

JANUARY 16

Genesis 32:13-34:31

Genesis 32:13-32

Vs. 13-21 Jacob sends Esau that day's equivalent to the "12 Days of Christmas." It's interesting to see how Jacob, a veteran herdsman, grouped these droves, even in terms of female to male ratios. I wonder why there were no male camels mentioned.

V. 20 There is certainly a cultural dance taking place here, but more importantly, Jacob is trying to appease Esau. I'm more impressed by what is missing. Any wife will tell you that "nothing says you're sorry, like saying you're sorry." The gifts were an interesting token, but the words never came. People secure in Christ should have boldness using that word.

Vs. 22-32 For us as disciples, the only lesson I can see here is that the Lord tests our tenacity. Faith is more often seen in persistence and endurance, than in genius and success. Apparently there was a folk legend of something like this. If you held the "spirit" until the light of dawn, it would grant your wish. I guess the Irish weren't too far off. Anyway, if so, God was using it and making a point with Jacob. This *man* would be the pre-incarnate Son of God. For Jesus I'm sure this was more like playing, trying to wrestle a sock away from a Jack Russell Terrier; but He wanted to see how persistent Jacob would be in pursuing God's blessing.

V. 28 This is the birth of the name *Israel*. What a name and how true it has been. And Israel has been striving with men and God ever since. Jacob's striving with God was in "taking" the blessing rather than waiting on God and receiving it in obedience. (Think about this when you read about the kingdom suffering violence below.) The prevailing is seen in his perseverance. He outlasted man, and even in his disobedience there was a faith in the promise that stayed alive. Isn't it interesting that the name came out of strife and contention, and it will be this way until Christ returns? Israel has been and will be a focus of fighting in the world, and it has been and will be the focus of spiritual aggression against God. But as the name suggests, with God's help, they will prevail.

God gave Jacob a constant reminder of this day and the blessing pronounced on him. What an interesting "reminder" to give to a scoundrel. This limp would be a permanent, lifelong disability. With every limp, Jacob would be reminded of his wrestling and contending with God and man and the words of blessing from the angel. This promise of blessing on Jacob would not end his woes. Oddly, the hip disorder was going to slow him down to make him less "tricky," and it would be a reminder to depend on God. Whether Jacob actually becomes more "spiritual" is doubtful.

You've got to laugh at God's timing. On the day when Esau is coming with 400 men, running the hundred in 13 seconds would be a handy skill; but Jacob is now disabled, though blessed, by God.

Genesis 33

Vs. 1-17 I'm sad every year when I read this. Here comes Esau, like a big, friendly, drooling St. Bernard, running up to Jacob, hugging him, and crying on him. Then there is Jacob, blessed, yet with ulcers and a bad conscience. And Jacob has a totally unfriendly, suspicious and "stiff-arming" manner.

It was actually the Lord who soothed Esau. His blessing Esau had allowed Esau to forgive. Also, it doesn't seem that Esau had a complicated and conniving nature, so he might not have been disposed to holding on to grudges.

Jacob never says he's sorry or that what he did was wrong. (Keep this in mind when you read the next few dysfunctional family adventures. The kids were like Dad, except for one notable

exception.) Jacob's entire demeanor and desire is to be "accepted" and then left alone. This was all about him. The gifts were only manipulative. Since Jacob thought he had to forcefully get God's blessing, he turned into this kind of a man. Esau looks good and honest. No ulcer there. But Jacob has masterminded his own little tragic life - rich, blessed, and miserable. And it will get worse.

Forcing the gifts on Esau was important to show socially that there was some sort of "good" relationship between the two parties. This is why Abraham refused the stuff from the king of Sodom. He didn't want to be shown as "bonded" to, or in agreement with, him. This is why both Pharaoh and Abimelech gave lavish gifts to Abe after Abe tricked them, to show that things had been smoothed. By taking these gifts, Esau was being forced by Jacob to show that all was well between them. Esau's greeting and actions show that all was already forgiven long before he saw the gifts. This looks like manipulation to me, and if so, Esau must have just smiled and thought, "Same old Jacob, poor guy."

