
GENESIS 32:1 Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

Jacob, proceeding on his Journey, is met by the angels of God, Gen 32:1, Gen 32:2. Sends messengers before him to his brother Esau, requesting to be favourably received, Gen 32:3-5. The messengers return without an answer, but with the intelligence that Esau, with four hundred men, was coming to meet Jacob, Gen 32:6. He is greatly alarmed, and adopts prudent means for the safety of himself and family, Gen 32:7, Gen 32:8. His affecting prayer to God, Gen 32:9-12. Prepares a present of five droves of different cattle for his brother, Gen 32:13-15. Sends them forward before him, at a certain distance from each other, and instructs the drivers what to say when met by Esau, Gen 32:15-20. Sends his wives, servants, children and baggage, over the brook Jabbok, by night, Gen 32:21-23. Himself stays behind, and wrestles with an angel until the break of day, Gen 32:24. He prevails and gets a new name, Gen 32:25-29. Calls the name of the place Peniel, Gen 32:30. Is lame in his thigh in consequence of his wrestling with the angel, Gen 32:31, Gen 32:32.

Verse 1

The angels of God met him - Our word angel comes from the Greek αγγελος aggelos, which literally signifies a messenger; or, as translated in some of our old Bibles, a tidings-bringer. The Hebrew word מלאך malach, from לאך laach, to send, minister to, employ, is nearly of the same import; and hence we may see the propriety of St. Augustine's remark: *Nomen non naturae sed officii*, "It is a name, not of nature, but of office;" and hence it is applied indifferently to a human agent or messenger, 2Sam 2:5; to a prophet, Hag 1:13; to a priest, Mal 2:7; to celestial spirits, Psa 103:19, Psa 103:20, Psa 103:22; Psa 104:4. "We often," says Mr. Parkhurst, "read of the יהוה מלאך יהוה malach Jehovah, or מלאכי מלאכי malakey Elohim, the angel of Jehovah, or the angels of God, that is, his agent, personator, mean of visibility or action, what was employed by God to render himself visible and approachable by flesh and blood." This angel was evidently a human form, surrounded or accompanied by light or glory, with or in which Jehovah was present; see Gen 19:1, Gen 19:12, Gen 19:16; Jdg 13:6, Jdg 13:21; Exo 3:2, Exo 3:6. "By this vision," says Mr. Ainsworth, "God confirmed Jacob's faith in him who commanded his angels to keep his people in all their ways, Psa 91:11. Angels are here called God's host, camp, or army, as in wars; for angels are God's soldiers, Luk 2:13; horses and chariots of fire, 2Kgs 2:11; fighting for God's people against their enemies, Dan 10:20; of them there are thousand thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, Dan 7:10; and they are all sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation, Heb 1:14; and they pitch a camp about them that fear God, Psa 34:7." One of the oldest of the Greek poets had a tolerably correct notion of the angelic ministry: - *Αυταρ επειπεν τουτο γενοσ κατα γαια καλυψεν Τοι μεν Δαιμονες εισι, Διος μεγαλου δια βουλας, Εσθλοι, επιχθονιοι, φυλακες θνητων ανθρωπων· κ. τ. λ.*

Hesiod. Op. & Dies, l. i., ver. 120.

When in the grave this race of men was laid,
Soon was a world of holy demons made,
Aerial spirits, by great Jove design'd
To be on earth the guardians of mankind.
Invisible to mortal eyes they go,
And mark our actions good or bad below;
The immortal spies with watchful care
Preside, and thrice ten thousand round
Their charges glide: They can reward
With glory or with gold, A power they by
Divine permission hold - Cooke.

GENESIS 32:2 When he saw them, Jacob said, "This is God's army." He called the name of that place Mahanaim.

Verse 2

Mahanaim - The two hosts, if read by the points, the angels forming one, and Jacob and his company forming another; or simply hosts or camps in the plural. There was a city built afterwards here, and inhabited by the priests of God, Jos 21:38. For what purpose the angels of God met Jacob, does not appear from the text; probably it was intended to show him that he and his company were under the care of an especial providence, and consequently to confirm his trust and confidence in God.

The doctrine of the ministration of angels has been much abused, not only among the heathens, but also among Jews and Christians, and perhaps most among the latter. Angels with feigned names, titles, and influences, have been and still are invoked and worshipped by a certain class of men; because they have found that God has been pleased to employ them to minister to mankind; and hence they have made supplications to them to extend their protection, to shield, defend, instruct, etc. This is perfectly absurd.

