

Let's resume our study now in Genesis chapter 32. We've laid a little bit of groundwork in our first session by noting the somewhat interchangeable nature of the angel of the Lord and the Lord Himself in several Old Testament episodes, Old Testament appearances. And the reason this is important, and of course it raises questions, and some of these are difficult to answer.

We talked about some of this during the break, and it's excellent questions. The Scripture says no man has seen God at any time. And we wonder, well, what about the central figure of the three-person party that visited Abraham under the terebinth tree? And that certainly seems to be God speaking in the first person.

He says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" There is a long tradition, at least in my observation, of believing that several of these Old Testament appearances, whether it's the angel of the Lord or a theophany proper, that this is actually the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, in a pre-incarnate appearance. This is based on the idea that Jesus Christ is the revealed member of the Trinity. And we've had a lively discussion about that here over the break.

Because in my—and, of course, I get to say my view, and I don't have to repeat everybody else's during the break, so you'll probably only get one side of this—but I think it is, at least for me, a little bit further than I'm willing to go. And you think, well, gosh, you're usually further out in the weeds than most people.

But in this particular case, I'm not prepared to say that pre-0 B.C. appearances of God are always going to be the Lord Jesus Christ because He's the revealed member of the Trinity. That idea—I mean, there are people who have trouble documenting the Trinity in the Old Testament. Where do you find God the Son right on the surface of things in the Old Testament? It's very difficult to document.

So the idea of the Trinity is not prominent. It is there. It's a perfectly valid doctrine.

But the persons of the Trinity and who is appearing, the promises that are made to Abraham and to Isaac and Jacob and to the nation of Israel, the person that walked in the garden with Adam—is that God the Father? Is it God the Son? We suspect that it's probably not God the Holy Spirit, since He seems to always be an invisible presence. Is it a combination of them all? Is it God in a more general representative fashion? The one thing I am not prepared to say is that any time you see God, it is God the Son on the basis of the fact that He's the revealed member. Because that in itself is an assumption that He's the revealed member.

We know that He certainly was revealed, and in Him all the fullness of deity dwelt. But Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." The elders of Israel and Moses climbed Mount Sinai and ate a meal in the presence of God.

And you had the sea of glass and the throne and the presence of God. There are numerous instances in the Old Testament of prophets having a vision and seeing God. You have Isaiah and the whole episode of the burning coal.

"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" The coal on the lips. The speaker there details an angel to go touch his lips with the coal. You say, "Well, he didn't really see God.

It was just a vision." Well, what in our experience is not a vision in some form? If it's information coming to your brain and it seems to be coming from your eyes, when it's communication from God, it's not quite so easy to draw the line between what is concrete and what is spiritual. When Paul was caught up to the third heaven, we know the third heaven is the throne room of God.

Did he somehow have someone holding an angelic hand in front of his eyes so that he didn't see the throne and he saw everything but God? John in Revelation not only sees Jesus Christ in His revealed glory, with a face like flaming fire and so forth, but he also sees God on His throne, enthroned in the midst of the sea of glass and so on. I think rather than taking one passage and banking everything on it, that no man has seen God at any time, and if you do see God, it must be Jesus Christ, the revealed member, it is better to take things in their natural context and, at the risk of sounding like, well, when we can't explain it, we spiritualize it.

The idea that no man has seen God has to be understood in its context. This is talking about the unfiltered, undiminished glory of God. There are none of us in a fallen state that can see that and survive, but God obviously isn't imprisoned within His own glory and unable to reveal Himself to anyone.

God spoke to Moses on the mountain. Whichever person of the Trinity you think appeared in the Old Testament, you still have the same problem, because Jesus is just as much God as God the Father. We think, well, the Father is God God, and Jesus is the Son of God, and we sort of unconsciously diminish the deity of Christ and think, well, people can look at God when it's Christ.

He is every bit, every whit, as much God as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. So if you've seen Jesus Christ, you have the same difficulty with the passage that says no man has seen God. Everybody from the birth and the night in the manger until the ascension saw Jesus Christ, and He is God.

So God is capable of appearing in forms that we can see and live, and obviously His messengers can be seen, and people who see them can live over it. We've just seen that with Gideon and Manoah. I will maintain, as we noted when we were back in Genesis chapter 19, that the individual who comes and who details the messengers to Lot and so forth—actually, it's chapter 18, verse 1—the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre as he was sitting at the tent door.

