

In this week's readings, we take a break from 2 Peter and our study in 2 Kings to step back and remind ourselves that our identity is all wrapped up in God's care for our lives and His testing of our characters.

As we behold Jacob under the microscope of God's testing and observe his responses, we see our experience in the life of faith anticipated. Just as God tested Jacob, so He tests us - in order to reveal to us our true spiritual condition and the real neediness of our lives. As God spoke to Israel, so He speaks to us: "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way...to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Monday: Read Genesis 31:55-32:2

His Eyes Always Upon You

Jacob escapes Laban's clutches and arrives at the borders of the Promised Land. There God reassures him by opening his eyes to see the encamped angels who surround him. What was the purpose of such an awesome vision of angelic protection? Professor Ed Clowney says that these angels were "guardians of the Land of Promise" who showed Jacob that "the God of the Promise kept the Land of Promise." In this way Jacob was reminded, returning to his spiritual home in the Promised Land, God would bring him back to the place where His eyes of protection were always focused (Deuteronomy 11:12).

Meditate and Pray: Have you committed your steps in life to the Lord, believing in His Protective Hand on your life? Then you can thank Him that He has promised to guide with His eye upon you: "to counsel and watch over you" (Psalm 32:8). That is why God's Son came in human flesh -- to become our "way, truth and life" (John 14:6) who can guide us safely all our life long. Thank Jesus for such safety on your way with the words of # 605 from our Trinity hymnal:

*All the way my Savior leads me; what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt his tender mercy, who through life has been my guide?
Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in him to dwell;
for I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well;
for I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well."*

Tuesday: Read Genesis 32:1-2

A Confined Captive

As we see the Promised Land so well protected by angels, we are reminded of how God lovingly fenced His people within that Land to protect them from the surrounding nations. For an Old Testament believer like Jacob, all points of the compass outside of the Promised Land were dangerous. North was associated with the "wicked kingdoms of the North," especially Babylon, who would pour out of the North in judgment against Jerusalem (Jeremiah 1:13-16). South was forbidden since that way lay Egypt and bondage. West was the sea, often used as a symbol of the restlessness of evil. East was also a threat, for that was the way to Ammon, Moab and Edom, relatives of Israel whose idolatry was a constant threat to God's people.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the confining nature of His love. As Rev. Tom Swanston put it, pointing us forward to what "The Land" means for us in Christ, "Only within the comparatively restricting borders of the Promised Land could God's people be safe, happy, fruitful and blessed. And "The Land" is not the church – it is

Christ, in whom we abide by faith, secure and victorious.” Let us ask God to make us ever a confined captive, safely kept within the confines of His Son’s love, with the words of hymn # 687:

*Make me a captive Lord, and then I shall be free;
force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqu’ror be;
I sink in life’s alarms when by myself I stand;
imprison me within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand.*

Wednesday: Read Genesis 32:1-7 and 2 Kings 6:15-17

Security Guards

What reassurance and calm must have come over Jacob as he saw the multitude of angels sent to accompany him safely back on the road to the Promised Land. In this way, at just the right time, when he was so afraid of his brother Esau’s approach (Gen. 32:7), Jacob was reminded of God’s guardianship. For the same reassuring purpose, Elisha prays for his young servant’s eyes to see the fiery hosts of angels who outnumbered the hostile army of the Arameans which had surrounded the city where they stayed (2 Kings 6:17).

Meditate and Pray: Let’s thank God that He will send His angels to keep watch over us. Let us not minimize the profound spiritual protection which such holy spirits can provide. If there was a single angel with the comforting power to strengthen Jesus in His agonies in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43), then what can a whole host of angels accomplish in terms of our protection and Jacob’s? Surely such angelic protection is well able to fulfill the promise of Psalm 91:11: “To guard us in all our ways!” Even the very hairs of our head are well-protected. May God give us this sense of security in a dangerous world.

Thursday: Read Genesis 32:3-21

Glorious Low-Point

Jacob was afraid of the twenty-year-old grudge which Esau had against him, since he had stolen the blessing (Gen. 27:41). When he discovered that Esau was approaching with four hundred armed men in Gen. 32:6, all the composure which God’s angels had given him evaporates. Jacob becomes “greatly afraid and distressed.” His fear leads him to desperate measures. First, he divides up his family in Gen. 32:7 in the panic-stricken hope that perhaps one group may survive the slaughter. He then sends costly gifts to placate his brother’s anger (Gen. 32:13-21). We will evaluate these desperate tactics tomorrow. But today let us also notice with thankfulness that God used this impending confrontation with an enemy from whom he could neither retreat nor escape to drive Jacob to his knees. He utters one of the most beautiful and humble prayers of his whole life in Gen. 32:9-12, reminding God of His Promise to bless him and his offspring in Genesis 32:12.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that He has a perfectly-timed plan to teach us to rely on Him as our only help, to make us cling to Him in prayer. This is the glorious low-point to which the Christian life is designed to bring all of us. Jacob had never prayed before as he does now. May God also pin us down so that we utter with Jacob, “I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant” (Gen. 32:10).

Friday: Read Genesis 32:13-24**I Surrender All**

I conclude this week's notes with some insightful words on Jacob's struggle to give himself to God by faith in Genesis 32.

...Esau had four hundred men with him. This was a huge army from Jacob's point of view, and he could only assume the worst, namely, that Esau was coming to kill him. He thought quickly, then divided his family, servants, and flocks into two groups, reasoning that if Esau attacked one group, the other might escape.

Ah, but what if Jacob was in the group that Esau attacked? On second thought that didn't seem a very good plan. So Jacob backed up and tried something else. He decided to appease his brother with gifts. First he sent him a present of two hundred female goats...after this, Jacob sent a group of twenty male goats...but what if he was not satisfied with the goats? What if Esau had all the goats he wanted? Jacob decided to send two hundred ewes, then twenty rams. After this, he sent over the rest of his livestock...

But there was more. After he had sent the animals, Jacob sent his least-favored wife, Leah, and her children across the river Jabbok, followed by his favorite wife, Rachel, with her children. Then he sent over everything else he had. Finally, there at last, all alone and trembling in Gen. 32:24, was Jacob.

I suppose that if he had known the chorus, he might have been singing, "I surrender all." All the goats, that is. All the sheep. All the camels. All the cows. All the bulls. All the donkeys. He had given up everything, but he had still not given himself. That is what some of us do with God...

That night at the Jabbok River, God came in the form of an angel and wrestled with Jacob to bring him to the point of personal submission, after which this scheming, stiff-necked man was reborn. At least he was never the same again. When is the angel going to come and wrestle with you? Does he need to?

James Boice, *Renewing Your Mind in a Mindless World*, pg. 63ff

Let's thank God for Boice's challenge and prayerfully reflect: do we trust God enough to give Him ourselves unreservedly? God grant it through the Grace and Power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.