

“A Nighttime Wrestling Match: A Divine or Human Opponent?”
(Genesis 32:22-32)

1. The Lead-Up to the Incident

- (1) After 20 years (Gen 31:38), a reconciling meal (Gen 31:54), and Laban’s bidding farewell to his family (Gen 31:55), Jacob, his family, and everything he had were about to depart Paddan-Aram.
- (2) At the outset, Jacob saw so many angels [unwinged minions of God] that he thought it constituted “God’s camp”; whereupon, Jacob named this site: “Two Camps” (Gen 32:1-2).
- (3) Jacob prepares to encounter Esau:
 - (a) He sends messengers to locate Esau (Gen 32:3).
 - (b) He orders them to inform Esau that he has become wealthy and seeks an accommodation (Gen 32:4-5).
 - (c) The messengers return and report that they located Esau, that he is coming to meet Jacob, and that he is accompanied by 400 men (Gen 32:6).
- (4) Jacob’s Reaction to the Approaching Esau:
 - (a) He was so distressed that he divided his holdings, hoping to cut his losses in half in case Esau had hostile intentions (Gen 32:7-8).
 - (b) He prays desperately, demanding that God keeps the promises made to him (Gen 32:9-12).
 - (c) He prepares a lavish bribe, hoping to buy off Esau (Gen 32:13-21).

2. The Wrestling Incident

- (1) Jacob has his wives and children cross the Jabbok, along with everything else (Gen 32:22-23).
- (2) Jacob was then *alone*—and he wrestled with a *man* (’iš; וִיִּשׁ) till dawn (Gen 32:24).
- (3) The man put Jacob’s thigh out of joint when he realized he was not winning (Gen 32:25).
- (4) The man asked to be let go in light of the time, but Jacob refused unless he first received a blessing (Gen 32:26).
- (5) The man asked for Jacob’s name, to which he replied: “Jacob” (Gen 32:27).
- (6) The man changed Jacob’s name to Israel, which he said meant “struggling with God and with people and prevailing” (Gen 32:28).
- (7) Jacob asked in turn the man’s name, but the man wanted to know why Jacob wanted to know. Then he “said good bye” to him/blessed him (Gen 32:29).
- (8) Jacob named the site of the wrestling Peniel (=Face of God) because he is stunned that he thought that he had just seen God “face to face” and lived to tell the tale (Gen 32:30).
- (9) Jacob limped away (Gen 32:31).
- (10) An etiology for a diet restriction is provided in light of this incident (Gen 32:32).