He looked, and behold, three men were standing by him, and when he saw them, he ran from his tent door. And we studied that in detail, but obviously one of these three men is central. He always speaks in the first person.

He never talks about the Lord in the third person. I say never. I guess he does in verse 14 when he says, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” But he's reminding Abraham of something that he should know as a principle.

But he says, “At the appointed time, I will return to you, and Sarah shall have a son.” And he says, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?” in 18:17, since Abraham shall become a great nation? “I have known him, in order that he may command his children, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and righteousness,” and so forth. And then in verse 20 it says, “The Lord said, ‘Because the outcry is great, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry.’”

You can argue that this is along the lines of Gideon and Manoah, and that this is the angel of the Lord speaking in the first person on behalf of God. I wouldn't strenuously argue. But I do think that it is an interesting distinction in those episodes that with Manoah and Gideon, when a meal is brought, the angel of the Lord says, “Just place it on the rock,” fire consumes it, and it goes up to the proper recipient of communion with that meal, which is God Himself.

But in the case of Abraham, Abraham in 18:7 ran, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, they prepared it, brought out butter and milk. He stood by them under the tree as they ate. And they partake of this meal that he has prepared, which is more than just hospitality.

This is the very same idea that is embodied in Judges. So I would not die for it one way or the other. I think that this is God Himself.

I think it is probably God the Father who is speaking to the nation of Israel. God the Father is pictured as sending His Son. He says, “Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee.”

And He is the covenant, the promisor in the covenant to Israel. He pictures Himself as the husband to the unfaithful wife, Israel. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, has as His bride the church.

And I don't think that is an intermingling of spouses and father and son. I think the two are separate. But that is, again, not as important as realizing that what we have before us in Genesis chapter 32 is a representative of the Lord God.

And yet, struggling with Him is representative of struggling with God. Let's read the account. It says in verse 22 of chapter 32 of Genesis, “He, Jacob, arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of the Jabbok.”

Sort of interesting, it doesn't mention Dinah, the daughter. "He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had." In other words, this is very politically incorrect of God to not include Dinah in the listing here.

She is obviously on the scene, but she is just not mentioned. "He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until breaking of day.

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. And he said, 'Let me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'

So he said to him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' 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.' Then Jacob asked, saying, 'Tell me your name, I pray.'

He said, 'Why is it that you ask about my name?' And he blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. Just as he crossed over Penuel, the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

Therefore, to this day, the children of Israel do not eat the muscle of that shank, which is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank." I think I missed an R there. "Do not eat the muscle of that shank, which is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank."

First of all, we know that he's anticipating the meeting with Esau. A lot of this is happening at night. Verse 13 tells us this, that after he has prayed the prayer to God that is recounted in verses 9, 10, and 11, and 12, he lodged there that same night, took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother.

So this is already evening, and it's very, very unusual to ford a river in the evening or at night. It's very unusual to engage in any sort of travel at night. It's not like they had streetlights or Coleman lanterns to be able to travel.

But it is an indication of Jacob's anxiety that he is sending these gifts out that night. He delivers them to the hand of his servant and says, "Pass over before me and put some distance between successive droves," and so forth. And he, in verse 22, arose that night and took his two wives, his female servants and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of the Jabbok.

We have a very interesting wordplay going on in this section. There's so much I can say about structure and form here. We are, in the meeting with Esau, going to be right at the center of another chiasm.

But you're probably getting sick of chiasm, so I'm not going to really belabor that one. I will just tell you that the next scene where he encounters his brother Esau is at the center of another structural chiasm in Genesis. And it's very emphatic, and we're leading up to that.

But the fact that he is doing these unusual things at night is significant. He has prayed to God, but he's doing the same things that someone would do that wasn't really thinking that God was going to intervene. He is covering all of his bets, he's exercising the best wisdom that he can.

And this is not a condemnation, I'm just saying. He's not just standing there saying, "Well, the Lord God of my father Isaac and my grandfather Abraham will protect me," and just marching on out as if nothing had happened. He's really worried about the meeting with Esau.

So we have here, in addition to the structural emphasis, we also have a wordplay. If you think about the consonants in Jabbok, it's J, which of course is our transliteration of the Hebrew yod, or Y. We have Y, B, and K, which is actually here a Q, the qoph in Hebrew.

