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The Study of Genesis 32

Wrestling with God

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Wrestling with God

Genesis 32:1-32

- Gen 32:1** So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.
- 2 When Jacob saw them, he said, "This *is* God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.
- 3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.
- 4 And he commanded them, saying, "Speak thus to my lord Esau, 'Thus your servant Jacob says: "I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now.
- 5 I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight." ' "
- 6 Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men *are* with him."
- 7 So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that *were* with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies.
- 8 And he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape."
- 9 Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you':
- 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.
- 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.
- 12 For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' "
- 13 So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother:
- 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,
- 15 thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals.
- 16 Then he delivered *them* to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants,

- "Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves."
- 17 And he commanded the first one, saying, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose *are* these in front of you?'"
- 18 then you shall say, 'They *are* your servant Jacob's. It *is* a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also *is* behind us.' "
- 19 So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, "In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him;
- 20 and also say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob *is* behind us.' " For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me."
- 21 So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp.
- 22 And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok.
- 23 He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had.
- 24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.
- 25 Now 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.
- 26 And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"
- 27 So He said to him, "What *is* your name?" He said, "Jacob."
- 28 And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."
- 29 Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell *me* Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why *is* it *that* you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there.
- 30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."
- 31 Just as he crossed over Penuel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.
- 32 Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which *is* on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank.

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Matthew Henry Commentary

Genesis 32 -

We have here Jacob still upon his journey towards Canaan. Never did so many memorable things occur in any march as in this of Jacob's little family. By the way he meets, I. With good tidings from his God ([Gen 32:1](#), [Gen 32:2](#)). II. With bad tidings from his brother, to whom he sent a message to notify his return ([Gen 32:3-6](#)). In his distress, 1. He divides his company ([Gen 32:7](#), [Gen 32:8](#)). 2. He makes his prayer to God ([Gen 32:9-12](#)). 3. He sends a present to his brother ([Gen 32:13-23](#)). 4. He wrestles with the angel ([Gen 32:24-32](#)).

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Matthew Henry Commentary

Gen 32:1-2

Jacob, having got clear of Laban, pursues his journey homewards towards Canaan: when God has helped us through difficulties we should go on our way heaven-ward with so much the more cheerfulness and resolution. Now, 1. Here is Jacob's convoy in his journey ([Gen 32:1](#)): *The angels of God met him*, in a visible appearance, whether in a vision by day or in a dream by night, as when he saw them upon the ladder ([Gen 28:12](#)), is uncertain. Note, Those that keep in a good way have always a good guard; angels themselves are ministering spirits for their safety, [Heb 1:14](#). Where Jacob pitched

his tents, they pitched theirs about him, [Psa 34:7](#). They met him, to bid him welcome to Canaan again; a more honourable reception this was than ever any prince had, that was met by the magistrates of a city in their formalities. They met him to congratulate him on his arrival, as well as on his escape from Laban; for they have pleasure in the prosperity of God's servants. They had invisibly attended him all along, but now they appeared to him, because he had greater dangers before him than those he had hitherto encountered. Note, When God designs his people for extraordinary trials, he prepares them by extraordinary comforts. We should think it had been more seasonable for these angels to have appeared to him amidst the perplexity and agitation occasioned first by Laban, and afterwards by Esau, than in this calm and quiet interval, when he saw not himself in any imminent peril; but God will have us, when we are in peace, to provide for trouble, and, when trouble comes, to live upon former observations and experiences; for *we walk by faith, not by sight*. God's people, at death, are returning to Canaan, to their Father's house; and then the angels of God will meet them, to congratulate them on the happy finishing of their servitude, and to carry them to their rest. 2. The comfortable notice he took of this convoy, [Gen 32:2](#). *This is God's host*, and therefore, (1.) It is a powerful host; very great is he that is thus attended, and very safe that is thus guarded. (2.) God must have the praise of this protection: "This I may thank God for, for it is his host." A good man may with an eye of faith see the same that Jacob saw with his bodily eyes, by believing that promise ([Psa 91:11](#)), *He shall give his angels charge over thee*. What need have we to dispute whether every particular saint has a guardian angel, when we are sure he has a guard of angels about him? To preserve the remembrance of this favour, Jacob gave a name to the place from it, *Mahanaim, two hosts, or two camps*. That is, say some of the rabbin, one host of the guardian angels of Mesopotamia, who conducted Jacob thence, and delivered him safely to the other host of the angels of Canaan, who met him upon the borders where he now was. Rather, they appeared to him in two hosts, one on either side, or one in the front and the other in the rear, to protect him from Laban behind and Esau before, that they might be a complete guard. Thus he is *compassed* with God's favour. Perhaps in allusion to this the church is called *Mahanaim, two armies*, [Son 6:13](#). Here were Jacob's family, which made one army, representing the church militant and itinerant on earth; and the angels, another army, representing the church triumphant and at rest in heaven.

