into two groups as a precaution when he hears Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob’s reaction to Esau’s apparently hostile advance against him was to try to protect himself. This was Jacob’s standard response to trouble. Up until now, Jacob has been able to handle his problems himself by hook or by crook. But now God has brought him to the end of his natural resources. Jacob recognizes that this time his scheming ways would not be enough. So, he calls on God for help.

In 32:9-12, we move from Jacob’s physical concerns to his spiritual concerns. In these four verses, Jacob offers up one of the greatest prayers in the Bible.⁹ **“Jacob said, ‘O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you, I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children. For You said, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.’”¹⁰** Reflecting on Jacob’s prayer, I see four elements for us to implement in our prayer lives.

1. **Acknowledge God.** Jacob addressed the Lord as the God of his **“father Abraham”** and his **“father Isaac”** (32:9a). This is significant. Jacob was beginning to understand more fully his place in God’s divine plan. His prayer is the divine pattern of many biblical prayers—to acknowledge who God really is! When Nehemiah prayed about the sad condition of his people in Jerusalem, he lifted up his voice to God and said, “I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God” (Neh 1:5a). When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said, “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name’” (Matt 6:9).¹¹ Whenever we pray, we ought to acknowledge God for who He is! To glibly walk into His presence demonstrates that we lack an understanding of His greatness. He is a king to be honored. Therefore, we must acknowledge Him as such.
2. **Pray God’s Word.** Jacob prays on the basis of two things: 1) God told him to return to his homeland, and 2) God promised to bless him (32:9b). He isn’t appealing to God on the basis of his own performance, but solely on the basis of God promises (cf. Rom 4:20-21). Jacob stands on the promises of God because he knows that God keeps His Word. Many of our prayers fall short because there is none of God’s Word within them. This is because there is so little of God’s Word in us. Yet, both prayer and God’s Word are essential.

Would you ever fly on an airplane with one wing? Of course not! The two wings of the Christian life are prayer and God's Word. God speaks to me through the Scriptures; I speak to Him through prayer. Today, will you make a commitment to pray through the Scriptures as you read them? You may have to read less but your prayer life will grow. You will become a dual-weapon in the spiritual realm.

3. **Admit your unworthiness and God's goodness.** Jacob's arrogant self-confidence is gone and he finally acknowledges that he is completely unworthy of God's lovingkindness and faithfulness (32:10). This is a big step for Jacob. He has come to the point of recognizing that he stands by God's mercy alone. Sometimes we have to hit bottom before we can see our true condition. Only as we recognize that we stand by mercy will we be prepared to act mercifully toward others. When you pray to the Lord, it is critical that you confess your sin, keep short accounts with Him, and acknowledge that you are undeserving and nothing without Him.
4. **Pray specifically.** Jacob asks God to save him from the hand of his brother (32:11). He doesn't mince words...he's clear and specific. Unlike his actions before going to live with Laban, when he took matters into his own hands to wrest away Isaac's blessing from Esau (27:1-29), Jacob now realizes that he must depend totally on God in order to secure his own well-being. It is worth noting that Jacob requests God's protection for himself and his family. He's showing some semblance of concern for someone other than himself. We must follow Jacob's example and learn to pray specific requests. When we do so, God tends to respond with specific answers.

Before moving on, we should take note of two more things. *First, Jacob prays to God in the midst of an interpersonal conflict.* Often, strained relationships can drive us to our knees in prayer. When this happens, we are changed and often the individual that we are in conflict with is also changed. Prayer softens our heart and can soften the heart of another. Prayer can change sour attitudes and dissolve resistance. Prayer has been called the oil that makes the engine of reconciliation run. Prayer brings God's power into our lives and the lives of those around us. *Second, Jacob should have turned to prayer earlier in this process.* It seems Jacob prayed as a last resort. Thus, Jacob fears Esau (32:11) and is **"greatly afraid and distressed"** (32:7). This did not have to be! Prayer diminishes anxiety. Many of us worry because we have chemical or emotional problems, but most of us worry because we don't pray. Today, will you make a commitment to pray for yourself and the person you are in conflict with? Will you also pray first, instead of as a last resort? As you do, it will go well with you.

