

**Genesis in Biblical Perspective :  
The Gospel of Christ from Genesis –  
A New Man, A New Name, A New Life**

**Genesis 32**

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

We are in Genesis 32 for this study and finally Jacob gets converted, praise the Lord. God has revealed to us His sovereign love for 'Jacob I have loved.' We have seen Jacob sin and God's longsuffering and drawing. Now Jacob comes in the newness of life and he is converted. Victorious grace becomes transforming grace and here is a new creation with a new name. He is a new man in Christ Jesus. We will begin by reading the first eight verses and then we'll work our way through the entire chapter. This is the Word of God, it's the truth. Genesis 32:1–8 says

*[1] Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. [2] And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim. [3] And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, [4] instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. [5] I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'" [6] And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." [7] Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, [8] thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape."*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

I know hardly anything about flowers. I'm not a horticulturist or a flower lover. I certainly don't mind them but I'm just not into them. When I was in Junior High there was always a little flower that appeared that I always loved to see. The red bud trees started putting out the red buds. I liked seeing the red buds. The red buds were the first flower of Spring and that meant Spring was coming. When Spring was coming, baseball was right behind it. That is the way I looked at it –

red buds, Spring, then baseball. I'm too old for baseball now so now it's red buds, Spring and Claritin-D. That is kind of how it works.

It's a signal. Boom, red buds, life is coming. We will not only get a chance to see in this text life come to Jacob but the red buds too that pop out and say that life is coming. You can't come to Christ until the Father draws you. No man can come to Me unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). We have been watching Jacob in his self-centeredness, self-reliance, self-righteousness, self-absorption and a patient, loving, sovereign God graciously calling him and now we're going to see this victorious, transforming grace convert him to go see a few red buds. When the Lord is drawing there are some signs of life that begin to pop out and they are all over this text.

Let's begin by looking at the first verse. Genesis 32:1 says, *Jacob went on his way...* Have you heard of the phrase 'caught between a rock and a hard place'? That is where Jacob has been – between a rock and a hard place. The rock was Esau and he is in front of him. The hard place was Laban and he is behind him. Jacob, instead of waiting on God to fulfill His promise to give him the covenant blessing and to exalt him over Esau, he exalted himself. With treachery he took the family blessing, the covenant blessing and the birth right. Then Esau says "I'm going to kill Jacob."

Under the need of a wife he gets sent away, fleeing Esau and goes to where his mother is from to get a wife. He comes under the indentured servitude for twenty years under Laban whereby he is now on his way back to the Promised Land. He now has two wives – Rachel and Leah – as he has sinfully engaged in the act of polygamy. He has eleven sons with the promise of one more. When he left the land of Promise God told Jacob "I'll be with you, I'll give you a nation, I'll give you My presence and I will bring My blessing upon you so that what you need to serve Me I'll give you." Jacob comes back and he has the presence of God, even though he doesn't deserve it. He has all the resources God has blessed him with from camel, oxen, sheep etc. God told Jacob He would supply all his needs according to His riches.

So now he arrives with Laban behind him. The hard place, Laban, was handled because when Laban caught up with him with his own army God put the fear of the Lord in him and said "Don't do or say anything good or bad to Jacob." So God protected Jacob from Laban. Then they put this blessing between them which is called the blessing of Mizpah where they raised up a boundary. The blessing was for Jacob not to go back across that boundary and Laban said he wouldn't come across this boundary and may the Lord watch between me and you in our absence. That was not a benediction but a malediction. Laban was saying "I don't trust you and if you do anything against me when I'm not looking I'm going to ask God to get you." That was a malediction that they were actually declaring on each other because they didn't trust each other.

So the hard place is gone, Laban has gone back but there is still a boundary there and he can't go over that boundary so he has to go forward. He can't retreat and the rock is ahead of him. The rock is still there. Esau is still there. I can just imagine Jacob moving along pretty slowly here because Esau is ahead of him. There was at least a little hope of mercy when Laban catches up with him because Jacob married his two daughters and his kids were Laban's grandkids, but Esau could probably care less about Jacob's wives and his children. The last thing Jacob heard Esau say was "I'm going to kill you." In the meantime, Esau has conquered an entire nation called Edom and the land of Seir belongs to him. Now Jacob's messengers tell him that Esau is on his way here to see him and he has a full army with him of four hundred men.

It says in the text that Jacob began to be afraid and distressed. I don't blame him. Do you know where most of our fears come from? They are fueled by unconfessed, unrepented, hidden sins. He knows what he has done to Esau. He senses his treachery and Esau is coming not from justice but revenge. Jacob is fearful and distressed. I want to point out some things that have happened in that passage we just read.