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Matthew Henry Commentary

Gen 32:3-8

Now that Jacob was re-entering Canaan God, by the vision of angels, reminded him of the friends he had when he left it, and thence he takes occasion to remind himself of the enemies he had, particularly Esau. It is probable that Rebekah had sent him word of Esau's settlement in Seir, and of the continuance of his enmity to him. What shall poor Jacob do? He longs to see his father, and yet he dreads to see his brother. He rejoices to see Canaan again, and yet cannot but rejoice with trembling because of Esau.

I. He sends a very kind and humble message to Esau. It does not appear that his way lay through Esau's country, or that he needed to ask his leave for a passage; but his way lay near it, and he would not go by him without paying him the respect due to a brother, a twin-brother, an only brother, an elder brother, a brother offended. Note, 1. Though our relations fail in their duty to us, yet we must make conscience of doing our duty to them. 2. It is a piece of friendship and brotherly love to acquaint our friends with our condition, and enquire into theirs. Acts of civility may help to slay enmities. Jacob's message to him is very obliging, v. 4, 5. (1.) He calls Esau his lord, himself his servant, to intimate that he did not insist upon the prerogatives of the birthright and blessing he had obtained for himself, but left it to God to fulfil his own purpose in his seed. Note, *Yielding pacifies great offences*, [Ecc 10:4](#). We must not refuse to speak in a respectful and submissive manner to those that are ever so unjustly exasperated against it (2.) He gives him a short account of himself, that he was not a fugitive and a vagabond, but, though long absent, had had a certain dwelling-place, with his own relations: *I have sojourned with Laban, and staid there till now*; and that he was not a beggar, nor did he come home, as the prodigal son, destitute of necessaries and likely to be a charge to his relations; no, *I have*

oxen and asses. This he knew would (if any thing) recommend him to Esau's good opinion. And, (3.) He courts his favour: *I have sent, that I might find grace in thy sight*. Note, It is no disparagement to those that have the better cause to become petitioners for reconciliation, and to sue for peace as well as right.

