

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 32-33

WE RESUME OUR JOURNEY THROUGH GENESIS MEETING JACOB ON THE WAY AS HE TRAVELS BACK TO HIS HOMELAND AFTER 20 (CHALLENGING) YEARS WITH LABAN. IN CASE WE HAVE FORGOTTEN LETS REVIEW THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS MOMENT. JACOB HAD ORIGINALLY LEFT HOME BECAUSE HE THOROUGHLY OFFENDED HIS OLDER BROTHER ESAU. HE HAD DECEIVED HIS FATHER ISAAC INTO GIVING HIM THE BLESSING THAT WAS RESERVED FOR ESAU. HERE ARE SOME OF ESAU'S WORDS THE LAST TIME HE WAS A MAJOR CHARACTER IN OUR STORY:

GENESIS 27:41 (NLT) - FROM THAT TIME ON, ESAU HATED JACOB BECAUSE THEIR FATHER HAD GIVEN JACOB THE BLESSING. AND ESAU BEGAN TO SCHEME: "I WILL SOON BE MOURNING MY FATHER'S DEATH. THEN I WILL KILL MY BROTHER, JACOB."

SO AS MUCH AS JACOB WANTS TO RETURN HOME, HE IS MINDFUL THAT THIS IS THE TEMPERATURE OF THE WATER HE IS WALKING INTO. HE HAS SPENT THE LAST 20 YEARS SERVING LABAN, GROWING A FAMILY, AND RUNNING FROM THE CHOICES AND DECISIONS HE HAS MADE. AND NOW HE'S HEADING BACK TO FACE THEM BY FACING ESAU.

GENESIS 32:1-8 - JACOB HEADS FOR HOME, SENDS MESSENGERS AHEAD TO ESAU

ESAU APPEARS TO BEING A MAN ABOUT THINGS. HE IS RETURNING HOME AND IS HEADING, INTENTIONALLY, RIGHT TO WHERE HIS BROTHER IS LIVING. HE SENDS MESSENGERS AHEAD WITH GIFTS INTENDED TO SHOW ESAU THAT JACOB WANTS FAVOR AND PEACE BETWEEN THEM. THE MESSENGERS RETURN AND TELL JACOB THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION: "*WE MET YOUR BROTHER, AND HE'S COMING TO MEET YOU, WITH 400 MEN AT HIS SIDE (V. 6).*"

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS COULD MEAN - IT'S SORT OF A NEUTRAL AND FACTUAL STATEMENT. WE SAW HIM AND HE'S COMING TO MEET YOU WITH 400 MEN. DOES THIS MEAN ESAU IS SKIPPING HAPPILY WITH HIS 400 CLOSEST FRIENDS TO SEE HIS LONG LOST BROTHER JAKE? DOES THIS MEAN ESAU IS FINALLY ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THAT WHICH HE HAS COMMITTED TO - THE DEATH OF HIS "BROTHER" JACOB - AND HE IS BRINGING 400 OF THE BEST, MOST VICIOUS, BLOOD-THIRSTY MERCENARY KILLERS?

WE DON'T KNOW YET. BUT JACOB SEEMS TO THINK HE KNOWS WHICH OPTION THIS NEWS IS LEANING TOWARDS. GENESIS 32:7 TELLS US THAT "JACOB WAS GREATLY AFRAID AND DISTRESSED". HE SEPARATES HIS COMPANY INTO TWO GROUPS, SO THAT HOPEFULLY, WHEN ESAU'S ARMY ATTACKS, ONE GROUP COULD SURVIVE.