In 32:13-21, Jacob sends presents before meeting Esau.¹² Moses records these words: **"So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys."** [A total of 550 animals.] **He delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, 'Pass on before me, and put a space between droves.' He commanded the one in front, saying, 'When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these animals in front of you belong?' then you shall say, 'These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.'** Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, 'After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.' For he said, 'I will appease¹³ him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.' So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp."

Jacob assigned a servant to each herd. This was a very generous gift! He wasn't going to skimp in his effort to be reconciled with Esau. He truly wanted to make things right with his brother. He instructed them in what to do and say. After praying a Godly, exemplary prayer only a short time ago, Jacob reverts to his cowardly and self-serving ways. He sends his servants, his children, and his wives before him. He wants them to protect him when he should have been the one at the head of the procession protecting them and putting his trust in God.

Why did Jacob send such an impressive gift to Esau? As a bribe or payoff for his sin of deception and theft? Possibly (Prov 21:14), but it could also have been an act of restitution and reconciliation (Ezek 33:14-16). Restitution is critical for reconciliation. It is the surest evidence of a truly changed heart. A person who wants to reconcile but does not want to make restitution for sin is not really repenting. In Luke 19, we read the story of Zacchaeus. One of the evidences of his sincerity was when he said, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:8-9a).

Becoming a believer does not get you "off the hook" for making restitution. Like Zacchaeus, restitution was evidence that his repentance was sincere. A person who does not want to make the past right is not a mature believer. Do you need to make some kind of restitution? Apologize to a former spouse? Pay for or return something that was stolen? Correct slanderous statements you made? Admit a wrong you committed? Ask forgiveness from your children that you treated poorly? Restitution shows that we are serious about our apology. It shows that we recognize the wrong done to another. Restitution is often the foundation on which the bridge of reconciliation is built.

It is worth noting that the word "**appease**" (*kaphar*) illustrates a biblical theme. The Bible says that Jesus Christ "appeased" (i.e., "propitiated") God's wrath against our sins (see Dan 9:24; Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). In this context, Esau was angry with Jacob. Jacob sends a costly gift ahead, hoping to turn aside Esau's wrath. Of course, this illustration is not perfect. Esau's wrath is a matter of bad temper and resentment. God's wrath is a matter of justice and righteousness. It is a determination to wipe sin out of existence. Jacob's gift is one of his own providing. The blood of Jesus Christ is provided by God. But the essential idea of propitiation is illustrated for us here. God is angry with sin. We are not acceptable to Him as we are. There is only one way in which the anger of God against our sin can be turned away: We must send ahead of us the blood of Jesus Christ. God accepts the gift and then, through the blood of His Son, accepts us and we see Him face-to-face. In Jacob's case, it is reconciliation with his brother that he wants.¹⁴

In 32:22-32, we transition into a new scene. Moses writes, "**Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had**"¹⁵ (32:22-23). The fact that Jacob "**arose**" indicates he had already gone to bed. Questions must have been flooding his mind. Would Esau accept his gift? What if he didn't? What should he do next? No doubt unable to sleep, he awakened his family members and ushered them and his possessions across the river.¹⁶

In 32:24-26, Moses records some of the most fascinating words he has ever penned: "**Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled**¹⁷ **with him until daybreak**" (32:24). It was when Jacob was alone, having done everything he could to secure his own safety, that God came to him.¹⁸ God has arranged the circumstances so that He can get Jacob alone at a moment when he feels completely helpless.¹⁹ God then comes to Jacob as a wrestler to teach him how to fight like a man. This is only fitting since Jacob had spent most of his adult life wrestling with people—Esau, Isaac, Laban, and even his wives.²⁰

Jacob was standing between his past struggle with Laban and the impending struggle with Esau. God comes at this time because He wants Jacob to realize that his real struggle all along has been with God. Notice that we are not told that Jacob wrestled with a man...the man wrestled with Jacob. Is this significant? I think so. It shows us that God is the initiator of this conflict. God was bringing Jacob to the end of himself. He was leading him to a settled conviction that God was superior to him and that he must submit to God's leadership in his life (cf. Rom 12:1-2).

