

Genesis 32-33 “A New Name”
Psalm 60 and 108
Revelation 3:7-13

November 1, 2009

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 60.

The inscription over Psalm 60 is one of the longest in the Psalms:

*To the choirmaster: according to Shushan Eduth (probably the name of the tune).
A Miktam of David; for instruction;
when he strove with Aram-Naharaim and with Aram-Zobah,
and when Joab on his return struck down twelve thousand of Edom
in the Valley of Salt.*

Think about this in light of Jacob.

Where has he just come from?

Paddan-Aram – from Laban the *Aramean*.

and Psalm 60 is about fighting the Arameans.

Who is Jacob negotiating with in Genesis 32-33?

Esau – otherwise known as *Edom*.

and Psalm 60 is about fighting the Edomites.

For the next 1,000 years after Jacob,

Israel will be pinned in between the Arameans and the Edomites.

And Psalm 60 is a song for the midst of the battle.

When things are not going well –

and when it does not appear that God is with you.

In other words, it is the song for when your hip is out of joint!

It is the song for when you face the black night and you wonder if you will survive.

Our Lord Jesus was once caught between the Arameans and the Edomites, as it were –

Pilate the Roman governor of Judea and Herod the Edomite king of Galilee.

And so let us sing Psalm 60 as those who flee to Christ.

Psalm 60

Revelation 3:7-13

As we go through Genesis 32-33 today,

I want you to keep in mind what Jesus says in Revelation 3.

Because Revelation 3:7-13 is in some ways a commentary on Jacob,
whose name became Israel.

Even as God changed Jacob's name into Israel.

Even as the wrestler became the overcomer,
so also Jesus promises to you.

Genesis 32-33 is a call to perseverance.

To the one who endures – to the one who holds fast what he has –
to the one who conquers, Jesus says
“I will write on him the name of my God,
and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem,
which comes down from God out of heaven,
and my own new name.”

In other words, Jesus will make you like Jacob!
Even as Jacob endured and persevered
and clung to God when all his strength was gone –
and God gave him a new name,
so also Jesus will do for those who cling to him,
when all your strength is gone!

Over the last few weeks I’ve been suggesting
that Jacob is not nearly the scalawag that most people think.
Jacob is far more honorable than most moderns seem to think –
but our text today makes it clear that all of Jacob’s schemes and plans
(even the honorable ones!)
do not bring about the blessing of God.

And Jacob himself understands that apart from God’s steadfast love and faithfulness
he is only an unprofitable servant.

1. Two Camps (32:1-21)

*32:1 Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.
2 And when Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!”
So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

Mahanaim means “two camps.”

These two chapters are all about two camps:
Jacob’s camp and God’s camp (v1-2)
Jacob’s camp and Esau’s camp (v3-6)
Jacob’s two camps (v7-8)

By the end of chapter 33, however, there is only one camp:
El-Elohe Israel (God, the God of Israel)

Why?

Because at the end of chapter 32 God has renamed Jacob.
He has placed his name upon him.
And at the beginning of chapter 33 Esau returns to Seir,
renouncing any claim to the land.

Notice in verse 3 that Esau is already living in Seir:

3 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, 4 instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. 5 I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"

In verse 2 Jacob encounters the angels of God (the messengers of God).

Now he sends messengers (same word translated "angels") to Esau.

Why is Esau living in Seir?

When Jacob left Esau, he was living with Isaac in Beersheba –
in the southern part of the land.

But after Jacob left, Esau married one of the daughters of the Ishmaelites –
and moved southwards.

By moving to Seir, south of the Dead Sea,
Esau has renounced his claim to the Promised Land.

But if Esau has departed from the land and practically renounced his claim to the inheritance,
why does Jacob approach him with such fear and trembling?

There is one simple reason:

Esau had threatened to kill him.

The fact that Esau is now living 40 miles south of Isaac
is not entirely encouraging.

If Esau's intent is to kill Jacob,
then he may well prefer to live far away from his parents!

And when the messengers return, the news is not good:

6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, 8 thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape."

Jacob is terrified.

He remembers that Esau had threatened to kill him.

He knows that as long as he is alive, Esau has no rightful claim on the inheritance.

And so Jacob plans for the worst.

But he remembers God's promises,
and so, in the longest prayer in the book of Genesis,
he prays and asks God to do what he has promised:

9 And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac,
O LORD who said to me,
‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’
10 I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love
and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant,
for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan,
and now I have become two camps.