GENESIS 32:9-12 - JACOB PRAYS

THIS IS THE GRANDSON OF ABRAHAM SHOWING HIS TRUE HEART AT LAST. JACOB, FACING A PERCEIVED THREAT UPON HIS LIFE, SEEKS THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE. THIS PRAYER IS A PRETTY BOLD PRAYER. JACOB PLEADS WITH THE LORD FOR DELIVERANCE AND RECOUNTS THE LORD'S OWN PROMISES TO HIM AS THE REASONING FOR WHY THE LORD SHOULD BRING HELP! HE ESSENTIALLY PRAYS "GOD, YOU SAID YOU I WAS SUPPOSED TO RETURN HOME TO THE LAND OF CANAAN! IT WAS YOU WHO SAID YOU WOULD PROSPER ME AND MAKE MY DESCENDANTS LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA! IF ESAU KILLS ME, YOUR WORD WILL NOT COME TO PASS!" WOW!

JACOB IS BOLD, BUT HE IS BOLD BECAUSE HE KNOWS AND BELIEVES THAT YAHWEH IS THE FAITHFUL GOD WHO KEEPS PROMISES AND COVENANTS (REMEMBER THAT WHOLE ABRAHAM HAVING A SON THING?). AND WHILE HE IS BOLD, HE IS NOT ARROGANT - THOSE ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS. NOTICE HOW HE HUMBLY COMES TO GOD WITH CONFIDENCE - "*I AM UNWORTHY OF ALL THE LOVINGKINDNESS AND FAITHFULNESS YOU HAVE SHOWN ME*" HE PRAYS (V. 10). JACOB MODELS A GOOD HEART POSTURE HERE. WE OUGHT TO BOLDLY APPROACH GOD WITH CONFIDENCE IN WHAT HE HAS PROMISED, AND WE OUGHT TO APPROACH HUMBLY, KNOWING WE HAVE NOTHING AS WE COME!

HEBREWS TELLS US TO APPROACH GOD LIKE THIS: "THEREFORE LET US DRAW NEAR WITH CONFIDENCE TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED." (HEBREWS 4:16)

AS CHRISTIANS, WE COME WITH CONFIDENCE (BOLDNESS) ALL THE WHILE REALIZING WE'RE COMING FOR MERCY, GRACE AND HELP IN OUR TIME OF NEED TO BEGIN WITH!

ONE MORE POINT TO TAKE FROM JACOB'S PRAYER. WE SEE HERE THAT JACOB CLAIMED AND CONFESSED THE PROMISE GOD HAD MADE TO HIM (V 9-12). GOD NEVER FAILS ON HIS PROMISES AND SO JACOB WAS COUNTING ON GOD BEING FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR US FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. WE SHOULD FOLLOW JACOB'S EXAMPLE. WHAT HAS THE LORD PROMISED THAT YOU AND I MUST CLING TO IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS OF OUR LIFE? IF WE FIND AND REMEMBER AND BELIEVE THE PROMISE AND WORD OF GOD IN THESE SITUATIONS WE WILL FIND THE CONFIDENCE AND STRENGTH TO FACE OUR FEARS AND PRESS ON IN TRIALS.

HOWEVER, WE MUST BE CAREFUL THAT THE WORD WE ARE CLINGING TO IS INDEED A PROMISE OF GOD. IT CANNOT BE A MISAPPLIED OR MISINTERPRETED SCRIPTURE PULLED OUT OF CONTEXT. TOO MANY ARE LEFT DISCOURAGED WHEN THEY CLING TO THOSE KIND OF WORDS. IT ALSO SHOULD NOT BE A WORD WE "THINK" GOD HAS SPOKEN TO US WHICH IS NOT CONFIRMABLE BY THE SCRIPTURES. TOO MANY PEOPLE "THINK" GOD SAID SUCH AND SUCH AND THEY HOLD ON TO A WORD THEY HOPE IS THE LORD'S WHEN IT IS NOT. CLAIMING AND TRUSTING THE TRUE PROMISES OF GOD CAN CHANGE YOU LIFE. HOLDING ON TO A WORD THAT IS NOT THE LORD'S CAN RUIN IT.