Unfortunately, the greatest problem God has with most of us is getting us to slow down long enough to hear His voice. We're always on the move, always talking, never stopping just to listen. So what does God do? If we won't slow down on our own, He'll step in and slow us down. With a pink slip. Or a midnight phone call. Or a visit to the emergency room. Or a family crisis. Or a financial disaster. Or a serious illness. Or any one of a thousand other crises that break into our little routine and force us to stop what we are doing and begin to listen to God.²¹

“When he [the man] saw that he had not prevailed against him [Jacob], he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him” (32:25). After wrestling with Jacob all night, the man merely **“touched”** Jacob's thigh socket and dislocated his leg. But why did he touch Jacob's thigh? Because the thigh is the largest and strongest muscle of the body. By touching his thigh, the man was deliberately crippling Jacob at the point of his greatest strength. It was an acted-out parable, a lesson whose moral Jacob could not miss: When you wrestle with God, you always lose. In one sense, this is an “unfair” fight because at the end God cheats. He cheats! Touching Jacob's thigh was “unfair.” At least that's the way it looks from the purely human perspective. According to the rules of wrestling, that isn't “fair.” Please understand. God is just and right in all He does. He never cheats. But sometimes it appears that God is unfair in the way he treats us. How many of us have gone through a difficult time and seen life crumble around us, and we've cried out, “God! That's not fair.” And the answer comes down from the Almighty, “My child, I'm not playing by your rules.” That's such an important lesson to learn. God doesn't play by your rules. That's why things happen in your life that, on the surface, appear to be unfair. God is never unfair in the absolute sense. But in order to accomplish His greater purposes, He is willing to do things in your life that may appear to you to be unfair. God's answer is always, “My child, I love you more than you know, but I'm not playing by your rules.”²²

“Then he [the man] said, ‘Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.’ But he [Jacob] said, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me’” (32:26). This is a new determination. Up until this point in Jacob's life, he used all his strength and ability to achieve his own ends. For the first time, he's come to the end of his own resources. Before this night, Jacob was running the show. Now he realizes that without God, he's nothing. All his huffing and puffing has brought him to realize how helpless he is when compared with the strength of God. Whereas before he used his wits to deceive Esau and trick Isaac, now he is learning the great lesson of Zechariah 4:6, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.”

The man requested to be released but Jacob refused to let Him go. Jacob has been reduced to the place where all he can do is hold on to the Lord with everything he has. Jacob can't fight anymore, but he can hold on, which isn't such a bad place to be. He requested that the man bless him. Jacob, the schemer, had finally come to realize that the blessing of God must be obtained from God Himself, and this must be done by clinging to Him in helpless dependence, not by trying to manipulate Him. After wrestling all night, Jacob became a man. He earned some spiritual chest hair. Jacob demonstrates strength and persistence. Jacob prevailed, in the sense of obtaining his request, by acknowledging his dependence and cleaving to God as his deliverer. He is sincere in his need for God's help (32:26; cf. John 15:5).

In 32:27, Jesus says to Jacob, **“What is your name? And he said, ‘Jacob.’**” Now this may seem like a strange question coming from the Lord! Didn’t He know who Jacob was? Of course He did. The question is, “Jacob, do you know who you really are?” The last time Jacob was asked for his name, the question had come from his earthly father, Isaac. Jacob had lied on that occasion and said, “I am Esau,” and he stole the blessing. Now, 20 years later, he was seeking the blessing of his heavenly Father. This time he answered truthfully, “My name is Jacob” (i.e., “heel-grabber,” “cheater,” “deceiver,” and “supplanter”). It had come to stand for the basic reality of Jacob’s life. He was a man who fully earned his own name. It is a confession of who he really is. He had to acknowledge the truth about himself before God could make him into a new man. Jacob owned up to his name. Women birth males; God makes men.

