

By Joseph F. Dumond

This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Gen 32	1 Sam 20-21	Ps 68	Mark 10
--------	-------------	-------	---------

Wrestling with God (Genesis 32)

As Jacob and his company continued southwest toward the River Jabbok, today called the Wadi Zerqa, Jacob was met by angels and set up camp, calling the place Mahanaim, “Two Camps,” as the angels were camped here next to him. God was with Jacob and was returning him to Canaan, just as He had promised (Genesis 28).

Meeting Esau was a fearsome prospect. Jacob knew his elder brother to be an impetuous man who acted first and thought later. Would his rash nature explode in wrath? Would Esau avenge himself by slaughtering Jacob and all he had? If Esau still entertained thoughts of vengeance, Jacob would attempt to appease him with gifts. Perhaps showing deference and humility before Esau, addressing him as “Lord” and sending him presents, would turn Esau’s wrath away. Jacob sent out messengers to respectfully inform Esau of his approach. The messengers returned and told Jacob that Esau was coming—with 400 men! Jacob prepared for the worst, dividing his family and possessions into troops to send out one after the other with himself at the forefront (33:3), hoping in this way to preserve as much of his family as possible should Esau attack. Ahead of them he sent troops of men bearing gifts, hoping waves of gifts would cool Esau’s hot head. For the moment, however, Jacob remained at the ford of Jabbok.

What happens next at Jabbok is of profound importance for understanding the character development of Jacob. Before examining the details of the story, though, we must look at Jacob’s prayer.

In reading the life of Jacob, we have seen him develop from a cultured and physically imposing young man—who relied on his own cunning and skill to obtain what he wanted, manipulating those around him—into a man who learned that real prosperity, security and peace depends on one’s righteousness before God. That in itself is a great growth in character. But by the time

Jacob arrives in Jabbok after years of service for Laban's flocks, he has made a quantum leap in character growth. The prayer in verses 9-12 shows that Jacob had now come to see that even complete righteousness before God does not entitle one to God's goodness. "I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant," he confessed (verse 10, New Revised Standard Version). Jacob now sees himself as he truly is—an unworthy man wholly dependent on the mercy and undeserved grace of God. Now, to bring his character to maturity, while Jacob is alone at Jabbok, the strangest wrestling match in history will be played out in the darkness, without a single spectator.

In the middle of the night, a supernatural Being comes down and wrestles with Jacob. This Being, identified as God, must have been the preincarnate Yeshua Messiah, who, as the "Word" with God the Father from the beginning, was also God (John 1:1-3, 14). It could not have been God the Father since Jacob saw Him and, as the apostle John later stated, "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18)—clearly referring to the Father in this verse.

At first Jacob may not have known who his opponent was—but before the match was over, Jacob discerned His identity, for he later calls Him God (verse 30). Now why did God want to wrestle Jacob? A better question would be, why did Jacob continue to wrestle once he figured out he was wrestling with God? What would be the point of wrestling with God? God could easily beat His opponent. Or God could simply match His opponent move for move and produce a draw. Or God could deliberately lose. In any case, to continue the match would seem pointless. So why did Jacob continue to wrestle? We can't know for sure of course. But perhaps it was simply because God wanted to wrestle—as a test of Jacob's perseverance and attitude. The wrestling match, viewed in this context, would seem to have been a test of submission: Would Jacob submit to continuing to wrestle, even when it seemed pointless, just because God wanted it that way? Also, from the conclusion, it is evident that Jacob wanted God's blessing. And God, it seems, wanted to know just how much he wanted it. In the end, Jacob demonstrated his deep feeling of total reliance on God's blessing. And he showed that he would hold on to whatever God was doing in his life in order to receive that blessing. In confronting Esau and whatever other obstacles he would later face, his own cunning and ingenuity would not deliver him. He knew that he had to trust in God alone.

As the match progresses, Christ sees that He is not prevailing against Jacob. This does not mean that Jacob was winning and Christ was losing. It simply means that Jacob had not yet given up. He was still wrestling. Then Christ makes it far more difficult for Jacob to continue by striking his hip socket. In pain and even in tears (Hosea 12:3-4), Jacob still does not give up. Finally, Christ tells Jacob to release Him as the day is dawning. But Jacob says he will not let go until Christ blesses him. This is almost certainly not disobedience, as it might appear to be. Rather, it is apparent that Jacob understood his holding on until receiving the blessing to be the reason God engaged him in the contest to begin with. In faith, we are to hold God to His promises to bless us until He does so—for that is what He has told us to do. In doing this, Jacob prevailed with God and was renamed Israel, meaning "Prevailer with God." This does not mean that Jacob won and Christ lost. Indeed, the match ended before either of them was pinned. Of course, Christ could have pinned Jacob at any moment. But that was not His desire

—nor was it the point. The point was to see if Jacob could persevere with God in the face of adversity. And he did. So who won the match, Jacob or Christ? The truth is that both won. God always prevails. And now Jacob prevailed with Him. It must be the same with us.

