

• *Jacob is still discovering himself*

1. Again Jacob is taught that evasiveness does not pay

• *The only successful venture in his life has been the time when he said 'My honesty will answer for me.'*

2. Jacob tells of his fear

• *Behind fear is unbelief and lack of love*

• *Then they separate peacefully*

3. The past begins to catch up with Jacob

• *Frightening news - Esau is coming to meet him and has four hundred men with him*

• *Dealing boldly with the past*

Jacob is still in the process of discovering himself. For a long time he has been a man of deceit and trickery but he is slow to recognize this deceit in himself. Jacob is a disciple, a learner. God is his teacher. He has come under the discipline of various trials ^{☐1} and is now being made to face the painful truth about himself ^{☐2}.

1. **Again he is taught that evasiveness does not pay.** Jacob leaves Laban. There is still a lot of evasiveness in his character. He makes no attempts to explain anything to Laban; he simply leaves ^{☐1}. At the same time Rachel steals the idols that Laban had at home; they seem to have had value as an entitlement to the family inheritance ^{☐1 ☐2}. Jacob's way of acting lacks any kind of frankness. '*Jacob deceived Laban*' says Genesis 31:20. When Laban found out he was furious and soon started to pursue Jacob's family. Jacob is in Canaan by the time Laban catches him, in Gilead ^{☐3}. Laban is ready to do harm to Jacob but God warns him in a dream to leave Jacob alone ^{☐4}. So he catches up with the fleeing family ^{☐5} and complains bitterly to Jacob ^{☐6}, telling him of how he was inclined to do him harm ^{☐7} and complaining about the stolen gods ^{☐8}. Jacob once again is discovering that God will not bless any of his efforts at self-centred manipulation. Not a single piece of deceit has turned out good since he was a young man. The only successful venture in his life has been the time when he said 'My honesty will answer for me.'

2. **Jacob tells of his fear** ^{☐1}. It is an important confession. Behind Jacob's deceitfulness is fear. And behind fear is unbelief and lack of love. Faith works by love ^{☐2}. Love throws out fear ^{☐3} (1 John 4:18). Weak faith produces flimsy love. Inadequate love is full of fear. Fear leads to deceit.

Jacob swears no one has stolen Laban's gods ^{☐1}; he does not know about his wife's theft ^{☐2}. But Laban's search does no good ^{☐3} and Rachel's trickery is as good as her father's ^{☐4} and her husband's. Jacob is in a position to act self-righteously as though he were a model of good behaviour ^{☐5}. He certainly can claim that Laban has had a good bargain in having had Jacob to work for him ^{☐6} and that only God's protection of Jacob has preserved him ^{☐7}. Laban is still self-justifying ^{☐8} but suggests they part peaceably ^{☐9}. The two make a covenant ^{☐10} with a stone monument as a witness which they call 'The heap of witness' in Aramaic and in Hebrew ^{☐11}. Then they separate peacefully.

3. **The past begins to catch up with Jacob.** The angels of God are travelling with Jacob ^{☐1}, and Jacob sends messengers ahead to tell of his coming ^{☐2}. But soon he has a piece of frightening news. Esau is coming to meet him and has four hundred men with him ^{☐3}. Jacob is afraid. The last time he had any contact with Esau, Esau was threatening to kill him. Now Esau is travelling towards Jacob with four hundred men! It is the greatest danger Jacob has been in since he ran from Esau over twenty years ago. What will he do now? It is a sin of the past catching up with him. He had never dealt straightforwardly with the complaints of Esau. He had simply run for his life without caring to reach any happy arrangement with Esau. Now Esau is on his way with a large number of men, almost an army!

God was encouraging Jacob to deal boldly with the past. The warning to Laban ^{☐1} and the accompanying angels ^{☐2} were indications that God

^{☐1} 29:1–30:43
^{☐2} 31:1–55

^{☐1} 31:17–18
^{☐2} 31:19

^{☐3} 31:21–23
^{☐4} 31:24
^{☐5} 31:25
^{☐6} 31:26–28
^{☐7} 31:29
^{☐8} 31:30

^{☐1} 31:31
^{☐2} Galatians 5:6
^{☐3} 1 John 4:18

^{☐1} 31:31
^{☐2} 31:32
^{☐3} 31:33
^{☐4} 31:34–35
^{☐5} 31:36–37
^{☐6} 31:38–41
^{☐7} 31:42
^{☐8} 31:43
^{☐9} 31:43
^{☐10} 31:44–46
^{☐11} 31:47–55

^{☐1} 32:1
^{☐2} 32:2–5
^{☐3} 32:6

was with him. He had made peace with Laban. Now is the time to become reconciled to Esau. He knows that God is with him. He calls the name of the place 'Mahanaim' – 'Two Camps'. Alongside his own camp there is a host of angels. God who sent angels to protect him when he was travelling to Haran (28:12) is now sending angels to protect him on his return.

☞¹ 31:24
☞² 32:1

• *Jacob is not ready yet to trust God alone*

But not even an angelic army is enough to make Jacob trust God alone. He has to do some organising himself! He divides his large company into two ☞¹. At least half might survive if Esau invades ☞². He still needs to make his own arrangements as well as having God's angels. Apparently Jacob feels the angels could do with some practical scheming to help them along with their protective measures!

☞¹ 32:7
☞² 32:8

• *Self discovery*

In all of this Jacob is being forced to discover himself. He should have learnt by now that treacherous subterfuge and sneaky dishonesty simply brought no blessing to him. Had it worked with Esau? With Isaac? With Laban? And the cause of the whole business is still not dealt with. The violent hostility of Esau over twenty years ago was caused by Jacob. One might think it would fall aside with the passing of all these years. Jacob's past wickedness has caught up with him.

• *In his desperation Jacob turns to God in prayer*



Many of us have to come to the point where we are forced to face ourselves and our personal weaknesses. Jacob has reached that point. All he can do now is pray.

• *Close to discovering God and His great mercy*

So in his desperation Jacob turns to God. It is this that God wants. A man who is desperate is open to God's ways and God's will. Perhaps Jacob will get rid of his trickery and deceit for ever. Jacob's only hope, in his extreme desperation, is that the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac will come to his rescue. When we discover ourselves and see the awful truth, we are getting close to discovering God and His great mercy.

Note

1. This is based on a similar custom at Nuzi. It has been disputed but still remains the best explanation, in my opinion.

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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