

Genesis 32:1-23

Introduction

A. God reassured Jacob of his presence by sending angels to meet him (32:1-2)

1. On two prior occasions, God assured Jacob that He would be with him wherever he went:
 - a. One was when he first left Canaan and God appeared to him in a vision (READ 28:13-15)
 - b. The second was when God told Him to go back to Canaan (READ 31:3)
2. Now, as he's traveling back to Canaan he witnessed evidence of this promise when he met God's angels (READ 32:1-2):
 - a. We are told very little about this meeting—we don't know how many angels there were, whether they were physically present or if he met them in some sort of vision or dream, whether they said anything to him, or even what their purpose was
 - b. The word for "camp" can also mean encampment or army so when Jacob declared, **"This is God's camp"** he was probably referring to the angels as God's army
 - c. The fact that he calls the place "Mahanaim" which means "two camps" suggests there may have been quite a multitude of angels, enough to make up two companies of angels
3. Since we're not told why the angels met Jacob we are left to speculate, but it seems logical that they met him as a visible representation of God's promise to be with him
4. Takeaway: God's promise to be with us includes His angels watching over us
 - a. Exodus 23:20: God promised Israel that he would send an angel ahead of them during the Exodus: **"Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."**
 - b. Psalm 34:7: **"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them."**
 - c. Psalm 91:11: **"For he will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways."**
 - d. Matthew 18:10: **"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven."**
 - e. Hebrews 1:14: The author of Hebrews refers to angels as **"ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation"**
 - f. Hebrews 13:2: even calls on us to **"not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."**

B. Even with this amazing reminder of God's presence with him, Jacob was still greatly afraid and distressed over meeting Esau (READ 32:3-8)

1. As Jacob approached home, he sent messengers to Esau in what appears to be an attempt at reconciliation:
 - a. If you remember, Jacob fled home because Esau was seeking to kill him after Jacob deceived Isaac into giving him the familial blessing instead of Esau
 - b. There are a few reasons why I believe this was an attempt at reconciliation by Jacob:
 - 1) He sent messengers to Esau even though Esau wasn't living in Canaan at the time (where Jacob was headed), and he wouldn't even be passing anywhere close to where Esau was; Esau was living in Seir (Edom) which was over 100 miles away southeast of the Dead Sea
 - 2) When Jacob sent the messengers to Esau, he referred to Esau as **"my lord"** and himself as Esau's **"servant"** (4): **"Thus you shall say to my lord, to Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob...'"** – this is interesting because when Isaac blessed Jacob he made him master over his brothers, and then told Esau that he would serve Jacob (Genesis 27:29, 40)
 - 3) Some have suggested that by informing Esau of all the possessions he had acquired (5) Jacob may have been suggesting that he would share those possessions with Esau (otherwise, what would be the intent?)
 - 4) Lastly, Jacob clearly stated that he was hoping Esau would be gracious to him and no longer seeking to kill him (5b): **"that I may find favor in your sight."**
2. However, Jacob's hopes of reconciliation appear dashed when the servants return:
 - a. The servants reveal that Esau is coming to meet with Jacob, but he's not coming alone; he has with him four hundred men
 - b. They don't say why Esau is coming or what his motives are, but Jacob assumed the worst and **"was greatly afraid and distressed"** (7)
 - c. So, he divided up all of his family, servants, and animals into two groups, thinking that if Jacob attacked one, the other could escape (8)
3. Takeaway: Even though we know the promises God has made to us, sometimes we still struggle with fear and maybe even distress:
 - a. At the risk of being too hard on Jacob, his fear and distress over Esau came immediately on the heels of being met by an army of God's angels—maybe two armies!
 - b. God reassured him on two previous occasions that He would be with him and protect him
 - c. I don't know about you, but I'm not so sure I fair much better than Jacob at times
 - d. Even though I know the promises of God, I sometimes find myself struggling with fear or distress over different events or circumstances in my life
 - e. I am going to go out on a limb here and suggest that even though the Bible repeatedly tells us not to fear, fear in and off itself is not always a sin:
 - 1) Clearly, when fear causes us to distrust the LORD or leads us away from Him, it's sin

- 2) However, what about when we respond to our fear appropriately by drawing near to the LORD, calling out to and trusting Him?
- 3) Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, is a good example; when he learned the Moabites and the Ammonites were coming to attack Judah, his fear drove him to seek God's help (2 Chronicles 20:3): **"And Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek Yahweh, and called for a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to seek help from Yahweh; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek Yahweh."**
- 4) We see something similar with Jacob in the next set of verses

<p>C. Jacob responded to his fear by praying to God for protection (READ 32:9-12)</p>