So Y, B, Q. Yabbok is the name of this river. What is Jacob's name? Ya-Kov, Y-Q-B. We have this idea of sending presents in order to pacify his brother.

And there is another word here for pacifying that has the Y, B, Q pattern. So there is a lot going on here to tell us that this is an important scene. There's another word here that recurs quite often.

In fact, in verses 21 and 22, this word occurs five times, and it's the word face. It begins actually in verse 17. He says, "When Esau, my brother, meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Who are these in front of you?' Then you shall say, 'They are your servant Jacob's.'"

So when he tells these people, even up in 16, "Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves." Pass over before me. Literally in Hebrew, go ahead of my face.

Jacob is worried about meeting his brother face to face. So he sends the servants and the presents before his face. That's the literal phrase in Hebrew.

Go ahead of my face. He sends the gifts on in verse 21. The present went on over, literally on his face.

It's all A-L, which is upon, and his face. It means they went ahead of him, went before him. He says in verse 20, "Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us."

Notice that he's put these intermediate things between him and Esau. "I will appease him." And the word for appease him in verse 20 there, this is literally, cover his face.

I will cover his face. The word for cover, in our English, is almost a transliteration of the Hebrew. The Hebrew word here is kaphar.

K-A-P-H-A-R. Yom Kaphar, Day of Atonement. The atonement idea is to cover.

It's the literal meaning of kaphar. So he says, "I will send these presents, and I will cover his face with these gifts that go before my face. And afterward, I will see his face.

Perhaps he will accept me." So it's all about faces in verse 20 there. And then it says the present went on over before his face.

But he himself lodged that night in the camp. And he doesn't seem to have confidence that those presents are going to sufficiently cover Esau's face and make his face presentable in the sight of Esau. When it says, "Perhaps he will accept me," in verse 20, the literal phrase there is, "Perhaps he will lift up my face."

So, I will cover his face with the present that goes before my face. Afterward, I will see his face. Perhaps he will raise up my face.

And this is literal word for face here. The consonants are P and N. Pen or pan is the word for face. And, of course, when we get down to the end of this episode, Jacob calls the name of this place, Face of God.

"I have seen the face of God, and my life is preserved." And we have an interweaving here of his anticipation and his coming face to face with his brother Esau and his coming face to face with God in this meeting with the man. And by studying one, we can gain insight into the other.

Jacob obviously links these two things in his own mind. So, obviously there is some ferrying going on here at the ford of the Jabbok. The Jabbok is a river.

It is about 23 miles north of the Dead Sea. It runs into the Jordan. It is about 50 miles long.

It has its source up in the mountains, some 1,900 feet above sea level. And of course, as you know, in the Dead Sea area there, you are actually below sea level. And by the time the Jabbok empties into the Jordan, you are about 1,150 feet below sea level.

So, it descends about 2,000 feet in the space of 50 miles. So, as you can imagine, there are deep gorges and canyons that this river passes through to achieve that amount of drop in that short of space. And it is some rough country.

In the later pages of Scripture, we find out that the Jabbok River is the boundary of the Ammonites. The kingdom of Ammon lies on the other side of the Jabbok. The near side of the Jabbok to Israel, the side that

Jacob is crossing over to, he is leaving what will be the land of the Ammonites and coming into this land of Gilead on the other side of the Jabbok.

This was the land of the Amorites. And when you study the Exodus and Israel coming up, you find out that they were trying to ask for safe passage and people wouldn't grant it, and so they had to have some military conflict. And Israel, God gave them a victory over the Amorites and they took possession of that land that is on the near side, the south side of the Jabbok.

But there are several references in Deuteronomy, I think in Numbers and on over into Joshua, to the Jabbok River as the border with the Ammonites. And it's quite interesting to see that the conflict that takes place with Jephthah in Judges is he has a dialogue with the king of Ammon. I might just turn over there right quick because this is the place where this meeting is occurring, and this is also important to us.

If you look at after Gideon and after some of the other ones, you get over to chapter 11 of Judges. Jephthah was a Gileadite, it tells us in 11:1, a mighty man of valor. He was the son of a harlot.

Gilead begot Jephthah. Gilead's wife bore sons. When the sons of his wife grew up, they drove Jephthah out because he's the bastard son.