1. They are God's instruments, not self-determining agents.
 2. They can only do what they are appointed to perform, for there is no evidence that they have any discretionary power.
 3. God helps man by ten thousand means and instruments; some intellectual, as angels; some rational, as men; some irrational, as brutes; and some merely material, as the sun, wind, rain, food, raiment, and the various productions of the earth. He therefore helps by whom he will help, and to him alone belongs all the glory; for should he be determined to destroy, all these instruments collectively could not save. Instead therefore of worshipping them, we should take their own advice: See thou do it not - Worship God.
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GENESIS 32:3 Jacob sent messengers in front of him to Esau, his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom.

Verse 3

Jacob sent messengers - מלאכים malachim, the same word which is before translated angels. It is very likely that these messengers had been sent some time before he had this vision at Mahanaim, for they appear to have returned while Jacob encamped at the brook Jabbok, where he had the vision of angels; see Gen 32:6, Gen 32:23.

The land of Seir, the country of Edom - This land, which was, according to Dr. Wells, situated on the south of the Dead Sea, extending from thence to the Arabian Gulf, 1Kgs 9:26, was formerly possessed by the Horites, Gen 14:6; but Esau with his children drove them out, destroyed them, and dwelt in their stead, Deu 2:22; and thither Esau went from the face of his brother Jacob, Gen 36:6, Gen 36:7. Thus we find he verified the prediction, By thy sword shalt thou live, Gen 27:40.

GENESIS 32:4 He commanded them, saying, "This is what you shall tell my lord, Esau: 'This is what your servant, Jacob, says. I have lived as a foreigner with Laban, and stayed until now.

Verse 4

Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau - Jacob acknowledges the superiority of his brother; for the time was not yet come in which it could be said, The elder shall serve the younger.

GENESIS 32:5 I have cattle, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favour in your sight."

GENESIS 32:6 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau. Not only that, but he comes to meet you, and four hundred men with him."

Verse 6

Esau - cometh - and four hundred men with him - Jacob, conscious that he had injured his brother, was now apprehensive that he was coming with hostile intentions, and that he had every evil to fear from his displeasure. Conscience is a terrible accuser. It was a fine saying of a heathen,

Hic murus aheneus esto,
 Nil conscire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa.
 Hor. Ep., l. i., E. i., v. 60.
 Be this thy brazen bulwark of defense,
 Still to preserve thy conscious innocence,
 Nor e'er turn pale with guilt.
 Francis.

In other words, He that has a good conscience has a brazen wall for his defense; for a guilty conscience needs no accuser; sooner or later it will tell the truth, and not only make the man turn pale who has it, but also cause him to tremble even while his guilt is known only to himself and God.

It does not appear that Esau in this meeting had any hostile intention, but was really coming with a part of his servants or tribe to do his brother honor. If he had had any contrary intention, God had removed it; and the angelic host which Jacob met with before might have inspired him with sufficient confidence in God's protection. But we find that when he needed faith most, he appears to have derived but little benefit from its influence, partly from the sense he had of the injury he had done to his brother, and partly from not attending sufficiently to the assurance which God had given him of his gracious protection.

GENESIS 32:7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two companies;

Verse 7

He divided the people, etc. - His prudence and cunning were now turned into a right channel, for he took the most effectual method to appease his brother, had he been irritated, and save at least a part of his family. This dividing and arranging of his flocks, family, and domestics, has something in it highly characteristic. To such a man as Jacob such expedients would naturally present themselves.

GENESIS 32:8 and he said, "If Esau comes to the one company, and strikes it, then the company which is left will escape."

GENESIS 32:9 Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your country, and to your relatives, and I will do you good,'

Verse 9

O God of my father Abraham, etc. - This prayer is remarkable for its simplicity and energy; and it is a model too for prayer, of which it contains the essential constituents: - 1. Deep self-abasement. 2. Magnification of God's mercy. 3. Deprecation of the evil to which he was exposed. 4. Pleading the promises that God had made to him. And, 5. Taking encouragement from what God had already wrought.

GENESIS 32:10 I am not worthy of the least of all the loving kindnesses, and of all the truth, which you have shown to your servant; for with just my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I have become two companies.