What is your name? Until you can say, “My name is bitterness,” you can’t be healed. Until you can say, “My name is greed,” you can’t be healed. Until you can say, “My name is deception,” you can’t be healed. Until you can say, “My name is unfaithfulness,” you can’t be healed. What is your name? Whenever you are ready to come clean, God can make you clean. But until then you will stay just as you are. Every believer’s self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-dependence must be conquered by God if we are to fulfill His purposes in our lives. God may be wrestling with you this very day. He may be saying to you (clever, astute, capable as you are), “You have believed in Me, but you have always manipulated your own life and made your own arrangements. My child, what is your name?”²³

Until we are “broken” by God, we can never be greatly used by God. God brings us again and again to breaking points. Why? Because God can’t really use a self-reliant man. But a broken and contrite heart, he will not despise. When you are broken, you’ll be ready to listen and ready to obey. Then—and only then—can God greatly use you. Are your broken today? A.W. Tozer once said, “The Lord cannot fully bless a man until He has first conquered him.”²⁴ God never uses anything that comes to him together.²⁵ Will you submit yourself to Him?

Jesus responded, **“Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.”**²⁶ Jacob was given a new name, Israel.²⁷ Israel means either “God strives” or “he who strives with God.” If the latter interpretation is the one intended by the wrestler who blesses Jacob, then the name fits well with Jacob’s character as one who, throughout his life, strove with God. Jacob became a man’s man... God’s man! When the sun goes down his name is Jacob. When the sun comes up again his name is Israel. At 8 PM he is “the cheater”; by 6 AM, he is “the man who wrestled with God.” Before that night, Jacob was in excellent physical condition; ever after that he would walk with a limp.²⁸

Part of the new life in Christ is that we are blessed with a new identity! As believers, we are no longer sinners but saints! We are no longer enemies of God, but friends of God. We are no longer orphans, but adopted sons and daughters of God. We are no longer rejected, but “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” (1 Pet 2:9). And God isn’t finished! In Rev 2:17, He promises to give a new name written on a white stone to believers who overcome. A name so wonderful that it would seem preposterous to you now if you were to hear it, but our Almighty God will make you adequate for it.

In 32:29, Moses writes: **“Then Jacob asked him and said, ‘Please tell me your name.’ But he said, ‘Why is it that you ask my name?’ And he blessed him there.”** One wonders if, “Why is it that you inquire about my name?” is another way of asking, “Jacob, don’t you realize who I am?”²⁹ The verb **“blessed”** here means that the Lord endowed Jacob with success; he would be successful in everything he did, including meeting Esau.³⁰

Who won the match that night? God. Who lost? Jacob. But who really won? Jacob! That's the paradox of life. When we wrestle with God, we always lose. But when we lose, we win! Did not Jesus say something very similar?

- “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it” (Mark 8:35).
- “The last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (Matt 20:16).
- “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Matt 20:26).
- “Whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matt 20:27).

In God's economy, the values of the world are completely reversed. The way up is down and the way to save your life is to lose it. Strangely enough, when you fight with God, defeat leads on to victory and the road to the kingdom goes by way of the cross.

Our story closes with this account: **“So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, ‘I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.’”** “Peniel” means “the face of God.” The face of God is Jesus Christ. Jesus came down from heaven to humble Himself and wrestle a 100-year-old man. It was commonly understood that no one could see God and live (48:16; Exod 19:21; 24:10; Judg 6:11, 22).

“Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.”³¹ Jacob had a permanent limp. God had crippled him and made him weak so that He might be Jacob's strength and that God's power might be perfected in Jacob's weakness. It was a lesson that Jacob would remember with every step he took for the rest of his life (cf. 2 Cor 12:7-10). The result of this spiritual crisis in Jacob's life was obvious to all who observed him from then on (32:31). It literally resulted in a change in his walk. When God touched the strongest sinew of Jacob, the wrestler, it shriveled, and with it Jacob's persistent self-confidence.³²

Maybe you're a bit like Jacob. Maybe you need to reconcile a broken relationship from the past. Humble yourself. Prepare to make restitution if necessary. Go to that person acknowledging your sin and seeking forgiveness. Leave it under the blood of Jesus Christ.

Maybe you need to be reconciled to God. Perhaps you have exhausted yourself trying in your own strength to be good enough to make up for your past sins—to somehow be right with God. Acknowledge Him, admit your need, and cling to Jesus as your Savior.

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Notes

¹ See R.T. Kendall, *All's Well that End's Well: The Life of Jacob* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 138.

