

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 29

Chapter 32

Angels of God

Genesis 32:1 Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. ² And Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.

At the close of chapter 31, Laban left the camp in Galeed/Mizpah to return to Haran and Jacob was finally free to journey to his father's home in Beersheba. South of the Mountains of Gilead, Jacob met the angels of God. It was not his first meeting with angels; twenty years earlier he had met them in a dream where he saw them ascending and descending a stairway. It was at that meeting that the LORD promised to be with him and it was at that meeting that Jacob promised to be faithful to the LORD if He provided for him. On the Jabbok River, several day's journey from where he left Laban, Jacob encountered these angels. We must think of this event as a reminder to Jacob of his promise twenty years earlier. Jacob called the place "God's camp" and he named the place Mahanaim which means "two groups or two camps." Some commentators say the name was a reference to the two hosts present at that time; the angels made up one group of individuals and Jacob and all his entourage made up the second. Other commentators point to Jacob's action later in this passage where he divided his family into two groups in order to protect them from his brother. What Jacob actually meant by the name, we do not know.

Message to Esau

Genesis 32:3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. ⁴ He also commanded them saying, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; ⁵ and I have oxen and donkeys *and* flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight."

Jacob was within 90 miles of his brother's home, too close to just arrive unannounced. Jacob was a changed man but he did not know the heart of his brother from whom he had not heard a word in about 20 years. He was reaching out to his brother in the hope that Esau would accept him into his father's land without a fight.

During the 20 years that Jacob was in Haran, Esau had made the land of Seir his home. Seir is a mountain range that runs from the east side of the Dead Sea, down through the land of Edom, and halfway down the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Message from Esau

Genesis 32:6 **And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."**

Jacob's messengers did not return from Esau with a clear report of his intentions. The report that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men was not a good sign.

Jacob's Fear

Genesis 32:7 **Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; ⁸ for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape."**

Jacob was fearful that he could not defend his family against the 400 men of Esau. Jacob divided this family into two parties hoping that if Esau's anger brought destruction, perhaps half of his family would survive.

Jacob's PLAN 1a: Divide his family and possessions into two groups and separate them in hopes that at least half of the family will survive the wrath of Esau.

Jacob's Prayer

Genesis 32:9 **And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who didst say to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' ¹⁰ I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which Thou hast shown to Thy servant; for with my staff *only* I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. ¹¹ " Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me, the mothers with the children. ¹² "For Thou didst say, 'I will surely prosper you, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" ^{13a} So he spent the night there.**

Jacob's PLAN 1b: Pray! Ask God to approve of his plan and remind God of the promise He made to Jacob at Bethel 20 years before.

In his fear, in his distress, Jacob reached out to the only One Who could save him and his family, God. He had done all he knew to do to try to save his family on his own by dividing it into two groups. He remembered the LORD's promise at Bethel; the LORD had kept His part of the covenant and blessed Jacob while he was in Haran. Jacob had acquired a dozen descendants, significantly fewer than the grains of sand of the sea. If his family died, the LORD's promise would not have been complete. For that to happen, it was now Jacob's turn to fulfill his part of

the covenant. It was time for Jacob to trust the LORD God by turning his attention to Him in prayer. It is an example of the lesson we must all learn.

Jacob's Gift for Esau

Genesis 32:13b Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ And he delivered *them* into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between droves." ¹⁷ And he commanded the one in front, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these *animals* in front of you belong?' ¹⁸ then you shall say, '*These* belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.'" ¹⁹ Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, "After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; ²⁰ and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." ²¹ So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp.

Notice the bounty of the gift Jacob set aside for his brother. We do not know the percentage of Jacob's wealth that it represented, but if it was just 10%, it meant that Jacob, in the last six months that he was in Haran, acquired about 2,000 female goats, 200 male goats, 2000 ewes, 200 rams, 300 milking camels with colts, 400 cows, 100 bulls, 200 female donkeys, and 100 male donkeys – 5,500 animals!

Safety for Wives and Children

Genesis 32:22 Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ And he took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.

Jacob's PLAN 2: Pull the family back together and send them across the Jabbok for the night.

After his prayer time with the LORD and as night was beginning to fall, Jacob changed his plans for his family. They had been divided between two camps but at this time, he retrieved them and sent them together as a whole family across the ford of the Jabbok and had them camp there for the night with all his personal possessions. He then



The Ford in the River Jabbok

returned to the other side of the Jabbok to spend the night alone.