1. We see here that Jacob's fear led him to pray and seek the LORD's help:
 - a. He began and ended his prayer with a focus on God's promises (RE-READ 32:9, 12)
 - b. He expressed humility and thankfulness for God's loyalty and faithfulness to him: He considered himself a **"servant"** of God and **"unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness"** God had shown him
 - c. He cried out to God for help (RE-READ 32:11):
 - 1) This wasn't just a request from Jacob, but a pleading, a cry for help
 - 2) He stated specifically that he feared Esau would come and attack him and his family
 - 3) So, he cried out to God, **"Deliver me, I pray"**:
 - a) The word translated here as **"I pray"** isn't the Hebrew word for pray, but rather a particle of entreaty or exhortation which is often used to add a sense of urgency to one's request
 - b) It's most often translated as **"please"** like the ESV does here: **"Please deliver me from the hand of my brother..."**
 - c) So, Jacob's prayer should be understood here as an urgent plea for God's help
2. Takeaway: Jacob's prayer is a good example for us when we struggle with things like anxiety, stress, fear, or even despair:
 - a. When we struggle with such things we should focus on God's promises:
 - 1) They say there are between 7000 and 8000 promises made by God in the Bible
 - 2) They include things like forgiveness, salvation, protection, providing for our needs, help when we need it, that He will never leave us or forsake us, etc.
 - 3) No matter what we struggle with, there is a Bible verse or passage that applies to it (if not directly, indirectly), and there's likely a promise from God associated with it
 - b. When we struggle with such things we should remember God's faithfulness and loyalty to us:
 - 1) Deuteronomy 7:9 says, **"Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments."**

- 2) According to 2 Timothy 2:13, this is true even when we struggle to be faithful to Him: **“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”**
- c. Finally, it goes without saying that when we struggle with such things we should cry out to God for help:
 - 1) I often find with myself that I wallow in my struggle for a while before it dawns on me that I haven’t prayed or called out to God!
 - 2) Not only does God promise to hear our plea but He promises to give us peace during the struggle **“which surpasses all comprehension, [and] will guard [our] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:7)

Struggling myself with being anxious for a couple weeks while working on this passage: place for Kimberly to ride out storm, stuff she needs to do for bank/license/car, my blood sugar/cholesterol/sleep apnea/foot, jaw, KS office in April with Grand Cayman trip, and water leak issues at home, etc.

D. Jacob sent gifts to Esau hoping he would accept him (32:13-22)

1. Many suggest Jacob’s actions here demonstrated a lack of faith and trust in the LORD:
 - a. He is clearly afraid of meeting Esau and sends the gifts in the hopes that Esau will accept him (he states both of these directly)
 - b. The size of the gift was substantial: 550 animals
 - c. Even the way he went about sending the gift on ahead of him was apparently a way to illicit maximum impact—sending it in stages, one group of animals followed by another followed by another, etc.
 - d. Most translations suggest that Jacob did this to **“appease”** or **“pacify”** (v. 20) Esau so he would accept Jacob
 - e. Some have gone as far as to say that Jacob was attempting to bribe or buy off Esau
2. However, another option is that Jacob’s actions were a genuine attempt at reconciliation and atonement:
 - a. Jacob reflected a tremendous amount of humility to and respect for Esau in not just this passage, but when he actually met Esau later, including repeatedly referring to Esau as his lord, himself as Esau’s servant, and bowing down to him seven times when he met him (33:3)
 - b. When we interpret Jacob’s actions and his comments in v. 20 in light of this, it’s possible they reflect an attempt at atonement:
 - 1) In a theological sense, atonement refers to making amends for sin in order to be reconciled with God, and this could only be accomplished by God sending Jesus to pay the penalties for our sin through death on the cross
 - 2) In a secular sense, atonement simply means to make amends for some wrongdoing through some appropriate action or gesture—in the ANE, it was common to make amends by giving gifts and we see this when Abigail brought

gifts to David to make amends for her husband Nabal's disrespectful treatment of David's men

- 3) This appears to be Jacob's intent here:
- a. He had wronged Esau by using manipulation and deception to acquire the birthright and blessing, which left Esau with none of the family estate or inheritance and a whole lot of anger and ill-will against Jacob
 - b. The phrase "**I will appease him**" (20) is more literally "**I will cover his face**" which appears to be a Hebrew idiom: the phrase is only used here in the OT so it's hard to know exactly what it means, but there was a similar ANE Assyrian and Babylonian idiom, "**to wipe the face**", which meant to remove someone's anger from their face or countenance
 - c. The phrase "**perhaps he will accept me**" is more literally "**perhaps he will lift my face**" which was another Hebrew idiom: Most English translations render this "perhaps he will accept me" as the NASB, however some like the CSV along with some commentaries render stay with the atonement theme and render it "perhaps he will forgive me"
 - d. Rather than see Jacob's gifts as a bribe or attempt to buy off Esau, it's more likely they were an attempt at reconciliation and atonement—especially in light of the fact that when Jacob finally meets up with Esau, Esau tries to reject the gifts but Jacob insisted that Esau share in part of the prosperity that God had given him (READ 33:8-12)
3. Takeaway: when dealing with difficult situations or our own anxieties and fears, even though we pray we should still do what we can from a human perspective to address them:
- a. In his fear, Jacob didn't just pray to God for protection, but did what he could to make atonement and seek reconciliation with Esau
 - b. This was reasonable and didn't show a lack of faith or trust in God; it was simply common sense
 - c. Did Paul show a lack of faith when he mentioned his Roman citizenship to avoid being tortured, or when he appealed to Caesar hoping to get a fairer trial (Acts 25)?
 - d. Even when we pray, God expects us to do what's reasonable and acceptable as long as it doesn't involve sin

Man on roof during flood praying for God to help him
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