² Sailhamer writes, "The events of this chapter are couched between two accounts of Jacob's encounter with angels (vv. 1, 25). The effect of these two brief pictures of Jacob's meeting with angels on his return to the land is to align the present narrative with the similar picture of the Promised Land in the early chapters of Genesis. The land was guarded on its borders by angels. The same picture was suggested early in the Book of Genesis when Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden and 'cherubim' were positioned on the east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life. It can hardly be accidental that as Jacob returned from the east, he was met by angels at the border of the Promised Land. This brief notice may also be intended to alert the reader to the meaning of Jacob's later wrestling with the 'man'...at Peniel (vv. 25-30). The fact that Jacob had met with angels here suggests that the man at the end of the chapter is also an angel." John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis: EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), Electronic ed.

³ Which angels Jacob meets is not stated. Perhaps they are the same two angels that accompanied the Lord to Abraham's house prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18). More likely, they are the angels that Jacob meets just prior to his twenty-year stay at Laban's household (28:12). After that previous encounter in which the Lord re-confirms the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob, Jacob calls the place of the meeting "the house of God" and "the gate of heaven." In this passage, Jacob calls the place of meeting "the camp of God" -- suggesting that this meeting evokes within Jacob emotions that are similar to those he experienced in that earlier encounter. Jacob's two encounters with angels (his only two encounters with angels) --one just prior to entering Laban's territory and one just after departing from it -- form an inclusio around Jacob's experiences with Laban, suggesting perhaps that that era of Jacob's life is now complete. Barry C. Davis, *Genesis* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Biblical Seminary unpublished class Notes, 2003).

⁴ There are several intentional verbal links between the Bethel and Mahanaim vision. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50, Vol. 2: WBC* (Waco, TX: Word, 1994), 281.

⁵ Ray Pritchard, *The Breaking Point: Genesis 32:22-32*

<http://www.calvarymemorial.com/sermons/SMdisplay.asp?id=334>

⁶ See also Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 232.

⁷ Rev. Bruce Goettsche, *Making Peace With Your Past* (Genesis 32:1-21):

<http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/092599.html>.

⁸ Esau may have had a large army because he had had to subjugate the Horite (Hurrian) population of Seir (32:6). His soldiers probably consisted of his own servants plus the Canaanite and Ishmaelite relations of his wives.

⁹ Jacob's prayer (his first recorded prayer and the only extended prayer in Genesis) reflects his deeply felt need for God's help and his own humility (32:9-12). Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 443. Waltke likens its form to the "penitential psalms."

¹⁰ Some commentators have thought this final verse of the prayer redundant, but it actually follows the predominant form of a lament in which God is motivated to act. The primary motivation Jacob can offer to God is God's promise, and so he falls back on that at the end of the prayer. See NET Study Bible Notes.

¹¹ Gene A. Getz, *Jacob: Following God Without Looking Back* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 130.

¹² Davis shares this insight: "This section begins (32:13a) and ends (32:21b) with the statement that Jacob 'spent the night' at his camp. The section also begins (32:13b) and ends (32:21a) with a reference to the present that Jacob is giving to Esau. Thus these two declarations form a chiasmic inclusio around Jacob's instructions to his servants regarding how they are to deliver his gifts to Esau. Presenting this story by the use of a chiasmic inclusio, has the effect of slowing down the events of the story and of building up the tension that surrounds not knowing but wanting to find out how the meeting between Jacob and Esau will work out. This literary technique, moreover, works wonderfully here to reflect Jacob's hesitancy to proceed and his desire to put off the encounter as long as possible." Davis, *Genesis*.

¹³ Heb. "I will appease his face." The cohortative here expresses Jacob's resolve. In the Book of Leviticus the Hebrew verb translated 'appease' has the idea of removing anger due to sin or guilt, a nuance that fits this passage very well. Jacob wanted to buy Esau off with a gift of more than five hundred and fifty animals." See NET Study Bible Notes.

¹⁴ Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: Genesis 24-50* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1999), 54-55.

¹⁵ Hebrew narrative style often includes a summary statement of the whole passage followed by a more detailed report of the event. In this case, verse 22 provides a summary statement while verse 23 begins the detailed account. See NET Study Bible Notes.

¹⁶ Getz, *Jacob*, 141.