Jacob's Struggle Until Daybreak

Genesis 32:24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

25 And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

With whom did Jacob wrestle all night? Was it a real man in a human body? Was it an angel who had possessed a human body? Was it a spirit such as an angel who appeared to have a human body, but not really? With those questions in mind, let us ask questions about Jacob. Was Jacob just as mighty as the angel? Was he truly wrestling with this man in the flesh or was it in a dream? Was the struggle of his might or of his mind? Maybe Hosea can shed a little light on this passage.

Hosea 12:2-4 The LORD also has a dispute with Judah, And will punish Jacob according to his ways; He will repay him according to his deeds. ³ In the womb he took his brother by the heel, And in his maturity he contended with God. ⁴ Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; He wept and sought His favor.

Hosea identifies this man as an angel but also as God. He is also called the angel of the LORD. Could Jacob be stronger than the LORD God who made the heavens and the earth and holds it all in His hands? Surely not! Jacob must have been wrestling with the LORD in a dream where his will was struggling against the will of the angel of the LORD. When we think about our struggles with the LORD, such a case is not too farfetched. The LORD has spiritually wrestled with many who in the end fail to submit to Him and accept His wonderful salvation. Many have contended with the LORD and won, only temporarily in this life, but lost the battle in the next. The LORD had not prevailed in spiritual matters against this stubborn man named Jacob. At 91 years of age, he was a different man from the 71 year old version who deceived his father and stole his brother's blessing.

As daybreak drew near, the LORD dislocated Jacob's hip socket, not only in the dream but also in real life. Jacob awoke with his hip socket out of place. The LORD will not cross the boundaries He set in place for His creation. Jacob could be stubborn up to the point that the LORD would not cross to make Jacob submit; however, the LORD was willing to strike the socket and bring physical ailment to those with whom He wrestled. Physical ailments are temporal, spiritual ailments are eternal.

Name Change of Jacob

Genesis 32:26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ And he said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."

Even in physical pain from the dislocation of his hip socket during the spiritual battle, Jacob held on to the LORD and would not let go until he received something. Notice that he wanted from the LORD what he had stolen from his brother – a blessing, and then he would be willing to submit to the LORD.

It was time for Jacob to receive the blessing of a new name, Israel. The name means “God strives” or “God rules.” The passage says, **“for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.”** The Hebrew literally says, **“Thou hast had power with God and with man thou shalt also prevail.”** The literal interpretation sheds a greater light on the translation. Because Jacob had wrestled spiritually with God, he would also prevail over men. Through his descendants, specifically those of his son Judah, the Messiah will come Who will prevail over all of humanity as every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is LORD. How amazing it is that the LORD of creation wrestled with Jacob to prepare him and his family for the coming of the LORD as a babe to be the Savior and ultimate Judge.

Jacob Requests Name

Genesis 32:29 Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, " I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."

With the theological seed of the incarnation of the LORD in this passage, Jacob or anyone else could hardly have understood its meaning. Should Jacob know the name? What harm would have come if he had learned the name of the LORD God Almighty? We do not know. The LORD did not want him to know His name. The new name of Israel for Jacob was good enough from the LORD’s position. With that name came a new heart, a new nature that can come only from the LORD; it was not man made, it was God made.

That morning “Jacob named the place Peniel” which means the “face of God.” Jacob thought he had seen the face of Elohim (God) and lived to tell about it. Here we find a seed of doctrine that will continue in the Scripture but not without controversy. Moses asked to see the face of God and the LORD would not allow that to happen. According to the LORD, seeing the face of God would bring death; therefore, the LORD allowed Moses to see the back of God as He passed by. So how did Jacob see the “face of God” and live? Moses was awake and wanted to physically see the “face of God.” In this case, Jacob spiritually saw the “face of God” as he wrestled with Him in his dream and that is the difference.

Sinew Not Eaten

Genesis 32:31 Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. ³² Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew

of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

Jacob did not keep this story secret; his children knew the story and passed it down through all the generations and Moses included it here. This event in Jacob's life was so important that his descendants refused to eat the sinew of the hip because of it. The sinew consists of the tendons and connective tissues that hold the muscles to the bone. This passage is not addressing the eating of the sinew of the hip socket of humans; it is speaking of the tendons and connecting tissues of animals such as cows, lamb and goats.

