

Genesis – Lesson 24

Jacob's Reconciliation With Esau

Read Genesis 32:1-23.

- (a) What phrases in Genesis 32:3-12 show Jacob's great *fear* of Esau? What did he do *at first* when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him?

It is obvious from this account that Jacob fears Esau; phrases like the following demonstrate this: 1) he sends messengers to Esau and indicates what he has achieved *"to find favor"* in Esau's sight (vv. 3-5), 2) when Esau says he is coming to meet Jacob, Jacob is *"greatly afraid and distressed"* (vv. 6-7), 3) Jacob assumes that Esau will attack the camp (v. 8), 4) Jacob turns to God and prays to be delivered from Esau's hand (vv. 9-12), 5) Jacob sends a gift to Esau to assuage him (vv. 13ff), and 6) Jacob stays at the rear of the caravan for protection (v. 16ff).

- (b) In what way was Jacob's fear connected to his *guilt*?

Jacob knows that Esau's anger against him is (partially) justified: if it were not for Jacob's deceit, Esau would have received Isaac's blessing. Even though Esau was not *qualified* to receive the blessing, nevertheless, Jacob knows that he used trickery to gain the upper hand and get both Esau's birthright and his blessing. So, he is afraid because he knows that what he has done drove a wedge between himself and his brother, and what he believes Esau is about to do is related to this guilt.

- (a) From Jacob's prayer in verses 9-12, list the phrases in which Jacob *praised God*, *confessed* his own sin, *thanked* God for his provisions, and *asked* for what he wanted.

In v. 9, Jacob *praised* God by speaking of him as the *"God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac,"* and by calling him *"Lord."* He *praised* him also by rehearsing what God had spoken to him (i.e. to return to Canaan), thus indicating his reverence of God. In v. 10, Jacob *confesses* that he is not worthy of the love and faithfulness of God, and he *thanks* God for the great prosperity that came from God's hand. Then, in v. 11, Jacob *requests* from God deliverance from the hand of Esau, reminding God that he had promised to protect him (see 2b below).

- (b) What were some of the *reasons* that Jacob gave to God of why He should spare his family?

Jacob gives two (2) primary reasons why God should act to protect him: 1) because Esau may come and attack his wives and children, and 2) because God had promised to do good to Jacob and to multiply his offspring as numerous as the sand of the sea. Jacob pleads with God to protect him because, if Esau attacked, the promises of God might be nullified.

- (c) How did Jacob's method of dealing with his brother *change* after praying?

Prior to his prayer, Jacob simply *pleaded* with Esau to be kind, sending messengers to him to try and placate him. After his prayer, Jacob became more *proactive*, sending a gift to Esau and then establishing a barrier between Esau and his close family in the event that the gift did not persuade Esau to back off. It is *possible* that Jacob believed that God would protect him now, and that the material prosperity he now possessed would be used by God to calm his brother and protect himself.

(d) Was Jacob's gift to Esau *costly*? How *many* animals were involved? Why does this *matter*?

The gift appears costly: Jacob sent 200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 milking camels (with their calves), 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys, and 10 male donkeys, a total of 550 animals (not counting their calves). Such a gift would appear to Esau (Jacob hoped!) as a *genuine* peace offering, designed to show Esau that Jacob was truly repentant and willing to reconcile with his brother.

Read Genesis 32:24-32 and Hosea 12:2-5.

3. (a) Who was the "*man*" that Jacob wrestled with (see also Hosea 12:2-5)? What was the *purpose* of this event? What does it have to do with Jacob's imminent *visit* with Esau?

Based on how Jacob refers to this man in v. 30, and what Hosea writes about *who* Jacob strove with (i.e. "*with God*"), it would appear that this "*angel*" (or "*man*") was actually a *theophany* of God himself, possibly a pre-incarnate appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity in human form. The purpose of this event was to *break Jacob*, even going so far as to maiming him with a hip injury (see 3b below) so that he would no longer see himself in pride, but would be humbled and contrite in spirit. This was particularly relevant to his impending meeting with Esau: instead of coming to Esau in a state of personal pride over all that he had accomplished, Jacob would (instead) now come to Esau with a sense of humility to reconcile with him.

