

Jacob Prepared to Meet Esau

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others the importance of showing their love and acceptance to their children and grandchildren throughout their life, not just at the time of death. Once Jacob and his family said their goodbyes to Laban, Jacob began to prepare to meet his brother, Esau. That will be the focus of this topic.

Genesis 32:1-8 says, “So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, ‘This *is* God’s camp.’ And he called the name of that place Mahanaim. Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, ‘Speak thus to my lord Esau, “Thus your servant Jacob says: ‘I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.’”’ Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, ‘We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men *are* with him.’ So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that *were* with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies. And he said, ‘If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape.’” We see that the angels of God met Jacob as he traveled. The name “Mahanaim” means *two camps*. Jacob gave that place this name to show that it was both the camp of the angels of God, as well as the place where he camped for a period of time.

It was from this place that Jacob sent messengers to Esau to let Esau know he was returning after staying at the house of Laban for twenty years. In the message that was sent to Esau, Jacob spoke of the way the Lord had blessed him during the time he was with Laban. Jacob also called himself a servant. Jacob said that he had accumulated oxen, donkeys, flocks of sheep and cattle, as well as male and female servants. This word translated “lord” can be translated *Lord, lord, master or ruler*. In this use, Jacob is referring to his brother as master or ruler. In this way, we see that Jacob was humbling himself before his brother and wanted to find favor with him.

The messengers Jacob sent to Esau met Esau and then returned to Jacob. However, the messengers said that Esau was coming to meet Jacob and that he had four hundred men coming with him. When Jacob heard about the four hundred men that were coming with Esau, he could only imagine that a negative result would happen when he and his brother met. Suddenly, Jacob was filled with a great fear. He had strong emotional distress within himself when he heard about the four hundred men who were coming with Esau. Here, we see that the only thought Jacob had was that Esau was planning to get revenge for stealing the blessing by killing him. Jacob immediately divided his cattle and flocks into two groups. Jacob said that if one group was attacked by Esau and those with him, the other group was to immediately flee and try to escape. He thought that way it would be possible for one group to escape.

Genesis 32:9-12 then tells us, “Then Jacob said, ‘O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, “Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you”: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have

become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me *and* the mother with the children. For You said, “I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”” In his fear and distress, Jacob could only think of one thing to do and that was to pray to the Lord. That was the right thing to do. It reminds us of the fact that many people pray in a time of crisis.

In his prayer to the Lord, we see that Jacob included several key statements. First, Jacob reminded God of the fact that God was the One who told him to return to his own country. Jacob also said that the Lord had promised to deal well with his servant. Second, Jacob said he was not worthy of all of the mercies and all of the truth the Lord had shown to Him as a servant of God. The word translated “not worthy” means *small or insignificant*. Here, we see that Jacob realized his own unworthiness as he prayed. He knew that he did not deserve the mercies the Lord had shown to him. Jacob also realized that God had revealed much truth to him and that he was the servant of God. At the time he prayed, Jacob had completed the crossing of the Jordan and had divided his family and flocks into two companies.

Third, Jacob asked for deliverance from his brother and the four hundred men with him. Jacob also told the Lord that he feared his brother. He was afraid that when Esau and the men with him arrived, they would attack Jacob and his family. Instead of depending on himself, Jacob asked the Lord to deliver himself and his family. We see by his statement that Jacob was honest with God and did not try to hide his fear. He realized that the Lord was the only One who was able to deliver him and his family because Jacob had no power within himself.

Fourth, Jacob reminded the Lord of the promise that the Lord had made to his family. The Lord had told Jacob He would treat Jacob well. He had promised Jacob that he would have so many descendants they would be like the sand on the beach at the sea because there would be so many. God had told Jacob that the number of descendants would be so large they would not be able to count the number. Jacob realized that he had a choice. He could either depend on himself and his own strength or he could cry out to the Lord for help. Here, we see that Jacob made the choice to cry out to the Lord and ask the Lord to show His mercy.

Genesis 32:13-21 says, “So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals. Then he delivered *them* to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, ‘Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves.’ And he commanded the first one, saying, ‘When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, “To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose *are* these in front of you?” then you shall say, “They *are* your servant Jacob’s. It *is* a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also *is* behind us.”’ So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, ‘In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; and also say, “Behold, your servant Jacob *is* behind us.”’ For he said, ‘I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.’ So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp.” We see that Jacob prayed to the Lord for protection and then he prepared a gift for his brother.

Jacob decided to send a present ahead of him for his brother Esau. The Scripture does not tell us whether God led Jacob to send this gift or if Jacob made this decision himself either before or after he had prayed to the Lord. This gift included a total of 580 animals: 220 goats, 220 sheep, 30 camels and 30 colts of those camels, 50 cattle and 30 donkeys. Each group of animals was sent as a separate group with a distance between each group. Jacob also gave the servants with these groups of animals instructions about what to say to Esau when they met him. The servants were to tell Esau this message about each group of animals, ““They *are* your servant Jacob’s. It *is* a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also *is* behind us.”” Notice that the message the servants were to give, with each of the groups of animals, was to tell Esau that they were from his servant Jacob, and it was a present sent to his lord Esau. Then they were to add, ““Behold, your servant Jacob *is* behind us.”” By these words, Jacob was doing his best to show that his attitude had changed over the previous twenty years. Laban had taught him what it felt like to be deceived and Jacob had a much more humble attitude.

At the same time, Jacob thought the present might appease Esau and that afterward, Esau would accept him. The word translated here as “appease” is translated by the word “atonement” 71 times and translated by several other words, including various words related to reconciliation. This is the only place where it is translated appease. Except for the use in this verse and two others, the verb is always used in connection with the removal of sin and defilement. In this verse, instead of offering a sacrifice to God to make reconciliation with God, Jacob sent a gift of 580 animals to try and make reconciliation with Esau. This is an indication that Jacob realized the seriousness of his sin toward Esau over twenty years earlier. Jacob wanted to see the face of Esau and know that he was accepted by him because he feared that Esau would try to destroy him and his family.

Jacob sent this large present of animals ahead of him but we see that Jacob, along with his family and the rest of his possessions, stayed that night in their camp. We will see in our next topic, by what happened to Jacob later that night, that the Lord had more to teach Jacob before he met his brother. Here, we see that Jacob was doing what he could to try and be reconciled with his brother. This is probably a case where Jacob prayed to the Lord but did not think that the Lord would change the heart of Esau. That happens many times, even in the lives of those who follow the Lord, because they try to work things out in their own strength instead of depending on the strength of the Lord. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why it is so important to depend on the strength of the Lord, instead of trying to solve our problems and fears in our own strength. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children your trust in the Lord and help them learn to explain true trust in the Lord to others.