

The Hardest Test of Faith: The One in Front of You

Genesis 32.1-21

God has promised Jacob that he will return to his homeland safely, but there's still the problem of Esau. Remember him? – the brother who wanted to kill him! It's been 20 years, but old fears come back to haunt us. Jacob must now face his hardest test of faith.

Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire: Jacob's Fear of Esau

- Laban is gone, and angels meet Jacob: *It's all good!*
- Esau is coming with four hundred men: *It's terrible!*
- Jacob prays to God for deliverance: *I trust in You.*
- Jacob tries to appease Esau with gifts: *Hedging his bets.*

Lessons for the Growing Christian

- *Take comfort from the knowledge that angels watch over us.*
- *We can confidently pray for protection when we face trials.*
- *When facing a trial, trust in the Lord, not your own efforts.*



1. Genesis 32 is the end of the 'Laban narrative' – Jacob's twenty years spent with his uncle Laban in Haran (Gen. 29-31). When Jacob was on his way to Haran, he met angels, and now, as he returns from Haran, he meets angels again. These two meetings highlight the ministry of angels to God's people. How did God use angels in Scripture (how many different instances can you think of)? Are angels still active today (see Heb. 1.14)? Have you ever sensed angels ministering to you?
2. In Genesis 32.3-8, Jacob's hope turns into terror. See if you can follow his train of thought. What had happened the *last time* he was with his brother (Gen 27)? What blessing did Isaac bestow on him (see Gen 27.28-29)? What was his standing in relation to Esau (see Gen. 25.23 and 27.37)? Now notice how he refers to Esau and himself in Gen. 32.4-5; what is he inconspicuously trying to do? When he hears that Esau is coming to meet him, with four hundred men, what is he sure Esau plans to do?
3. Jacob's prayer in verses 9-12 is beautiful – a cry of desperation that reflects his utter dependency on God. What do you see in his prayer that is a model for our prayers today? How does he refer to God? To himself? What does he 'remind' God about? How does he make his request to the Lord? How would you describe his 'attitude' in prayer? When you are facing a trial, how do you pray?
4. After a beautiful prayer, it's disconcerting to find Jacob trying to 'fix things' on his own. To put it bluntly, he's trying to buy his brother off! But before we come down too hard on him for his faltering faith, perhaps a look in the mirror is in order. How often do we pray for strength, boldness, or some other kind of help from the Lord, then doubt His ability to answer, and trust in our own efforts instead? For a quick 'refresher course' on what really living by faith entails, see Prov. 3.5-6, Hebrews 11, and James 1.5-8 and 4.13-15.