





## Wrestling at Peniel – Genesis 32

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### **GENESIS 32:1-2**

This chapter begins with Jacob returning to Canaan with his family, servants, and cattle. Along the journey Jacob is met by angels which prompted him to name the place "Mahanaim," meaning "two camps" or "two hosts." It's mind-boggling how we can gloss over stories like this without realizing the profound implications of what the meeting of these two camps represents.

Let's pause and take it all in...

The concept of "two camps" illustrates the coexistence of the physical world we see and the unseen spiritual realm that we don't see. The spiritual realm is depicted in biblical accounts such as 2 Kings Chapter 6, where a divine army protects the prophet Elisha and his servant:

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*When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. 'Oh no, my lord! What shall we*

*do?' the servant asked. 'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*  
—2 Kings 6:15-17, NIV

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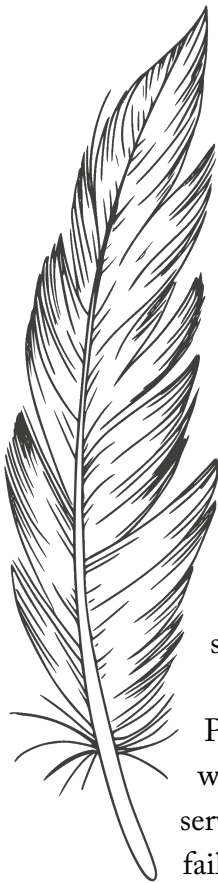
This is my prayer for you today, for whatever you're going through, whether it be the loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, health issues, or a fear of the future: "Open her eyes, Lord, so that she may see." See the chariots ablaze with fire and the multitude of angels waiting on the Lord's command. You are well protected, and nothing can happen outside of God's will.

In the book of Hebrews, the role of angels is reaffirmed:

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*Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*  
—Hebrews 1:14, NIV

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Psalm 103 praises God's mercy and compassion, acknowledging His dominion over all creation. Verses 20-21 specifically speak of angels, calling them "mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word" and "his heavenly hosts, his ministers who do his will." The Psalm depicts angels as powerful beings who heed and execute God's commands, serving Him faithfully, while emphasizing their obedience and service to God.

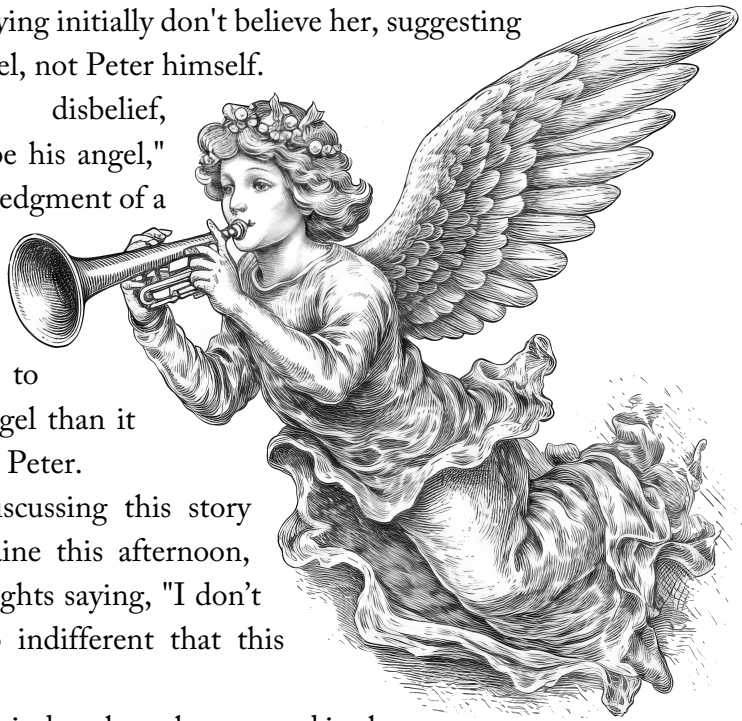
In Acts chapter 12, we read about angels yet again. After Peter is miraculously freed from prison he goes to the house where other believers are praying for him. When he knocks, a servant girl named Rhoda hears his voice but, in her excitement, fails to open the door. Instead, she runs to announce Peter's

presence. Those praying initially don't believe her, suggesting that she saw his angel, not Peter himself.

Their initial disbelief, assuming "it must be his angel," shows their acknowledgment of a spiritual reality parallel to their own. In fact, it was easier for them to believe it was an angel than it was to believe it was Peter.

