

## Is It Blind Faith? Genesis 32:1-21

For our nighttime devotions, Robyn and I have been reading from L.B. Cowman's book "Streams in the Desert". I want to read for you the entry for February 12. It begins with a phrase from **Matthew 6:32 "Your heavenly Father knows"** and follows with something we all should keep in mind about our circumstances.

"A visitor at a school for the deaf was writing questions on the board for the children. Soon he wrote this sentence: 'Why has God made me able to hear and speak, and made you deaf?'"

The shocking sentence hit the children like a cruel slap on the face. They sat paralyzed, pondering the dreadful word 'Why?' And then a little girl arose.

With her lip trembling and her eyes swimming with tears, she walked straight to the board. Picking up the chalk, she wrote with a steady hand these precious words: 'Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure' (Matthew 11:26). What a reply! It reaches up and claims an eternal truth upon which the most mature believer, and even the youngest child of God, may securely rest – the truth that God is your Father (and that He knows what is best).

Can you state that truth with full assurance and faith? Once you do, your dove of faith will no longer wander the skies in restless flight but will settle forever in its eternal resting place of peace: Your Father! (Emphasis added)

I still believe that a day of understanding will come for each of us, however far away it may be. We well understand as we see the tragedies that today darken and dampen the presence of heaven for us take their proper place in God's great plan – a plan so overwhelming, magnificent, and joyful, we will laugh with wonder and delight."

*Arthur Christopher Bacon*

I wonder if Jacob believed that or came to realize that by this time in our text?

I wonder if I have really learned that lesson, to understand and hold to the sovereignty of God in all things that no matter the circumstances God is in control, has a plan, and has a purpose?

The trials God allows often don't make sense to us.

Jacob and Laban have parted company. For Jacob it was a fearful situation not knowing what Laban might do when he caught up to him. I think God's intervention in the dream Laban had tells us a lot about his intentions. It also tells us a lot about God's faithfulness in providing divine protection over Jacob in keeping His promise to return him safely to his home in the Promised Land.

But as we will see in **chapter 32**, Jacob needs to realize that growth in faith is never over for the follower of God. There will always be another test, another event to trust God again and again and again. What Jacob had was no different than what we have to remind us of God's assuring and abiding presence. We have the written Word of God that reveals His many promises through the trials of life. Jacob had the verbal Word of God given to him in a vision at Bethel where he saw the angels of God going up and down the staircase with God standing at the top. He spoke to Jacob that He would both protect and provide. Jacob was given that promise again 20 years later when God told him to head back to Canaan reminding him once again of His promise of abiding protection and provision. Once again we see that tests of faith are never over. I read something this past week that was a reminder of this truth: "Faith that goes forward triumphs."

God told Jacob in **31:3** to **"Go back to the land of your Fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."** And we see in the opening of **32:1** that **"Jacob also went his way"**.

Faith acts on what God says. The encounter with Laban was over and it was time to move on, to keep going. But what was ahead of him was the unknown. Behind him was Laban. Ahead of him was Esau. But with him was God. Never forget that whatever the valleys of the shadow of death you may walk through there is no evil to fear because God is with you.

So Jacob loaded the camels again, put out the camp fire and went on his way.

In **verses 1 and 2** we notice Jacob's meeting is purposeful.

## I. JACOB'S MEETING IS PURPOSEFUL – vs. 1-2

**Verse 1** tells us that Jacob's journey is protected.

### A. Jacob's Journey Is Protected – v. 1

I have to tell you that I have read Genesis dozens of times and it wasn't until recently that I noticed something I had missed all the other times I have read this passage. It's important and I don't want you to miss it.

**“Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him.”**

I never saw that before – **“the angels of God met him.”** They are God's protectors and messengers.

Several hymns came to mind.

There's not an hour that He is not near us –  
No not one! No not one!  
No night so dark but His love can cheer us –  
No not one! No not one!  
Jesus knows all about our struggles;  
He will guide till the day is done.  
There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus –  
No not one! No not one!

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Be not dismayed whate'er betide;  
God will take care of you.  
Beneath His wings of love abide;  
God will take care of you.

Thro' days of toil when heart doth fail;  
God will take care of you.  
When dangers fierce your path assail;  
God will take care of you.