¹⁷ “The verb translated ‘wrestled’ (*abaq*) sounds in Hebrew like the names ‘Jacob’ (*Yaaqob*) and ‘Jabbok’ (*Yabboq*). In this way the narrator links the setting, the main action, and the main participant together in the mind of the reader or hearer.” See NET Study Bible Notes.

¹⁸ “The great encounter with God came when Jacob knew himself to be exposed to a situation wholly beyond him.” Derek Kidner, *Genesis: Tyndale OT Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1967), 168.

¹⁹ Kendall writes, “Jacob needed to learn something about the true God...and it was going to be tough. God doesn’t transport us out of the real world. The Christian life must be lived in a tough world. Take, for example, the eagle who forces her young out of the nest. God does that too And Jacob, who thought he knew God, is suddenly discovering something about God he had never seen before. God was being tough and he was unprepared for it. Every Christian finds out sooner or later God seems to desert them and appears in a way they fail to recognize. When things start to go wrong, we think, ‘Oh, I am not pleasing the Lord. If I were, these things would not be happening to me. God is angry with me.’ Here was Jacob, in the middle of the night, wrestling was someone who appeared to be stronger than he was. The same God was still at work with Jacob, but it appeared that Jacob was being deserted. Christians and non-Christians alike have all passed the same question: “Why does God allow unpleasant things to happen to me? Well, it’s a divine toughness, and this was what Jacob was having to learn. He needed to understand he could trust God when he didn’t understand what was happening. Is your faith so weak that you can only trust God when you see you have a grip on events and everything is going just right for you? You may say in good times, “Oh, isn’t God wonderful?” Yet you will not know the real God until you have been deserted, when everything is wrong, and you still love Him. This is what God wants to teach you and me.” Kendall, *All’s Well that End’s Well*, 128-129.

²⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Authentic: Genesis 25-50* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1997), 58.

²¹ Pritchard, *The Breaking Point*.

²² Pritchard, *The Breaking Point*.

²³ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 402.

²⁴ A.W. Tozer, *The Divine Conquest* (Harrisburg: PA: Christian Publications, 1950), 53.

²⁵ Crawford Loritts, “Preaching That Raises Our Sights,” *PreachingTodaySermons.Com* <http://store.yahoo.com/pttranscripts/prthraoursi.html>.

²⁶ Hamilton writes, “By his wrestling with God Jacob began a new stage in his life (v. 28); he was a new man because he now began to relate to God in a way new for him. As a sign of this, God gave him a new name that indicated his new relationship to God. Israel means ‘God’s warrior.’ The acknowledgment of the old name, and its unfortunate suitability [Jacob, v. 27], paves the way for the new name [Israel, v. 28].” Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50: NICOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 333.

²⁷ “The transformation pertains to the way in which Jacob prevails. Heretofore he prevailed over people by trickery. Now he prevails with God, and so with humans, by his words, not by the physical gifts conferred on him at birth or acquired through human effort.” Waltke, *Genesis*, 446.

²⁸ Pritchard, *The Breaking Point*.

²⁹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 336.

³⁰ See NET Study Bible Notes.

³¹ Hamilton points out the symbolic significance of Jacob’s thigh within the history of Israel. He states: “Given the other references to ‘thigh’ in the patriarchal traditions, it is inconceivable that any later Israelite would have missed the national import of this verse [32:25]. Jacob, the ancestor of Israel, had his thigh struck, and it was from that thigh that Israel came forth (Exod. 1:3 [sic 1:5]).” Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 331.

Davis follows up with this helpful comment: “Exodus 1:5 reads: ‘And all the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was already in Egypt.’ The Hebrew word translated ‘loins’ by the NASB in Ex 1:5 is the same word (*yarek*) that the NASB translates ‘thigh’ in Gen 32:25, 31. Furthermore, the same symbolism as picked up on in Ex 1:5 may be seen also in Gen 46:26 (‘All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, his direct descendants, not including the wives of Jacob’s sons, were sixty-six persons in all’) where the NASB translates the Hebrew word *yarek*... (thigh) as ‘descendants.’” Davis, *Genesis*.

³² Allen P. Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568 (October-December 1985): 350.