This is a model prayer:

It starts by identifying who God is –

“O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac.”

But he does not treat God as a distant deity who is only tangentially related to him.
He is the God of my fathers – but he is also my God!

“O Yahweh, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred,
that I may do you good.’”

(think of how Jesus teaches us to pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven”)

God had said in Genesis 28:13 at Bethel

that he was the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac.

Now Jacob asks God to remember his promise.

You said that you are the God of my fathers,
and you said that you would be with me – to do me good.

But Jacob also acknowledges that he is not worthy of God’s faithfulness.

God has been faithful.

He has demonstrated “steadfast love” to Jacob.

This word is “hesed” – which refers to “covenant faithfulness” –
someone who does what he promises.

And Jacob says that he is not worthy of the *least* of God’s deeds of *hesed*.

Why does he say this?

Because he crossed the Jordan River with only a staff.

Unlike Abraham’s servant, he had no great wealth with which to obtain a bride.

But now he has returned to the Jordan River as Mahanaim – two camps.

He had nothing – and now God has given him great wealth.

Jacob recognizes that all that he has comes from God’s hand.

Isaac had inherited everything from his father.

But Jacob has received everything from God.

Truly the blessing of Abraham has come to Jacob –

not that Jacob has received the flocks and herds of Abraham
(Esau has those)

but that Jacob has the *presence of God* with him.

And because God is with him, Jacob asks:

*11 Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau,
for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children.*

God has given Jacob wives and children.
He has given him flocks and herds.

But God has not given Jacob a fighting force!
Abraham had 318 trained warriors in his service.
But their descendents now serve Esau.
And Esau is now approaching with 400 warriors.

*12 But you said, 'I will surely do you good,
and make your offspring as the sand of the sea,
which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"*

Remember your promises, O God!

Brothers and sisters,
this is how Jesus prays for us!
Jacob is the Seed of Abraham – he is the one who has received the inheritance –
and so he prays that God would bless his offspring – his seed.

Just as Jesus prays for you.
And so therefore we come to God in the name of Jesus, the Seed of Abraham,
and we say:

Remember your promises, O God!
God has been faithful to his promises –
in spite of our unworthiness,
in spite of the fact that we have nothing.
And so we come to him, with nothing to offer him –
except what he has given to us!

And after praying,
then do what God has put in front of you to do.

Because that is what Jacob does.

13 So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 16 These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove." 17 He instructed the first, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?' 18 then you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.'" 19 He likewise

instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, “You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, 20 and you shall say, ‘Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.’”

Jacob sends a present to Esau:

220 goats
220 sheep
30 camels – with young
50 cattle
30 donkeys

There is a play on words going on here:

Jacob is now two camps (Mahanaim),
and he offers Esau a gift (minhah)

In later Hebrew scriptures, this word is used almost exclusively for the grain offering.
It refers to a gift given by a subordinate to his superior.

Some have suggested that Jacob’s present indicates a lack of faith in God.

He has prayed to God.
He has asked God to protect him.

But Jacob seems awfully concerned with appeasing Esau –
with saving “face” as it were.

If you look at verses 20-21,
the word for “face” occurs 5 times (only once is it translated “face”!)

*For he thought, “I may appease him [his face]
with the present that goes ahead of me, [before my face]
and afterward I shall see his face.
Perhaps he will accept me.” [my face]
21 So the present [minhah] passed on ahead of him, [before his face]
and he himself stayed that night in the camp [mahaneh].*

Some would say that Jacob is more concerned with the face of Esau
than he is with the face of God.

But that misses the point here.

It is certainly true that Jacob is concerned with the face of Esau.
But Jacob’s prayer makes it clear that he understands that it is *only*
if the face of God shines upon him
that he will find favor before the face of Esau.

The point *is* all about *face*.

But you have to understand what gifts do in ancient culture.
A gift creates an obligation on the part of the recipient.

Jacob wants something from Esau,
so he gives him a princely present.

2. A New Name (32:22-32)

22 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, [he strives with God] for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. 30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, [face of God] saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

There are some delightful word plays here:

even in English you can see the play between Jacob and the ford of the Jabbok;
but it gets better, because the verb "to wrestle" is 'abaq.