No matter what may be the test,  
God will take care of you.  
Lean, weary one, upon His breast;  
God will take care of you.

God will take care of you,  
Thro' every day, o'er all the way.  
He will take care of you;  
God will take care of you.

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Never a trial that He is not there,  
Never a burden that He doth not bear,  
Never a sorrow that He doth not share;  
Moment by moment I'm under His care.

Moment by moment I'm kept in His love;  
Moment by moment I've life from above.  
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine;  
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine.

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Hymns reflect the many Scripture passages that remind us of God's abiding presence and protection. Here, angels from God came and met with Jacob. God's messengers of hope and protection invisible up until that time revealed themselves to him. They had been sent as God's protection over Jacob. They had been sent by God to escort Jacob in safety to the land of Canaan. Their appearance now does not mean they were absent when confronted by Laban. They were there all the time and for some reason, perhaps to abate some of Jacob's apprehension, God allowed them to be seen.

Without them Jacob was helpless. He had no human protection so God opened his eyes to show him that he was surrounded by a wall of protection.

**II Kings 6:16-17**

**II Thessalonians 1:7** calls them God's mighty angels.

**Hebrews 1:14** calls them God's ministering angels.

**Psalm 103:20-21** **“Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word. Praise the Lord, all His heavenly hosts, you His servants who do His will.”**

Walvoord and Zuck write that **“The source of defense and the means of victory come from God's ministering angels.”**

Every step of the way Jacob's journey is protected. When he saw the angels, Jacob's joy is proclaimed

### B. Jacob's Joy Is Proclaimed – v. 2

We read in **Genesis 28:16-17** that after Jacob awoke from his dream he said **“Surely the Lord is**

**in this place, and I was not aware of it.’ He was afraid and said, ‘This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’”** And in **verse 19** he called the place Bethel, which means house of God.

Here he calls the place Mahanaim, which means two camps. There are several suggestions about what this means. Some believe Jacob is referring to his camp and the camp of God – a human camp and a divine camp.

Some believe he is referring to the two groups he divided his people into in **verse 7**.

Some suggest that it is referring to the two groups that had just met – the camp of Laban and the camp of Jacob. They met in hostility and left in peace or at least in a truce.

Still others believe that the angelic host appeared in two groups. One group was behind him to protect him from Laban. The second group was ahead of him to protect him from Esau.

While there isn’t anything definitive that would suggest one idea over another, I like to think that it is the latter – the protection of the angelic host in front and behind.

**Psalm 34:7 “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.”**

When Jacob saw the angels he couldn’t help but be overjoyed by their presence. We may never see one of God’s angels providing us with divine protection, but rest assured they are just as present now with you and me as they were with Jacob. So proclaim joy just as Jacob did.

As Jacob resumed his journey filled with the knowledge of God’s protective presence through His angels, he was filled with joy.

As Jacob prepared to meet up with his brother Esau, Jacob’s message is prepared.

## **II. JACOB’S MESSAGE IS PREPARED – vs. 3-5**

How would you approach the situation if you were planning to meet someone you knew who had great animosity toward you? In **chapter 33** we are going to talk about the issue of reconciliation. In preparation Jacob gathered some of his servants and gave them a message to take to his brother Esau. He was still living in the land of Edom. Remember Esau became known as Edom after he sold his birthright and the land where he lived was known as Edom.

Words matter a lot. Notice how careful Jacob is about the choice of words he uses. He wants to convey the right message to his brother.

Notice first that Jacob refers to himself as Esau’s servant. The use of the word servant implies both courtesy and humility. He had learned much in the 20 years he was in Haran and one of the greatest lessons was humility. He left as a self-seeking opportunist and was returning as a humble servant. The term servant also conveys the message that he had no interest in political sovereignty over Esau.

He then instructed them to talk about his sojourn in Haran with their Uncle Laban for the past 20 years. He doesn’t say anything about the trouble he experienced at the hands of their uncle or how he had been deceived as the reason for leaving. His focus is on what he has accumulated in that time period. He wanted Esau to know that he had no interest in his possessions. His needs were sufficiently taken care of.

The last thing we notice in his message is his request for Esau’s favor. A proud person won’t seek favor, but a humble servant will. Jacob is asking for Esau to extend grace to him. Yes, they had their differences in the past and there was a lot of hostility expressed by Esau when he had fled, but he was hoping that was all behind them and so he was seeking the grace of Esau.