Verse 10

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies - The marginal reading is more consistent with the original: *מכל החסדים ומכל האמת* katonti miccol hachasadim umiccol haemeth, I am less than all the compassions, and than all the faithfulness, which thou hast showed unto thy servant. Probably St Paul had his eye on this passage when he wrote, Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints. A man who sees himself in the light of God will ever feel that he has no good but what he has received, and that he deserves nothing of all that he has. The archangels of God cannot use a different language, and even the spirits of just men consummated in their plenitude of bliss, cannot make a higher boast.

For with my staff - i.e., myself alone, without any attendants, as the Chaldee has properly rendered it.

GENESIS 32:11 Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he come and strike me, and the mothers with the children.

Verse 11

And the mother with the children - He must have had an awful opinion of his brother when he used this expression, which implies the utmost cruelty, proceeding in the work of slaughter to total extermination. See Hos 10:14.

GENESIS 32:12 You said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your seed as the sand of the sea, which can't be numbered because there are so many.'"

Verse 12

Make thy seed as the sand - Having come to the promise by which the covenant was ratified both to Abraham and Isaac, he ceased, his faith having gained strong confirmation in a promise which he knew could not fail, and which he found was made over to him, as it had been to his father and grandfather.

GENESIS 32:13 He lodged there that night, and took from that which he had with him, a present for Esau, his brother:

Verse 13

And took of that which came to his hand - הביא בידו habba beyado, which came under his hand, i.e., what, in the course of God's providence, came under his power.

GENESIS 32:14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

Verse 14

Two hundred she-goats, etc. - This was a princely present, and such as was sufficient to have compensated Esau for any kind of temporal loss he might have sustained in being deprived of his birthright and blessing. The thirty milch camels were particularly valuable, for milch camels among the Arabs constitute a principal part of their riches, the creature being every way so serviceable that the providence of God appears peculiarly kind and wise in providing such a beast for those countries where no other animal could be of equal service. "The she-camel gives milk continually, not ceasing till great with young; the milk of which," as Pliny has remarked, "when mixed with three parts of water, affords the most pleasant and wholesome beverage." Cameli lac habent, donec iterum gravescant, suavissimumque hoc existimatur, ad unam mensuram tribus aquae additis - Hist. Nat., lib. 11., chap. 41.

GENESIS 32:15 thirty milk camels and their colts, forty cows, ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals.

Verse 15

Ten bulls - The Syriac and Vulgate have twenty; but ten is a sufficient proportion to the forty kine. By all this we see that Jacob was led to make restitution for the injury he had done to his brother. Restitution for injuries done to man is essentially requisite if in our power. He who can and will not make restitution for the wrongs he has done, can have no claim even on the mercy of God.

GENESIS 32:16 He delivered them into the hands of his servants, every herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass over before me, and put a space between herd and herd."

GENESIS 32:17 He commanded the foremost, saying, "When Esau, my brother, meets you, and asks you, saying, 'Whose are you? Where are you going? Whose are these before you?'"

GENESIS 32:18 Then you shall say, 'They are your servant, Jacob's. It is a present sent to my lord, Esau. Behold, he also is behind us.'"

GENESIS 32:19 He commanded also the second, and the third, and all that followed the herds, saying, "This is how you shall speak to Esau, when you find him.

GENESIS 32:20 You shall say, 'Not only that, but 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."

GENESIS 32:21 So the present passed over before him, and he himself lodged that night in the camp.

GENESIS 32:22 He rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford of the Jabbok.

Verse 22

Passed over the ford Jabbok - This brook or rivulet rises in the mountains of Galaad, and falls into the Jordan at the south extremity of the lake of Gennesaret.

GENESIS 32:23 He took them, and sent them over the stream, and sent over that which he had.

GENESIS 32:24 Jacob was left alone, and wrestled with a man there until the breaking of the day.

Verse 24

And there wrestled a man with him - This was doubtless the Lord Jesus Christ, who, among the patriarchs, assumed that human form, which in the fullness of time he really took of a woman, and in which he dwelt thirty-three years among men. He is here styled an angel, because he was *μεγαλης βουλης Αγγελος*, (see the Septuagint, Isa 9:7), the Messenger of the great counsel or design to redeem fallen man from death, and bring him to eternal glory; see Gen 16:7.