When I was discussing this story with my friend Elaine this afternoon, she echoed my thoughts saying, "I don't ever want to be so indifferent that this doesn't excite me."

These stories remind us that what we read in the Bible about angels and the spiritual realm is not just ancient history; it's a pattern of divine interaction that deserves our attention.



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❓ What comfort can the story from 2 Kings 6:15-17 offer to us in times when we're afraid?

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? There are several places in the Bible where angels have appeared to people. Can you name one or two other than the ones I mentioned here?

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### **GENESIS 32:3-23**

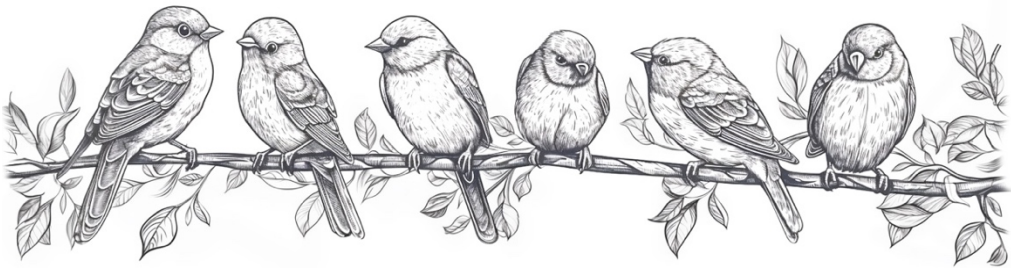
In Genesis 32:6, Jacob is faced with his greatest fear; his brother Esau is approaching with a band of 400 men. We're not walking in Jacob's shoes, but we all have "Esau" in our lives—fears and challenges that feel insurmountable at times. The question is, what do we do about it?

Jacob's response gives us an alternative to the 'fight or flight' reactions typically triggered by fear when he embraces a third option: faith. Instead of reacting to his fear, he's proactive in the way that he deals with his fear. This spiritual strategy, grounded in faith, provides a model for us. It's an approach that doesn't deny the reality of our fears but instead confronts them with the power of faith in action.

1. **He Followed God's Command:** Despite the risks, he obeyed God's direction to return home.
2. **He Prayed:** Facing potential danger, he turned to God, expressing his fears and seeking guidance.

3. **He Leaned on Promises:** Jacob held onto God's promises for protection and prosperity.
4. **He Attempted to Reconcile:** He proactively sent gifts to Esau, seeking to mend their fractured relationship.
5. **He Persevered:** Jacob didn't give up, wrestling with God and not letting go without a blessing.

Through faith, we learn that the overwhelming problems we face are opportunities to experience God's faithfulness and to grow stronger in our reliance on Him.



? What promise or promises from scripture do you lean on when you are afraid?

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❓ When was the last time that you had a fear or a challenge that felt insurmountable? How did God resolve the problem?

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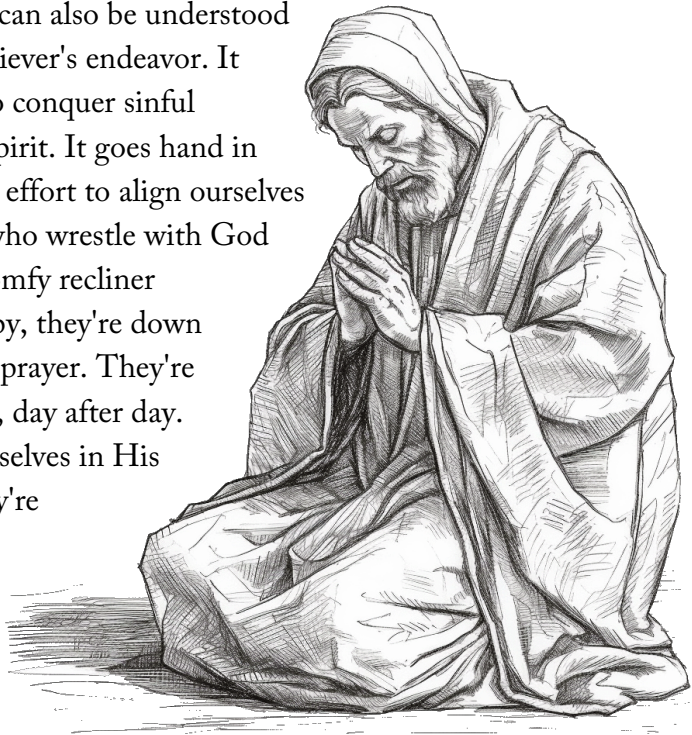
**GENESIS 32:24-26**

