

## Genesis 32 - Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau

### A. Jacob hears of Esau's approach.

1. (1-2) Jacob meets the angels of God at Mahanaim. He realizes God is with him and he has angelic protection.

a. **This is God's camp:** Literally, Jacob observed he was in a *double camp*. He was not alone; God had a camp of angels with him at Mahanaim.

i. It was not as if God's angels just joined Jacob. They were with him the entire time. Now Jacob could see God's angels with him and it provided great encouragement.

ii. Angels, though "higher" beings than us, are ordained by God and sent down to serve us (Hebrews 1:14). In 2 Kings 6:15-17 Elisha's servant had his eyes opened to see the tremendous angelic host surrounding them.

iii. John Paton, a missionary to the New Hebrides Islands, told of how one night hostile natives surrounded his missions headquarters, intent on burning the Paton's out and killing them. He and his wife prayed through the entire night, and when daylight finally came, their attackers all left. A year later, the chief of the tribe became a Christian, and Paton asked the man about that night. The chief replied, "Who were all those men you had with you there?" The missionary explained only he and his wife were there. The chief insisted he had seen hundreds of big men with shining garments and swords circling the mission headquarters, so the natives were afraid to attack (Billy Graham in *Angels, God's Secret Agents*, page 3). That night in the New Hebrides Islands, there certainly was a "double camp"!

b. **The angels of God met him:** This wonderful revelation of God's presence and care came after Jacob finally separated from Laban, the worldly man. Separation from the world brings greater insight to the believer.

2. (3-6) Jacob's message to Esau.

a. **Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother:** Jacob, seeking to reconcile with his brother (who 20 years before swore to kill him), first began by humbling himself and sending the message, "**your servant Jacob.**"

b. **I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants:** Jacob isn't bragging. He wants Esau to know that he is a man of wealth and that he has not come to take anything from Esau. We see Jacob trying to get inside Esau's head and answer Esau's concerns.

c. **He also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him:** When the messengers return, Jacob heard news that made his blood run cold. Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Because Jacob could not bring himself to think the best of Esau (for understandable reasons), he was convinced the 400 men are an army intending to destroy him and his family.

3. (7-8) Jacob's fear and carnal preparation.

a. **Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed:** When Laban confronted Jacob with a hostile militia Jacob boldly stood up to him and spoke his mind (Genesis 31:36-42). But with Esau, Jacob was afraid to meet him. This was because Jacob knew he was in the right with Laban, but he knew he was in the wrong with Esau.

i. In a similar way many Christians are crippled by their past. Their past sin haunts them and they have difficulty believing that Jesus really settled it all and that He wants them to move on and trust in Him.

b. **Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed:** Before Jacob left home, after his brother swore to kill him, Rebekah told Jacob *until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there* (Genesis 27:45). Rebekah never sent for Jacob and therefore he had every reason to believe 20 years had not diminished his brother's anger.

i. But Jacob also had every reason to believe God would protect him. He seems to have forgotten God had a special camp of angels there to protect him. His great fear and distress is not appropriate for someone who is protected by God.

ii. Jacob should have said, "I don't know if Esau is coming to me in peace or in war. I hope for peace, but if it is war, I trust God will protect me."

c. **He divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies:** In splitting his company, Jacob used man's wisdom to prepare for Esau's coming. He should have trusted God could protect all he had. Jacob forgot about God's "two camps" and was tried to make his own "two camps."