But it may be asked, Had he here a real human body, or only its form? The latter, doubtless. How then could he wrestle with Jacob? It need not be supposed that this angel must have assumed a human body, or something analogous to it, in order to render himself tangible by Jacob; for as the

soul operates on the body by the order of God, so could an angel operate on the body of Jacob during a whole night, and produce in his imagination, by the effect of his power, every requisite idea of corporeity, and in his nerves every sensation of substance, and yet no substantiality be in the case.

If angels, in appearing to men, borrow human bodies, as is thought, how can it be supposed that with such gross substances they can disappear in a moment? Certainly they do not take these bodies into the invisible world with them, and the established laws of matter and motion require a gradual disappearing, however swiftly it may be effected. But this is not allowed to be the case, and yet they are reported to vanish instantaneously. Then they must render themselves invisible by a cloud, and this must be of a very dense nature in order to hide a human body. But this very expedient would make their departure still more evident, as the cloud must be more dense and apparent than the body in order to hide it. This does not remove the difficulty. But if they assume a quantity of air or vapor so condensed as to become visible, and modified into the appearance of a human body, they can in a moment dilate and rarefy it, and so disappear; for when the vehicle is rarefied beyond the power of natural vision, as their own substance is invisible they can instantly vanish.

From Hos 12:4, we may learn that the wrestling of Jacob, mentioned in this place, was not merely a corporeal exercise, but also a spiritual one; He wept and made supplication unto him. See Clarke on Hos 12:4 (note).

GENESIS 32:25 When he saw that he didn't prevail against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled.

Verse 25

The hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint - What this implies is difficult to find out; it is not likely that it was complete luxation of the thigh bone. It may mean no more than he received a stroke on the groin, not a touch; for the Hebrew word נָגַג naga often signifies to smite with violence, which stroke, even if comparatively slight, would effectually disable him for a time, and cause him to halt for many hours, if not for several days. I might add that in this place - the groin, a blow might be of fatal consequence; but as the angel gave it only as a proof of his power, and to show that he could not prevail because he would not, hence the blow was only disabling, without being dangerous; and he was probably cured by the time the sun arose.

GENESIS 32:26 The man said, "Let me go, for the day breaks." Jacob said, "I won't let you go, unless you bless me."

Verse 26

Let me go, for the day breaketh - Probably meaning, that as it was now morning, Jacob must rejoin his wives and children, and proceed on their journey. Though phantoms are supposed to disappear when the sun rises, that could be no reason in this case. Most of the angelic appearances mentioned in the Old and New Testaments took place in open day, which put their reality out of question.

GENESIS 32:27 He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob".

GENESIS 32:28 He said, "Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have fought with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Verse 28

Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel - וְיִשְׂרָאֵל Yisrael, from שַׂר sar, a prince, or שָׂרָה sarah, he ruled as a prince, and אֵל el, God; or rather from אִישׁ ish, a man, (the א aleph being dropped), and רָאָה raah, he saw, אֵל el, God; and this corresponds with the name which Jacob imposed on the place, calling it פְּנֵי אֵל peniel, the faces of God, or of Elohim, which faces being manifested to him caused him to say, Gen 32:30, רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פְּנִים אֶל פְּנִים raithi Elohim panim el panim, i.e., "I have seen the Elohim faces to faces, (i.e., fully and completely, without any medium), וַתִּנְצֵל נַפְשִׁי vattinnatsel napshi, and my soul is redeemed." We may learn from this that the redemption of the soul will be the blessed consequence of wrestling by prayer and supplication with God: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." From this time Jacob became a new man; but it was not till after a severe struggle that he got his name, his heart, and his character changed. After this he was no more Jacob the supplanter, but Israel - the man who prevails with God, and sees him face to face.

And hast prevailed - More literally, Thou hast had power with God, and with man thou shalt also prevail. עִם אֱלֹהִים Im Elohim, with the strong God; עִם אַנְשִׁים im anashim, with weak, feeble man. There is a beautiful opposition here between the two words: Seeing thou hast been powerful with the Almighty, surely thou shalt prevail over perishing mortals; as thou hast prevailed with God, thou shalt also prevail with men: God calling the things that were not as though they had already taken place, because the prevalency of this people, the Israelites, by means of the Messiah, who should proceed from them, was already determined in the Divine counsel. He has never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain. He who wrestles must prevail.