II. He receives a very formidable account of Esau's warlike preparations against him ([Gen 32:6](#)), not a word, but a blow, a very coarse return to his kind message, and a sorry welcome home to a poor brother: *He comes to meet thee, and four hundred men with him*. He is now weary of waiting for the days of mourning for this good father, and even before they come he resolves to slay his brother. 1. He remembers the old quarrel, and will now be avenged on him for the birthright and blessing, and, if possible, defeat Jacob's expectations from both. Note, malice harboured will last long, and find an occasion to break out with violence a great while after the provocations given. Angry men have good memories. 2. He envies Jacob what little estate he had, and, though he himself was now possessed of a much better, yet nothing will serve him but to feed his eyes upon Jacob's ruin, and fill his fields with Jacob's spoils. Perhaps the account Jacob sent him of his wealth did but provoke him the more. 3. He concludes it easy to destroy him, now that he was upon the road, a poor weary traveller, unfixed, and (as he thinks) unguarded. Those that have the serpent's poison have commonly the serpent's policy, to take the first and fairest opportunity that offers itself for revenge. 4. He resolves to do it suddenly, and before Jacob had come to his father, lest he should interpose and mediate between them. Esau was one of those that hated peace; when Jacob speaks, speaks peaceably, *he is for war*, [Psa 120:6](#), [Psa 120:7](#). Out he marches, spurred on with rage, and intent on blood and murders; four hundred men he had with him, probably such as used to hunt with him, armed, no doubt, rough and cruel like their leader, ready to execute the word of command though ever so barbarous, and now breathing nothing but threatenings and slaughter. The tenth part of these were enough to cut off poor Jacob, and his guiltless helpless family, root and branch. No marvel therefore that it follows ([Gen 32:7](#)), *then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed*, perhaps the more so from having scarcely recovered the fright Laban had put him in. Note, Many are the troubles of the righteous in this world, and sometimes the end of one is but the beginning of another. The clouds return after the rain. Jacob, though a man of great faith, yet was now greatly afraid. Note, A lively apprehension of danger, and a quickening fear arising from it, may very well consist with a humble confidence in God's power and promise. Christ himself, in his agony, was sorely amazed.

III. He puts himself into the best posture of defence that his present circumstances will admit. It was absurd to think of making resistance, all his contrivance is to make an escape, [Gen 32:7](#), [Gen 32:8](#). He thinks it prudent not to venture all in one bottom, and therefore divides what he had into two companies, that, if one were smitten, the other might escape. Like a tender careful master of a family, he is more solicitous for their safety than for his own. He divided his company, not as Abraham ([Gen 14:15](#)), for fight, but for flight.

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Matthew Henry Commentary

Gen 32:9-12

Our rule is to call upon God in the time of trouble; we have here an example to this rule, and the success encourages us to follow this example. It was now a time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it; and here we have him praying for that salvation, [Jer 30:7](#). In his distress he sought the Lord, and he heard him. Note, Times of fear should be times of prayer; whatever frightens us should drive us to our knees, to our God. Jacob had lately seen his guard of angels, but, in this distress, he applied to God, not to them; he knew they were his fellow-servants, [Rev 22:9](#). Nor did he consult Laban's *teraphim*; it was enough for him that he had a God to go to. To him he addresses himself with all possible solemnity, so running for safety into the name of the Lord, *as a strong tower*, [Pro 18:10](#). This prayer is the more remarkable because it won him the honour of being an *Israel*, *a prince with God*, and the father of the praying remnant, who are hence called *the seed of Jacob*, to whom he never said, *Seek you me in vain*. Now it is worth while to enquire what there was extraordinary in this

prayer, that it should gain the petitioner all this honour.

I. The request itself is one, and very express: *Deliver me from the hand of my brother*, [Gen 32:11](#). Though there was no human probability on his side, yet he believed the power of God could rescue him as a lamb out of the bloody jaws of the loin. Note, 1. We have leave to be particular in our addresses to God, to mention the particular straits and difficulties we are in; for the God with whom we have to do is one we may be free with: *we have liberty of speech (parresia)* at the throne of grace. 2. When our brethren aim to be our destroyers, it is our comfort that we have a Father to whom we may apply as our deliverer.

II. The pleas are many, and very powerful; never was cause better ordered, [Job 23:4](#). He offers up his request with great faith, fervency, and humility. How earnestly does he beg! *Deliver me, I pray thee*, [Gen 32:11](#). His fear made him importunate. With what holy logic does he argue! With what divine eloquence does he plead! Here is a noble copy to write after.

1. He addresses himself to God as the God of his fathers, [Gen 32:9](#). Such was the humble self-denying sense he had of his own unworthiness that he did not call God his own God, but a God in covenant with his ancestors: *O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac*; and this he could the better plead because the covenant, by divine designation, was entailed upon him. Note, God's covenant with our fathers may be a comfort to us when we are in distress. It has often been so to the Lord's people, [Psa 22:4](#), [Psa 22:5](#). Being born in God's house, we are taken under his special protection.