"You shall have no inheritance in our father's house. You are the son of another woman." I guess you'd say that's a bastard son. It's kind of a reverse situation.

But Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tov. And worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him. It came to pass after a time the people of Ammon made war against Israel.

These are the people on the north side of the Jabbok. And it was when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tov. They said, "Well, we need a real bad news character to go fight these Ammonites."

So they came to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander that we may fight against the people of Ammon." Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

So Jephthah said to the elders, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon and the Lord delivers them to me, shall I be your head?" The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The Lord will be a witness between us. Shall I not do according to your words?"

So Jephthah goes with the elders of Gilead. The people made him head and commander. Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord in Mizpah.

Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, "What do you have against me that you have come to fight against me in my land?" And then 13, the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and to the Jordan."

This is that patch of land south. This didn't belong to Ammon, as we'll soon see. So Jephthah sent messengers back.

And in verse 15 he says, "Thus says Jephthah, Israel did not take away the land of Moab nor the land of the people of Ammon. For when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea, came to Kadesh, sent messengers to Edom, saying, 'Please let me pass through.'

The king of Edom would not heed. Sent messengers to the king of Moab. He would not consent.

So Israel remained in Kadesh. They went along through the wilderness, bypassed the land of Edom, land of Moab, came to the east side of the land of Moab and encamped on the other side of the Arnon. They did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab.

Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon. Israel said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land into our place.' Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory.

So Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. Remember, Sihon is the king of the Amorites. The Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them.

Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites who inhabited that country. They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. Now the Lord God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel.

Should you then possess it? Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the Lord our God takes possession of before us, we will possess. Now, are you any better than Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab?

Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them? Will Israel dwell in Heshbon and its villages and in Aroer and its villages and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon for 300 years? Why did you not recover them within that time? Therefore, I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me.

May the Lord, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon." However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.

Of course, he's going to fight. Jephthah is going to make his vow, and Jephthah is going to win the victory against the Amorites, drive them back across into their own side of the Jabbok, and then you have that awful scene where Jephthah returns and they're singing and dancing in timbrels, and it turns out to be his daughter and he had made a vow.

So, this is a place where some important things have happened. It's the border of the land, and this is going to be the future land of promise. This is part of what God has promised even though it's on the far side of the Jordan.

It is still part of the promised land. So, you have all of this quarreling over there today in Israel about the West Bank and the Golan Heights and one thing and another, and they're trying to whittle away, chip away at the land that the nation of Israel has possession of. But their possession actually extends beyond the West Bank, over across the East Bank and on into this land that had originally long ago belonged to the Amorites.

Well, this is where Jacob is, and he is ferrying. He's probably making several trips across the Jabbok with these servants and with his family and his sons and so forth. And we don't really know in verse 24 which side of the Jabbok that he is on because obviously he went back and forth trying to get all of this stuff across.

He took them and says in verse 22, it says that he crossed over the ford of the Jabbok, and that "crossed over" in 22 is a singular verb, and that says Jacob crossed over. But then it says in 23 he took them and sent them over the brook and sent over what he had, and you get the idea that now he's on the other side. And then it says Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

As I mentioned last time, I think that because the camp that gave rise to the name Mahanaim, the angels that he observed on his way to the Jabbok, were on the north side, I think that's where he is, and he is the last one to cross over into the land of promise. And he's not yet crossed over. He's sent everything else before his face, everything else, even his family and his two camps and everything, but I think he himself is still on the northern side of the Jabbok, and that's why he encounters this man, because he's a man from the camp.

He's one of the angels, in fact the angel of the Lord here evidently. Jacob was left alone. Obviously it would be pretty difficult to be alone if he was on the south side with all of his possessions.

So he's probably on the north side there, although it doesn't specifically tell us. And out of nowhere it says a man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. It doesn't tell us how they encountered, who tackled whom, what the reason for the struggle was, why didn't they talk, did somebody sneak up on someone else and tackle them?

We just don't know. And this is shrouded in darkness. It's in the middle of the night, and even the account here is like trying to watch—you've seen movies sometimes where they show things happening at night and all the lights are off, and you can't quite see on the screen what's happening, and you want to turn out all the lights in the room to try to get your TV screen to have better contrast because you just can't see what's happening in this very low light—and it's sort of that way in this account.

