

Genesis Chapters 32-33 Summary - John Karmelich

I want to start with my lesson title: "Overcoming Fear". The main character here, Jacob, is running for his life from his uncle Laban (his former employer) who wanted to kill him, but didn't as God told him, "Say nothing good nor bad to Jacob". At the same time Jacob must soon face his brother who he hasn't seen in 20 years! The last time he saw his brother Esau, he threatened to kill him. Jacob needs to get past his brother to get home! For the reunion, Esau was sending 400 men to meet Jacob. Therefore, the fear Jacob had was real. His plan was to separate his traveling party into groups so if Esau attacked one, the others could escape. He also sent his brother a gift of 550 animals to appease his anger. The point here is his fear is real, just like the fears we face are real! If all of that isn't strange enough, we also will read about Jacob wrestling with God (Hosea 12:4 confirms it was God!) Christian scholars state the wrestler was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, but I'll leave it at that! The wrestling match was for God to say to Jacob in effect, "Are you going to trust Me or not?" Jacob eventually gave up. God then blessed him and changed his name to Israel (which means struggled with God and prevailed). By the way, the first ever prayer recorded in the bible is here, with Jacob recounting His promises about how He blessed his life and Jacob still acted in fear despite the wrestling match!

Now if that isn't enough fear for one lesson, I don't know what is! As we know, none of us know what the day will bring. All we can do is pray for His guidance and make the best decisions we can with the situation at hand. The bible is full of stories of people at "wit's end", not sure how they will survive the situation in front of them. At the time of this writing, I'm dealing with a situation like that. I don't have a clue as to what the outcome will be. I just pray for guidance, make the best decisions I can and move forward trusting God is guiding my life for His glory! In the opening verses of Chapter 32, Jacob saw a bunch of angels (Jacob is still outside of Israel), and it is a reminder that God is guiding him! What we must remember is God assigns us angels who are guiding us and leading us through our situation so He will get the glory when it works out.

OK now that I described the opening few verses, let's keep going. I should point out in the Hebrew text indicates there were two groups of angels with Jacob. Angels were behind him to protect him from Uncle Laban. Another group was in front of him, as protection from his fear of being attacked by Esau (his brother) and the 400 men with him! If you have any doubts about the power God gives angels, see 2nd Kings 19:35 where it says one angel killed 600,000 bad guys! Don't mess with angels! Where are our angels when things are falling apart in our lives? They're there, carrying out His will for our lives!

Even with Jacob seeing that obvious positive sign, "Jacob was still Jacob" full of fear, and trying to see if there's a way he can spare his life by his wits! Again, he sent messengers to Esau and found out he is coming with 400 men! So, Jacob's legitimately scared for his life! As I stated, he put his traveling party into groups figuring if the 400 attacked one group, the rest could escape!

Then we have the first recorded prayer in the bible. Jacob does a wise thing: He recites back a promise God made to him. It's not like God forgets! Reciting God's promises is a way of remembering the God of the universe made unconditional promises to guide us so we don't have to be afraid! Jacob then adds a part for God to deliver him from his brother! Still, he was known as a conniver, figuring maybe he'll be able to bribe his way out of this problem. That's when he sends the 550 animals ahead to his brother in effect to say, "Don't kill me and here's a nice gift for sparing my life!"

At this point in effect God's had enough of Jacob's lack of trust in Him. Grant it, God could have killed him on the spot and said I'll work with someone else, but God's showing that if he can work with Jacob then there is hope for the rest of us as well! Then Jacob got into a wresting match with what Christians call a preincarnate appearance of Jesus! Obviously, God could end it at any time. The reason for all of this is for Jacob to submit to God. Let's be honest if it was over in 5 minutes, Jacob wouldn't get it. So, it was turned into an all-night wrestling match!

Then of all things, God renames Jacob to "Israel" which means to struggle with God. In the bible when a person gets a new name, it sticks. With Jacob the bible goes back and forth as if to imply when Jacob is acting "in the flesh" God uses the name Jacob. When they're doing His will, "Israel" is used! That is not the only thing that happened during the wresting match. God also permanently cripples Jacob so he would really have to depend upon God in situations like this and not easily make a run for it.

This leads me to Chapter 33. Here we get the big Jacob and Esau reunion. Esau doesn't kill him. What we see is Esau misses him! What impresses me the most is how Jacob changed after the wresting thing the night before. Instead of Jacob coming in last after everyone else arrives, he "leads the march". Esau greets his brother after 20 years and says in effect, thanks for the gift, but I'm good! Jacob insisted that he take it, so Esau took the 550 (plus) animals, so that ends that!

After the big reunion thing is over, Jacob goes back to being Jacob. Esau says to come to my place for a bit. Jacob starts making excuses about tired children and they can't go out of their way. He implies a visit to Esau's hometown, but after Esau is out of site, Jacob starts his journey back to Israel. Realize it was a meeting in what is Jordan today, and Esau was the founder of the "Edomites" that became part of what we call Jordan today. Bottom line, after the big hug, Jacob lied again and headed back to Israel.

When Jacob made it back to the land of Israel, he bought a plot of land there. He built an altar there, as a thank you gift to God for getting him home safely! He still has not returned to where his father lived. We'll discover in the next chapter what a mistake it was for Jacob to buy a piece of real estate there! It was due to fear that he bought it, and I'll get to it in the next lesson!

OK John, good story, what does it have to do with us? Obviously, God is not going to physically start a wresting match with us to get us to do His will! What God desires is to let go of control. I've always been a believer that God does for us what we can't do for ourselves if it is His will! When I started this lesson, I mentioned that fear can be a good thing at times like helping us not get too close to danger. At the same time, God wants us to overcome our fears when it comes to doing His will. I've always been a big believer that His will involves total surrender of our lives to Him, then figuring out what we have a gift to do, while still doing our share to help as needed. When we turn our will over to Him, God finds ways to asks us, "Do you trust Me now, even at this moment?" Jacob was a man overcome by fear and tried living by his wits to get out of danger. God had to cripple Jacob to ask in effect, "Do you trust Me now?" He then took the lead of all the people seeing his brother. Obviously, he still had his faults as he immediately went to Israel and not to visit his brother. My point is if God can work with Jacob and all his faults then He can work with us despite all of our faults!

The word "surrender" of our will to His, is an easy thing to grasp in concept but a hard thing to practice in real life. It took Jacob a lifetime to learn to completely trust God! We'll continue to see him struggle in the upcoming chapters. If you get nothing else out of this lesson, realize if God can work in Jacob, I believe He can work through your life and mine. He can help us overcome all of our fears and give us the wisdom to make good decisions and use our lives for His glory!

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John