

February 23, 2021

Read Genesis 32

Key verse: Genesis 32:30

*So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying,  
'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.'*

### **Wrestling with the Word**

Anyone who argues that the Bible is hard to understand need only look at Genesis 32 to make their case; there is a crafting of various traditions in this chapter that results in a final version that is confusing to say the least. Who was this mysterious man with whom Jacob wrestled? Why did he need to end this tussle by daybreak? Did Jacob actually prevail over God?

The story of Jacob's wrestling match is a metaphor of what we do with scripture; we wrestle with it! There is a Hebrew word (מִדְרָשׁ - midrash) which describes our wrestling with scripture. Midrash has been going on for thousands of years, plumbing the depths of meaning in Bible passages without attempting to reduce any passage to one authoritative interpretation. Jesus himself engaged in midrash with the rabbinical authorities of his day.

I urge you to wrestle with the word of God, not just during Lent but throughout your life. Engage in midrash. Ask, difficult questions. Seek possible answers. But don't confine scripture to your particular interpretation. God has many things to share with many people, and the same words can affect different people in different ways.

Jacob had no idea who was wrestling with as his struggle continued, but by naming the place of this encounter Peniel ("Facing God") he indicates that he now knows who his opponent has been. He further indicates his surprise that he is alive to testify to this encounter; no one believed that they could come face to face with God and actually survive. My own midrash of this story is that God welcomes our questions and our struggles, and rather than dying as a result of our wrestling with him, we are instead blessed!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, you welcome those who seek you with their whole heart. Help us to do so. Help us to recognize your grace that allows us to wrestle with you and your word. Help us to hear the messages that you would share with us through your word, and inspires us to share those messages with those who need to hear them. Amen.