

January 19

Scriptures: Read Genesis 32 & 33

Key Verse: “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant...” (Genesis 32:10)

Overview

When Jacob came to the border of the Promised Land “the angels of God met him” (32:2) and so he called that place “Mahanaim”, meaning “dual camp”. We believe he called it a dual or double camp rather than just a plain camp because it was special: it was the Lord’s camp. Often in the Hebrew text, the dual or plural form of words are used in a singular sense to express majesty. This manifestation of the glory of God came after Jacob had overcome the fear of Laban, but he was still in more fear to face his brother Esau. In order to give Jacob confidence and joy, God allowed him to see a host of angels encamped as mighty army, which may have been sent to Jacob to assure him that the Lord was with him to protect him and his family.

Still, Jacob remained in fear of his brother. When he heard that Esau was coming with 400 men, he became terrified. He thought they were coming as enemies and, still not trusting completely in God, he devised a plan to divide all his family and possessions in two companies so that if one was attacked the other might escape. Finally, Jacob does what he should have done first; he fervently prayed with a humble heart. In his prayer he acknowledges God as the personal living God of his father and grandfather, and he casts himself upon His mercy. He recognizes his condition is unworthy of the kindness and faithfulness of God, confesses his fear and asks God to deliver him from Esau. However, he might still have been depending on himself and lacking trust in God when he sent generous gifts to Esau at different intervals, so that his brother might forgive him and have his anger appeased.

One night, when Jacob was alone, possibly meditating and praying, he had a life-changing experience which could be called his conversion, for since that time Jacob, the “deceiver”, was never like that again, and God changed his name to “Israel”, meaning “Prince with God”. “A Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day” (32:24). Take note that it was not he who instigated the wrestling, it was the Man that came to him. The reason for this might be to show Jacob that it was God who gave him the strength to persist and continue in the match.

Even after the Man struck Jacob’s hip, putting it out of the joint and thus weakening him, Jacob was still able to wrestle. Now he learned that his weakness was made perfect in God’s strength (2 Cor. 12:9; Hebrews 11:34; Joel 3:10). Jacob was given the fortitude to continue until dawn and would not let the Man go until he blessed him. He recognized it was a divine encounter and the blessing he desired was a spiritual blessing since, as we know, he was already blessed greatly in the material sense. Indeed, Jacob “struggled with God” (32:28), and the “Man” with whom he wrestled was most likely Christ in a pre-incarnate form (a Christophany). We know that Jesus Christ was always present, even in creation (John 1:1-5). The way Jacob prevailed serves as a great example for us to keep on in fervent prayer until we are divinely touched and blessed by God. We see in this story how God deals with His children in love, discipline and refining, to bring them to a point where they could be called “princes with God”.

When Jacob first saw Esau, he approached him humbly, bowing down to the ground and prostrating himself before him, which was an ancient custom for one seeking to be granted forgiveness. But his brother Esau ran to him with hugs and kisses. They wept together and had a wonderful reunion after being apart for 20 years. No doubt God had intervened to change Esau's heart towards him. This had not happened because of all the gifts that Jacob had sent, for Esau did not even want them: he also had been blessed materially, and only took them after Jacob insisted.

Jacob, as a new man, now traveled with confidence, for he knew the Lord was his strength, so there was no reason for Esau to leave some men with him as protection (33:15). Also, after he had bought land in the Promised Land, he erected an altar to the Lord and called it "El Elohe Israel", meaning "God, the God of Israel" (33:20). For the first time we see Jacob now renamed Israel, calling the God of his fathers as his own personal God.

Prayer

God of our fathers, we call upon You to restore broken relationships, keeping us in Your perfect will. Grant that we may not stop praying until we have Your assurance of blessing.