Vs. 18-20 Now it is true that Jacob, like Abraham and Isaac before him, needed a large area where he could graze his herds. I'm surprised that Jacob settled near Shechem because his father Isaac was still alive, probably 75 miles south in Beersheba. Who knows what was going through his mind and why he didn't see his father. Did he still have a guilty conscience? I think Jacob was blessed by God, but cursed by his own deceitful nature. Jacob buying the land near Shechem meant that he needed it for grazing and that he would stay there. It would also allow him to trade with the people in Shechem. This is probably the acreage referred to in John 4.

Genesis 34

There must be a passage of time here. Just guessing, when Jacob returned, his oldest son Reuben would only have been about 13. If you look at the numbers mentioned previously, you can figure this out. Dinah might have been about 8 and Joseph would have been 6 when they entered the land. There must be about 10 years that have gone by, especially considering what Simeon and Levi were capable of.

Vs. 1-7 I've heard preachers "wax elephants" regarding Dinah meeting with the women of the land as being something wrong. I can't see it. Prince Shechem was obviously wrong, and he seems somewhat repentant and wants to do the right thing. We don't know enough to understand what Jacob keeping *his peace* meant. Jacob would have been there with all of his wives, so I'm sure Dinah was comforted and they talked about the situation.

V. 7 The sons were not just *very angry*. They felt that war had been declared.

Vs. 8-12 Two wrongs don't make a right, but it does seem like Hamor and Shechem were sincere.

Vs. 13-17 If not for the word *deceitfully* in v. 13, we wouldn't know that anything was wrong here. I think they knew that father, son, and the entire city would agree with their proposal. I don't agree with some who say the sons were surprised that Shechem agreed to this. I think this was premeditation and careful planning. These were the sons of Jacob, the trickster. They had grown up with the conflict and trickery between their mothers and the conflict and trickery between Jacob and Laban. They knew how to use conflict and trickery. As often happens, the sins of the fathers are magnified in the children.

Vs. 18-24 These people had no idea what was going to happen.

Vs. 25-31 Jacob took no real leadership to bring the situation to a conclusion. In that leadership vacuum, Simeon and Levi, "chips off the old block," took over; but as it often is when sin is out of control, they went way beyond Dad. After Simeon and Levi killed all the men (Jacob mentions later that in their murderous rage they also crippled the animals), the other brothers were lined up and ready with their shopping carts at the city gate. They entered the city and did

"supermarket sweep," looting the dead bodies, houses and markets. The neighbors would learn that this was "No Ordinary Family."

V. 30 Notice in Jacob's words, there is no regard for God. Jacob is worried about himself. Notice how often he says *me*, *my*, and *I*.

V. 31 Their words to Jacob, after he rebukes them, lacks an "I'm sorry." This was just like Jacob, who was no better with apologies. Jacob's woes aren't through. Now this dysfunctional family has two unrepentant murderers.

Matthew 11:7-30

Jesus is very pointed in this section. John the Baptist ended an era, so to speak. In v. 13 Jesus says, *all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John*. As disciples, we are living "at the end of the age" and have a very important role and place in God's continuing work.

Vs. 7-11 Although the people went to see John for various reasons, John the Baptist was the final prophet of the Old Testament period. He fulfilled both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Then Jesus goes on to say that John the Baptist was the greatest of all men ever born before the new covenant. If you think that over, that is a pretty huge declaration. There were great men who lived before John, but John had the greatest task and honor of all men before him. He was the messenger sent to introduce to Israel, the Messiah -the seed of Abraham and the promised son of the woman. In the Apostle John's description of Jesus and John the Baptist's ministry in John 1, you can see that John the Baptist wasn't just introducing the Jewish Messiah. He was introducing the Savior of mankind.

And then in a very brief way, Jesus says that all who are born of the Spirit by faith in Jesus are greater than John. Spiritual birth trumps physical birth. It is an amazing privilege to be born of the Son to follow Him in the harvest.