Look at what it says in verse 25. “When he saw that he did not prevail against him”—well, which he is whom? Which he saw that the other he did not prevail against the first he? When Jacob saw that he—you can't really tell who is seeing and who is not prevailing against whom here until you get on down into the verse, and it says he touched the socket of his hip.

You still don't know who touched whose socket, but it says the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint. So toward the end of the verse, you finally—and you have to work your way backward and piece this together as to who saw what—and apparently it's the man saw that he, the man, could not prevail against him, Jacob. He, the man, touched the socket of his, Jacob's, hip.

The socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as he wrestled with him, and we still can't figure out which one is he and which one is him. And this is just like the struggle in the darkness. And this is sort of where Jacob is, and we're kind of in Jacob's position here.

He's got a hold of something, he's got a hold of somebody, but at this point he's not asking any questions. He doesn't say, “Bless me,” or anything else. He's just in the midst of a struggle.

And it's not—and I'm going to tip my hand here on our Scripture reading—this is not a struggle according to knowledge, is it? He doesn't know who he's got a hold of. He's just struggling. And this is a long struggle, and it's a lot of effort.

And Jacob is a powerful man. You remember back in 29, you remember that stone on the well, and all the shepherds would gather and several of them would lift that stone off. Jacob lifted that stone off single-handed for Rachel.

He's a very physically powerful man. He wasn't the hairy one, but apparently he didn't lack in physical strength. And he's been out there with the flocks and the herds and all that.

He's obviously very powerful, and this messenger is not able to physically prevail over him. And so he has to—you get the idea that he has to sort of invoke a little higher power there. And he, when it says “touch,” this word for touch can mean a touch; it can also mean to strike.

And the fact that he ends up with a hip out of joint, this is probably touch in the sense of striking something. And so he puts his hip out of joint. And then in verse 26, we still have all of these pronouns and very few identifiers.

“He said, ‘Let me go, for the day breaks.’” Well, who said this to whom? “He said, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’” In all of 26, you have to work backward to figure out who's talking to whom.

Verse 27, he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” And so from this we work back and figure that it's Jacob asking the other one to bless, and it is the man who says, “Let me go, for the day breaks.”

And it is almost as though when day breaks and this person's identity is going to be revealed, that's what he doesn't want to happen. He's got to leave before he is fully visible or something. Why is it an issue that the day is going to break?

Does it just mean it's been a long time and let's cut this out, or does it mean that I can't stick around until after daybreak? Maybe he's an angel that has to go off watch and the morning watch angel is coming on duty and this one needs to get back. It doesn't say where.

This for us is shrouded in as much mystery as it is for Jacob. He says, “What is your name?” And he says, “Jacob.” Jacob's name is fraught with significance going all the way back to the beginning of this cycle of stories.

How did he get that name? It was back in chapter 26 when he is born and the two are struggling in the womb and so forth and you have the naming based on—sorry, this is in 25—based on grasping his brother's heel. His name was called Jacob because of that, to grasp.

This is the third word in that word group. Ya'akov means to grasp. That's the verb that Esau used when he says, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For these two times he has taken away—he took my birthright, he takes my blessing"—and he uses the verb Ya'akov to take something away, which is kind of a rare word, but for the purposes of the wordplay.

And it crops up again here in chapter 32. He says, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel." Jacob means the grasping one, the supplanting one, but you will be called Israel, for you have struggled with God and with men.

And this verb sarah, from which Yisra'el comes—El is the name of God—and it is loosely, and once again they are very fond of wordplay and words that sound the same but have different meanings, and you very seldom get a literal name derivation. It's usually a name that has a little irony or a tongue in cheek or a wordplay involved in it.

But there is a perfectly good word for wrestle, and we have already seen it in the recent context of Genesis, and that's pathal, which is where we get Naphtali. I think pathal is actually the root, and the Niphal, all of that is niphtal or Naphtali.

And so pathal is a perfectly good word for—or pathal rather—is the normal word for wrestle, and he could have used that, but instead he uses sarah. And this, of course, rhymes with or is very similar to the word for prince, and Prince of God or Prince of El is also a translation of this name that is given to Jacob.

But he says the reason he is given this name: "You have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed." And we think, wow, so Jacob out-wrestled God. Jacob wrestled with God and beat Him, pinned Him to the mat, so to speak, got Him to cry uncle.