The first thing that happens is that as Jacob goes on his way he arrives at the camp of Mahanaim. The name of this place means 'two camps.' It means there is Jacob's camp and God's camp. Jacob sees all these angels when he gets there. When Jacob left the Promised Land he stopped at a place called Beth-el which means 'house of God' and Jacob saw the ladder and all the angels. God tells Jacob He will be with him and the ladder isn't for Jacob to go to heaven but for God to come down to him. Now he is heading back to the Promised Land and arrives near the Jabbok River which is near the northern boundary. As he comes over the northern boundary he sees not the house of God but the camp of God. The idea of the word camp means the army of the Lord, the host of the Lord for gathered in front of him is an army of angels that the Lord allows him to see who now come and meet Jacob. These are the messengers of God, created beings, ministering Spirits, angels.

Then Jacob sends out his own messengers to go and meet Esau. They go with a message of contrition that 'your servant Jacob is coming back to my lord, Esau and I am coming back with a lot of stuff, so don't be fearful that I'm coming for your stuff.' So Jacob attempts to pacify Esau with this message but the messengers return very quickly with the message 'Esau is coming for you with four hundred men.' So Jacob began to tremble. Then out of his fear, Jacob institutes a threefold effort.

His first effort is that he decides to split his camp into two camps. In one camp he puts his servants and this large, generous gift that he is going to send to Esau which are all of his flock, camels, livestock etc. Then for a strategy he separates out a second camp and this camp includes Leah, her children, Rachel, her children and all of his family into the second camp, thinking that when Esau

comes perhaps he'll get so preoccupied with the first camp and the capturing of all that is there that the second camp will be able to exist. So that is first strategic initiative.

His second effort is a big moment for he prays. He hasn't done this yet and God has been so gracious to him yet it has always been I'll negotiate, I'll deceive, I'll manipulate, I'll trick but now he prays. This is the longest prayer in the book of Genesis and the first prayer out of Jacob's mouth. Let's look at this prayer. Genesis 32:9–21 says,

*[9] And 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 kindred, that I may do you good,' [10] I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. [11] Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. [12] But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" [13] So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, [14] two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, [15] thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. [16] These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove." [17] He instructed the first, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?' [18] then you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.'" [19] He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, "You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, [20] and you shall say, 'Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he thought, "I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me." [21] So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.*

So here is Jacob who has divided into two camps – one will have my servants and possessions and the other will be my family. Maybe as Esau attacks my first camp then he'll miss the second and my family will be spared. The second thing is that Jacob begins to pray. This may have been prayerless, praiseless and he hasn't acknowledged God and now he calls upon the Lord fervently in prayer.

The third effort he makes is that he arranges this gift that he is sending to Esau in a way that hopefully will pacify Esau. Jacob wants to pacify Esau and his anger

by sending to him a large, generous gift. This gift contains over 550 animals and riches that go with it. Jacob decides to divide it up in accelerated amounts. There will be a first group, then a second group and then a third group and they will gradually get larger as they come. Then he decides to use a little salesmanship here. He isn't quite converted yet and so Jacob still has a plan here. He wants his messengers to make sure that Esau knows that all these things belong to Jacob but he is giving them to you for he is right behind us which is a lie for he is not right behind them, for behind the first group is the second group and so forth. So instead of Esau seeing Jacob behind the first group Esau will see another big gift that has been brought to him and the same will happen with the third gift that will be even bigger than the first. You can see these accelerated gifts Jacob is using to try to win his brother's pacification and calm his anger. When that is done and the plan is in place then comes the encounter at the river Jabbok that feeds the Jordan River. Genesis 32:22–32 says

*[22] The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. [23] He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. [24] And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. [25] When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. [26] Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." [27] And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." [28] Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." [29] Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. [30] So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." [31] The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. [32] Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.*

Jacob has his plan in place and his two camps divided trying to save the family. He sends these accelerated gifts to pacify and he has called upon the Lord in prayer. By the way, the Jabbok River descends rapidly from about 1300 feet above sea level down to about 200 feet below sea level. He cuts through a canyon and is a very treacherous river. So at night there is a treacherous fording of the stream by his entire family as they come across the Jabbok River. He gets the second camp that has his family, across the river.

In the next chapter, Genesis 33, which we'll see in the next study he arranges his family in a particular way as they cross this river. He first puts his servants out, then Leah, her children, then Rachel and then Joseph. Then Jacob is last to

cross. He is not converted yet. Basically he sends them across in the order of his love with himself being the one he loves most of all.