Vs. 12-15 I think this expresses the conflict between worshiping God by the law and rituals, and worshiping God in Spirit and in truth. Jesus introduced the latter. John concluded the former. Elijah was the prophet used by God to try to turn the northern kingdom of Israel back to God before their punishment. John the Baptist was used to attempt the same in his generation. Jesus said that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the earth would be required of that particular generation of Jews that would kill both John and Him. That punishment was finalized in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Vs. 16-17 That generation was treating the messages of both men in a trivial, childish way, insisting that both John and Jesus should conform to what the people expected and wanted. It was really a matter of life and death. The people should have been alert and ready to respond.

Vs. 18-19 John was criticized because he was very strict. Jesus was criticized because he ate rich food, drank wine and associated with tax collectors and sinners. Apparently these were "reasons" John and Jesus were not taken seriously. John didn't join in the excesses of the culture and Jesus didn't join in shunning people. He mixed freely with them. (Note on v. 18 - Luke 7:33 adds to John the Baptist's description and says, *eating no bread and drinking no wine*. Jesus was the opposite of John.)

Yet as much as people could reject John and Jesus for not dancing to their tune, they knew inwardly that both of these men were acting from God. In particular, the works Jesus was doing from the Father couldn't be denied.

Vs. 20-24 This is pretty straightforward. We've just read about Sodom. Can you imagine that?

Vs. 25-26 God intentionally blinds those who are *wise and understanding* in their own eyes. This happens even among His own children.

V. 27 On the one hand, this will make you a good Calvinist; but on the other, if you read John 6, Jesus says the same things but seems to imply that there is a response of faith. If a person welcomes the Word of the Son, the Father reveals the Son and the Son in turn reveals the Father. If that acceptance and welcoming faith is not present, no amount of hovering around Jesus brings a person closer. The Father doesn't grant access to the Son.

Vs. 28-30 The rest is the promise of rest in the battle. Notice the order: *Come to me*, then *take my yoke*, then *learn from me* and then *I will give you rest*. I heard this preached by Tony Evans once and it was amazing. If you don't have the devotion and relationship, learning is just effort and feeds only the mind. You have to **come to Him** and want **Him** and be submitted to **Him** in

devotion, taking **His** yoke. If this isn't first, learning just makes you hard and proud. And then, you have to learn **from Him**. You have to submit to **His** Word and **His** way. As Evans said, you don't go asking Him to do things your way or bless your way. He'll tell you that your way doesn't work and it hasn't been working. No, you've got to do things His way. You learn from Him. Then, and only then, do you get the rest. And this rest comes in a chaotic world. The world doesn't change, we do.

As we've seen in Genesis and in The Psalms, the real rest of God works even when there is no safety or security. That rest is in Jesus Himself because we belong to Him, following Him in the harvest, looking forward to His return.

Psalm 14

Vs. 1-4 Paul uses the words of this psalm in Romans 3 to show that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin. Only God can break that power, but for all men, including disciples, that power is still there. The answer is that now in Christ, for us, there is forgiveness; and the power of sin is broken by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The true cure comes when our bodies are "redeemed," in being resurrected.

Vs. 5-7 But in spite of all the hardship, David was confident that God would deliver and the people would once again rejoice.

Proverbs 3:19-20

Isn't it interesting to have this proverb, following the psalm that says, *the fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'*? If I found a pencil lying on a desk and tried to convince people the pencil "just got there, that it just "happened" after 80 zillion years of evolution and earthly events," they would say *I* was a fool. Rational people would tell me the pencil needed an engineer to design it because it's really two halves glued together around that fabricated graphite core. Then it gets 12 coats of paint, etc. And then, someone had to put it on the desk.

No, the pencil is evidence of a designer, an engineer and a manufacturer. But those same people would say the world just happened. It is our sin that makes us fools. It is that desire to rebel against God regardless of the cost that is sin. Sin is the most powerful and deadly force on this planet. Why don't we have a world "Sin" day and put little black ribbons on all our products to remind us that we're fighting against sin? It is hard to fight against something you don't believe in.