Jonathan's Loyalty (1 Samuel 20)

David tries desperately to make peace with Saul. The Scriptures show that David carried himself with wisdom and the proper decorum (18:5, 30). Each month, on the occasion of the new moon, Saul held a feast at his court—apparently an important meeting to establish the agenda for the month. All the leading men were expected to be present. There had to be a very important reason to be excused.

In chapter 20 we see David leaving Samuel and going back to Saul's capital, but David fears coming into the king's presence. David's best friend, Jonathan, can't believe his father Saul intends any harm to David. But David knows better. He tells Jonathan to cover for his absence with what sounds like a reasonable excuse, explaining that Saul's reaction will reveal his intent.

King Saul sees through the explanation Jonathan gives him to excuse David. Saul becomes extremely angry at Jonathan, reviling him and disparaging his mother (verse 30)—a form of cursing that is sadly in common usage even today. Saul rages at Jonathan that he'll never be king as long as David lives (verse 31). When Jonathan attempts to reason with his father, asking what David has done to deserve death (verse 32), Saul explodes into fury and even tries to kill Jonathan—finally convincing Jonathan that there is no hope for David to reconcile with Saul (verse 33).

Jonathan carries out the predetermined method for alerting David of the threat on his life. The two meet for an emotional goodbye. Again they pledge their love and loyalty, and that of their families in perpetuity (verses 41-42).

As a note of interest, verse 26 gives internal validation of the fact that Old Testament laws were in general use at this time. (There are some who try to argue that such laws were invented much later, in the period of Ezra after the Jewish captivity in Babylon.)

Feigning Insanity; Taste and See

That the Lord Is Good (1 Samuel 21:13-15; Psalm 34)

David reasons that it would be safer with the enemy than with Saul. But he almost gets in over his head with the Philistines. They would probably have tortured him for useful military information against Israel. By pretending to be insane, however, David renders himself not only useless to the Philistine cause, but even offensive in the royal presence of Achish (verses 12-15). The superscription at the beginning of Psalm 34 tells us how this episode ends, with the king driving David away and him departing. In this same superscription, however, it should be

noted that Achish is referred to as Abimelech—this being the dynastic title of Philistine rulers for centuries, meaning “My Father Is King” (compare Genesis 20:2; 26:1).

In Psalm 34, David writes of God setting His angels about him and saving him from Achish. His words are intended to encourage others to take inspiration from these events to look to God’s deliverance in all seemingly impossible trials (verses 8-14). David is essentially saying to us today that just as God saved him, He will likewise save us too. Notice verse 6: “This poor man [David] cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”

Those who trust in God will find true and ultimate happiness, as David basically assures us. Indeed, we are to put God’s way of life to the test (verse 8). However, some would take verse 9 (“There is no want to those who fear Him”) and read into it a “prosperity gospel,” thinking that God promises to shower us with the riches of this world. Yet the word “want” here really means “lack”—and clearly implies lack of any absolute need. Indeed, our spiritual needs and our physical wants are two separate things. Verse 9 is not promising uninterrupted comfort, but that God will meet every ultimate need.

The circumstances confronting David as he wrote these words confirm this truth. A refugee from his own country because of a death sentence from his king, he found himself far from comfort—in the land of his lifelong enemies! Yet God was with him.

Consider that our spiritual welfare is most important. And spiritual strength can be increased when we are in physical need. The apostle Paul put it this way: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). Of course, God is faithful to meet even our physical needs until He decides that it is time for our physical life to come to an end.

For a bit more insight into this matter, read and consider Proverbs 30:7-9.

David and the Showbread; Prayer for Relief (1 Samuel 21:1-12; Psalm 56)

David is too inexperienced in political matters to comprehend just how deep the subterfuge was running in Saul’s regime. He makes a huge tactical error that will cost many innocent lives. This incident ushers in the beginning of a vast sea of anguish that would so characterize David’s life, providing him with great depth of feeling for the inspiration of so many of his psalms that would prefigure the sufferings of the innocent Christ.