As they cross the river Jacob is left all alone for everyone of has crossed but him and then all of sudden in the darkness of a night the hand of a man lays upon him and pulls him into a wrestling match. Jacob holds his own with the man and then the man subdues him by touching his hip. Now his hip is out of socket and his leg has become useless but still Jacob hangs on. Jacob is a strong man for he was the one who moved the stone that was over the well that three men together couldn't move. In equality they have wrestled with each other but then the man he is wrestling with defeats him by touching his hip and therefore overcoming him. Yet even overcome with no strength of a leg Jacob still will his arms clings to the man. Jacob holds on to him and say "I will not let you go until you bless me" and the man blesses him. Quickly we have seen that this is not just a man but this is a God-man – truly a man for the wrestling match is even, yet the hand of God, a mere touch, breaks the strength of Jacob. Jacob knows this wasn't just any man.

Now Jacob is a man with a new name and a new life. He names the place Peniel meaning I have seen God face to face. Jacob walks away with a limp. The next time we study in Genesis 33, the man with a limp, leaving Peniel, walking past Penuel, we see that he is walking tall, for the next time we see him he'll be in front of his family to meet Esau. He will not be behind to save himself.

I want to give you five practical lessons from this text. The first lesson is you serve a Savior but you never serve Him alone. The Lord your God is with you. The Lord said to Jacob "When you leave here I'll be with you" and the angels were an affirmation of it at Beth-el. Now that Jacob returns to the Promised Land the Lord says "I'll be with you. I'll be with you when you go to Laban. I'll be with you now that you confront Esau. I the Lord God will be with you." And you too have that promise. The Lord says in Matthew 28:19–20, *[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

One thing God has done to accomplish His presence in ministry in our life is that He has created an entire order of beings that exist to do His bidding of ministry and message. They are the angels. He has given His angels charge over you. The Bible says this is so real that many of us like Abraham have entertained angels unaware, without knowing it. You are never alone. Not only is the Lord your God with you but He has a camp, an army, a host that is devoted to serving Him in the lives of His people.

My first trip to Uganda was in 1985. There was machine gun fire every night with no electricity or running water. We made a trip up through the rebel invested country to a small school that had existed for decades by a Christian institution

designed to educate young Ugandan women that ranged in age from 14 to 18 years of age. When they graduated from the school you would know them. In fact, around Uganda you would see a woman and you could tell by her demeanor and deportment if she had gone through that school. A Godly English Christian woman was the head mistress and I had the privilege to go there and preach for two days. It was a great blessing to have that opportunity. They had survived the wars with Idi Amin and Obote and the now president Museveni was used to liberate Uganda from the treachery of Idi Amin and Obote but something had happened a couple of years before that, that I had the privilege to talk to some people about.

When I sat down to talk with the head mistress she began telling me in a matter of fact way the battles between Museveni's army and Idi Amin's army that took place just off the hill right down from where the school stood. One battle had raged all night and this was one of the battles that Museveni had lost. When victory came Idi Amin's soldiers were cut loose and they ransacked the village. As they drank and became drunk they sent messages up the hill that they were coming to despoil the young women at the school and that they would be there before the morning. These girls had no where to go so they went into the chapel and under this head mistress they began to call upon the Lord saying "O God, there is no one to deliver us, will You protect us?" In the early morning hours no one had come. As the dawn would break they looked over the hill and no soldiers were coming up. They looked even further in the afternoon and still no soldiers.

Finally the late afternoon one or two of the women gathered some courage and went down to the village and they had found that all the soldiers of Idi Amin had left. When they had asked others why they didn't do what they said they were going to do, the village people said "Oh they set out and started up the hill but they were not strong enough for another battle as they saw the troops arrayed with lights surrounding the school, they decided to move on." There were no troops. It was just the girls in prayer. Who was that army that protected them? I will say to you that it was an angelic intervention of the Lord God. I would say it was the Lord God who intervened to protect them. You do not know how many times the Lord has done that in your life and mine. Sometimes we'll get a glimpse of it and say "It must have been an angelic intervention." You do not live this life alone. The Lord is with you and His army of angelic ministry stands at His beckon to serve. He has given His angels charge concerning you.

Lesson two from the text is that the Lord God in the life of Jacob has shown us how to pray. How many of you have ever gone through a discipleship on prayer and have been taught the acronym ACTS? I guess Jacob was taught by the same person that taught you because that's exactly the way he prays. A stands for adoration. C stands for confession. T stands for thanksgiving. S stands for supplication. Jacob starts off with adoration in Genesis 32:9 which says [9] *And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac..."* He uses both the premier names of God – Elohim and Yahweh. Then Jacob confesses

that he is a sinner, he's weak, he has no strength and that he cannot deliver himself. Then he gives thanksgiving to God for being with him in all that he has needed. Then he gives supplication by saying "Now I'm afraid. Deliver me." That fear of his unrepented sin was overcoming him and even with the encouragement of the angels, still he called out to the Lord. "I'm afraid. O God be my strength."

Then he does something very important that I don't know how to add to the acronym ACTS. After Jacob gave his supplication he said "Because You promised me. You promised me You would never leave me. You promised me You would bring me back to the land. You promised me that You would do good to me. It is not because I deserve it and it is not even because I need it but it's because You promised it." God delights in the prayers of His people when they bring Him back His Word.