- (b) List at least three *outcomes* of this event. Which do you consider most *significant*? Why?

The following were outcomes of Jacob wrestling with the man: 1) he was injured (a hip injury leading to a limp; v. 25), 2) he is given a new name by the man (Israel instead of Jacob; v. 28), 3) he is blessed by the man (v. 29), 4) Jacob saw the face of God and lived (v. 30), and 5) the Israelites gained a cultural habit of not eating the sinew that touches the hip socket (v. 32). Probably the most significant of this is *the changing of his name* (see also 3c below). Prior to this, Jacob was known as "one who cheats," but now he is known as "one who strives with God." The name change indicates a change of *focus*; instead of Jacob now thinking primarily about himself, Jacob will now think of others, and the people who will come from him will be far more important than he himself is. The limp will be a constant reminder of this change of focus; it will remind Israel that he is now directly connected to his God, and that his life is not his to run any longer.

- (c) Why does Jacob ask the *name* of the person he is wrestling? How is this connected to the changing of his own name to *Israel*?

Jacob, undoubtedly, knows that this "man" is far more than a man, and far more than an angel. It is highly likely that Jacob knows that his wrestling match is with God himself, and wishes to know the *name* of this God. Remember: the Israelites have just received (for the first time) the name of God (i.e. the I AM statement) on the mountain, and Moses demonstrates that this desire has been in place from long ago, men wanting to know the name of God. It is *in* this name that God's power is shown; the I AM statement indicates that God is self-existent and all-knowing, thus his name is associated with his power and position. The same is true of the name-change in Jacob: now, instead of being one who cheats and is filled with personal pride, Jacob will now be known as one who is humble and contrite, the patriarch of a family that God will personally know. Israel will now humbly walk with God, and God will keep his promises through him.

4. What are some ways that we “wrestle” with God? Why does God *allow* it? What is its *purpose*?

To “wrestle” with God is much the same as what happened with Jacob: specific events in life where we are *forced* to deal with God and his power over us. Such things include the *trials* and *disciplines* of life: sickness, setbacks, emotional letdowns, pain, disappointments, etc. In all of these, we are forced to “wrestle” with the *goodness of God*; does God really mean to work all things together for our good? Because we so often believe that we have the power in ourselves to accomplish whatever we want (without God), God will send such difficulties our way in order to *drive us back to him in faith*. Thus, such encounters are designed to *build* our faith, to make us trust more in God and less in ourselves. We are *rarely* useful to God when we are filled with personal pride, so God “wrestles” that pride out of us, and forces us to our knees before his purposes.

Read Genesis 33:1-20.

5. (a) What kind of *attitude* did Jacob now exhibit? Esau? Why the *change*?

Jacob now exhibits an attitude of *humility*. Esau, it would appear, *also* seems to be a changed man, for he runs to greet Jacob and they are reconciled. The change in Jacob is due to God’s work in him (see 3 and 4 above), but it *must also be true in Esau*. Esau had sworn to kill his brother, but now they appear to reconcile and Esau appears to be willing to reconcile *without the need of a gift* (see v. 9). Only God could have produced such a change of heart in Esau, and it may be *directly related to God answering Jacob’s prayer*.

- (b) What is the *parallel* in the reconciliation of these estranged brothers to the work of Jesus for us?

The story of the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau is a *beautiful* foreshadowing of what happens for us by faith in Jesus Christ: just as we are estranged from God, who has promised to destroy everything that is evil (including us), Christ has come to us to *break* us of our self-righteousness and lead us to a *humble* relationship with God. Instead of seeing ourselves as *capable* of creating a relationship with him through pleading or gifts, Christ comes to show us that only through a *humble* appearance before God will we be able to be restored to him. Jesus acts as our *mediator*, taking us gently before God, as those who have been *conquered* by him and *forced* to bow our knee before him. It is this *reaction* to God that ultimately leads to our reconciliation; Christ creates a way for us to come to God, and it is only by a humble act of faith that God will receive us.