David is on the run. Innocently enough, he flees to Ahimelech, who is serving as high priest at Nob. Ahimelech is fearful, perhaps having heard rumors of the breach between Saul and David and does not want to put himself and the other priests in jeopardy by getting in the middle of any conflict. David, sensing this, lies to Ahimelech to expedite his and his men’s need for sustenance and to immediately be on their way: “I’m on a secret mission for the king” (compare verse 2). The lie works for David, but this will, though unintended by him, result in terrible tragedy for the priests.

Here we also see the interesting occasion when David and his men eat the holy bread, elsewhere called showbread, which was a special grain offering to God intended only for the priests (verses 3-5; compare Exodus 25:23-30; Leviticus 24:5-9). Ahimelech is willing to feed them with it only if they are ritually pure. Perhaps this hearkens back to God's original intent that the whole nation of Israel was to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6) who were to be pure in this way before their presentation before God (verse 15). David affirms the ritual purity of his men and, furthermore, argues that the bread is effectively common anyway because new bread had already replaced it before God.

Reassured, Ahimelech gives them the bread. While "the Talmud explains this apparent breach of the law on the basis that the preservation of life takes precedence over nearly all other commandments in the Law" (Nelson Study Bible, note on 21:6), this is not entirely correct—as we cannot lie, steal or commit adultery to protect human life. But preserving the lives of others clearly is part of the intent of God's law (compare Romans 13:10; Proverbs 24:11-12), and this did take precedence over the ceremonial laws God gave, which He intended to be observed for a limited time (compare Hebrews 9:9-10; Galatians 3:19-25). Christ explained on more than one occasion that saving life even took precedence over the general prohibition against work on the Sabbath. In its same note on David and the showbread, The Nelson Study Bible continues: "Yeshua referred to this incident in Matt. 12:2-4; Mark 2:25, 26, in His discussion with the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath. The spirit of the Law was kept by Ahimelech's compassionate act." That much certainly is true, for Christ upheld the feeding of David with the bread.

Doeg, an Edomite loyal to Saul, sees Ahimelech give David food and Goliath's sword (verses 7-9). The account says that Doeg is there "detained before the LORD," i.e., under a spiritual vow. Subsequent events will make his religious piety questionable, however, and it is entirely possible that he undertook the vow for a wrong reason, perhaps to act as a spy among the priests. In any case, his witnessing of these events will result in severe consequences when he later passes the information on to Saul.

Though it was acceptable for David to eat the showbread, it was certainly not right for him to lie. It is even worse when we later find out that David suspected Doeg would relay what happened to Saul (22:22). But David was operating out of fear. Goliath's sword should have been a reminder of God's deliverance—but fear can cause a man to forget his priorities. (God's human servants can go from high points of strong faith to lows of fear and doubt.) David is so fearful of Saul that he flees the country into enemy Philistine territory, reasoning that he has a better chance of survival there even though he is still held in contempt by the Philistines because of his former victories over them (verses 10-11).

When captured by the Philistines in Gath, David composes Psalm 56 as a prayer for relief from tormentors, his experiences on the run providing its inspiration. We see some beautiful word pictures here. God remembering David's sacrifices in His book of remembrance is described as David's tears being put into God's bottle. The American national motto, "In God We Trust"—a shortened form of the longer Pilgrim motto, "In God We Trust, God with Us"—finds its origins

in verse 11, “In God I have put my trust.” And David touches on the ever-present biblical theme of “walking with God.”

Psalm 68

In Psalm 68 David calls on God to deal with His enemies and for the righteous to rejoice in His triumph. The first half of the psalm (to verse 18) reviews God’s historic acts on behalf of the Israelites, progressing from the wilderness of Sinai to the conquest of the Promised Land. Verse 18 carries the meaning forward to Christ’s day, as we will see, and then the second half of the psalm “looks forward with expectations of God’s continuing triumphs until the redemption of his people is complete and his kingly rule is universally acknowledged with songs of praise” (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, note on Psalm 68).

