

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 25

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 32-33

INTRODUCTION

In life when we do something wrong, we harbour feelings of fear and guilt. And sometimes the moment comes when we have to face up to our wrong doings. Chapters 32 and 33 present some valuable insights into the manner that God deals with us, the changes that should take place in us, and the manner in which we should conduct ourselves.

OUTLINE

A. The Angels of God Met Jacob (32:1-2).

1. God's angels met Jacob on his way back to Palestine (v.1).
2. Jacob saw them and he named the place Mahanaim (v.2).

B. Jacob Sent Messengers to His Brother Esau (32:3-8).

1. Jacob sent messengers before him to meet Esau (v.3).
2. Jacob instructed his messengers to inform Esau of his return (vv.4-5)
3. Jacob's messengers returned with the information that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men (v.6).
4. Jacob was afraid. He divided his entourage into two camps (vv.7-8).

C. Jacob Prayed for Deliverance from Esau (32:9-12).

1. Jacob called upon the LORD God (v.9).
2. Jacob acknowledged that he was unworthy of all the blessings that God had given him (v.10).
3. Jacob pleaded with God to deliver him from Esau (v.11).
4. Jacob reminded God of His promise to do him good (v.12).

D. Jacob Prepared to Meet Esau (13-23).

1. Jacob camped there for the night (v.13).
2. Jacob prepared 550 animal gifts for Esau (vv.14-15).
3. Jacob instructed his servants to present the gifts to Esau by stages (v.16).
4. Jacob gave specific instructions to his servants regarding the manner in which they should

present the gifts to Esau with the hope that Esau would accept him peaceably (vv.17-21)

- Jacob sent all his family across the Jabbok River (vv.22-23).

E. Jacob Wrestled with A “Man” (32:24-32).

- Jacob was alone. He wrestled with a “man” until dawn (v.24).
- The “man” crippled Jacob because he could not overcome him (v.25).
- Jacob refused to release the “man” until he was blessed (v.26).
- The “man” renamed Jacob “Israel” (vv.27-28).
- Jacob asked the “man” for his name. The “man” marvelled at his request, but blessed him (v.29).
- Jacob named the place “Peniel” (v.30).
- Jacob crossed over Peniel at sunrise, but he was limping (v.31).
- From then, the children of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh because of Jacob’s experience (v.32).

F. Jacob and Esau Met (33:1-11).

- Jacob saw Esau coming with his men (v.1a).
- Jacob divided his family (vv.1b-2).

- Jacob bowed himself to the ground as he approached Esau (v.3).

- Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him (v.4)

- The conversation between Jacob and Esau (vv.5-11).

- Esau wanted to know who the people with Jacob (v.5a) were.

- Jacob introduced them as they came forward to greet Esau (vv.5b-7).

- Esau wanted to know why Jacob sent the droves of animals (v.8a).

- Jacob explained that they were for Esau that he might find grace in his sight (v.8b).

- Esau expressed his sufficiency and told Jacob to keep the animals (v.9).

- Jacob successfully persuaded Esau to accept the gift of animals (vv.10-11).

G. Jacob and Esau Parted Company (33:12-17).

- Esau suggested that they travelled together (v.12)

- Jacob politely turned down the suggestion because they might slow Esau down (vv.13-14).

- Esau suggested leaving some of his people to help Jacob (v.15a).

4. Jacob again turned down the suggestion saying that it was not necessary (v.15b).
5. Esau returned to Seir (v.16).
6. Jacob journeyed to Succoth (v.17).

H. Jacob Pitched His Camp in Shechem (33:18-20).

1. Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem (v.18).
2. Jacob bought a piece of land from Hamor (v.19).
3. Jacob built an altar and named it "El-elohe Israel" (v.20).

COMMENTARY

God's Ministering Angels

On his return journey, Jacob met and saw the angels of God. No other details were given about this meeting. It must have reminded Jacob of how he met God's angels at Bethel when he left home for Haran. Then he was uncertain of what lay ahead. Now he faced another problem—Esau. Esau had previously vowed to kill him and that was the main reason why Rebekah sent Jacob away to Laban under the pretext of getting a wife. He feared that Esau might still harbour hatred against him. He had not heard from Esau in the past twenty years. His fear is natural and obvious. Jacob might have wondered whether God would sustain him as He had originally promised at Bethel. Therefore this meeting with the angels of God served to comfort and encourage him.

Fearing and Despairing

Immediately after this experience, Jacob sent messengers before his entourage to meet his brother Esau in the land of Seir, which was Edom. He instructed his messengers to address Esau as "lord" (Hebrew, *adonai*), and to describe Jacob as his brother's servant (32:4). This was an attempt to tone down the blessing, which Jacob had received from Isaac their father. Isaac's blessing on Jacob had made him lord over his brother (27:29). Now Jacob hoped that Esau would be gracious and forgiving towards him (32:5).