Grace is unmerited favor, being given something we don’t deserve. That’s what God has given to us, His unmerited favor. Grace that saves us. Grace that sanctifies us. Grace that settles us. Grace that is sufficient in all circumstances we encounter.

Jacob was asking for the unmerited favor of his brother. He understood that he didn't deserve it because of how he had taken advantage of him in the past, but he was asking for it none the less.

You have perhaps heard the saying that you hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Jacob had no idea what to expect, but then you can only run away from your past for so long before it must be confronted and that's what Jacob is doing. His message was prepared. In **verses 6-8** we see that Jacob's misery is painful.

### III. JACOB'S MISERY IS PAINFUL – vs. 6-8

If Tolkien had written this, he would have told us in great detail what Jacob did while he waited, but as it is here in Scripture we don't know what happened after sending the messengers on their way. I think he took a walk everyday down the road leading to Seir wondering when his servants would return and what kind of message they would bring him from his brother. I'd like to think that he waited with great patience and faith, but I suspect he still has enough of the old nature in him to wrestle with his thoughts, to be a little anxious.

**Who among us hasn't had some feelings of apprehension when we have had to meet with the boss or return for a consultation with a doctor?** If I were a betting man, I'd say we have all had a time or two when we wondered about some meeting or upcoming event.

Jacob's messengers finally returned. **Is it a message of hope or hopelessness? Is it favorable or fearful?**  
 "Master, we found your brother."  
 "Master, he's coming to see you."  
 "Master he's bringing 400 men with him."

Talk about a heart stopper.

Notice how **verse 7** puts it:

**"In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups."**

If this were a western, they would be circling the wagons to prepare for an imminent attack. He wasn't just afraid, he was greatly afraid. It reminds me of King Belshazzar in **Daniel 5** who was so

afraid of the handwriting on the wall his knees knocked together in fear.

Jacob is both greatly afraid and distressed. Fear is defined as being an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain or threat. Notice it doesn't say it will happen, but just the thought that it might happen can cause fear.

Distress means extreme sorrow, anxiety or pain. It is misery or agony over being in the state of great trouble.

Jacob was both very fearful and distressed over the news of Esau's pending arrival. Rather than rely on God's promise, he chose to do what seemed to be the logical thing, be fearful. Divide up into two groups. If he attacked one group, then hopefully the other could escape. Now, remember that when Jacob fled from Laban he had a three day head start and it took Laban seven days in a dogged pursuit to catch up with him. **So what made Jacob think that he could outrun Esau who was on his doorstep?**

It's been said that you don't have to go looking for trouble because trouble will find you. Jacob assumed Esau's intentions were hostile. Esau may have also assumed Jacob's intentions were hostile and so the need to bring 400 men. Since they hadn't seen or spoken to each other in 20 years they assumed the worst.

Now I want you to notice that fresh in Jacob's memory banks was the visible presence of God through His angelic host and yet we read here that he chose to be fearful and distressed rather than trust God who had sent His angels for protection to bring him safely to the land.

**Warren Wiersbe states "When faith is crowded out by fear, we're prone to start scheming and trusting our own resources."**

It tells me folks, that it's all too easy to forget God's promises, to look at the circumstances rather than trust God, to walk by sight and not by faith. I want to suggest to you here that **verse 1** and **verse 7** are incompatible if we are walking by faith.

**Matthew 14:22-31**

You get bad news – will you have fear or faith?

As if a lightbulb went off in his head, Jacob has an aha moment. Notice in **verses 9-12** that Jacob's musing is prayerful.

#### **IV. JACOB'S MUSING IS PRAYERFUL – vs. 9-12**

He uses both the names Elohim and Jehovah in addressing God in this prayer.

Elohim refers to God being the Creator-God, the all powerful God.

Jehovah refers to God being eternal or self-existent.

This is his first recorded prayer since leaving Bethel. Notice what he includes in his prayer. First he calls on God to recount what He had said earlier, that He was the One who told Jacob to return to Canaan.

Folks, not that God needs reminding of what He said, but when we pray remind Him of His Word. Pray His Word back to Him. Basing your prayer on the Word of God is always the right thing to do to. He will always fulfill His promises.