The person with whom he is wrestling says, "Let me go, the day is breaking." He says, "I won't let you go until you bless me." He says, "What's your name?" "Jacob."

"Your name is not Jacob anymore. It's going to be Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed." And we think, wow, he sort of won this wrestling match, and he is wrestling with God, and so this is a concession. God cries uncle and gives him a blessing.

Well, if you think about it, A, that's a strange sort of theology, that if you can just get a hold of God and you are strong enough, you can wrestle Him into giving you what you want. But Jacob asks, saying, "Tell me your name, I pray." He said, "Why is it that you ask about my name?"

Same thing Manoah and his wife do. They want to know the angel's name, and the angel doesn't give him his name there either. But he says, "Why is it that you ask about my name?" And he blessed him there.

Why is the angel's name not an issue? Because just like the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit doesn't make an issue out of Himself. He takes the things of Christ and communicates them to us. The angel takes the things of God.

It doesn't matter what his name is. He is speaking for God. He is a representative of God.

What he communicates is directly from God. His name is a non-issue. His name might be Neuchatel or something, or it could be Michael or Gabriel or any of the other messenger angels that we see in the Scriptures.

Raphael and some of these others are listed in the Apocryphal books. His name doesn't matter because he is not speaking from his own authority. He is speaking from God.

That's why his name isn't an issue. This is another clue that this is in fact an angel and not God Himself. God is not shy about His own name, and yet to wrestle with the angel seems to be to wrestle with God.

He says, “You have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.” When is the last time we saw this struggling and prevailing, wrestling and prevailing, in the same breath? It was back during the birth of Naphtali, remember?

Remember how that went? Back in chapter 30, she gives her maid Bilhah in verse 3 to Jacob. She will bear a child on my knees. Jacob went into her in verse 4.

Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Rachel said, “God has judged my case, and He has heard my voice and given me a son.” She called his name Dan.

Then she conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Rachel said in verse 8, “With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed.” So she called his name Naphtali, from pathal, to wrestle.

Well, has she really prevailed? She thinks she has. She says, “I’ve prevailed,” but this is Bilhah. She’s not really going to prevail ever.

She will eventually have her own sons, but she doesn’t really prevail against Leah, as we saw in the outcome of the tribes of Israel. It’s the Leah tribes—Judah, Levi, Reuben—that prevail in Israel throughout Israel’s history. And Rachel never really does prevail, but she says she has.

She says, “I’ve accomplished this, and I’ve prevailed.” Well, here the angel tells Jacob, “You have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.” Is he talking just about this wrestling match?

Probably not. He doesn’t say, “You’ve struggled with me and have prevailed.” But this has been the nature of Jacob’s life, hasn’t it?

From the beginning, from the womb—that’s the reminiscence of his name—from the very beginning he was struggling with his brother, grasping his heel. His entire life has been a struggle, and he tried to do it in his own power with his own cunning and conniving in getting the birthright and the blessing and so forth. He has struggled.

He went up to Laban and was in a constant struggle with Laban for 20 years. He’s coming back to the land, and he’s about to confront his brother Esau, and that revives the idea of the struggle between the elder and the younger brother that was taking place in the womb before they were ever born. And Jacob has also been struggling with God because he is in the process of being transformed from the man that he was, Jacob, to the man that he will be by the time we get to the late 40s, 47 and 48 of Genesis, and we see Jacob in his old age and on his deathbed.

He’s a far different man than he started out being, but it is a struggle. Not everybody goes through this struggle in the Bible. You look at some of the other great men.

You think about David out with the sheep. You think about Moses in Midian for that 40 years. And their time of preparation isn’t necessarily characterized by constant struggle the way Jacob’s life is.

How does Jacob amass this great wealth that he’s sending forward to meet Esau? It’s all through conflict with Laban and wrestling it away, lamb by lamb and goat by goat, from Laban with his peeled sticks and everything else. How did Abraham amass his great fortune?

It just says God blessed him. How did Isaac get all of his flocks and herds? God blessed him.

He isn’t constantly wrangling, and sure there’s some strife along over wells and one thing and another, but everything in Jacob’s life seems to be a struggle. It seems to be a wrestling match, and he just perseveres and he wrestles and he works and he slaves and he eventually gets there. But if there was a motto, if there was a family escutcheon, if they had heraldry in Jacob’s day and he was going to get his little family crest and coat of arms, it would probably be two guys wrestling because he just seems to have to fight for everything that he gets, or he thinks that he does.