In Psalm 68:4 God’s name is given as “Yah” (see also Isaiah 12:2), a shortened form of Yhwh, usually transliterated as Yahweh. This longer form, replaced in most Bible versions with the word “Lord,” is the third-person form of the name that God gave in the first person in Exodus 3:14. In that verse God gave a long version of this name, “I AM WHO I AM,” as well as a short version “I AM.” Just the same, the third-person form Yhwh means “He Is Who He Is,” while the shorter form Yah means “He Is” or “He Who Is.” This short form appears in the names of many people in the Bible, such as Elijah (i.e., Eli-Yah), Isaiah (i.e., Yitza-Yah) and Jeremiah (i.e., Yerem-Yah).

Psalm 68:5-6 expresses God’s special concern for the orphan and widow and His care to make those who are lonely part of families. His desire is to help those in need, which brings us to the next clause in verse 6—delivering the oppressed. Actually, the specific wording here—of bringing those who are bound into prosperity but the rebellious to desert exile—probably relates, given the context of the verses that follow, to God’s merciful deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and their subsequent rebellion and wilderness wanderings (see also 66:10-12).

God still continued to provide for His people. Psalm 68:8-9 appears to paraphrase a few lines from the Song of Deborah in Judges 5:4b-5 about God providing rain to the Israelites in the Sinai desert. The provision of rain also ties the psalm to Psalm 65:9-10. God’s “inheritance” (Psalm 68:9) is a reference to Israel (see Deuteronomy 9:29)—synonymous in the next verse with His congregation and the poor for whom He provided (Psalm 68:10).

Verses 11-14 speak of God granting victory to Israel in its battles against the armies of various kingdoms on the way to subduing the Promised Land. Zalmon in verse 14 is a mountain near Shechem in northern Israel (see Judges 9:46-48). Bashan (Psalm 68:15) is a high plateau northeast of the Sea of Galilee. It was part of the territory of King Og when the Israelites came to the land. “Mountain” in these verses seems to symbolize land and dominion. That is, the mountain of Bashan is the land or kingdom of Bashan. God says it is now a mountain of His (verse 15)—that is, it is incorporated into His dominion as part of the Kingdom of Israel. The

mountain's peaks (verse 16) would represent its various sub-kingdoms or city-states. These peaks are erupting, like volcanoes, with envy against the takeover by God and His people. God, however, says He desires to dwell in this mountain—the Promised Land—forever.

Yet, depending on when David wrote this psalm, the mountain of God could perhaps be more specifically identified as Mount Zion—of which the whole land of Israel is an extension (just as Zion, the Mountain of the Lord's House, will, after Christ's return, represent both Jerusalem and the whole Kingdom of God). For it is in Jerusalem that God has chosen to dwell: "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: 'This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it'" (Psalm 132:13-14).

With this in mind, consider Psalm 68:17. It mentions God's vast chariot army, and then notice how the NRSV translates the second half of the verse: "The Lord came from Sinai into the holy place." The Hebrew wording here is difficult, but this meaning fits well in context. That is, what has gone before in the account has shown the progress from the wandering in the wilderness to the permanent establishment of God within His sanctuary in Israel—probably on Mount Zion.

The first phrase in the next verse, "You have ascended on high" (verse 18), would fit with the idea of God's entourage moving from lower surrounding lands to the heights of Israel (especially in the sense of ascending to the place that was to represent the spiritual peak among the nations of the earth). The mountain of God, we have seen in other psalms, represents the heavenly Zion as well—just as it does here. Indeed, there is much more to this verse.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul notes something remarkable about this passage. He quotes from it in Ephesians 4:8. Then, in verse 9, he asks: "Now this, 'He ascended,'—what does it mean but that He also first descended...?" Paul realizes that this verse refers to God, who dwells in the highest heaven. So how can He be portrayed as ascending to a higher place or station? Only if He first descended—and this Paul explains as prophetic of God coming down from heaven as a human being, Yeshua Messiah, to then later ascend back up to heaven to reassume His divine majesty. We will see more about Paul's explanation of this when we come to the book of Ephesians in the Bible Reading Program.

The next phrase in Psalm 68:18, also referred to by Paul, "You have led captivity captive," finds an earlier parallel in the Song of Deborah: "Arise, Barak [the leader of Israel's army], and lead thy captivity captive" (Judges 5:12, KJV). In that passage, the NKJV translates the phrase simply as, "Lead your captives away." Indeed, the idea here seems merely to be: "Take those you have captured and lead them away as captive." Many see in this a sort of victory procession (compare Psalm 68:24-25). The NIV, similar to the NRSV, renders the phrase in Psalm 68:18 as "You led captives in your train." However, it is not clear if the captives here are humiliated and paraded enemies (compare also Colossians 2:15) or those whom God has converted to His truth—themselves victorious with God in the procession (compare Psalm 69:33; Romans 6:16-22; Ephesians 3:1).

