

We often live as if we have a reservoir of *our own* good works and *our own* good character to get us through the tough times of life, and so we seek to live life by our own wits. Like a good Shepherd, the Lord must corner us until we have nowhere to turn except back to Him. May the Lord convict our hearts of the danger of seeking to walk without Him, so that our fear of stumbling might cause us to rely on our Shepherd's sure-footedness for each of our steps. This is one of the great lessons from our recent study of Jacob. May we learn with Jacob how our every step depends on the Lord's enabling grace.

**Monday: Read Genesis 32:1-12 and Matthew 5:21-24**

**Unfinished Business**

One of the proofs of our absolute dependence on the Lord for every step in righteous living and true worship is that we often come to Him full of lingering sin problems which by rights should disqualify us from His blessing – problems arising either from our own conflicted hearts or from conflicts with others. Like Jacob, we build our altars and seek the Lord's help and guidance – all the while knowing that we have unfinished business. Drawing near to the Lord, we are reminded of our offenses (Mt. 5:23).

Such was Jacob's situation as Genesis 32 opens. As soon as he comes into the Promised Land, the burden of his broken relationship with Esau weighs on him. He therefore sends messengers ahead to procure his brother's favor (Gen. 32:4-5), sending expensive gifts to appease Esau for his having stolen the inheritance years earlier (Gen. 27:35,36).

How did God react to Jacob's long-standing guilt against his brother? Did He withdraw entirely until Jacob provided penance for his sin? Such is the mistaken conclusion on the part of those who require that we forgive others before God can forgive us. Yes, Jesus' words on forgiveness and reconciliation may appear to say this at first glance.

*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. **First** go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. (Matt. 5:23-24)*

*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matt. 6:12)*

But no amount of repentance, towards God or towards those we have offended, can ever make us right with God! We are never told in the New Testament that we are "justified by our repentance" or that we can ever be "sorry enough" to earn God's favor!

No, God's supply of grace comes first in Jacob's life before the demand to repent towards Esau! That is why the Lord *makes the first move* to renew His relationship with Jacob in Genesis 32 before asking him to face his brother! God comes to first reveal Himself "face to face" in mercy to Jacob (Gen. 32:26-30).

**Meditate and Pray:** Thank God for His initiatives of grace in our lives by which He continually comes and renews our dying faith. How wonderful that He is able to wrestle with us in all our broken relationships and sin in order to bless us in the end! Let us use Jacob's experience of seeing God's face to plead with Him that He would let His face shine down on those burdened with un-reconciled relationships! Use the words of hymn # 411 to help in this prayer:

*Shine Thou upon us, Lord, true Light of men, today,  
And through the written Word Thy very self display,  
That so from hearts which burn with gazing on Thy face  
Thy little ones may learn the wonders of Thy grace.*

*Breathe Thou upon us, Lord, Thy Spirit's living flame,  
That so with one accord our lips may tell Thy Name.  
Give Thou the hearing ear, fix Thou the wandering thought,  
That those we teach may hear the great things Thou hast wrought.*

*Speak Thou for us, O Lord, in all we say of Thee;  
According to Thy Word let all our teaching be,  
That so Thy lambs may know their own true Shepherd's voice,  
Where'er He leads them go, and in His love rejoice.*

*Live Thou within us, Lord, Thy mind and will be ours;  
Be Thou beloved, adored, and served with all our powers,  
That so our lives may teach Thy children what Thou art,  
And plead, by more than speech, for Thee with every heart.*

**Tues/Weds: Read Genesis 32:1-2; 32:22-30 & 33:1-11**

**Army of Angels**

Jacob escapes Laban's clutches and arrives at the borders of the Promised Land only to face the fearful prospect of meeting his brother. How reassuring for him to have God open his eyes to see the angels who surround him. That was the purpose of this 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 that God was bringing him back to the place where His eyes of protection were always focused (Deuteronomy 11:12).

But even more to the point for Jacob, who was in a very tight spot anticipating his meeting with Esau, these angels represent God's ability to insert Himself into all the conflicts of our lives. Angels throughout Scripture are "throne creatures" who show up whenever and wherever God's people need Him to come down to their aid. For example, when Jacob was first running from Esau, it was the Lord's presence which the angels represented in "coming down and going up" Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12-13). In the same way, here in Genesis 32 it was "the Angel of the Lord" who met Jacob coming in the middle of the night to both wrestle with and bless him.

But what about Esau? How is it that this hostile foe should run towards Jacob, throw his arms around his neck and weep? How is this miraculous transformation in Esau to be understood, so that Jacob can describe meeting him as "seeing the face of God" (Genesis 33:10)? Just as the Lord had restrained Laban in his "power to harm" Jacob (Gen. 31:29), sending a Divine visitation to change that wicked man's hostile intent, so now God presented Himself in restraining power to Esau, changing his anger to kindness. Remember, unless the Lord

had come down with His “army of angels” to restrain Esau’s army of four hundred armed men (Gen. 32:6), the outcome could well have been as bad as Jacob feared!

**Meditate and Pray:** Thank the Lord for the promise that He will give His angels charge over you, to guard you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:11). Have you committed your steps to the Lord, believing in His Protective Hand on your life? Then you can thank Him that He has promised to “to counsel you and watch over you” (Psalm 32:8). That is why God’s Son came in human flesh, in order to become our “way, truth and life” (John 14:6), who can guide us safely all our life long. Though He was not willing “to call down legions of angels” to deliver Himself from death, Jesus is willing and able to call those angels down “to guard us in all our ways.” Thank Jesus for such safety along 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.*

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

**Visible Security**

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, 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 out-numbered the hostile army of the Arameans which had surrounded the city where they stayed.

**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? 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.

**Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Genesis 32:1-2 and 48:15-16**

**Safe in the Land**

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. The North was associated with the “wicked kingdoms of the North,” especially Babylon, who would pour out of the North in judgment against

Jerusalem – see Jeremiah 1:13-16. The South was forbidden since that way lay Egypt and bondage. The West was the sea –often used as a symbol of the restlessness of evil. The 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.

How amazing that, because the Lord has His “Angel” watch over Jacob’s life – even the land of Egypt becomes a safe place for Jacob to dwell! He is able at the end of his life to bless the sons of Joseph in that foreign land, claiming that on every day and at every turn, God had shepherded him and even delivered him from all evil through His “Angel” (Gen. 48:15-16)!

**Meditate and Pray:** Thank God for the protective power of this “Angel of the Lord,” fully revealed at the fullness of God’s time, who was God sent to earth to redeem and deliver God’s own! Thank Him even more that now in Christ we know an even greater safety than the Promised Land ever provided.

Only within the comparatively restricting borders of the Promised Land could God’s people be safe, happy, fruitful and blessed. But now the “Promised Land” is neither Israel nor the church, “The Land” is Christ, in whom we abide by faith, secure and victorious. Tom Swanston

Sing about “abiding in the Lord” with words from Psalm 73 (hymn # 657):

*In sweet communion, Lord, with Thee  
I constantly abide;  
My hand Thou holdest in Thy own  
To keep me near Thy side.*

*Thy counsel through my earthly way  
Shall guide me and control,  
And then to glory afterward  
Thou wilt receive my soul.*

*Whom have I, Lord, in heaven but Thee,  
To Whom my thoughts aspire?  
And, having Thee, on earth is naught  
That I can yet desire.*

*Though flesh and heart should faint and fail,  
The Lord will ever be  
The strength and portion of my heart,  
My God eternally.*

*To live apart from God is death,  
'Tis good His face to seek;  
My refuge is the living God,  
His praise I long to speak.*