GENESIS 32:13-21 - JACOB SENDS AHEAD THREE GIFTS

JACOB SENDS A LARGE CARAVAN OF GIFTS FOR ESAU BEFORE HIM. HE INSTRUCTS HIS SERVANTS TO APPROACH ESAU WITH THESE GIFTS AND SAY THAT "*THESE ARE A PRESENT TO MY LORD ESAU FROM JACOB, WHO IS BEHIND US.*" JACOB PLANS TO SEND THREE SEPARATE CARAVANS OF SUCH GIFTS TO ESAU WITH THE HOPE THAT IT "*WILL APPEASE (ESAU)...PERHAPS HE WILL IN TURN ACCEPT (JACOB)...*" (V. 20). THE THREE FOLD GIFT PRESENTATIONS MAY ALSO BUY JACOB A BIT MORE TIME TO ADJUST HIS PLANS IN CASE ESAU ISN'T APPEASED.

THIS CHAPTER GIVES US SOME GOOD GUIDANCE ON DEALING WITH RELATIONAL CONFLICT IN A GODLY WAY. JACOB'S APPROACH IS A GOOD MODEL FOR US. CONSIDER HIS APPROACH - JACOB ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THERE IS A CONFLICT RATHER THAN PRETENDING IT DOESN'T EXIST OR DOESN'T MATTER. HE BELIEVES IT IS HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP MAKE THINGS RIGHT (32:3). HE THEN GOES TO THE LORD IN PRAYER (V. 9-12). AFTER HE HAS ASKED GOD FOR HELP, HE DOESN'T JUST "LEAVE IT IN GOD'S HANDS", BUT INITIATES THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS RECONCILIATION. HE APPROACHED HIS "ENEMY" (HIS BROTHER) AND HE DOES IT WITH HUMILITY (V. 17-20). JACOB DID NOT LET HIS FEAR OF THE CONFLICT OR ESAU'S RESPONSE (IN THIS CASE POSSIBLE DEATH!) BE AN EXCUSE TO AVOID THE CONFRONTATION (V. 20). HE THEN LEAVES THE RESULTS, AND ESAU'S RESPONSE IN GOD'S HANDS. BUT FOR JACOB'S PART, AS FAR AS IT DEPENDED ON HIM, HE WORKED TOWARDS PEACE (ROMANS 12:18)

GENESIS 32:22-32 - JACOB WRESTLES WITH "GOD", NAME CHANGED

WE JUST READ WHAT IS NOT ONLY A REMARKABLE MOMENT, BUT ALSO AN HISTORIC ONE. JACOB HAS DONE ALL THAT HE CAN ACCORDING TO HIS EFFORTS TO MAKE PEACE WITH ESAU AND NOW "THE LORD" STEPS IN TO TEACH JACOB THE LESSON THAT WILL CHANGE THE TRAJECTORY OF HIS ENTIRE LIFE. JACOB HEADS TO BED WITH A HEART TROUBLED BY THE UNKNOWN EVENTS OF THE NEXT DAY WHEN HE WILL LIKELY MEET HIS BROTHER FACE TO FACE.

AT SOME POINT OF THE NIGHT A "MAN" MEETS HIM AND "*WRESTLED WITH HIM UNTIL DAY BREAK* (V. 24)". WE LEARN ELSEWHERE IN SCRIPTURE THAT THIS "MAN" WAS ACTUALLY AN ANGEL (HOSEA 12:4). AFTER AN ALL NIGHT WRESTLING MATCH, THE ANGEL HAS YET TO WIN THIS BOUT! THE ANGEL THEN DISLOCATED JACOB'S HIP SOCKET (A CRITICAL PIECE OF HARDWARE IN ANY PHYSICAL CHALLENGE) AND THEY CONTINUE TO WRESTLE! AS MORNING COMES, THE ANGEL HAS HAD ENOUGH AND WANTS TO LEAVE - RELENTLESS JACOB REFUSES TO LET HIM GO WITHOUT FIRST RECEIVING A BLESSING!