The next clause in Psalm 68:18 says, “You have received gifts among men.” Paul in quoting this seems to reverse it, saying that God “gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8)—referring to the apportioning of spiritual gifts to Christ’s followers (verses 7, 11-16). The Expositor’s Bible Commentary states: “Paul does not cite either MT [the Masoretic Text] or LXX [the Septuagint] Some have claimed that, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul felt free to amplify the meaning of the Psalm, since the giving is implicit in the receiving for. But it seems more probable that the apostle was drawing on an ancient oral tradition reflected in the Aramaic Targum on the Psalter and the Syriac Peshitta version, both of which read, ‘Thou hast given gifts to men.’ Early rabbinical comments applied the verse to Moses when he received the Law on Sinai so as to bring it to the people” (note on Ephesians 4:8, emphasis added). Zondervan notes on this verse: “Paul apparently takes his cue from certain Rabbinic interpretations

current in his day that read the Hebrew preposition for ‘from’ in the sense of ‘to’ (a meaning it often has) and the verb for ‘received’ in the sense of ‘take and give’ (a meaning it sometimes has—but with a different preposition...)” Of course, God receives from people only what He has already given them or produced in them—so Paul’s understanding was certainly correct in any case.

Verse 19 of Psalm 68 continues in the theme of God providing for His people: “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits.” However, it is possible that the latter clause should be rendered, as in the NRSV, “who daily bears us up” (i.e., carries us), or, as in the NIV, “who daily bears our burdens.”

But those who oppose God will not fare so well in the end (verses 21-23). Crushing enemies in blood under foot (verse 23) recalls Psalm 58:10. As there, this is not to relish the destruction of others but to portray a meting out of justice on those who refuse to repent.

In these verses, we are moving beyond ancient Israel’s subjugation of the Promised Land to the future subjugation of the earth to God’s Kingdom at Christ’s coming. As we saw, Psalm 68:18, besides representing the establishment of the ancient sanctuary in Jerusalem, also represented the resurrection and ascension of Yeshua Messiah to the heavenly sanctuary. Yet it also represents the ascension of Christ to the throne of the earth in His Kingdom (as in Psalm 47), when the future temple is established at Jerusalem (see 68:29).

Verse 30 is probably to be interpreted by verses 31-32, so that “beasts of the reeds” (verse 30)—likely descriptive of the crocodile and hippopotamus of the Nile—represents Egypt and Ethiopia (verse 31) and “the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples” (verse 30) represents the various “kingdoms of the earth” (verse 32), both great and small. Though initially rebuked, most will soon become part of a great chorus of nations praising God (see verses 32-35), as was called for in the previous psalm.

Mark Chapter 10

Yeshua is again teaching the crowds when the Pharisees show up to begin testing Him again. They asked Him about divorce (putting away) a wife. As He most often did, Yeshua responds to the question with a question: "What did Moses command you?" They responded with the reference they desired to go by in that they said Moses allowed them to put away the wife. Yeshua corrected them in stating that they must go back to the "original way" of YHWH's design before sin entered the world: one man, one woman joined together in one flesh. The only reason Moses gave the instruction concerning divorce is because of the hardness of men's hearts.

Yeshua blesses the little children who wanted to see Him and touch Him.

A man asks Yeshua what he must do to be saved. Yeshua tells him to keep and guard the commandments. To which he replies that he has kept them from his youth. Then, Yeshua, knowing the man's heart love him but said that he still had something he had to overcome: love of his earthly possessions. Yeshua told him to sell all he possessed and give to the poor, then come and follow Me.

As they continued to travel and Yeshua continued teaching, He again told His disciples of what was to befall Him very soon. The Son of Adam shall be delivered to the chief priests and to the scribe, and they shall condemn Him to death and shall deliver Him to the gentiles.

Ya'aqob and Yohanan, the sons of Zabdai came to Yeshua and desired Him to grant them a seat to His right and to His left. The other ten disciples were very displeased with this request and Yeshua told them that those who were to sit at His right and His left had already been determined and prepared by Elohim. He also told them that ruling over one another is not the way of the Kingdom, but serving each other is. The least is the greatest and the greatest, least. The gentiles conduct rulership over one another but this is not the way of YHWH.

Yeshua heals blind Bartimai.