Anytime I think of "perseverance," I'm always reminded of Jacob. His entire life can be seen as a testament to unwavering perseverance, from the moment of his birth where he grabbed his brother's heel, symbolizing his quest to be the firstborn, to his cunning negotiation for Esau's birthright. These actions illustrate Jacob's foresight and determination to secure a future he believed was his. His tenacity continued as he works for Laban for 14 years to earn the right to marry Rachel, to his tireless efforts to prosper in a foreign land, against great odds.

This theme of perseverance emerges once again as Jacob wrestles with God (many scholars believe this was Jesus) at the Jabbok River. While this struggle is a transformative experience for Jacob, it symbolizes the internal conflicts we all face, and the perseverance needed to overcome them.

When I say that we need to persevere, I'm not talking about perseverance in general, I'm talking about steadfastness in faith—the kind of enduring commitment that refines character and nurtures hope.

Wrestling with God can also be understood as a metaphor for the believer's endeavor. It represents our struggle to conquer sinful nature and walk in the Spirit. It goes hand in hand with an intentional effort to align ourselves with God's will. Those who wrestle with God aren't sitting back in a comfy recliner watching life pass them by, they're down on their knees in fervent prayer. They're persistently seeking God, day after day. They're immersing themselves in His Word for direction. They're weeping in repentance. They're standing firm in their faith against the winds of adversity. They're embracing their trials as opportunities to grow stronger in faith.



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*Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

*—Romans 5:3-5, NIV*

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The Bible tells us that Jacob wrestled with "a man" until daybreak, while Genesis 32:25 tells us that the man "could not" overpower him or prevail against him. This doesn't mean that God didn't have the power or the ability to overpower Jacob, it simply means that God didn't permit himself to overpower Jacob. It defies God's nature to go against the promises He made, one being that Jacob would return to the land of his fathers.

Instead of overpowering him, God gave Jacob a physical ailment, illustrating the paradoxical nature of blessings and the sometimes painful ways that God may choose to deliver them. This physical injury marks a pivotal transformation in Jacob's life, illustrating that blessings from God can come through trials and struggles, shaping us into more faithful and reliant followers.



❓ What can Jacob's struggle with God teach us about perseverance and faith?

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What can Jacob’s dislocated hip teach us about the nature of blessings and the ways that God delivers them at times?

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**GENESIS 32:27-32**

Up to this point, Jacob had been prosperous, industrious, and smart. His life was marked by a stubborn persistence, even if it meant wrestling, deceiving, or working 14 years for his wife. He was relentless in his pursuit of what he deemed valuable, starting before he was born, when he wrestled with Esau in the womb for the birthright, but for the most part, he had been leaning on his own effort to get where he was. By asking Jacob what his name was, Jesus was reminding him of this fact.

The moment the man touched Jacob’s hip he went from a position of self-reliance to one of utter dependence on God. The touch on his hip, rendering him physically weaker, symbolized the pivotal shift in Jacob's life where he could no longer lean on his own strength but was compelled to trust entirely in God's power.

The name Israel means "he struggles with God," but notice that there’s more to this name than simply the struggle. Genesis 32:28 says, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."



The Septuagint offers us a different perspective as it translates the verse, "Israel will be your name for you grew in strength against God, and against mighty men." It's important to remember that any time we wrestle with God whether it be searching the scriptures or fervently praying, we should grow through the process.

Scripturally, his two names are used interchangeably to reflect different facets of his life. "Jacob" is a reminder of his human nature and frailties, while "Israel" signifies spiritual triumph and a covenantal bond with God.

As you're reading the Bible, you might notice that people like Abraham, Sarah, and Paul were addressed by their new names after they were given to them, but

Jacob's name is interchangeable throughout scripture.

For example, in Genesis Chapter 46, we find the use of both Jacob and Israel as the author goes back and forth between the two. This dual usage of his name illustrates his two-fold identity. When the text uses "Israel," it often highlights moments tied to his role as the father of the nation and his spiritual legacy, reflecting his status and the fulfillment of divine promises. Conversely, "Jacob" is used in more personal or human-centered contexts, emphasizing his individual actions, experiences, and sometimes his vulnerabilities. This deliberate use of two names helps convey different aspects of his character and destiny, painting a fuller picture of God's promises to him.

