

Lesson: Family Drama and the Promise Pt 3 (Gen 32:1-32)

Upon God’s instruction, Jacob left Laban. He took his family and their possessions back to the land of Canaan. But on the way, he had to encounter Esau. Jacob had left home, running for his life. So, Jacob feared the result of meeting his brother. But the encounter with Esau was in no way the most impactful meeting that occurred in this journey. Jacob had an appointment with God who was ready to radically transform him to fulfill his part in bringing the promise of salvation to the world.

Biblical Takeaways

1. *Jacob meets angels but still fears (Gen 32:1-8)*

- a. Jacob was able to break away from Laban, despite Laban’s protestations to remain. Along Jacob’s way, he encountered angels. He had seen angels before at Bethel (Gen 28:12-19). The sight of angels confirmed for Jacob that he was on the right path. He was where he was supposed to be. He called the place where he met the angels Mahanaim, which means two camps, signifying his increase in wealth.
- b. But Jacob knew he had to face his brother Esau. The last time he was around Esau, Esau was on the verge of killing him. In Jacob’s mind, a battle to the death was inevitable. In the intervening years, Esau had been able to establish a community around himself in Mount Seir which would come to be known as Edom. Jacob sent messengers ahead, they came back with a report that Esau knew of his coming and came with his own community. Jacob believed this would mean his end and the end of his family. But the angels signified God’s promise. Jacob did not heed the message.

2. *Jacob turns to God (Gen 32:9-12)*

- a. Jacob turned to God in prayer in his moment of distress. This is the proper protocol for distressed people. Whenever we find ourselves overwrought and overwhelmed, it is absolutely necessary that we turn to God in prayer.
- b. When we pray, we should imitate Jacob’s prayer. Several things to note: God was God for his grandfather and father. God told him to return to his country. All that he had came from God, he left with a staff and came back with a family and wealth. A cry for deliverance. A reminder to God of his promise of provision and protection.

3. *Jacob attempts to appease Esau (Gen 32:13-21)*: Jacob then sent his servants and presents ahead of him to appease his brother. He wanted Esau to know he was coming behind them. Jacob’s working theory was that if Esau destroyed (v. 8) one part of his company he would be able to escape with the other. Anxiety still drove Jacob despite his time in prayer.

4. *Jacob is Defeated by God and Israel wins (Gen 32:22-32)*

- a. Jacob then sent his family and his possessions ahead of him across the Jabbok.
- b. He thought he was by himself but the Lord answered his prayer. But it was not how he might have thought the answer might come. The text says he wrestled with a “man.” Remember God often appeared as a man or “men” as in Gen 18:2. This was a divine visitation, an incarnation of God before *the* incarnation in Jesus Christ.
- c. The wrestling continued all night until the break of day. The man did not overpower him but instead knocked his hip out of joint. The display of strength showed the power God

had over Jacob that he could injure him at any time. The man demanded to be let go but Jacob refused because he knew something divine was occurring. He said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” Jacob knew his struggle should produce something life altering.

- d. The man’s response shows the gravity of this moment. God had already changed the name of Abram to Abraham (17:5), named Isaac (17:19), and now Jacob’s name would identify with God and change his identity. He would be called Israel which means, God wins. Jacob in wrestling with God had his sense of identity defeated and he emerged with a new one, Israel. When God defeats us, we win. God declared Jacob had won with both God and people. Jacob won by being defeated so that Israel might win. His ways were no longer to be the same trickster huckster ways. He was God’s man completely now.
- e. A mystery remained because the Lord would not tell Jacob his name. That was not to be revealed, yet. But Jacob knew he had seen the “face” of God. This is only in a sense. He saw God’s face through the mask God has put on. We know to see the face of God meant certain death (Exod 33:20). Jacob’s walk was different from that day forward. He knew God could have killed him. To survive after wrestling with God, was an act of mercy in the first place.
- f. Israelites chose not to eat a certain part of the cattle because of what had occurred to Jacob.