2. He produces his warrant: *Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country*. He did not rashly leave his place with Laban, nor undertake this journey out of a fickle humour, or a foolish fondness for his native country, but in obedience to God's command. Note, (1.) We may be in the way of our duty, and yet may meet with trouble and distress in that way. As prosperity will not prove us in the right, so cross events will not prove us in the wrong; we may be going whither God calls us, and yet may think our way hedged up with thorns. (2.) We may comfortably trust God with our safety, while we carefully keep to our duty. If God be our guide, he will be our guard.

3. He humbly acknowledges his own unworthiness to receive any favour from God ([Gen 32:10](#)): *I am not worthy*; it is an unusual plea. Some would think he should have pleaded that what was now in danger was his own, against all the world, and that he had earned it dear enough; no, he pleads, *Lord, I am not worthy of it*. Note, Self-denial and self-abasement well become us in all our addresses to the throne of grace. Christ never commended any of his petitioners so much as him who said, *Lord, I am not worthy* ([Mat 8:8](#)), and her who said, *Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table*, [Mat 15:27](#). Now observe here, (1.) How magnificently and honourably he speaks of the mercies of God to him. We have here, *mercies*, in the plural number, and inexhaustible spring, and innumerable streams; *mercies and truth*, that is, past mercies given according to the promise, and further mercies secured by the promise. Note, What is laid up in God's truth, as well as what is laid out in God's mercies, is the matter both of the comforts and the praises of active believers. Nay, observe, it is *all* the mercies, and *all* the truth; the manner of expression is copious, and intimates that his heart was full of God's goodness. (2.) How meanly and humbly he speaks of himself, disclaiming all thought of his own merit: "*I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies*, much less am I worthy of so great a favour as this I am now suing for." Jacob was a considerable man, and, upon many accounts, very deserving, and, in treating with Laban, had justly insisted on his merits, but not before God. *I am less than all thy mercies*; so the word is. Note, The best and greatest of men are utterly unworthy of the least favour from God, and just be ready to own it upon all occasions. It was the excellent Mr. Herbert's motto, *Less than the least of all God's mercies*. Those are best prepared for the greatest mercies that see themselves unworthy of the least.

4. He thankfully owns God's goodness to him in his banishment, and how much it had outdone his expectations: "*With my staff I passed over this Jordan*, poor and desolate, like a forlorn and despised pilgrim;" he had no guides, no companions, no attendants, no conveniences for travel, but his staff only, nothing else to stay himself upon; "*and now I have become two bands*, now I am surrounded with a numerous and comfortable retinue of children and servants:" though it was his distress that had now obliged him to divide his family into two bands, yet he makes use of that for the magnifying of the

mercy of his increase. Note, (1.) The increase of our families is then comfortable indeed to us when we see God's mercies, and his truth, in it. (2.) Those whose latter end greatly increases ought, with humility and thankfulness, to remember how small their beginning was. Jacob pleads, "Lord, thou didst keep me when I went out with only my staff, and had but one life to lose; wilt thou not keep me now that so many are embarked with me?"

5. He urges the extremity of the peril he was in: *Lord, deliver me from Esau, for I fear him*, [Gen 32:11](#). The people of God have not been shy of telling God their fears; for they know he takes cognizance of them, and considers them. The fear that quickens prayer is itself pleadable. It was not a robber, but a murderer, that he was afraid of; nor was it his own life only that lay at stake, but the mothers' and the children's, that had left their native soil to go along with him. Note, Natural affection may furnish us with allowable acceptable pleas in prayer.