GENESIS 32:29 Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." He said, "Why is it that you ask what my name is?" He blessed him there.

Verse 29

Tell me, I pray thee, thy name - It is very likely that Jacob wished to know the name of this angel, that he might invoke him in his necessities: but this might have led him into idolatry, for the doctrine of the incarnation could be but little understood at this time; hence, he refuses to give himself any name, yet shows himself to be the true God, and so Jacob understood him; (see Gen 32:28); but he wished to have heard from his own lips that name by which he desired to be invoked and worshipped.

Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? - Canst thou be ignorant who I am? And he blessed him there - gave him the new heart and the new nature which God alone can give to fallen man, and by the change he wrought in him, sufficiently showed who he was. After this clause the Aldine edition of the Septuagint, and several MSS., add ὁ ἐστὶ θαυμαστόν, ἢ καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ θαυμαστόν, which is wonderful; but this addition seems to have been taken from Jdg 13:18.

GENESIS 32:30 Jacob called the name of the place Peniel : for, he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

GENESIS 32:31 The sun rose on him as he passed over Peniel, and he limped because of his thigh.

Verse 31

The sun rose upon him - Did the Prophet Malachi refer to this, Mal 4:2 : Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings? Possibly with the rising of the sun, which may here be understood as emblematical of the Sun of righteousness - the Lord Jesus, the pain and weakness of his thigh passed away, and he felt both in soul and body that he was healed of his plagues.

GENESIS 32:32 Therefore the children of Israel don't eat the sinew of the hip, which is on the hollow of the thigh, to this day, because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

Verse 32

Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew - What this sinew was neither Jew nor Christian can tell; and it can add nothing either to science, or to a true understanding of the text, to multiply conjectures. I have already supposed that the part which the angel touched or struck was the groin; and if this be right, the sinew, nerve, or muscle that shrank, must be sought for in that place.

The serious reader must meet with much instruction in this chapter.

1. After his reconciliation with Laban, Jacob proceeds on his way to Canaan; and as God, who was continually watching for his welfare, saw the trials to which he would shortly be exposed, therefore he provided for him the instructive vision of angels, that he might see that those who were for him were more than those who could be against him. A proper consideration of God's omniscience is of the utmost advantage to every genuine Christian. He knows whereof we are made, he remembers that we are but dust, he sees our trials and difficulties, and his eye affects his heart. Hence he is ever devising means that his banished - be not expelled from him.
2. Jacob's recollection of his unkindness and injustice to his brother, when he hears that he is coming to meet him, fills his soul with fear, and obliges him to betake himself to God by prayer and supplication. How important is the office of conscience! And how necessary are times of trial and difficulty when its voice is loudest, and the heart is best prepared to receive its reproofs! In how many cases has conscience slumbered till it pleased God to send some trial by which it has been powerfully awakened, and the salvation of the sinner was the result! Before I was afflicted I went astray.
3. Though salvation be the free gift of God, yet he gives it not to any who do not earnestly seek it. The deeper the conviction of guilt and helplessness is, the more earnest the application to God for mercy is likely to be. They whose salvation costs them strong crying and tears, are not likely (humanly speaking) to part with it lightly; they remember the vinegar and the gall, and they watch and pray that they enter not into temptation.

4. In the strife and agony requisite to enter in at the strait gate, it is highly necessary that we should know that the grace and salvation of God are not purchased by our tears, etc.; for those things which are only proofs and arguments that we have sinned, can never remove the iniquity of our transgressions. A sensible and pious man observes on this subject, "That prayer and wrestling with God should be made as though no other means were to be practiced, and then the best means be adopted as though no prayer or wrestling had been used." God marks even this strife, though highly pleasing in his sight, with such proofs of its own utter insufficiency, that we may carry about with us the memorial of our own weakness, worthlessness, and slowness of heart to believe. God smote the thigh of Jacob, 1. That he might know he had not prevailed by his own strength, but by the power and mercy of his God. 2. That he might, have the most sensible evidence of the reality of the Divine interposition in his behalf. 3. That he might see God's displeasure against his unbelief. And 4. That men in general might be taught that those who will be the disciples of Christ must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and mortify their members which are upon the earth. Those who have not cut off a right hand or foot, or plucked out a right eye, for the kingdom of heaven's sake, are never likely to see God. The religion that costs us nothing, is to us worth nothing.