Jacob and Esau wrestled in the womb (ch 25)

Jacob has wrestled with Esau and Laban.

Esau represents his descendents – the Edomites;
and Laban is the "Aramean" – representing the Arameans (Syrians).

In later history, the Edomites dominate the south.

The Arameans dominate the north.

Jacob/Israel has wrestled with Edom and Laban – and has overcome.

But not only has Jacob wrestled with Esau and Laban.

Jacob now wrestles with God.

Remember Hosea 12 that we read a few weeks ago:

"In the womb he took his brother by the heel,
and in his manhood he strove with God.

He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor."

The change of Jacob's name is crucial.

God had changed Abram's name to Abraham.

Now Jacob is shown to be the true seed of Abraham,
as God changes his name from Jacob (wrestler/supplanter)
to Israel (he who perseveres with God)

Jacob is the wrestler

Israel is the one who perseveres – and prevails over God and man

What is interesting, though, is that unlike Abraham,
the scriptures continue to use Jacob and Israel interchangeably.

Augustine commented on this wisely:

“The name Abraham was to receive its explanation in this world,
because it was here that he became the father of many nations,
from which his name is derived.

The name Israel, on the other hand, belongs to the next world,
where we will see God.

So the people of God, the Christian people,
is in this world and this time both Jacob and Israel;
Jacob in our actual situation,
Israel in our hopeful expectation.”

We are moving from Jacob to Israel,
as we seek to persevere in our wrestling.

But even insofar as we have already become Israel through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we limp.

And even as Israel limps towards Esau,
demonstrating that if he prevails, it will not be through his physical strength,
but only through God’s blessing,
even so “the limp is the posture of the saint,
walking not in physical strength,” (Waltke, 448)
but in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Jacob Blesses Esau (33:1-16)

33:1 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. 2 And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. 3 He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

Bowing seven times is the sign of a vassal.

Ironic, isn’t it?

Rebekah had been told “the older will serve the younger.”

Isaac had blessed Jacob, saying,

“may your brothers bow down to you.”

But now Jacob is bowing down before Esau.

Jacob treats Esau as the older brother,
and what is more he speaks to Esau as a servant to his lord –

4 But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. 5 And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6 Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. 7 Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. 8 Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company [camp] that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." 10 Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand.

Esau speaks of Jacob as "my brother" –
but Jacob speaks of Esau as "my lord."

What is more, Jacob brings a gift (minhah)
which is ordinarily given by the inferior to his superior.

But in verse 10 things start getting interesting:
For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me.

Remember Peniel – your face is as the face of God:
What happened when Jacob saw the face of God?
He wrestled with him – and he prevailed.
Jacob is now wrestling with Esau – in diplomacy!
Jacob could have come with haughty arrogance,
claiming the birthright and insisting that Esau bow before him.

But Jacob is no idiot!
He is seeking to appease his brother.
He wants Esau to stay in Seir and leave the Promised Land to him.

Esau, on the other hand, appears to have no more interest in God's promises
than he had 8 chapters ago.

And so Jacob, in his diplomatic wrestling,
changes the terms:
he has been saying, please accept this gift (this minha),
but now he says, "please accept my blessing."

*11 Please accept my blessing that is brought to you,
because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough."
Thus he urged him, and he took it.*

Many commentators have said that Jacob feels guilty about "stealing" Esau's blessing,
and so he is offering this gift as a token of his repentance.

This entirely misses the point!

Esau asks what is this “company” (mahaneh)

Jacob says that it is a present (minhah).

Esau says, I have enough.

Jacob says, no, accept this *blessing*, because God has dealt graciously with me,
and because *I* have enough.

This has nothing to do with guilt

(after all, we have not seen anything in Genesis
that even suggests that Jacob was guilty!)

rather, this has to do with Jacob’s *very cautious* assertion
of the right to bless his brother.

He humbles himself before his brother –

he will not be proud and arrogant.

Jacob believes God’s promises.

Augustine points out that Jacob bows before his older brother
to show us that these things “were said of a future Jacob.”

If Jacob understands that the promise to Abraham is still 400 years away,
then he may well have understood that “the older shall bow to the younger”
may also be centuries away!

And in so doing, Jacob portrays the humility of Christ.

Think about it:

Jesus was King.

But he humbled himself and became a servant.

Jacob is the heir – he has received the birthright and the blessing –
but he does not need to make a show of it.