6. He insists especially upon the promise God had made him ([Gen 32:9](#)): *Thou saidst, I will deal well with thee*, and again, in the close ([Gen 32:12](#)): *Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good*. Note, (1.) The best we can say to God in prayer is what he has said to us. God's promises, as they are the surest guide of our desires in prayer, and furnish us with the best petitions, so they are the firmest ground of our hopes, and furnish us with the best pleas. "Lord, thou saidst thus and thus; and wilt thou not be as good as thy word, the word upon which thou had *caused me to hope*?" [Psa 119:49](#). (2.) The most general promises are applicable to particular cases. "Thou saidst, *I will do thee good*; Lord, do me good in this matter." He pleads also a particular promise, that of *the multiplying of his seed*. "Lord, what will become of that promise, if they be all cut off?" Note, [1.] There are promises to the families of good people, which are improvable in prayer for family-mercies, ordinary and extraordinary, [Gen 17:7](#); [Psa 112:2](#); [Psa 102:28](#). [2.] The world's threatenings should drive us to God's promises.

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Matthew Henry Commentary

Gen 32:13-23

Jacob, having piously made God his friend by a prayer, is here prudently endeavouring to make Esau his friend by a present. He had prayed to God to deliver him from the had of Esau, for he feared him; but neither did his fear sink into such a despair as dispirits for the use of means, nor did his prayer make him presume upon God's mercy, without the use of means. Note, When we have prayed to God for any mercy, we must second our prayers with our endeavours; else, instead of trusting god, we tempt him; we must so depend upon God's providence as to make use of our own prudence. "Help thyself, and God will help thee;" God answers our prayers by teaching us to order our affairs with discretion. To pacify Esau,

1. Jacob sent him a very noble present, not of jewels or fine garments (he had them not), but of cattle, to the number of 580 in all, [Gen 32:13-15](#). Now, 1. It was an evidence of the great increase with which God had blessed Jacob that he could spare such a number of cattle out of his stock. 2. It was an evidence of his wisdom that he would willingly part with some, to secure the rest; some men's covetousness loses them more than ever it gained them, and, by grudging a little damage; *skin for skin, and all that a man has*, if he be a wise man, *he will give for his life*. 3. It was a present that he thought would be acceptable to Esau, who had traded so much in hunting wild beasts that perhaps he was but ill furnished with tame cattle with which to stock his new conquests. And we may suppose that the mixed colours of Jacob's cattle, ring-straked, speckled, and spotted, would please Esau's fancy. 4. He promised himself that by this present he should gain Esau's favour; for a gift commonly *prosper*, *which way soever it turns* ([Pro 17:8](#)), *and makes room for a man* ([Pro 18:16](#)); nay, *it pacifies anger and strong wrath*, [Pro 21:14](#). Note, [1.] We must not despair of reconciling ourselves even to those that have been most exasperated against us; we ought not to judge men unappeasable, till we have tried to appease them. [2.] Peace and love, though purchased dearly, will prove a good bargain to the purchaser. Many a morose ill-natured man would have said, in Jacob's case, "Esau has vowed my death without cause, and he shall never be a farthing the better for me; I will see him far enough before I will send him a present:" but Jacob forgives and forgets.

II. He sent him a very humble message, which he ordered his servants to deliver in the best manner, [Gen 32:17](#), [Gen 32:18](#). They must call Esau their *lord*, and Jacob his *servant*; they must tell him the cattle they had was a small present which Jacob had sent him, as a specimen of his acquisitions while he was abroad. The cattle he sent were to be disposed of in several droves, and the servants that attended each drove were to deliver the same message, that the present might appear the more valuable, and his submission, so often repeated, might be the more likely to influence Esau. They must especially take care to tell him that Jacob was coming after ([Gen 32:18-20](#)), that he might not suspect he had fled through fear. Note, A friendly confidence in men's goodness may help to prevent the mischief designed us by their badness: if Jacob will seem not to be afraid of Esau, Esau, it may be hoped, will not be a terror to Jacob.