4. (9-12) Jacob's prayer.

a. **Then Jacob said:** After first reacting in fear and unbelief, Jacob did the right thing. He went to the LORD and prayed a good prayer, full of faith, thanksgiving, and God's Word.

b. **The Lord who said to me, "Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will deal well with you":** Jacob's prayer had *God's word* (what God said in Genesis 31:3). Jacob also quoted God's promise **"I will surely treat you well . . . "** (remembering what God said in Genesis 28:13-15).

i. Many of our prayers fall short because there is none of God's Word within them. Often there is none of God's Word in them because there is little of God's Word in us. Jacob *remembered* what the LORD had said to him.

c. **I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies:** His prayer had *thanksgiving*. Jacob understood he was not worthy of what God did for him or what he was asking God to do, but he relied on what God promised and not upon his own worthiness.

d. **Deliver me, I pray:** His prayer had *faith*. He boldly asked God to do something, and gave humble grounds for why the LORD should fulfill His word.

i. George Mueller, a great man of faith and prayer, was once asked what was the most important part of prayer. He replied: "The 15 minutes after I have said, 'Amen.'" "No matter how great Jacob's prayer was, his faith will be seen in what he does *after* his prayer.

5. (13-21) Jacob sends many gifts to Esau.
- a. **Took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother:** Jacob sent such an impressive gift because he wanted to make it completely clear to Esau that he did not need or want anything from him. It also could have been a carnal attempt to buy his brother's good favor.
  - b. **I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me:** In all likelihood, Jacob is a perfect example of the principle "when all else fails, pray." And as soon as he finished praying, he took up us own strategies again.
    - i. After all, if Jacob really trusted God, he would be at the *head* of the procession to meet Esau, not the *tail*.
    - ii. Jacob hoped, "**perhaps he will accept me**," but in Jacob's mind, perhaps not. Jacob also thought, "Perhaps he will kill me just like he said he would."
  - c. **So the present went on over before him:** This gift is a good example of the way we trust in our ability understand how we can help God fulfill his promise, rather than praying and listening for his instructions for us. Sometimes he instructs us to do something, sometimes he just tells us to stay out of the way, but we may never know unless we ask him for direction/discernment while praying over the matter. It is an error to act first and pray if it doesn't turn out right. We must pray first for direction, then act.

## B. Jacob wrestles with God.

1. (22-23) Jacob sends all his possessions over the river.
- a. **He took them, sent them over the brook:** This is a demonstration of his faith, because Jacob left himself no retreat. If Esau wanted to attack his group, they would quickly be backed up against the river.
  - b. **Sent over what he had:** Jacob spends the night alone. This is his last night on the east side of the Jordan, and he probably spent the night in prayer.
    - i. God had to get Jacob alone before He dealt with him. While all the hustle and bustle of the huge entourage was with Jacob, he could busy himself with a thousand different tasks. But once he was alone, God could command his attention.
    - ii. Think of all Jacob had to pray about: thanking God, remembering all the LORD did for him, wondering how God would fulfill His work in him. This was a significant turning point in Jacob's life and he knew it.
2. (24-25) A **Man** wrestles with Jacob.
- a. **A Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day:** Jacob didn't wrestle with the **Man**. Instead, **a Man wrestled with him**. Jacob didn't start out wanting anything from God. God wanted something from him. God wanted all of Jacob's proud self-reliance and fleshly scheming and came to take it, by force if necessary.
  - b. **A Man wrestled with him:** As the following verses show, this was no mere man. This is another "special appearance" of Jesus in the Old Testament before His incarnation in Bethlehem. This was God in human form.

c. **Until the breaking of the day:**

i. “How did Jacob ever manage to keep up his struggle throughout the entire night? I do not know. But I do know that his determination to hang in there was no greater than our frequent determination to have our own way and eventually win out over God.” (Boice)

d. **He saw that He did not prevail against him:** As the fight progressed, it seemed Jacob was pretty evenly matched against the **Man**. But the match was only even in appearance. The **Man** could have won easily at any time, using supernatural power.

i. Sometimes we feel man really *can* contend with God. A man or woman in rebellion against God might seem to do pretty well. The “match” is even in appearance only. God can turn the tide at any moment, and is allows the “match” to go own for His own purposes.

ii. It isn’t hard to imagine Jacob working so hard and feeling he is getting the best of his “opponent,” until finally the **Man** turns the tide in an instant. Jacob must have felt very defeated.