WHAT A WILD STORY! FIRST OFF, IF YOU HAVE EVER WRESTLED OR WATCHED COMPETITIVE WRESTLING OF ANY KIND, YOU CAN QUICKLY RECOGNIZE HOW PHYSICALLY DEMANDING IT IS. MOST HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLING MATCHES LAST 2-3 MINUTES PER ROUND AND THE KIDS ARE EXHAUSTED AT THE END OF THE TIME. JACOB IS WRESTLING ALL NIGHT! AND WITH A BUSTED HIP! AND HIS OPPONENT IS AN ANGEL! AND HE'S WINNING THE MATCH MOST OF THE TIME!

HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?! WELL IT'S NOT POSSIBLE...UNLESS GOD IS HELPING JACOB PREVAIL. AND BECAUSE GOD WAS HELPING JACOB IN HIS WRESTLING, JACOB IS ABLE TO OVERCOME. AND SO, JACOB LITERALLY AND EXPERIENTIALLY IS LEARNING THAT THERE ARE IMPOSSIBLE THINGS BEFORE HIM THAT HE CANNOT, THAT HE WILL NOT OVERCOME ON HIS OWN STRENGTH. BUT WITH GOD HELPING HIM, HE CAN PREVAIL. AND SO IN THIS VERY MOMENT, THE LORD CHANGES JACOB'S NAME TO "ISRAEL" WHICH MEANS "HE WHO STRIVES WITH GOD" IMPLYING THAT WITH GOD, HE WOULD PREVAIL. AND FROM HERE ON OUT, GOD'S SPECIAL LOVE AND FAVOR WOULD BE ON JACOB'S CHILDREN, NOW CALLED THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.

AT THE VERY INTRODUCTION OF THIS NAME, ISRAEL, GOD'S PEOPLE FOR ALL TIME WOULD BE POINTED BACK TO THIS STORY WHICH THEIR FOREFATHER EXPERIENCED FOR THEM. THEY WOULD, WE WOULD, HAVE OBSTACLES IN THIS LIFE THAT WE CANNOT OVERCOME, BUT IF WE STRIVE WITH GOD'S HELP, WE CAN PREVAIL. WITHOUT IT, WE ARE FEARFUL, TIRED, WEAK, HIP-OUT-OF-JOINT, KIND OF PEOPLE TRYING TO WRESTLE ANGELS ALL NIGHT. BUT WITH THE GOD OF ISRAEL, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.

AND WITH THAT, THE SUN BEGINS TO RISE UPON THE NEW DAY AND THE NEXT WRESTLING THAT THE MAN FORMERLY KNOWN AS JACOB WOULD HAVE TO FACE: HIS BROTHER ESAU.

GENESIS 33:1-11 - JACOB MEETS ESAU

JACOB LOOKS UP AND SEES ESAU. HE PUTS HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN SAFELY BEHIND HIM AND WALKS OUT TO MEET HIM. HE BOWS BEFORE HIS BROTHER SEVEN TIMES. HOW DOES ESAU RESPOND? BY RUNNING TO JACOB, EMBRACING HIM, THREW HIS ARMS AROUND HIS NECK AND KISSED HIM. THE REUNITED BROTHERS BEGIN TO WEEP TOGETHER. THIS IS NOT EXACTLY THE EXPECTED RESPONSE.

ESAU THEN WITH JOY AND EXCITEMENT WANTS TO MEET JACOB'S WIVES AND CHILDREN. HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHY JACOB SENT ALL THE GIFTS - *WE'RE BROTHERS, WE'RE FAMILY AND WE'RE TOGETHER AGAIN! YOU SHOULDN'T BE GIVING ME GIFTS, WE SHOULD BE CELEBRATING TOGETHER!* YET JACOB INSISTS ESAU TAKE THESE GIFTS - HE IS FILLED WITH GRATITUDE (AND RELIEF) AND WANTS TO HONOR HIS BROTHER. WHAT A TURN OF EVENTS.