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Matthew Henry Commentary

Gen 32:24-32

We have here the remarkable story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel and prevailing, which is referred to, [Hos 12:4](#). Very early in the morning, a great while before day, Jacob had helped his wives and his children over the river, and he desired to be private, and was left alone, that he might again more fully spread his cares and fears before God in prayer. Note, We ought to continue instant in prayer, always to pray and not to faint: frequency and importunity in prayer prepare us for mercy. While Jacob was earnest in prayer, *stirring up himself to take hold on God*, an angel takes hold on him. Some think this was a created angel, the *angel of his presence* ([Isa 63:9](#)), one of those that *always behold the face of our Father* and attend on the *shechinah*, or the divine Majesty, which probably Jacob had also in view. Others think it was Michael our prince, the eternal Word, the angel of the covenant, who is indeed the Lord of the angels, who often appeared in a human shape before he assumed the human nature for a perpetuity; whichsoever it was, we are sure *God's name was in him*, [Exo 23:21](#). Observe,

I. How Jacob and this angel engaged, [Gen 32:24](#). It was a single combat, hand to hand; they had neither of them any seconds. Jacob was now full of care and fear about the interview he expected, next day, with his brother, and, to aggravate the trial, God himself seemed to come forth against him as an enemy, to oppose his entrance into the land of promise, and to dispute the pass with him, not suffering him to follow his wives and children whom he had sent before. Note, Strong believers must expect divers temptations, and strong ones. We are told by the prophet ([Hos 12:4](#)) how *Jacob wrestled*: he *wept, and made supplication*; prayers and tears were his weapons. It was not only a corporal, but a spiritual, wrestling, by the vigorous actings of faith and holy desire; and thus all the spiritual seed of Jacob, that pray in praying, still wrestle with God.

II. What was the success of the engagement. 1. Jacob kept his ground; though the struggle continued long, the angel, *prevailed not against him* ([Gen 32:25](#)), that is, this discouragement did not shake his faith, nor silence his prayer. It was not in his own strength that he wrestled, nor by his own strength that he prevailed, but in and by strength derived from Heaven. That of Job illustrates this ([Job 23:6](#)), *Will he plead against me with his great power? No (had the angel done so, Jacob had been crushed), but he will put strength in me; and by that strength Jacob had power over the angel*, [Hos 12:4](#). Note, We cannot prevail with God but in his own strength. It is his Spirit that intercedes in us, and *helps our infirmities*, [Rom 8:26](#). 2. The angel put out Jacob's thigh, to show him what he could do, and that it was God he was wrestling with, for no man could disjoint his thigh with a touch. Some think that Jacob felt little or no pain from this hurt; it is probable that he did not, for he did not so much as halt till the struggle was over ([Gen 32:31](#)), and, if so, this was an evidence of a divine touch indeed, which wounded and healed at the same time. Jacob prevailed, and yet had his thigh put out. Note, Wrestling believers may obtain glorious victories, and yet come off with broken bones; for *when they are weak then are they strong*, weak in themselves, but strong in Christ, [2Co 12:10](#). Our honours and comforts in this world have their alloys. 3. The angel, by an admirable condescension, mildly requests Jacob to let him go ([Gen 32:26](#)), as God said to Moses ([Exo 32:10](#)), *Let me alone*. Could not a mighty angel get

