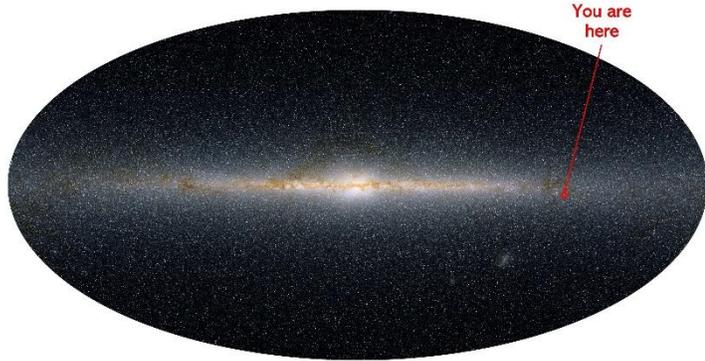


**BRUISES IN PERSPECTIVE**  
**A Devotional Meditation from**  
**Genesis 32:3-36:43; Psalm 118:22-29; Isaiah 8:14-15; Daniel 2:31-45;**  
**Obadiah 1; Matthew 21:41-44; Hebrews 11:6**  
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The first round of my wrestling match with God featured the Total Perspective Vortex, a plot device from the satirical science fiction radio play *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. It's ironically fitting that the Vortex is described as a torture device –

The prospective victim . . . is placed within a small chamber wherein is displayed a model of the entire universe – together with a microscopic dot on a microscopic dot bearing the legend "you are here." The sense of perspective thereby conveyed destroys the victim's mind; it was stated that the [Vortex] is the only known means of crushing a man's soul.\*



*Panoramic view of the entire sky as seen by Two Micron All-Sky Survey. (Original image: [NASA/JPL photo PIA04250](https://www.nasa.gov/photo/pi/PIA04250.jpg)).*

*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* came to my attention when I was a 19-year-old college student in the process of evaluating everything I had learned up to that point. It was the fall term of my second year at Florida State University. In the decade since I had asked Jesus to be my Savior, I had found no reason to doubt Him. However, at college I encountered philosophical, religious, and scientific lines of thought that did not conform to my Christian upbringing. None provided a valid reason why I should not believe in a Creator, but their arguments caused me to ponder why I believed what I believed.

The crisis came on the night before Thanksgiving, as I was on a bus headed home for the holiday. My thoughts dwelt on *The Hitchhiker's Guide*, and on Carl Sagan's documentary series, *Cosmos*. It's amusing that a science fiction comedy and a serious science documentary combined to help me grasp the vastness of the universe, and my very small presence within it. As I sat alone in the dark on that bus, an image of the cosmos came to mind, and I experienced my own personal Total Perspective Vortex. At that moment, I silently cried out to my God, "I must believe in You, because I cannot bear the alternative of being all alone in this universe."

That first wrestling match with my Creator ended with the simple conclusion that I believe because I cannot conceive of a universe in which He is not there. The conclusion might have been different had I not already been in relationship with my God since

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\*"Total Perspective Vortex," *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Wiki*, ([https://hitchhikers.fandom.com/wiki/Total\\_Perspective\\_Vortex](https://hitchhikers.fandom.com/wiki/Total_Perspective_Vortex)).

childhood. The foundation of our relationship remains firm to this day, and enables me to pass the fundamental test of faith:

Now without faith it is impossible to please God. For the one who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6 TLV

This speaks to Jacob's experience in his lifelong wrestling with God. We know of the famous wrestling match in which God changed his name from Jacob to Israel, but what brought him to that point? His relationship with the Almighty also began in childhood, and then passed through several phases over his long life. His first crisis of faith likely occurred when he had to decide how to step into the calling God had for him as the next steward of the covenant of redemption. Then came the crisis of fleeing his brother Esau after appropriating the birthright and firstborn blessing. More crises followed as he encountered the scheming of his father-in-law Laban, and the rivalry of his wives Rachel and Leah. Then came a second flight for his life, along with his wives and children, to escape Laban's anger at discovering Jacob had prospered at his expense. Then, having made peace with Laban in a covenant defining the border between them, Jacob found himself once again within reach of Esau.

This is where we see how much Jacob's relationship with the Almighty had matured. Twenty years earlier, at his first direct encounter with God at a place he called Bethel – House of God – Jacob set up a memorial stone and made this vow:

If God will be with me and watch over me on this way that I am going, and provide me food to eat and clothes to wear, and I return in *shalom* to my father's house, then *ADONAI* will be my God. So this stone which I set up as a memorial stone will become God's House, and of everything You provide me I will definitely give a tenth of it to You.

Genesis 28:20-22 TLV

That is the statement of a man who regards God as an augmentation of his own strength and cunning. Jacob's prayerful vow reveals a heart not yet broken and tender. Although he was no longer a young man, he still had the youthful disadvantage of thinking that he, with God's help, would be master of his own destiny. The years of exile softened his heart and gave him a different outlook. We see this in the prayer he spoke just before his second encounter with God:

Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, *ADONAI*, who said to me, "Return to your land and to your relatives and I will do good with you." I am unworthy of all the proofs of mercy and of all the dependability that you have shown to your servant. For with only my staff I crossed over this Jordan, and now I've become two camps. Deliver me, please, from my brother's hand, from Esau's hand, for I'm afraid of him that he'll come and strike me—the mothers with the children. You Yourself said, "I will most certainly do good with you, and will make your seed like the sand of the sea that cannot be counted because of its abundance."

Genesis 32:10-13 TLV

This is a humbled man at his wit's end. He throws himself on his Redeemer because he has no alternative. If God does not intervene, then everyone he has grown to love and all he has done will be lost. He is done trying to shape outcomes as he believes they fit God's plan, and instead surrenders to that plan, and to the God Who authored it.

It is only at this point that Jacob is ready to wrestle God face-to-face, an event he memorializes by naming the place Peniel – Face of God. His grandfather Abraham was ready to offer up his only son of promise at God's request; Jacob was ready to trust the God of Promise to do as He said and leave no room for anyone to claim part of His glory.

We might say that, with this prayer, Jacob set up a figurative memorial stone. We know God accepted both the prayer and the man who uttered it because, after wrestling all night, Jacob came away with a new name, Israel, which spoke to his status in God's eyes.

It wasn't a different memorial stone that Jacob set up at Peniel; it was the same Stone, only this time he had passed beyond the threshold of God's house and drawn near to see God's face. Not many people do that, even though we all will encounter that memorial Stone. Yeshua had something to say about it to the spiritual leaders of His day:

Have you never read in the Scriptures?

The stone which the builders rejected,  
this has become the chief cornerstone.

This came from *ADONAI*,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to people producing its fruits. Whoever falls on this stone will be shattered; but the one upon whom it falls, it will crush him.

Matthew 21:41-44 TLV

The Stone is the Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel. Jacob could not become Israel until he had fallen on the Stone and been shattered. He is forever blessed for his act of faith, but not so his brother Esau. Both men had opportunity to come to terms with their Creator, but Esau saw no reason to drop his reliance on himself. The Bible says the House of Jacob will utterly consume the House of Esau. That's what it means to be crushed by the Stone that will grind all the nations into chaff at the end of days.

Our God wrestles with us as long as we are willing to toe the mark with Him. The match continues throughout our lifetime, but we have the option of walking away at any time. The question is whether we will allow Him to leave us bruised and broken and fit for His Kingdom, or be reduced to dust in the wind.