

Mahanim — Two Hosts, Jacob's Scheming, and David's Parched Corn

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Jacob at Mahanim — Scheming Instead of Resting

Genesis 32 opens with Jacob coming to a remarkable experience: the angels of God met him. He named the place Mahanim — Two Hosts. What an impression that should have made on him. He had encountered the host of God. He had been seen, attended, met. The God of his fathers had sent His ministering servants to him. And yet the next thing we read is Jacob scheming.

He hears that Esau is coming with four hundred men. His first response is to divide his company — if Esau destroys one group, the other can escape. His second response is prayer, genuinely expressing his dependence on God, confessing his unworthiness for all the lovingkindness shown to him. His third response is more scheming: he prepares a series of droves of animals as a gift — ten separate waves of generosity — hoping to soften Esau's heart before he himself arrives. Then he wrestles with the angel, not in prayer but in physical contest, demanding a blessing. The whole chapter is Jacob trying to make things happen.

This is not a chapter about someone depending on the Lord. It is a chapter about someone praying and scheming, praying and scheming, and managing to be afraid despite having just met the host of God. There is a verse in Proverbs that captures it: the horse is prepared for the day of battle, but safety is of the Lord. Jacob was perpetually preparing the horse. The point of that proverb is not that the horse does not need preparing — it is that safety is of the Lord regardless of how thoroughly the horse is prepared. Jacob had not got there yet. He couldn't sit

quietly and say: the angels of God met me; what do I have to fear?

*The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but safety is of the Lord. —
Proverbs 21:31*

This is an honest portrait, and an honest one because it is so recognisable. We pray, genuinely, and then we rise from our knees and begin to work out what we are going to do. We hear the Lord's voice and then we make our plan. We depend on God and then we prepare the ten droves of animals. That is Jacob, and that is us.

David at Mahanim — A Different Man in the Same Place

Second Samuel 17:24 finds David at Mahanim — the same place Jacob had been. He has fled from Jerusalem before Absalom's revolt. Along the way Shimei, a man of Saul's family, threw stones at him and cursed him viciously: away, thou man of blood! When Abishai offered to go and take his head off, David stopped him: let him alone. For Jehovah has bidden him. It may be that Jehovah will look on my affliction, and that Jehovah will requite me good for his cursing this day.

David brought up, in defence of the man cursing him, the shame of his own son's rebellion. Someone accused me unjustly, David said in effect, but my own son is seeking my life — and the Lord has permitted both. That is a heart resting in the government of God. David was not scheming. He was not preparing ten droves of gifts to soften Absalom's heart. He was walking under a chastening hand that he recognised as just, and resting in the God who holds all things.

When he arrives at Mahanim, the supplies that meet him tell their own story. In the list of provisions that Barzillai and the others brought — beds, basins, wheat, barley, honey, cream, cheese — there is parched corn. Parched corn in the Old Testament speaks of Christ in resurrection. It was what Ruth ate in the field when Boaz pressed it upon her. It was what David brought to his brothers at the battle line in 1 Samuel 17. It was the bread of the harvest, of resurrection, of the new

thing God was doing.

What does the man of God feed on in the midst of trouble? Parched corn — Christ in resurrection, Christ in glory, the ascended Lord. David was not feeding on grievances, or on plans, or on Absalom's movements. He was in a place where the Lord had brought him, eating what the Lord had provided, including that which spoke of the risen Lord who could not be touched by anything his enemies might do.

The Life Hid with Christ in God

Colossians 3:1–3 puts David's experience into New Testament language: if ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. What can touch the life that is hid with Christ in God? Nothing. It is resurrection life, life in the glory, life that no enemy can reach. The same Absalom who could take Jerusalem could not reach that life.

Second Corinthians 4:8–11 shows the apostle Paul living in precisely this way: troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed — always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. What sustained Paul through what he endured was not that his circumstances were easy. It was that the life of Jesus — resurrection life, Christ in glory — was being manifested through his mortal flesh. He was feeding on parched corn.

Second Corinthians 5:14–15 adds the constraint: the love of Christ constraineth us — because we thus judge that if one died for all, then all died — and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again. It is not only that He died for us,

but that He rose again. That rising is the ground of the life hid with Christ in God, and the ongoing object of the soul that feeds on parched corn in the wilderness.

The Blessed Hope — Coming to Meet Us

First Thessalonians 4:13–18 ties this to the coming of the Lord. The angels of God met Jacob at Mahanim. The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God — and the dead in Christ shall rise first, and then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. He is not sending angels. He is coming Himself to meet us. That is infinitely more than what Jacob had.

That hope — based entirely on His death and resurrection — is the ground of everything. Romans 6:3–10 anchors it: we have been baptised unto His death, buried with Him, raised to walk in newness of life, identified with His resurrection. Christ having been raised from the dead dies no more; death has dominion over Him no more. We are risen with Him. We share that indestructible life. And so whatever Esau brings with his four hundred men, whatever Absalom is doing in Jerusalem, whatever is happening in this world that causes anxiety — it cannot touch the life hid with Christ in God. We are waiting for the last trump, not the last jihad.