clear of Jacob's grapples? He could; but thus he would put an honour on Jacob's faith and prayer, and further try his constancy. *The king is held in the galleries* ([Son 7:5](#)); *I held him* (says the spouse) *and would not let him go*, [Son 3:4](#). The reason the angel gives why he would be gone is *because the day breaks*, and therefore he would not any longer detain Jacob, who had business to do, a journey to go, a family to look after, which, especially in this critical juncture, called for his attendance. Note, Every thing is beautiful in its season; even the business of religion, and the comforts of communion with God, must sometimes give way to the necessary affairs of this life: *God will have mercy, and not sacrifice*. 4. Jacob persists in his holy importunity: *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*; whatever becomes of his family and journey, he resolves to make the best he can of this opportunity, and not to lose the advantage of his victory: he does not mean to wrestle all night for nothing, but humbly resolves he will have a blessing, and rather shall all his bones be put out of joint than he will go away without one. The credit of a conquest will do him no good without the comfort of a blessing. In begging this blessing he owns his inferiority, though he seemed to have the upper hand in the struggle; *for the less is blessed of the better*. Note, Those that would have the blessing of Christ must be in good earnest, and be importunate for it, as those that resolve to have no denial. It is the fervent prayer that is the effectual prayer. 5. The angel puts a perpetual mark of honour upon him, by changing his name ([Gen 32:27](#), [Gen 32:28](#)): "Thou art a brave combatant" (says the angel), "a man of heroic resolution; what is thy name?" "Jacob," says he, a *supplanter*; so *Jacob* signifies: "Well," says the angel, "be thou never so called any more; henceforth thou shalt be celebrated, not for craft and artful management, but for true valour; thou shalt be called *Israel, a prince with God*, a name greater than those of the great men of the earth." He is a prince indeed that is a prince with God, and those are truly honourable that are mighty in prayer, Israels, Israelites indeed. Jacob is here knighted in the field, as it were, and has a title of honour given him by him that is the fountain of honour, which will remain, to his praise, to the end of time. Yet this was not all; having power with God, he shall have power with men too. Having prevailed for a blessing from heaven, he shall, no doubt, prevail for Esau's favour. Note, Whatever enemies we have, if we can but make God our friend, we are well off; those that by faith have power on earth as they have occasion for. 6. He dismisses him with a blessing, [Gen 32:29](#). Jacob desired to know the angel's name, that he might, according to his capacity, do him honour, [Jdg 13:17](#). But that request was denied, that he might not be too proud of his conquest, nor think he had the angel at such an advantage as to oblige him to what he pleased. No, "*Wherefore dost thou ask after my name? What good will it do thee to know that?*" The discovery of that was reserved for his death-bed, upon which he was taught to call him *Shiloh*. But, instead of telling him his name, he gave him his blessing, which was the thing he wrestled for: *He blessed him there*, repeated and ratified the blessing formerly given him. Note, Spiritual blessings, which secure our felicity, are better and much more desirable than fine notions which satisfy our curiosity. An interest in the angel's blessing is better than an acquaintance with his name. The tree of life is better than the tree of knowledge. Thus Jacob carried his point; a blessing he wrestled for, and a blessing he had; nor did ever any of his praying seed seek in vain. See how wonderfully God condescends to countenance and crown importunate prayer: those that resolve, though God slay them, yet to trust in him, will, at length, be more than conquerors. 7. Jacob gives a new name to the place; he calls it *Peniel, the face of God* ([Gen 32:30](#)), because there he had seen the appearance of God, and obtained the favour of God. Observe, The name he gives to the place preserves and perpetuates, not the honour of his valour or victory, but only the honour of God's free grace. He does not say, "In this place I wrestled with God, and prevailed;" but, "In this place I saw God face to face, and my life was preserved;" not, "It was my praise that I came off a conqueror, but it was God's mercy that I escaped with my life." Note, It becomes those whom God honours to take shame to themselves, and to admire the condescensions of his grace to them. Thus David did, after God had sent him a gracious message ([2Sa 7:18](#)), *Who am I, O Lord God?* 8. The memorandum Jacob carried of this in his bones: *He halted on his thigh* ([Gen 32:31](#)); some think he continued to do so to his dying-day; and, if he did, he had no reason to complain, for the honour and comfort he obtained by this struggle were abundantly sufficient to countervail the damage, though he went limping to his grave. He had no reason to look upon it as his reproach thus *to bear in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus* ([Gal 6:17](#)); yet it might serve, like Paul's thorn in the flesh, to keep him from being lifted up with the abundance of the revelations. Notice is taken of the sun's rising upon him when he passed over *Penuel*; for it is sunrise with that soul that has communion with God. The inspired penman mentions a

traditional custom which the seed of Jacob had, in remembrance of this, never to eat of that sinew, or muscle, in any beast, by which the hip-bone is fixed in its cup: thus they preserved the memorial of this story, and gave occasion to their children to enquire concerning it; they also did honour to the memory of Jacob. And this use we may still make of it, to acknowledge the mercy of God, and our obligations to Jesus Christ, that we may now keep up our communion with God, in faith, hope, and love, without peril either of life or limb.