The messengers returned and reported that Esau was already on his way to meet him with four hundred men (6). News spread like wild fire. Esau must have heard that his brother Jacob was returning to the land. When Jacob's messengers met him, he did not give the messengers any message for Jacob. Jacob was terrified and worried. His immediate thought was that Esau was bent on killing him. He divided his entourage into two camps so that if Esau smote the first group, the second group would be able to escape. Although his action may be described as "justifiable prudence," it was on a lower level. God had promised that He would be with him. God had promised to multiply his seed. God had clearly directed him to return to the land of his fathers and kindred. God had given him encouragement through the meeting with the angels. But Jacob, true to his character, prepared to face the threat using his own plans.

Praying Always Without Ceasing

However, Jacob did right by turning to God. His prayer can serve as a teaching model for us. His call to God as the God of Abraham and of Isaac was not mere formality. It denoted the true God who had in the past blessed and protected Abraham and Isaac— they had prospered and lived to a ripe old age. Although the situation was urgent, he took time to address God appropriately (no trace of familiarity).

He then addressed God as LORD, the personal name of God, who keeps His covenant promises. He recalled that the LORD had commanded him to return to his country and to his kindred, and that He “will deal well” with him (v.9). He had obediently done what the LORD had commanded him to do. Jacob now rested on God’s promise to protect and prosper him just as God had protected him from Laban.

Jacob adopted the right attitude before God in prayer. He humbled himself and confessed his own unworthiness. He acknowledged that all his wealth and family were from God who had showed His covenanted love and faithfulness to him (32:10).

In the petition proper, he called upon God to deliver him “from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau” (32:11a). The repetition of the phrase indicates his earnest plea. Jacob openly admitted that he was afraid of Esau who might smite him and his family (32:11b). In verse 12, Jacob again claimed God’s promise to do him good and bless him with many children. Although gripped by fear and guilt at this point, Jacob totally exercised his faith in God to save him. His prayer was short and straight to the

point. If there was anything missing in his prayer, it is the failure to ask God what he must do. The following account relates what he had planned.

Praying and Preparing

Jacob prepared to present Esau with a generous gift. He took 200 female goats and 20 male goats, 200 female lambs and 20 rams, 30 female camels with their young, 40 cows and 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys, and 10 male donkeys. Jacob instructed his servants to arrange them by groups and to tell Esau “It is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us” (32:17, 18).

Jacob’s stratagem was criticised by some as evidence of his lack of faith. Having prayed to God for protection and deliverance, he then resorted to his own plan. Some went to the extent of saying that while he was praying his mind was “undoubtedly continuing to work on plans that might divert his brother’s antagonism.”¹ Others, who are more kind, approve of the gifts made to Esau and the fact that Jacob exercised human responsibility of being prudent. Prayer does not negate necessary action.²

Blessed Crippling

Jacob had sent his family ahead of him across the river Jabbok (32:22-23). He wanted to be alone probably to think through the whole thing. He had, in a way, stripped himself of all his possessions and prestige so as to focus on the problem at hand. But he was not

¹ James M. Boice, *Genesis*, volume 2:328.

² H.C. Leupold, *Genesis*, volume II:869.

alone. A “man” wrestled with him until the morning (32:24).

The man changed Jacob’s name to Israel and declared that Jacob as a prince had “power with God and with men and prevailed” (28). That was sufficient proof to Jacob that he had seen God face to face (30). Many years later, when Jacob recalled this incident, he called the man “the Angel” (Genesis 48:16). The prophet Hosea, referring to this incident, called him God, and also “the angel.”³ The “man” is none other than the pre-incarnate Second Person of the Godhead, the LORD Jesus Christ. This pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in human form before his birth in Bethlehem is theologically referred to as Christophany.

Jacob prevailed against the “man.” In order to win over Jacob, the “man” dislocated his thigh. But Jacob held on and would not let go unless “he” blessed him. The “man” changed his name to “Israel,” which means “God strives” or “may God strive.”⁴ Jacob commemorated his night of struggling with God by naming that place Peniel which means literally “the face of God” for as Jacob put it, “for I have seen God face to face” (32:30). He left the place the next morning. From then, the children of Israel do not eat the sinew (a tendon). This custom is still practised today. Jews today avoid eating the interior cord and nerve of the hind quarter of animals.⁵

³ KJV Hosea 12:3 He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: 4 Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him *in Bethel*, and there he spake with us;

⁴ Baldwin and Davis respectively.

⁵ John J. Davis, p. 256.

The blessing that Jacob received from the “man” was the change of his name. What is in a name? A name change means a change of life and status.⁶ For Jacob, the name was a tremendous blessing. He had prayed for deliverance from Esau. His prayer was answered. God had come to him as close as was possible and he had seen God face to face. Jacob was a changed man from this point onwards. Now crippled in his natural strength, Jacob became bold in faith. The spiritual lesson is that we must not do anything in our own strength and wisdom. The just shall live by faith. If we have faith even as little as a mustard seed, we can move mountains. Without faith we cannot please or approach God. How then can God be on our side?

Reconciliation

The moment of truth had come. Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with four hundred men (33:1). Jacob divided his family. He placed the handmaids and their children first, then Leah and her children, and lastly Rachel and Joseph (2). Then Jacob went on ahead of them and bowed himself seven times as he approached Esau. On seeing him, Esau ran to meet him and embrace him. He fell on Jacob’s neck, kissed him, and wept! Esau asked two questions: “Who are those with thee?” (5), and “What meanest thou by all this drove which I met?” (8). When Jacob explained that the animals were gifts,

⁶ KJV 2 Kings 23:34 And Pharaohnechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there.

KJV 2 Kings 24:17 And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

Esau replied that he had enough of his own (9). However, Jacob successfully persuaded Esau to accept them because God had been kind to him and blessed him and that he too had enough for his family (33:10, 11).

Esau then suggested that they carry on the journey together. But Jacob parried the suggestion by giving the excuse that his children and the young of the flocks could not catch up with the pace. Jacob further added that he would carry on slowly with his family and all his cattle until he reached Esau in Seir (33:13, 14). Esau offered to leave some of his men with Jacob but Jacob replied that there was no need for that.

Esau then went on ahead and returned to Seir. Jacob instead journeyed to Succoth, where he stayed for a while. Then he crossed the Jordan River and proceeded to Shechem. In Shechem, he bought a piece of land from Hamor and pitched his tents. He also built an altar and called it “God-the God of Israel” (33:20).

The central theme of this episode is the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. Jacob’s conduct gets two different interpretations. One view is that Jacob acted wisely in sending the gifts to Esau. Jacob was seen as the one seeking forgiveness and confessing his guilt, although this is not shown in the text. The other view is that Jacob was still using his own strength to protect himself and his family as seen by his division of his family, his bowing, and his gifts.

Let us weigh the two views. Jacob arranged his family in “climactic order”—the most beautiful and the best loved come last. As for himself he went

before them and met Esau, putting himself in grave danger, which showed his courage. His bowing to the ground seven times (such bowing was accorded only to kings) indicated his deep respect for his brother. It was not an indication that Esau was to rule over him. So there is no reason to doubt his sincerity and courage.⁷ Moreover, the promises of God do not negate the responsibility of man to help himself. God’s sovereignty does not dispense with human responsibility.

The second interpretation views that Jacob’s division and arrangement of his family showed his continued attitude of favouritism. He was willing to sacrifice the less loved ones.

Bowing seven times sought to remove from Esau’s thinking that he had come back to be lord over him. It was God’s purpose and plan that he was chosen and not Esau. Jacob knew that. So he was not acting in accordance to the revealed will of God. He could assume his God-given lordship over his people, and yet be humble and show a deep respect for his brother. But bowing seven times to the ground, like a servant, is not the way one meets a brother after a long separation. He was still gripped by fear and guilt. This act of his was not God honouring. In contrast, Esau’s greeting of his long lost brother was most natural, warm, and sincere.

Next, Jacob was not sincere when he told Esau that he would follow his brother to Seir, but at his own pace (33:13). Instead of going to Seir, which was south of where they met, Jacob proceeded west to Succoth. Then he crossed the river Jordan and went to

⁷ Leupold, 886.

Shechem. Jacob still could not speak openly and honestly.

PRACTICAL VALUE

There are merits in both interpretations. This writer believes that Jacob had changed after his experience with God at Peniel. And as with every person who has a personal saving encounter with Christ, he becomes a "new creature." But change does not come instantly. Change comes gradually. Our sinful habits and ways take time to change. It is a process, but change will effect, if he truly believes. Jacob truly believed and as we see later, he did change. One should not be too harsh in assessing Jacob's character and conduct; neither should one be too kind. AMEN

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LESSON 25

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Chapter 32 &33

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Genesis 32:1-2; Psalm 148:1-5; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:13-14.

Tuesday: Genesis 32:3-8; Romans 14:17-19; Proverbs 16:17; Matthew 5:9.

Wednesday: Genesis 32:9-23; Matthew 7:7-11; Acts 27:22-38;

Thursday: Genesis 32:24-32; 1Kings 18:36-44; Psalms 88:1-18.

Friday: Genesis 33:1-20; Hebrews 10:24-25; Psalm 133:1-3.

Discussion Questions

1. Based on the readings above, list the things you know about angels.

2. What was Jacob's response to his encounter with the angels of God?

3. How does fear affect our relationship with others? Illustrate with Jacob's experience.

4. What are the things that we can do to help one another deal with fear?

7. From Genesis 32:9-23, do you think that Jacob believed that God would deliver him?

5. What can we learn from Jacob's prayer that will help us in our own prayers?

8. How did Jacob understand his experience with the "man" who wrestled with him?

6. Describe how Jacob planned to disarm Esau with his gifts. How would you evaluate his plan? Was he consistent or inconsistent with his prayer?

9. In what way did Jacob-Israel act like the old deceiver Jacob, and in what way did he exhibit spiritual growth?
