



Lesson 20

Jacob returns to Canaan

In the last lesson we saw how Jacob departed from Laban to return to his home in Canaan. God had protected him during the 20 years he had been away and He protected him from Laban's rage when he left. But now Jacob faced a greater test of his faith in God's protection as he prepared to meet his brother Esau. Remember that Esau had been so angry with Jacob for tricking him out of his inheritance that he threatened to kill him and Jacob had to run away for his life!

Now Jacob was going back home; he continued his journey and sent messengers to his brother, Esau, telling of his return. God had forgiven Jacob his trickery but he still had to face the consequences of what he had done.

Jacob and the Angels of God (32:1-2)

In the meantime something else happened to him.

"Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim." Genesis 32:1-2

Mahanaim means 'two camps'; this was a place where Jacob camped and also where the angels of God's camp met him. It was an experience to encourage him and to help him to see that, whatever happened when he met Esau, God was with him and would protect him.

The Book of Psalms tells us that; *'The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them'*. Jacob had the great privilege of seeing these protecting angels. We do not share this ability to see angels today but disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ believe that they are still there, looking after those who await the return of the Lord Jesus and the kingdom of God.

"Are they (the angels) not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" Hebrews 1:14

Jacob travels towards Esau (32:6-21)

The messengers Jacob sent to Esau returned with a worrying message. Esau was coming with 400 men to meet him! Jacob was distressed and very afraid at this news and divided all his family and herds into two companies hoping that at least one would escape. But he did something far more important than this; he offered a prayer of great faith and trust in God.

"And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" Genesis 32:9-12

There is a lesson here for us. Jacob:

- Speaks to God of the promises He has made to him.
- Acknowledges to God that the life he has lived means that he is not worthy of God's care and love.
- Humbly asks God to deliver him.
- Reminds God that He has promised this deliverance.

But as well as asking God to protect him, Jacob sent Esau a generous present of animals from his herds and flocks to try and pacify his angry brother. Like Jacob our behaviour towards others should be generous and



Christ like even if we think they are against us. As Jacob waited for Esau's response, he sent his family on ahead and that night a great spiritual crisis occurred in his life.

Jacob wrestles with an Angel (32:28-32)

"And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Genesis 32:24-26

We are not told in Genesis that it was an angel who wrestled with Jacob but we find this information in the book of Hosea; *'He (Jacob) strove (wrestled) with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favour'* (Hosea 12:4). We can understand Jacob's anxiety, all those he loved and everything he had worked for were in danger from a vengeful Esau. This wrestling shows what was happening inside him, in his mind. Would he have the courage to go forward? Finally his faith won through and after he had received a blessing from the angel he said *'my life is preserved'*.

The angel told him that his name would be changed from Jacob to Israel. It is difficult to say exactly what this name means. Some Bibles suggest it means 'a prince with God', others say 'prevailed with God'. Perhaps we should see both meanings here. The angel had wrestled Jacob, testing him to see if his faith was really strong enough to meet Esau and when Jacob prevailed, he was promised that he would become a prince in God's kingdom. He had finally understood that the things he really wanted, to be part of God's promises for the future, could not happen through any strength he had but depended totally on God working in his life. God would prevail through him if only he would trust in the Lord.

This name of Israel was later passed on from Jacob to his descendants who were called 'the Children of Israel'. This is where the name of the modern country of Israel comes from.

The last thing the angel did was to touch Jacob and make him lame so that he limped for the rest of his life. Perhaps this was done so that he could no longer run away as he had done previously.

Jacob meets Esau (33:1-16)

The two brothers finally met. Esau asked Jacob about the many animals he had sent him as a present and realized that the brother who had deceived him many years ago had not now returned to claim the inheritance of his father's riches. It is a lovely example of the Bible teaching that *'a soft answer turns away wrath'*. In effect, Jacob said to his brother; *'God has blessed me and made me rich with many flocks and herds. I want to share with you some of what God has given me; I have enough for all my needs and do not need any more'*. So the brothers departed in peace. Esau went south, right out of the land of Canaan to Seir where he settled. Jacob went to Shechem, the place where his grandfather Abraham had settled when he first came into the land!

SUMMARY

In this lesson we have learned:

- God is willing to forgive us our sins but we always have to live with the consequences of what we have done.
- The angels are at work today, ministering to those who are waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.
- When our troubles seem very big, we can take all of them to God in prayer and ask for His guidance.
- If people are angry with us, it does no good to be angry back, rather we should remember that 'a soft answer turns away wrath'.
- God has promised His people something far greater than wealth in this life. Disciples of Jesus can look forward to eternal life in the kingdom to come.
- This kingdom will be on earth and its centre will be in the land of Israel.