And the angel tells him, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, the struggler, the grasper, the supplanter. Your name is going to be Israel, for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.” What does it mean to prevail?

Well, through these struggles he has obtained what he wanted, not always the way that he thought he was going to get it. He thought he would get great wealth by cheating his brother out of the birthright and out of the blessing. That's not how he ended up getting his wealth.

But he struggled all along, and he does eventually prevail. But how does he truly prevail? It's the intervention of God in his life.

It's when he turns to God and begins to live a life of faith that God can bless him. It is the presence of God and his struggle with God that reshapes his soul and makes him into a man of faith rather than a man who relies on his own efforts. But it's a struggle.

It takes God 20 years of hammering away at Jacob to chip away a lot of these old habits and old attitudes, and he has to learn about the firstborn. He has to learn about earning his way rather than cheating his way into things. And this is the heritage of Israel.

Jacob has a zeal. He is all for God, and he's all for birthrights and possessions and everything else, but the way that he goes about it needs a lot of work. And the way that he learns, his particular mode of learning, is through struggle.

You look at children. Some of them learn one way and some learn another. Some of them can read the book and pick it up the first time.

Some can listen in class and understand the lecture, understand the explanation, and pick it right up. Others don't really learn until they sit down and work the problems and just bang their head against it problem after problem after problem, and then they learn it. We just have different ways of learning.

Some of us as believers take to the truth of God and understand it and grasp it and begin to apply it without having to have a whole lot of testing and struggle in our souls. Others of us—and this can be true just in different areas, where in one area we do fine and in another area we really have to have that reinforced and become real to us through struggle.

Jacob is the picture in the Bible of the believer who learns through struggle. And some of us can simply by faith be overcomers. Others of us have to go through all kinds of turmoil and wrestlings before we prevail.

But Jacob sticks with it, and he makes a lot of mistakes and he burns a lot of time, but he prevails. He prevails with men and he prevails with God. But the funny thing is, he doesn't prevail in the way that he thought he was going to, and he doesn't prevail because of his wrestlings.

He sort of prevails in spite of them. Is wrestling with God the way to get a blessing? Does Scripture teach that anywhere?

Does anybody besides Jacob ever wrestle an angel to the ground and say, "Give me a blessing?" Well, there's one other example of that, and that's the nation of Israel. And that's what we saw in Romans chapter 10.

Israel has a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God, they sought their own righteousness. And what was it?

It's a righteousness by works. It's a righteousness by struggle. They worked and slaved and added to the law and put all kinds of restrictions on themselves and how far they could walk and how much of a burden they could carry and how big of a fire they could build and how much aid they could render to someone else.

They loaded themselves down with this heavy burden of regulations, thinking that this would be the means of attaining righteousness. That's what Romans 10 is all about. Is Israel ultimately going to prevail?

Yes, they will, but not because of their struggling. It's in spite of their struggling. And it's all foreshadowed and symbolized right here in this wrestling match of Jacob.

God doesn't bless Jacob because he wrestled. In fact, this isn't even the real blessing. If you turn forward in the Scriptures here to a few pages forward to chapter 35, he's going to return to Bethel.

God says to Jacob, “Go up to Bethel, dwell there, make an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.” Notice he doesn't say the God that you wrestled with a couple of weeks ago or a couple of months ago. He says, “Go there, make an altar to God who appeared to you when you fled.”

This is the last time you were at Bethel. Jacob said to his household, “Put away the foreign gods”—probably still got the teraphim floating around—“let us arise and go up to Bethel. I will make an altar there to God.”

They gave Jacob—this is what happens to the teraphim in verse 4. Verse 5, they journeyed. The terror of God was on the cities all around them.

They did not pursue the sons of Jacob. He comes to Luz, that is Bethel. He built an altar there in verse 7 because that's where God appeared to him when he fled.

Talks about Deborah dying. Then look at verse 9. God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram and blessed him.

God said to him, “Your name is Jacob. Your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” This—he didn't have to wrestle that angel down to get this new name.

This is God giving him the name at first hand. And it reiterates it in verse 10. So he called his name Israel. God—