3. (26) Jacob’s plea to the **Man**.

a. **Let Me go, for the day breaks:** The **Man** let Jacob know this won’t go on forever. Even though Jacob clung to him desperately, Jacob has lost. A better, greater Man defeated Jacob.

i. This is an invaluable place for everyone to come to: where God conquers us. There is something to be said for every man doing his “wrestling” with God, and then acknowledging God’s greatness after having been defeated. We must know we serve a God who is greater than us, and we cannot conquer much of anything until He conquers us.

b. **I will not let You go unless You bless me:** Hosea 12:3-5 summarizes Jacobs struggles and spiritual breakthrough: *He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; he wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us; that is, the LORD God of hosts. The LORD is His memorable name.* Jacob sought this blessing with weeping.

c. **Unless You bless me:** According to his past, Jacob was always clever and sneaky enough so he never felt the need to trust in God alone. Now he can *only* rely on the blessing of God. Jacob’s determination to be blessed is demonstrated by his reluctance to release his opponent, even when his thigh is dislocated.

i. Jacob has been reduced to the place where all he can do is hold on to the LORD with everything he has. Jacob can’t fight anymore, but he can hold on. Not a bad place to be.

ii. Here, God is answering Jacob’s prayer in Genesis 32:9-12. But before Jacob could be delivered from the hand of his brother, he had to be delivered from his own self-will and self-reliance.

iii. Jacob thought the real enemy was outside of him, being Esau. The real enemy was his own carnal, fleshly nature, which had not been conquered by God.

4. (27-29) Jacob's name is changed, and he is a blessed man.
- a. **What is your name?** Jacob must have felt a sense of shame, admitting his name was "Jacob," meaning "con-man, sneaky, cheater." Yet, this was *who he was*, and Jacob had to admit to it.
    - i. We all want to name ourselves favorably. We say, "I am firm; you are obstinate; they are stubborn fools." God wouldn't allow Jacob to cover up his name.
  - b. **Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel:** The name **Israel** is a compound of two words: *sarah* (meaning, "fight," "struggle," or "rule") and *el* (meaning, "God"). Some take the name Israel to mean, "He who struggles with God" or "He who rules with God." But in Hebrew names, sometimes God is not the object of the verb but the subject. *Daniel* means "God judges" not "he judges God." So this principle shows us **Israel** most likely meant, "God rules."
    - i. From this point on, he will be called **Jacob** twice as often as he is called **Israel**. This shows that the past often follows you even after a spiritual break-through.
  - c. **For you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed:** Jacob **prevailed** in the sense that he endured through his struggle until God thoroughly conquered him. When you battle with God, you only win by losing and by not giving up until you know you have lost. This is how Jacob **prevailed**.
  - d. **Why is it that you ask about My name?** The *Man* probably refused to tell Jacob His name because He figured Jacob should already know it, and it turned out that Jacob *did* know exactly who this was.
  - e. **And He blessed him there:** Surely, this was the blessing of being defeated by God. It was the blessing of the passing of the old (Jacob) life, and the coming of a new (Israel) life. It may also have had to do with the great idea of the blessing of Abraham, and meeting Jacob's immediate needs for security in the midst of fear. Whatever Jacob needed, God's blessing provided at the moment.
5. (30-32) The memorials of this event.
- a. **Jacob called the name of the place Peniel:** Jacob named the place **Peniel** ("Face of God"), because he *did* know the name of the *Man* who wrestled with him. He was the same One who wrestled with Jacob all his life.
    - i. Jacob also understood it was only by God's grace and mercy he escaped from this episode with his life. No man should be allowed to wrestle with God and live, but God was gracious.
  - b. **He limped on his hip:** The second memorial was a perpetual limp. Jacob would remember his being conquered by God with every step he took for the rest of his life. This was a small price to pay for such a great gift.