This event affected Jacob for the rest of his life. He walked with a limp until he died.

Chapter 33

Jacob Sees Esau

Genesis 33:1 Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. ² And he put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last.

After wrestling with the LORD all night, Jacob was ready to wrestle with his brother if necessary. He had a new name, a new heart and a new nature. Still, he was concerned. Bilhah and Zilpah were positioned in the front of the family with Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Ashur. Leah took the next post with Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Dinah. Rachel was last with Joseph, the youngest.

Jacob Approached Esau

Genesis 33:3 But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

Jacob's PLAN 3: Jacob took the lead and led his entire family to meet Esau.

All the animals that Jacob had set aside for Esau as a gift were in the front of the parade with the family following. The rest of the herds were following the family. Jacob took the lead of the family and gave honor to Esau by halting seven times and bowing to the ground. Just the day before he had divided the entourage and the family into two camps in the hope that at least one half might be able to flee for safety from Esau. Then he changed his mind and put them together on the opposite side of the Jabbok for safety. This morning, he decided not to hide or protect anything from his brother and the 400 men. The night with the LORD must have given Jacob

the strength to know that if Esau attacked, he would not prevail against the one who wrestled with God.

Esau and Jacob

Genesis 33:4 Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, " Who are these with you?" So he said, " The children whom God has graciously given your servant." ⁶ Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. ⁷ And Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down.

Esau, 91 years old, did not walk; he ran to meet his limping brother and embraced him with kisses and tears. It was not the action of a man who still held a grudge for his birthright and his stolen blessing. He was a contrite man who had reconciled his life over the past 20 years and desperately missed his twin, not knowing his fate, not knowing his blessing, not knowing his curse, not knowing his destiny. The caravan was long and Esau met all the family in order as they passed by, each bowing in respect and honor to their father's brother.

The Gift

Genesis 33:8 And he said, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" And he said, " To find favor in the sight of my lord." ⁹ But Esau said, " I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own." ¹⁰ And Jacob said, "No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. ¹¹ "Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have plenty." Thus he urged him and he took *it*.

Esau wanted nothing but his brother back, yet, Jacob had a debt to pay and the LORD had given him more than enough to offer his brother a marvelous gift of 550 animals. Esau did not want the gift but Jacob insisted and he took it.

Brother's Journey to Seir

Genesis 33:12 Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you." ¹³ But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴ "Please let my lord pass on before his servant; and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir." ¹⁵ And Esau said, "Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But

he said, " What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." ¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.

Esau was ready to lead the way and take his brother to their father's home in Beersheba but Jacob could not move that fast with the remaining herds and family. Remember, the flocks were still young and many were still nursing. Jacob was back in the Promised Land and he wanted to take his time making the trip. Jacob promised Esau that he would see him again in the mountain range of Seir. Esau even offered to leave some of the 400 men to help with the flocks but Jacob had enough help, enough mouths to feed, enough hurts to heal, enough feelings to soothe. Esau returned home to the south but Jacob had plans to move west and ultimately return to Bethel before visiting his father.

Jacob Settled in Succoth

Genesis 33:17 And Jacob journeyed to Succoth; and built for himself a house, and made booths for his livestock, therefore the place is named Succoth.

Jacob moved northwest about 10 miles to a place he named Succoth which means "booths or tents." When we see the word "house" we think of brick or wood but that is not the case here. Jacob pitched their tents and established Succoth as their home for an undetermined time. It was 2242 years after the creation of Adam; Joseph was one year old and Dinah was next and could not have been more than three years old at this time. When we begin Genesis chapter 33, Dinah will be at least twelve to fifteen years old. Surely some of those years were spent here in Succoth before moving to Shechem and establishing a home there on land he would purchase.

Jacob Settled in Shechem

Genesis 33:18 Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. ¹⁹ And he bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. ²⁰ Then he erected there an altar, and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

The area called Shechem introduced in this passage was 20 miles west of Succoth and across the Jordan River. Hamor was a Hivite of Canaanite lineage and one of his son was Shechem. The village will be called Shechem after his death. By the time of Moses, the name of the village was well established and he used the name here to identify the location of this event.

Upon arriving and camping outside the village, Jacob made arrangements to purchase land from the sons of Hamor for "one hundred pieces of money." A problem arises with the translation of the word "money" in this passage. The Hebrew word is *kesitah* and it means lambs; therefore, the proper translation of this passage is that Jacob bought the land for "one hundred lambs."