

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study – Genesis 32:1 – 33:20

Read Genesis 32:1-21

-Why did Jacob send messengers to Esau?

- probably seeking reconciliation with, since he was moving back to the land
- perhaps an act of faith; could probably have not told Esau & gotten away with it for some time, since Bethel was approx 80+ miles from Seir

-How did Jacob respond to the news of Esau's approach? Why was Jacob afraid? Did he need to be?

- responded in fear and distress
- responded by praying to God for deliverance/safety and making preparations for the eventual meeting
 - separated his entourage into 2 groups, so 1 could escape if the other was attacked
 - sent ahead gifts of livestock (about 500 animals in total!) to try to pacify Esau
- Jacob feared Esau might attack him and his family to kill him, as he had threatened 20 years previously (Gen. 27:41)
 - Esau was coming at him with 400 men, presumably armed
- fear was a natural human response; yet he didn't need to be afraid
 - God had sent his angels to meet him (v.1-2)- not just one or two, but a whole camp; hence the name Mahanaim ('two camps')
 - cf. Elisha's experience in 2 Kings 6:8-17 or Psalm 34:7
 - It seems God did this to reassure Jacob of his presence and protection (cf. His promise at Bethel in Gen. 28:13-15, which Jacob cites in his prayer)

-What can we learn about how to pray from Jacob's prayer?

- proper attitude in prayer – Jacob had right view of who he was before God (i.e. unworthy of His kindness & faithfulness); approached God in humility, without pride; not demanding
- rooted in the character of God (e.g. kindness, faithfulness) and in trust in His provision
- based on God's promises, thus in alignment with the revealed will of God

-Given his prayer for deliverance, was Jacob wrong to make the preparations he did to meet Esau? (you might also consider Ezra 8:21-23,31 with Nehemiah 2:7-9; Proverbs 18:16 & 21:14)

- it was not necessarily wrong; depends on what/whom he was trusting in
- trusting in God sometimes means doing nothing further, but often does involve making other preparations in accordance with wisdom
 - God often works through intermediate means, though not always (e.g. He could pacify Esau heart without gifts, but could also change Esau's heart **through** the gifts he received)
 - e.g. for Ezra, trusting God meant refusing an armed escort; for Nehemiah, it didn't – God protected them through the means of the king's decree and soldiers who accompanied him
- Jacob's actions in sending gifts ahead bring to mind the wisdom provided in Prov 18:16 & 21:14
- in part, perhaps also trying to make restitution for what he had done to Esau

Read Genesis 32:22-32

-Who was the man who came to wrestle with Jacob? If he was able to cripple Jacob so easily, why did he wrestle all night with Jacob?

- God appearing as a man to wrestle Jacob (v.30 – Jacob says he saw the face of God)
 - Jacob wanted to be alone, but God sought him out (v.24)
 - condescension on God's part; to take on form of a human, without special 'superhuman' strength – much like Jesus Christ
 - allowed Jacob to wrestle with him
- wrestling match appears to have been external, physical outworking of Jacob's inward struggles
 - Jacob facing seemingly impossible situation → could not go back to Laban, but seemingly could not go forward because Esau was coming with 400 men, perhaps to attack & destroy him
 - even though he had tried to send gifts, he could not be sure whether they would pacify Esau (v.20)
 - up to this point, he had gotten ahead by scheming, plotting, deceiving – in line with his name, Jacob – but now, all that seemed like it wouldn't/couldn't get him anywhere; at the core, these were ultimately struggles against God
 - knew that God had been watching over him, but not yet fully yielded, not yet fully trusting God to protect him
 - I think God allowed Jacob to struggle/wrestle with all his might and come to the end of his wits/strength, before completely breaking him, so that he could do nothing more than to cling to God and beg for his favor (cf. Hos. 12:2-4) – i.e. utter dependence on God

-In what sense did Jacob overcome in his struggle with God and men? (you might also consider Hosea 12:2-4; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Matthew 5:3-4)?

- in one sense, he prevailed against the man, who could not overpower Jacob; he overcame because God allowed/enabled him to (even though He showed that He could cripple Jacob in an instant)
 - Jacob had also struggled against Esau & Laban (and prevailed)
- on another level, he didn't seem to prevail at all, since the man/God crippled him
 - but was brought to utter dependence on God – could only cling to God and weep and seek His blessing
 - had to completely acknowledge that blessing & salvation came from God (he had acknowledged this before, though perhaps only half-heartedly, as shown by his deceiving of Laban by fleeing without telling him – 31:20)
 - in dependence on God, would know and experience his strength, power, and deliverance (cf. 2 Cor 12:7-10), thus truly overcome (i.e. would know & experience God's strength in his weakness)
- he did not overcome God, but rather, overcame in the sense that he was able to get through the struggle and move into complete dependence on God (the only way he could ultimately end that struggle)

-What is the significance of Jacob receiving a new name?

- Israel – means 'he struggles with God' or 'God struggles (for him)'
- signifies him receiving a new identity, becoming a new person (see above re: his struggle with God)
- no longer to be Jacob, the one who deceives/supplants/grasps the heel, but Israel, the one who struggles and overcomes

Read Genesis 33:1-20

-Do you find Esau's welcome of Jacob surprising? Why or why not?

- yes, considering how Jacob had treated him and the depth of his anger previously; some people can hold grudge for long time
- no, since God was working on Jacob's behalf, and He is able to change the hearts of men – could even have changed Esau's heart on his way to meet Jacob
- also, passage of time, and Esau's personality could have been other factors
- Esau also a worldly/godless man; could be that he was satisfied since he had prospered materially (33:9), thus the 'blessing' really meant nothing to him given his material prosperity and there was no reason any more to hold a grudge

-How has Jacob's attitude towards Esau changed from before he fled to Laban, and why?

- had previously seen Esau as someone from whom he needed to get something he wanted, by whatever means possible
- now insists on giving to Esau instead of taking from him
- in part, no doubt, because he was relieved that Esau welcomed him, and wanted to seal the reconciliation
- but also no doubt in large part because of the 20 years of discipline he had suffered under Laban
- now sees God's grace in his life (v.5, 11) and understands that he succeeds not by his own cunning, but by God's grace

-What did Jacob mean by saying that seeing Esau's face was like seeing the face of God?

- perhaps an element of flattery towards Esau
- but probably saying that he sees that God has answered his prayer for deliverance – to see God's face is to receive/experience his favor

-What do Jacob's actions in v.12-20 tell us about him?

- he appropriates the new name God gave him and sees God as his God (v.20)
 - but he is still called Jacob and still seems to struggle with the tendencies of the old man
 - deceived Esau again by saying that he will follow Esau to Seir, with no intention of actually doing so
 - incomplete obedience to God by not returning to Bethel – God's call was for Jacob to return to Bethel to fulfill the vow he made to God there (28:20-22, cf. 31:13 and clarified in 35:1)
 - instead builds booths for his cattle in Succoth and settles in Shechem, which is just a little short of Bethel; even tries to set up an altar named *EI Elohe Israel* (God, the God of Israel)
 - this will result in some disastrous consequences (Gen. 34)
- a picture in many respects of the struggle between the old man and the new man faced by every believer

Aliens and strangers in the world

Alone in the night, Jacob faced a painful crisis. Having fled from Laban, he could not turn back, yet going forward seemed to mean certain destruction at the hands of Esau and his 400 men. Having relied for so much of his life on his own strength and his own cunning to prevail against others, he now faced a seemingly impossible situation. At the core, however, Jacob's struggles with men were in reality a reflection of his struggle against God. In the midst of this struggle, God graciously (and mysteriously!) visited Jacob, taking on human form and allowing Jacob wrestle against Him with all his might, then completely breaking him so that he could do nothing more but cling to God and, weeping, beg for His favor (Hosea 12:4). In his brokenness, Jacob clung tenaciously to God as his only hope and prevailed, receiving God's blessing and a new identity.

In the same way, we today experience God's favor and receive a new identity only when we cling, completely broken and completely dependent, to God come in the flesh – Jesus Christ. Likewise, in our daily walk, we overcome only as we are rid of self-reliance and learn to rely only on Jesus Christ to enable us to live for Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit. As 2 Corinthians 12:9 reminds us, His grace is sufficient for us, and His power is made perfect in our weakness.

Are there circumstances in your life that tempt you to despair? Could these be reflections of a struggle in your life against God? Give these over completely to the Lord and come, broken, to cling to Him alone.