Today we teach bold prayer this way – Lord, I believe, I believe, I believe...so You have to do it, do it, do it. Or we think that if we stamp our feet that God will move. God moves upon the Word that He has given from the humble and contrite of heart. Jacob has humbled himself and now his boldness comes not from puffing himself up like a turkey strutting but his boldness comes from God's Word.

Who is the greatest example of this? It is Moses. God says to Moses "I'm going to give you the Promised Land, angels, milk and honey, military victory and you'll overcome all these people that come against you, but I'm not going with you." Moses said "God You can't do that." How many times have you prayed like that? I don't mean out of personal arrogance but "God You can't do that because You promised You would go with us." Moses said "It's not our military victory or political victory or our economic prosperity that shows the world that we are Your people. It is Your presence with us that shows the world we are Your people so God if You don't go with us we'll die right here in the wilderness." That is the strength of Jacob's prayer. He brings back to God not only his need but God's promises in His Word.

The third lesson from the text is when you wrestle with God you win by losing. Here is Jacob wrestling with this God-man. Here is the picture of what will happen when Jesus Christ comes into this world. He is fully Man. See the striving of two men but fully God for with a mere touch he breaks Jacob on his hip. As the God-man enters into this struggle with Jacob in full humanity, God wins by breaking Jacob with His touch. That is how we get saved. God breaks us.

Almost all the commentators get carried away with that word prevail and they say this is an example of prevailing prayer. I do believe that when we're called of God and we're being saved by the hand of God we'll lay hold of God and won't let go until He blesses but that's not the key to the text. The key to the text is not Jacob holding onto God when he wrestles Him but God came to wrestle with him. It was



God who came to him. Jacob didn't go to God. The reason Jacob sought God was because God sought him out in that dark night and all of his fear. Out of a dark night the hand of man lays hold of Jacob and draws him into a clinch. Jacob wrestles with this man with the strength of his might but then that man breaks him. He would have never clung to Him if God had not broken him and God broke him because He came to him. We come to Him because He came for us. You will come to Him and hold on when you are broken by Him.

The fourth lesson from the text is when He touches you, you live with a limp. It is not a baptism or church membership or walking forward in a meeting yet all that can be used of God that saves you. Someone who has had a real encounter with God and been saved is they walk with a limp. They are broken. It does not mean they are cowards. On the contrary, this man walking with the limp will walk past Penuel and now take the front of his family instead of hiding in back. He'll walk tall but he'll walk with a limp. There is no confidence in the flesh. It is the Spirit who gives life. The Lord is our strength, our confidence and it's not the chariots, things or possessions I have. It is the Lord God who has me.

The fifth lesson from the text is that He Himself gives us the Gospel message. You have delivered me. Here is a new man with a new heart, a new record, a new name and a new creation. Here is a man that in the darkness of night is trembling in fear and in the morning with a limp will walk in the courage of God. The dawn has not broken upon Jacob. While he will not be perfect as any new creation in Christ is not perfect until we get to be with the Lord, he is changed. Calling grace has become victorious grace. Victorious grace is transforming grace and now here is a man who no longer rests and relies upon himself but now he stands forth for the Lord. Like his grandfather Abraham he has a new name. Jacob now has a new name. I pray that each of you has a new name written down in glory and on the breast of your Savior He has redeemed you.

Have you been broken? You will not come to Him until you are and you can't serve Him until we are. Have we been broken of our self-reliance and self-righteousness? Have we repented not only of our sin but our righteousness which is like filthy rags? Have we been broken of everything that is within us? Cling only to Christ alone because He has come and called you and wrestled you to the mat, touched you and broken you. In every text here we have had the joy of looking at Jacob and seeing something in the New Testament in Christ, but now I end this study not with Jacob looking forward to Christ. In this study, Christ has come for Jacob. This same Christ has come for you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I do pray and ask that You would seal these truths upon our hearts. For any reading this who have never come to Christ, would You put their hip out of socket that they will walk no more but will cling to You and then because of Your power we will

walk boldly with a limp. There is no self-righteousness, no self-indignation, no self-reliance. We cling to You who came for us that we might hold fast to the Savior. O God, there are some men reading this that need to be broken so that they will walk out in front of their families. There are some women reading this that need to be broken that the culture of the day that shouts to them 'you're worth something because of what other people say about you.' There are some women reading this that need to have their worth in Christ. We all desperately needed to be reminded. Let not Satan tempt us away to this world and its affairs and our possessions that they will deliver us but may we cling to Him who holds us and will never leave us nor forsake us. May we raise up a generation of young men and women who own Christ because Christ has owned them. O God our God may Your people walk to the battle with courage even with a limp for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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