APPARENTLY THE GOD WHO CAN EMPOWER YOU TO WIN AGAINST AN ANGEL IN AN ALL NIGHT WRESTLING MATCH CAN ALSO WORK IN THE HEART OF A MAN. RATHER THAN ESAU AND HIS 400 MEN MARCHING TOWARDS JACOB TO DESTROY HIM, ESAU RUNS TOWARDS JACOB AND EMBRACES HIM. WITH GOD, JACOB PREVAILS INDEED.

GENESIS 33:12-20

ESAU IS SO EXCITED TO BE REUNITED THAT HE ASSUMES THE TWO BROTHERS AND THEIR COMPANIES WILL JUST BE TOGETHER FOREVER! "COME WITH ME BACK HOME, I'LL LEAD THE WAY!" ESAU SAYS. JACOB SEEMS HESITANT AND DECIDES TO GO AT A SLOWER PACE BECAUSE OF THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN HE IS TRAVELING WITH. ESAU EVEN OFFERS TO LEAVE SOME OF HIS MEN WITH JACOB TO PROTECT THEM ALONG THE JOURNEY. ESAU IS GRACIOUS AND EAGER AND THANKFUL. JACOB IS RELIEVED, BUT STILL PROCESSING ALL THAT HAS JUST OCCURED. ESAU WILL HEAD BACK TO HIS HOME IN SEIR AND JACOB WILL MOVE SLOWER AND REST IN SUCCOTH.

JACOB TRAVELS A BIT FARTHER AND STOPS IN SHECHEM, A CITY THAT WAS SPECIAL AND SIGNIFICANT TO ABRAHAM (GENESIS 12:6). SHECHEM WAS THE FIRST PLACE ABRAHAM STOPPED WHEN HE FIRST ARRIVED IN THE LAND OF CANAAN DECADES BEFORE. NOW HIS GRANDSON WILL BUY HIS FIRST PLOT OF SOIL IN THE LAND THAT GOD HAD PROMISED TO GIVE TO ABRAHAM AND HIS DESCENDANTS. AND JACOB CONCLUDES THIS TIME BY BUILDING (POSSIBLY REBUILDING) AN ALTAR TO THE LORD THERE. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME JACOB HAS BUILT AN ALTAR. HE NAMES IT AFTER THE NEW NAME THE LORD HAS GIVEN HIM. THE GRANDSON OF ABRAHAM IS BACK HOME IN THE PROMISED LAND AND HAS RESUMED THE WORSHIP OF THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC IN THIS PLACE.

FROM HERE ON OUT WE COULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER WHAT THE NAME "ISRAEL" MEANS. AND IT WOULD BE WISE FOR US TO REMEMBER THE LESSON THAT JACOB LEARNS AS HE IS RENAMED "ISRAEL". GOD TEACHES JACOB THAT BEING CALLED BY GOD DOES NOT REMOVE TRIALS FROM YOUR LIFE. BEING "BLESSED" BY GOD DOESN'T MEAN YOU WILL NEVER WRESTLE. BUT THE LESSON OF JACOB → ISRAEL IS THAT WITH GOD, YOU CAN OVERCOME THE TRIALS AND PREVAIL IN THE WRESTLINGS, AS GOD EMPOWERS YOU TO DO SO. ON OUR OWN WE ARE HELPLESS, WITH GOD WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS. SO WHEN WE MEET TRIALS ALONG OUR ROAD, DO WE FOLLOW JACOB'S EXAMPLE AND RUN TO GOD FOR HELP? IF AND WHEN WE DO, TRUSTING IN GOD'S PROMISES TO US, WE WILL FIND THE STRENGTH AND BE LED ON THE PATH THAT GOD DIRECTS, WHICH IN THE END LEADS TO US KNOWING AND EXPERIENCING HIM.