

Genesis Bible Study 18

The Blessing Reaffirmed

taken from

***Salvation for the Social Order: For Those Who Haven't Read the Bible
and for Those Who Think Religion is Merely a Private Matter***

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Reading: Genesis 32-33

Notes

When his 14 years of service to Uncle Laban were finished, Laban paid for his services. There was constant tension between Jacob and Laban, and his brothers-in-law felt that Jacob was getting too much of their inheritance. One day when Laban was out of town, Jacob took his family and possessions and left. Upon arriving home, Laban was furious to discover that his son-in-law was gone. He chased after Jacob and caught up with him after three days. The last night Laban had a dream in which God warned him not to injure Jacob. The next day he and Jacob spent the time complaining to each other about their bad experience, and listening to each other; so that in the end they parted as friends. This was the last time Jacob or his family talked with their Mesopotamian relatives. You can read the details in Genesis 31.

Jacob knew that he would soon have to meet his brother, Esau; so he sent a messenger to Esau, requesting a meeting together. Immediately Esau gathered an army of 400 men to come after Jacob. When Jacob heard that Esau was coming with a large army, he was terrified. You can read the complete story in Genesis 32-33. In that story he first sent a succession of extravagant gifts to his brother, and then when Esau arrived, he bowed in front of his brother, giving Esau the extreme respect that a disobedient vassal would give to a king. In this way he returned to Esau the honor that he had previously stolen, and the two were reconciled.

The most important part of the story is Genesis 32:22-32. It took place the night before Jacob met his brother. It is the most important event in Jacob's life.

Genesis 32:22-32 Condensed in Simple English

Jacob took his wives, maids, and children across the stream and then returned to spend the night alone. That night a man came and wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man was unable to defeat Jacob, the man touched the socket of Jacob's thigh, and the thigh became dislocated.

The man said, "Let me go, because the dawn is here." Jacob answered, "No, you must first bless me."

The man said, "What is your name?" Jacob replied, "Jacob."

The man declared, "Your name is no longer Jacob. It is Israel, because you have wrestled with God and have won."¹

Jacob asked, "What is your name?" The man said, "Why do you ask? " Then he blessed Jacob.

So Jacob called that place, Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God's face, and I am still alive."

The sun rose as Jacob crossed the stream, and he was limping because of his dislocated thigh.

Then Jacob saw Esau and his army approaching; so he divided his family into groups. He placed the maids and their children in front, behind them he placed Leah and her children, and last he placed Rachel and Joseph. He himself walked to the front and bowed 7 times before approaching Esau.² Then Esau ran to meet him and kissed him, and both men wept. Esau asked, "Who are these women and children?"

Jacob replied, "These are the family God gave me." Then each of the maids and wives came and bowed to Esau, together with their children.

Esau asked, "What do you mean by all these gifts you sent ahead?" Jacob answered, "They were sent to win your favor."

"I have plenty," was Esau's response. "You may keep all the gifts." Jacob insisted that Esau keep the extravagant gift, and Esau took it.

¹ One of the meanings of Israel is upright or straight.

² Seven times was the appropriate number of bows a vassal would make before a king.

Discussion

1. When Jacob met Esau, which brother appears to be the powerful first-born son?
2. Contrast Jacob's attitude towards Esau at this meeting with his attitude when he left home 20 years earlier.
3. Discuss the significance of the name "Israel".
4. In the end, did Jacob get the blessing he wanted? Do you think he heart was finally satisfied?
5. Do you believe that after this experience, Jacob was worthy to inherit the sacred trust that God gave to his grandfather, Abraham?

Content Questions for English Comprehension

6. Where did Jacob spend the night? What was he doing all night?
7. What name did the stranger give to Jacob?
8. Why was Jacob limping when he crossed the stream?