And so he humbles himself before Esau.

Normally, in the custom of the times, such a gift would call forth an exchange.

Why does not Esau offer anything in exchange for Jacob’s gift?

Some have said that Esau accepts this “blessing” as reparations for the “stolen” blessing.

It would be better to say that the “gift” that Esau gives Jacob
is that he vacates the Promised Land.

Whatever he may think about what happened 20 years before,
(which neither of them mention!)

Esau accepts the fact that Jacob has been blessed.

All Jacob wants is for Esau to renounce any claim on the blessing/birthright.

And Esau does.

In effect, Jacob gives Esau 550 animals

in exchange for Esau’s renouncing the inheritance.

The irony is that it would appear that Esau received all of Isaac's flocks.
He certainly seems to have Isaac's servants!

What does Jacob get?

The blessing of Abraham.

A blessing that is still 400 years away from its fulfillment.

Jacob sees, by faith, that the blessing of Abraham is what *really* matters here.

As we'll see next week, Jacob lives a very precarious life in the land.

He is a wandering nomad in the midst of powerful tribes.

But he understands that this blessing – and the presence of the living God that goes with it –
is worth any sacrifice!

(even humbling himself before the brother who should have bowed to him!)

Our Lord Jesus will do this when he stands before Esau's heir, Herod.

He could have asserted the right of Jacob (or, of course, his divine status!),

but some things are more important than asserting your rights.

Parents: do not get all uptight about your "rights" with your children –

Husbands: do not insist on your "authority" over your wife –

there are things that matter more than this!

That's why Jesus said to seek first *his* kingdom –

it is why Jesus said that we need to love *him* more than we love our family.

The Blessing of Abraham –

the presence of God with us –

knowing God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit –

these things are what matter!

If you forget this, then you will be forgotten.

If you are obsessed with your own legacy –with your own name – your own family –

then you will fade into obscurity.

But if you seek the *face of God* –

if your quest is to know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent,

then as you persevere in that quest,

you will receive that imperishable name that Jesus has received from his Father.

12 Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you." 13 But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die. 14 Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

Esau offers to escort Jacob to Seir,

but a company of hunters and fighters can move much faster than all the flocks and herds,
and so Jacob urges Esau to go ahead.

Jacob probably had no intention of going to Seir,
and so when Esau offers:

15 So Esau said, "Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me."

Jacob replies:

*But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord."
16 So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.*

Esau understands that Jacob isn't coming.

It would be rude to say so,
but the fact that Jacob declines Esau's offer of protection
indicates clearly that Jacob is not coming.

4. Succoth and Shechem: the Inheritance of Israel (33:17-20)

*17 But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock.
Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. [booths]*

Succoth is on the east side of the Jordan –
in the Transjordan region where the 2 ½ tribes will settle.

*18 And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way
from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. 19 And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's
father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his
tent. 20 There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.*

We'll come back to this next week,
but the point we need to see today is that Jacob is building an altar near Shechem –
one of the places where Abraham had built an altar in Genesis 12:6-7.

Psalm 108 reflects on this particularly juxtaposition of places
(part of Psalm 108 is virtually identical to Psalm 60).
In verses 7-10 of Psalm 108,
we hear about how God will divide up Shechem
and portion out the Valley of Succoth.
Shechem and Succoth are nowhere near each other.
Succoth is on the east side of the Jordan, near Peniel.
Shechem is pretty far west of the Jordan,
near Mt. Gerizim.

What is more, in Psalm 108, the King asks the question,
Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?

The only way that we can triumph over Edom
is if God goes before us to tread down our foes.

So the geographical connection of Shechem, Succoth and Edom
makes us think of the story of Jacob and Esau.

But there's more:

David's song begins "Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!"

What happened at dawn in Genesis 32:26?

God blessed Jacob.

And why does David sing praise to the LORD among the nations?

"For your steadfast love is great above the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the clouds."

Remember Jacob's prayer:

*10 I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love
and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant,*

David remembers God's steadfast love and faithfulness to Jacob.

And he asks God to show that same steadfast love and faithfulness to him.

And as we have already seen,

this connects with Jacob and David's heir, our Lord Jesus,

who was brought to the fortified city –

who came to Herod the Idumean, together with Pilate the Roman,
and even to the priests of God's own temple!

And in him, we too may sing:

"Oh grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man!

With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes."