

## **A Model for Translators: An Exegesis of Genesis 32:22-32**

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### **1. Introduction**

The book of Genesis has variety of materials and most of them are ambiguous in their nature. One such is the Jacob saga materials. It is hard to locate the beginning and the end of this short yet momentous event. The whole context of this passage is Jacob's encounter with the divine at the verge of his meeting with Esau. Here he seeks the blessings of the divine to protect him from Esau and his 400 men who have set out to meet Jacob. The encounter between God and Jacob makes him blessed; the divine gifts him with a new name and with a limp. The story recounts Jacob's encounter with the 'man' (In Old Testament the divine encounter with the human is mostly addressed as the 'man', 'the angel of the Lord', etc.) and is explained as a background to Jacob's meeting with Esau. Luther says: "every man holds that this text is one of the most obscure in the Old Testament."<sup>1</sup>) Acknowledging the indistinct nature and richness of the text, this study is an attempt to interpret the passage by using the original text along with various interpretations. It is also an attempt to relate the event to the present context of the church and society in India. Modern-day India still languishes under the caste system, in which the numerous lower castes are relegated to working in the lowest and most menial jobs. The story of Jacob and his wrestle with the mysterious but clearly superior being can be taken as a metaphor for their struggle for acceptance in the wider Indian society and the Church — Jacob may have limped as a result of his wrestling match, but he gained several benefits from it which lasted into later generations.

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1) H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 874.

## 2. Translation of Genesis 32:22-32<sup>2)</sup>

וַיָּקָם בַּלַּיְלָהּ הוּא וְיָקָם  
אֶת־שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי  
שִׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת־אֶחָד עֶשֶׂר וּלְדָוִד  
וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶת מַעְבַּר יַבְבֹּק

22 And he rose up that night and took two of his wife and two of his women servants and eleven of his sons and passed over the ford Jabbok.

וַיִּקְחֵם וַיַּעֲבֵרם אֶת־הַנָּחַל  
וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ

23 and he took them and sent them over the brook and sent over that he had.

וַיִּנְתַּר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ  
עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר

24 and Jacob was left alone and there a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכַל לוֹ וַיִּנְעַע  
בְּכַף־יָרְכוֹ וַתִּקַּע כַּף־יָרְכוֹ  
וַיַּעֲקֹב בְּהֶאָבֵקוֹ עִמּוֹ

25 when he saw that not prevailed against him, and he touched the hollow of the his thigh and was out of joint the hollow of the thigh of Jacobs he wrestled with him.

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי כִּי עָלָה  
הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ  
כִּי אִם־בְּרַכְתֵּנִי

26 and he said let me go for breaketh of the day. And he said I will not let thee go except thou bless me.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה־שֵּׁמֶךָ  
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב

27 and he said what unto him is and he said thy name Jacob

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד  
שֵׁמֶךָ כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ  
עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אָנָשִׁים וַתִּגְבַּל

28 and he said no thy name more shall be called Jacob, but Israel for as a prince has thou power with God and with men, and he has prevailed.

וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה־נָא  
שֵׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל  
לְשִׁמִּי וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם

29 and asked him and Jacob said tell me thy name I pray thee. And he said wherefore it is that thou dost ask after my name? and he blessed him there.

וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם  
פְּנֵי־אֵל כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים  
אֶל־פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצֵל נַפְשִׁי

30 and Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face and is preserved my life.

וַיִּזְרַח־לוֹ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר  
אֶת־פְּנֵי־אֵל וַהּוּא צָלַע עַל־יָרְכוֹ

31 and rose the sun upon him as he passed over Peniel and he halted upon his thigh.

עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יֵאָכְלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל  
אֶת־גִּיד הַנֶּשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר עַל־כַּף  
הַיָּרֶךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע  
בְּכַף־יָרְכוֹ יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד הַנֶּשֶׂה

32 therefore eat not the children of Israel of the sinew which shrank which is upon the hollow of the thigh unto this day, because he touched the hollow of the Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

2) In chapter 32, the verse numbering does not follows the Hebrew text, but the English

### 3. Source:

The source critics like S. R. Driver, J. Wellhausen, the great bulk of 32:3-33:20 delivered from J. Driver assigned only 33:18-20 to other sources, mostly E, to which Wellhausen also ascribed 32:13b-21. Subsequent source critics tended to find somewhat more E in these chapters. Scholars like S. A. Geller, E. Blum, G. W. Coats and C. Westermann argue that this episode is an integral part of J's account of Jacob.<sup>3)</sup> The earlier assumption that the narrative is composed of two versions which once existed independently must be given up. With the exception of v. 23 and 24a, there is no real doublet in the narrative. It must therefore be ascribed completely to the Yahwist.<sup>4)</sup> Similarly 32:30 led many to argue that 32:22-32 was composed of E and J, though different analyses were offered, even by the same commentator in different editions. More recently the fashion has swung back to regarding 32:3-32 as all from the hand of J.<sup>5)</sup>

#### 3.1. Structure:

This passage describes the return of Jacob to Canaan. The event throughout this chapter occurs at night. Jacob was distressed due to the news of Esau and his 400 men. He spends that 'night' in the river bank after sending all his people and belongings over the river. It is during the 'night' (v. 21) that he sends his gift on to Esau. And now, he himself gets up in the 'night.' Anxiety may have produced insomnia.<sup>6)</sup> The mysterious activity and the critical problems posed have led to much discussion.

The story about Jacob is spread over three sections according to V. P. Hamilton :

1. vv. 22-25 are narrative, describing Jacob's and his entourage's crossing of the Jabbok, and Jacob's wrestling with a man.

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translations.

3) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 2 (Dallas: Word Books Publishers, 1994), 294.

4) G. von Rad, *Genesis, A Commentary, Revised Edition* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1987), 320.

5) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 289.

6) V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 328.

2. vv. 26-29 are dialogue between Jacob and the man, and they climax in the renaming of Jacob as Israel.
3. vv. 30-32 are etymology, explaining the origin of the name Peniel and a certain dietary restriction.<sup>7)</sup>

One can read vv. 22-23 in two ways. First, Jacob himself crosses the river (v. 22, sing. and not pl.). Second, Jacob sends his entourage across, but he himself does not cross (v. 23). The ‘man’ who encountered Jacob is no river demon who tries to stop Jacob from fording the river. There are no obstacles in the river crossing. Indeed, taken together, vv. 22-23 might suggest that Jacob crossed the Jabbok several times.<sup>8)</sup>

### 3.2. Setting:

While on the river bank Jacob has undergone the struggle between life and death. He is there alone, having sent all his belongings across the river without him. According to the text, the wives, handmaids, and sons were brought over first. It is interesting to note how, in a patriarchal society, only the sons are mentioned, as the one daughter Dinah was not as important for later history as the sons were. In ancient Israelite patriarchal society the females were not considered as equal to males. Hence, the daughter is not mentioned, only the sons. This kind of exclusive male chauvinistic approach is predominately found in Israel.

The text does not explain the logic in Jacob’s reasoning as to why he brought all his family across the Jabbok and remained on the river bank alone. The conjecture could be made that probably he was disturbed, sleepless, restless and fearful of death because of his brother Esau.

In the midst of this narrative built on human calculation, there are statements which are note worthy for their theological acumen. These include a brief theophany (32:1-2), a fearful prayer (32:9-12) and an extended encounter (32:22-32). There is little doubt that two theophanic episodes (32:1-2, 22-32) have had an independent life and been incorporated into the narrative.<sup>9)</sup>

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7) Ibid.

8) Ibid., 329.

9) W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 261.

#### 4. Exegetical Notes with Critical Apparatus of Genesis 32:22-32

Chapters 32-33 are similar in theme and content. Jacob returns to Canaan as per God's command. This trace back to the utter poverty of Jacob followed by blessings of God. Jacob gathers a large part of his possessions together and send them as gifts that they may wipe off the anger of his brother Esau.

##### 4.1. Genesis 32:22-25

The ambiguity of the text requires in depth study. Jacob is momentarily left alone, separated from his party. The word 'man'<sup>10)</sup> is open to all possible interpretations. The identity of the 'man' (v. 24) is obscure. In much interpretation, it has been understood as a demon or a Canaanite numen.<sup>11)</sup> It brings us to Jacob's situation, who perceives nothing but a male antagonist closing in upon him. 'A man struggled with him' describes the attack from Jacob's point of view; he is assaulted by an unidentifiable male and has to fight for his life.<sup>12)</sup> Indeed, the struggle was indecisive for a long period, until the mysterious antagonist touched Jacob's hip, which was put out of joint by the touch, as though by a magical power.<sup>13)</sup> The verb 'he struggled' (וַיִּאבֹק) occurs only here and in v. 25 and is clearly a play on the name Yabbok (יַבְבֹּק), and probably Jacob too (יַעֲקֹב), so one could paraphrase it 'he Yabboked him' or 'he Jacobed him'! The form in which the struggle took place is left unspecified. יַבֵּק is often said to be a by-form of טַבֵּק 'to embrace', a friendly gesture, but there is nothing friendly about this encounter.<sup>14)</sup>

The verb (אִבֹּק) is correctly translated 'wrestled', as just about all translators

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10) Jacob's assailant is identified simply as a 'man' (אִישׁ). Jacob will later identify the man as God (אֱלֹהִים) (v. 30), and Hos 12:4[5] identifies him as an angel (מַלְאָךְ).

11) W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 266-267.

12) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 295.

13) G. von Rad, *Genesis, A Commentary*, 321.

14) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 295. Undoubtedly, there is an acoustical similarity in Jacob, Jabbok, wrestled. Vv. 24-25 are the only two places where this denominative verb יַבֵּק occurs in the Old Testament (and both are Niphal). The noun from which the verb is built is יַבֵּק 'dust', suggesting perhaps that when one wrestles on the ground he gets dirty or dusty. In ch. 32 a man wrestles (אִבֹּק) Jacob (embraces for fighting). In ch. 33, Esau embraces (הִבֵּק) Jacob (embrace for greeting). Two verbs that rhyme are chosen to describe the start of Jacob's encounters.

agree. It matters little whether it be derived from the noun אֶבֶק meaning ‘dust’ and so the verb is construed to mean ‘roll in the dust’, or ‘to become dusty’ or ‘to raise the dust’; or whether the root קָבַח is compared which means ‘to clasp’ as the wrestlers do.<sup>15)</sup> H. Gunkel, G. von Rad and Westermann are among those who suggest that originally this was an account of Jacob’s encounter with a Canaanite river god. And this they hold is confirmed by the ‘man’s desire to depart before dawn’, a regular feature of folk tale. However, O. Eissfeldt argues the story actually identifies the opponent as El, the supreme Canaanite creator god. On the other hand in other dangerous encounters with the divine the unrecognised foe is the Lord or his angel and often in Genesis the Lord is equated with El.<sup>16)</sup>

It is clear that at some point Jacob has recognized the divine character of his opponent and has persistently sought a blessing. How and when Jacob became aware of the character of the ‘man’ with whom he wrestled, we are quite unable to say. Jacob must from the outset have been most distinctly aware that this was not a struggle merely between man and man in physical opposition.<sup>17)</sup> The man realized that he could not win, so he touched Jacob’s thigh. For the Israelite reader knowing the man’s identity, the first clause, ‘he could not win’, must have sounded astonishing.<sup>18)</sup> The words used do not suggest that something in the nature of a wrestlers trick was used. ‘The hollow of the thigh’ seems to have been the ball-and-socket joint. This joint was dislocated, we are not informed whether this infirmity was permanent or only for a few days or weeks. Speculation on this point is quite futile.<sup>19)</sup> It gives an insight into Jacob’s situation. A touch that dislocates indicates an opponent with superhuman power.<sup>20)</sup> The expression ‘until the breaking of the day’ reveals that a long bout of wrestling occurred.<sup>21)</sup> Then we have the incident when the man demanded to go before the day break. It indicates a desire to continue to hide his identity. It may also hint at the idea that no man can see God and live (cf. v. 2; Exo 33:20). In this process of struggle, it is another hint for Jacob of the supernatural

15) H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 875.

16) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 295.

17) H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 878.

18) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 295.

19) H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 877.

20) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 295.

21) G. von Rad, *Genesis, A Commentary*, 321.

character of his opponent.<sup>22)</sup>

#### 4.2. Genesis 32:26-29

Jacob was no easy conquest for the man. Jacob's Herculean strength was observed in 29:10 when he rolled away the stone from the well.<sup>23)</sup> No one knows why the man struck Jacob on the hollow of the thigh. Neither does one know why the man requests Jacob to 'release' him because dawn is beginning to break. Gunkel's commentary popularised the notion that this is a vestige of the Ur-form of the story. In the earlier traditional narrative (as stated above) the man who fought with Jacob was a nocturnal demon (or a river spirits) who loses his power at daylight. It appears that the dawn, as well as the place of the incident (the Jabbok river in the Transjordan area), are foils for the character of Jacob.<sup>24)</sup> Jacob is insisting on something that he cannot provide for himself. 'The words for "hollow of his thigh" are noted in various ways and meanings as if these were different in usage.'<sup>25)</sup> The touching of Jacob's thigh results in the thigh's being dislocated.<sup>26)</sup>

The etymology of Israel offered by the text relates **ישראל** to the verb **שרה** 'to struggle, fight'. The word literally means 'El (God) fights'.<sup>27)</sup> R. B. Coote relates it to the noun **משרה**, usually translated 'government'; hence he explains

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22) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 296.

23) V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 329.

24) *Ibid.*, 332.

25) The situation would be that two men are engaged in combat and at some point in the contest one combatant touches/strikes the scrotum of the other combatant. This situation would then be comparable to that envisioned in the law of Deu 25:11-12 in which two men are wrestling. The wife of the losing combatant disadvantages the winning combatant by seizing him by the private parts. *Ibid.*, 331.

26) In the Hiphil stem (**יקע**) designs some kind of public ritual act of execution on living bodies (Num 25:4; 2Sa 21:6, 9), in the Qal stem (as here) the meaning is 'separation, alienation, dislocation.' Given the other references to *thigh* in the patriarchal traditions, it is inconceivable that any latter Israelite would have missed the national import of this verse. Jacob, the ancestor of Israel, had his thigh struck, and it was from that thigh that Israel came forth (Exo 1:5).

27) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 296. "It has also been thought that the notion of 'God fighting' is incompatible with Israelite theology, so that the real meaning of Israel must be different. So, S. A. Geller following the Greek translators (LXX, Aquila, Symmachus) and the Vulgate, relates it to **שרר** 'to rule, be strong' and E. Jacob links Israel with **ישר** 'just, right' comparing the other ancient poetic name Jeshurun. W. F. Albright suggested it was related to Ethiopic and Arabic stems meaning 'to heal'; hence the word means 'God heals'."

the names as ‘El Judges’ which is very similar to M. Noth’s earlier suggestion, “May God rule.”<sup>28)</sup> The original meaning of Israel is much debated (God rules? God heals? God judges?), as is the relationship between Israel and verb שָׂרָה<sup>29)</sup> (struggled). The concept of God’s fighting with someone is certainly no more of a problem than the passage itself. The reversal of the emphasis (from ‘God fights’ to ‘fight with God’) in the explanation is because of the nature of popular etymologies which are satisfied with a word play on the sound or meaning of the name to express its significance.

Jacob now learns that he shall no longer be called Jacob. No longer will be the stigma of heel and his being supplanted be attached to him. Biblical Hebrew uses the idiom ‘they shall say no more’ or ‘it shall be said no more’ to indicate a spiritual metamorphosis of some kind. Particularly close to Genesis 32:29 is Jeremiah 3:16-17, ‘they shall no more say... But it shall be called.’ Jacob is making a confession about the appropriateness of his name. Only now would Jacob agree with Esau that Jacob is the perfect name for him (27:36). The acknowledgement of the old name and its unfortunate suitability, paves the way for a new name. Instead of merely blessing him, his opponent changes Jacob’s name, thus announcing Jacob’s new character and destiny. ‘He says: ‘not Jacob’ (the negative immediately before the word affected) shall thy name be called from now on but Israel.’ He adds a reason: ‘thou hast striven with God and with men and hast prevailed.’ שָׂרָה means ‘to strive’ or ‘fight’ — אֱלֹ is ‘God’.<sup>30)</sup> J. J. Scullion suggests that ‘with God and with men’ is merism, the statement of two extremes to express totality.<sup>31)</sup>

#### 4.3. Genesis 32:30-32

Jacob’s question is life and unlike the one that the man had earlier asked him. The man had said to Jacob: what is your name? Jacob’s question is phrased a bit differently. In asking Jacob his name, the man need not add ‘please’ as Jacob did when he asks his question. The man’s question is introduced as a statement.

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28) Ibid., 297.

29) This word is a *hapax legomenon* except Hos 12:3[4].

30) H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 880.

31) J. J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers*, Vol. 6 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 331.

Jacob's request is introduced as one inquiry and a statement.<sup>32)</sup> Jacob's question is nothing more than a request for information from the identification of his adversary. This request is formal element in the theophanies and seems to be that only with the disappearance of the deity does the protagonist realize he or she has had contact with the divine. The 'man' now implicitly identified with God (v. 28) refuses to give his name, lest it be abused and then he blesses Jacob. Then he disappears in the dark as suddenly as he came.

Jacob does not receive a direct answer to his question about the man's name, but that does not stop him from naming the place where this wrestling match occurred. He calls it Peniel,<sup>33)</sup> that is 'the face of El'. He refers to that event by saying, 'I have seen God face to face', a statement all the more remarkable given that it happened during the night at the bottom of a dark gorge. The expression face to face need not be confined to literal visual perception. In an idiomatic fashion it refers to the direct, non-mediated (i.e., immediate) character of a manifestation of presence. It describes a 'person-to-person' encounter, without the help or hindrance of an intermediary.<sup>34)</sup> Jacob is not saying: 'by all logical considerations, I should be dead by now.' It is true that God says that 'a man shall not see me and live'(Exo 33:20)<sup>35)</sup>, but that is hardly Jacob's concern. But for Jacob the most important aspect of the encounter is that 'I have seen God face to face, and yet my life was rescued.' This event involves Jacob moving from a proclamation of revelation to a statement of testimony which means he shifts from awe to relief.

The rising of the sun marks the passing of the time and the dawn of a new era in Jacob's career. Jacob's encounter with the man has progressed from night (v. 22) to dawn (vv. 24, 26) to daylight. Jacob's exclamation, I have seen God 'face to face' is mentioned before the rising of the sun, indicating that it is not the

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32) V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 335.

33) Peniel is called Penuel. Penuel has an old case ending of *u* for the construct in place of the other old case ending *i* in Peniel. The form Peniel may be used here because it sounds more like 'face of God'. Its location is uncertain, says that it lies close to the southern bank of the Yabbok somewhere between Mahanaim and Succoth. With an adequate and a historically accurate account of the origin of the name 'Peniel' before us, we may wonder at those who under such circumstances go far afield and try to account for its origin by comparing the Phoenician promontory of which was called *qeou proswpou* (face of God).

34) V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 336.

35) A concept that admits exception throughout the Old Testament.

displacement of the darkness by the sun that permits Jacob's identifying his antagonist.<sup>36)</sup> But he limps past Peniel, witnessing to the reality of his nocturnal encounter and showing that although in one sense he was victorious, God had left his mark on him. He was not totally self-sufficient.<sup>37)</sup> As Jacob departs Peniel, he leaves with two things he did not bring with him to the Jabbok River. He has a new name and a new limp. The new name will forever remind Jacob of his new destiny. The new limp will forever remind him that in Elohim Jacob met for the first time one who can overpower him.<sup>38)</sup>

## 5. Theological Themes

The Jacob story is the most complicated narrative among all other ancestral narratives. Particularly this prescribed pericope has the unique features with the combinations of multifaceted forms. There are many theological themes in this passage. Some prominent words such as 'cross', 'face' appear frequently in this passage.<sup>39)</sup> Theme of blessing (32:26-29), is another key word of the Jacob cycle. Jacob received blessings from his father (ch. 27), here it is solely from God.

It is a struggle between life and death for Jacob at the verge of meeting his brother Esau. Jacob's encounter with God finally ended with the divine conferring a blessing and with the bestowal of the new name Israel. This struggle shows the sovereignty of God and faithfulness to his promise despite the exhibition of all human unworthiness. At this juncture, it does not mean that Jacob had control over God, rather, that Israel is totally dependent on God's grace.<sup>40)</sup>

### 5.1. Theological and Ethical Message

Jacob has won the birthright, the blessing and ultimately the conflict with Laban. He has endured through all, and now he endures with God. Jacob has

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36) V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 337.

37) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 297.

38) V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 337.

39) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 294.

40) *Ibid.*, 294.

struggled with God, has been graced by God, and carries the mark of the struggle, at least temporarily, in his thigh. Jacob, though he does not realise it, then unwittingly asks for power over God by asking the attacker's name. The attacker refuses the request and blesses Jacob (v. 29).<sup>41)</sup> Only in the dawn after the night long struggle does Jacob realize that the encounter has been with God (v. 30). To God, the humility matters more than the wealth, possession and fame. Jacob stood on the mud bund of the river Jabbok in fear of his brother Esau and his 400 men who were with him. The God, who is the God of the lonely and weak, always takes the side of the weaker sections of the community and blesses them.

## **5.2. Relation to the other Biblical Passage**

The divine encounter with the human could be seen clearly in almost all the ancestral narratives where the divine takes the form of the human and literally interacts with the human as a person. It is portrayed in the biblical narratives under the description as the one who appeared to the human as 'an angel', 'an angel of the Lord' etc. One or more such examples are present in Genesis 18-19, which begins with three men standing in front of Abraham; in Judges 6 where Yahweh's angel sat under an oak tree, and shortly engaged in conversation; and especially in Judges 13, where Manoah and his wife take Yahweh's angel to be a man of God. Thus it is not unusual or unheard of in the Old Testament for supernatural beings to assume human form.<sup>42)</sup> Apart from wrestling with God, all other elements in the story could be seen in the biblical passages even including the change of the names in New Testament.

## **5.3. Relevance of the Text to the Present Day Context**

This narrative reflects some of Israel's most sophisticated theology. On the one hand, Jacob/Israel soars to bold heights of a promethean kind. But then, he is corrected by a limp, affirming that only God is God. On the other hand, Jacob is a cripple with a blessing. Israel must ponder how it is that blessings are given

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41) J. J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers*, 231.

42) V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 330.

and at what cost. This same theology of weakness of power and power in weakness turns this text toward the New Testament and the gospel of the cross. Jacob lived, but he lived a new way now with power and with new weakness. And then he faced his brother.<sup>43)</sup> Jacob's encounter with God is exclusive example for the modern day context of the Church and Society. The struggle to challenge the human-made structure of Church/Society is the struggle belonging to the ordinary persons, particularly the poor and the oppressed communities in the Indian soil. The weaker section of our community needs the divine intervention to meet the challenges of the oppressive structure of the society. The divine encounter would enable the Dalits, Adivasis, women and children to overcome the structural power base to face challenges ahead of them not only for the present day but also for the future generation. If this could be done it would enable them to live in harmony with all humanity and thereby realise the kingdom values presented in Isaiah where the lamb and the wolf live together.

## 6. Conclusion

This remarkable occurrence is not to be regarded as a dream or an internal vision, but should be felt within the sphere of sensuous perception. At the same time, it was not a natural or corporeal wrestling, but a 'real conflict of both mind and body, a work of the spirit with intense effort of the body', in which Jacob was lifted up into a highly elevated condition of body and mind resembling that of ecstasy, through the medium of the manifestation of God. Divine manifestation deserves to be commemorated in every possible way. Jacob marks this one for himself and for his descendants by giving a distinctive name to the place where it occurred. The new name given to Jacob is Israel and the explanation following is that Jacob struggled with God and with men and had overcome. 'The transformation of the name from Jacob into Israel, subsequently the father of nation is the climax of the text. The whole issue here is the one who grasped the blessings by meeting him makes Jacob pray to God for blessings.'<sup>44)</sup> This passage is an exclusive passage for the present day Church and Society which needs to

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43) W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 271.

44) G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 294.

encounter with God to liberate the people who are under the oppressive structure of the Church and Society. This is the only way that the people can meet the challenges.

<Keywords>

‘Man’, limp, name, wrestle, blessing.

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<Abstract>

## **A Model for Translators: An Exegesis of Genesis 32:22-32**

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The book of Genesis has a variety of stories, many ambiguous in their nature. One such is the Jacob saga materials, which abounds with puzzles and confusions. It starts with Jacob's encounter with the divine at the verge of his meeting with Esau. Before the meeting he seeks the blessings of the divine to protect him from Esau and his 400 men who have set out to meet Jacob. The story then moves on to Jacob's new name and how he acquires his limp. There is then a discussion of the source of the story and a consideration of its division into three parts. These are described as part narrative, describing the river crossing and Jacob's wrestling with a man; part dialogue between Jacob and the man, climaxing in the renaming of Jacob as Israel and part etymological, explaining the origin of the name Peniel and a certain dietary restriction.

There is then an examination of the puzzle of sending Jacob's family across the river while he remains on the other side. In the struggle there is the question of the interpretation of 'man'— there is considerable discussion on who "the man" is—a river god, a demon, El or God Himself. The one definite conclusion is that whoever the mysterious figure is, he is supernatural, as only such a person could cause the mysterious 'touch' that dislocates Jacob's hip, the implication of this and the consequences. The effect of change of name is considered, along with the conclusion that the identification of 'man' must be God and Jacob realising and acting on the implication. An examination of the theological and ethical themes involved in the story follows, together with consideration of the relationship of the story to other Biblical passages.

The articles concludes with its relevance to present day context for Indian society, especially marginalized sections of society. The relevance of the story of Jacob and his wrestle with the mysterious "man" can be taken as a metaphor for their struggle for acceptance in the wider Indian society and the Church—Jacob may have limped as a result of his wrestling match, but he gained several benefits from it which lasted into later generations.