**Henry Morris gives us some insight in how we should pray. "No prayer can be truly effective unless it, likewise, is in harmony with God's revealed Word."** Pray God's Word.

That's a good point to always keep in mind as we petition God about something. In the model for prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 6:9-13**) He says we are to pray for God's will. As Jesus suffered the agonizing pain of what lay before Him on the cross, He reminded us that we are to pray for God's will not our will (**Mark 14:36**). Pray God's will.

From his prayer we see another point to keep in mind when we pray. We must pray in humility. He recognizes that he is totally underserving of what God has done for him. Notice **verse 10 "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only a staff**

**when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups."**

That word 'undeserving' literally means "I am little." It's the same word used back in **27:15, 42** where it speaks of Jacob as Rebekah's younger son. To be little describes a lack of legal credentials to make a claim for himself. It also speak of someone who is totally dependent on someone else. In this case, Jacob is admitting total dependency on God.

His prayer gives several other truths that are good reminders for us to keep in mind when we pray.

His prayer is a statement of faith.

His prayer recognizes that it isn't his plans but God's promises that will deliver him.

His confidence is based on God's Word.

His confession is based on God's grace.

His deliverance is based on God's power.

His concern for his family's welfare is based on God's promises.

His prayer begins and ends with a focus on God. He is doing what God told him to do and so he prays accordingly.

His prayer rested in the character of God being completely faithful in all He says and does and in His covenant promises.

Prayer is the lifeline between us and God. He longs for us to come to Him with our petitions and praises. He longs for that sweet fellowship of telling Him what's on our mind.

Jacob was desperate for God.

He could have just as easily written **Psalm 34. Psalm 34:1-9, 15, 17-18**

What is before Jacob is uncertain and he cries out to God and it's no different for any of us. None of us know what is ahead on our journey in life. All we can do is learn to trust in, depend on and closely follow God who has given us inestimable promises.

I shared this thought from Thom Rainer Wednesday night, and it is appropriate to share it now.

*"Powerful churches have a passion for prayer. They are consumed with prayer. They are devoted to prayer. They pray for their members. And they pray for their communities."*

Jacob's musing is prayerful.

In our closing verses, **verses 13-21** we notice that Jacob's methods are pacifying.

## **V. JACOB'S METHODS ARE PACIFYING – vs. 13-21**

What he does here is not a lack of faith, but rather a means of pacifying his brother. He still doesn't know Esau's intentions, so these gifts were prepared as a way of showing Esau that his intentions were not hostile in any way. This was not a bribe but rather a testimony of God's goodness to him. Divided by their kind, Jacob was giving over 550 animals from his herds and flocks. The herdsmen were instructed on what to say as Esau approached.

The word pacify used here by Jacob means to propitiate. It's the word 'appease' in the KJV and means to cover, to turn away wrath or regain favor. His gifts were meant to smooth out the rough road between he and Esau to regain his favor and turn away his wrath.

What Christ did on the cross by dying for us turned away the wrath of God toward sinners. His shed blood paid the price satisfying the debt owed for sin. The evidence of God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice is in the crucifixion. If it hadn't been accepted, Christ would still be in the grave. Jesus turned away the wrath of God through His death and our faith.

As Jacob prepares to meet his brother, whatever his attitude and intentions may be, he could rest confidently in God's Word.

As we prepare to meet whatever challenges may come our way we can rest confidently in that same Word of God.

**Psalm 56:3-4** “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?”

**Psalm 112:7** “He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is secure, he will have no fear, in the end he

**will look in triumph on his foes.”**

**Isaiah 12:2** “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song’ He has become my salvation.”

Whatever the trials, whomever the challenges, let's respond like the little girl “Yes, Father, this was for Your good pleasure.”

Chance has not brought this ill to me;  
It's God's own hand, so let it be,  
For He sees what I cannot see.  
There is a purpose for each pain,  
And He one day will make it plain  
That earthly loss is heavenly gain.  
Like as a piece of tapestry  
Viewed from the back appears to be  
Only threads tangled hopelessly;  
But in the front a picture fair  
Rewards the worker for his care,  
Proving his skill and patience rare.  
You are the Workman, I the frame.  
Lord, for the glory of Your Name,  
Perfect Your image on the same.

Selected