Similarly, believers have a human nature, and we are partakers of the divine nature through the working of the Holy Spirit as we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. It's a common misconception, however, that after becoming Christians, the struggle with our old ways ceases and we consistently exhibit Christ within us. The fact is that the journey is ongoing,

the difference, however, is that the Holy Spirit empowers us in the fight against sin. Just as Scripture refers to the patriarch as "Jacob" even after he was renamed "Israel," it highlights that we, too, will face ongoing struggles. Christians experience a dual identity, much like Jacob — we live in the reality of our human frailty while also walking in the new life Christ has granted us. This duality remains until we are fully transformed in our eternal state.

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*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

*—2 Peter 1:3–4, NIV*

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As a point of interest (and I realize that this might be a little off topic here), in the verses following that one, Peter lists some attributes of a believer that seem to reflect a spiritual growth process, where each quality builds upon the previous one. Starting with faith as the foundation, believers are encouraged to grow in virtue progressively. Adding goodness to faith means acting rightly, then gaining knowledge to understand God's will. Self-control helps in living out that knowledge, which then strengthens perseverance through trials. This steadfastness then cultivates a godly character. It implies that spiritual maturity is gradual and cumulative, each step preparing for the next, leading to a more complete Christlikeness.



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*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.*  
–2 Peter 1:5–7, NIV

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Finally, as Jacob walks away limping, we learn that the greatest blessings aren't found in the deliverance itself, but in our leaning on the One Who delivers. An answer to prayer isn't necessarily the resolution we envision. Rather, it's the intimate and sustaining relationship that develops as we learn to lean on God through our trials. Our dependency on Him transforms our understanding of deliverance, teaching us that it's not the gift itself that we need, it's The Giver.

Hebrews 11:21 offers us a glimpse of Jacob in his old age, still affected by this life-changing encounter with God, showing his reliance not just on a physical staff but on God himself.

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*By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.*  
–Hebrews 11:21, NIV

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? What transformation took place when God dislocated Jacob's hip?

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? What do the names Jacob and Israel each mean?

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# Answer Key

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## Chapter 8 – Genesis 32

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### GENESIS 32:1-2

**What comfort can the story from 2 Kings 6:15-17 offer to us in times when we're afraid?**

It reminds us that God's protection is often unseen but always present, and reassures us that, regardless of how overwhelming our circumstances may seem, God's mighty power surrounds us, working on our behalf.

**There are several places in the Bible where angels have appeared to people. Can you name one or two other than the ones I mentioned here?**

One significant time when an angel appeared is found in Luke chapter 1, when the angel Gabriel visited Mary to announce that she would give birth to Jesus, the Messiah.

Another time that an angel appeared was in Judges chapter 6. While Gideon was threshing wheat, the angel appeared and greeted him as a "mighty warrior." He then gave Gideon the mission to save Israel from the Midianites

### GENESIS 32:3-23

**What promise or promises from scripture do you lean on when you are afraid? (This answer will be different for everyone)**

**When was the last time that you had a fear or a challenge that felt insurmountable? How did God resolve the problem?**

(This answer will be different for everyone)

## **GENESIS 32:24-26**

**What can Jacob's struggle with God teach us about perseverance and faith?**

Jacob's struggle with God teaches us about the importance of perseverance and faith in our spiritual lives. This incident illustrates the depth of determination and tenacity in faith, emphasizing that wrestling with challenges and persisting in prayer can lead to divine favor and transformation.

**What can Jacob's dislocated hip teach us about the nature of blessings and the ways that God delivers them at times?**

Jacob's dislocated hip teaches us about the paradoxical nature of blessings and the sometimes painful ways that God may choose to deliver them. This physical injury marks a pivotal transformation in Jacob's life, illustrating that blessings from God can come through trials and struggles, shaping us into more faithful and reliant followers.

## **GENESIS 32:27-32**

**What transformation took place when God dislocated Jacob's hip?**

When God dislocated Jacob's hip during their wrestling at Peniel, a significant transformation took place. This physical change was symbolic of a deeper spiritual transformation. Jacob, previously known for his cunning and self-reliance, became more dependent on God. Furthermore, God changed his name to Israel, meaning "God perseveres," signifying a shift in his identity and destiny.

**What do the names Jacob and Israel each mean?**

The name Jacob means supplanter, heel-holder, or to follow behind. The name "Israel" is commonly interpreted to mean "he struggles with God" or "God prevails."