

GENESIS

In the beginning God...

Jacob and Esau – Part 2

Jacob had spent the night wrestling with God and even though he undoubtedly is physically exhausted he is spiritually renewed and is ready to face his brother Esau. Although Jacob's servants reported back that Esau was coming, there was nothing mentioned that they had actually talked with Esau, perhaps they only saw or encountered Esau's entourage. It had been 20 plus years since they saw each other, neither one had a clue what the intentions were of the other. There was no time to back out now for either party. To begin the reunion Jacob prepared a large gift of animals divided into several droves followed by a servant who would say to Esau when they approached "*They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.*" (Genesis 32:18 ESV)

Chapter 33

V1 *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.* (ESV)

V2 *And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all.* (ESV)

V3 *He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.* (ESV)

Immediately on Jacob's return to his family he saw Esau and his 'army' approaching in the distance. Possibly as one final precaution, Jacob arranged his wives and children in appropriate order, the two female servants (handmaids), and their children first, then Leah and her children, then Rachel and Joseph. Presumably the purpose was to give the maximum possible protection to those he loved allowing them to scatter in different directions if necessary. Jacob then followed them all to meet his brother.

As was customary in those days, Jacob bowed low before Esau seven times as he came near him (similar to what was recorded later in the Egyptian *Tell el-Amarna* tablets of 1350-1330 BC stating that when you approach a king you bow seven times). This was not intended as an acknowledgment of surrender, but as a token of respect and recognition of Esau as ruler of the region.

V4 *But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.* (ESV)

V5 *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.” (ESV)

V6 *Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. (ESV)*

V7 *Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. (ESV)*

Then an amazing thing happened, Esau could no longer restrain himself and he ran towards Jacob, hugging and kissing him in a display of joyful reunion and reconciliation. He had long since realized that Jacob had properly been entitled to the birthright and blessing, and that God had chosen Jacob to be the inheritor of the promises, and he was reconciled to this fact. Now, finding that Jacob no longer held any bitterness in his heart toward him, but that he earnestly desired to regain their lost fellowship, Esau was overjoyed.

As for Jacob, this sudden outburst of affection and gladness, instead of the bitter encounter he had been dreading for 20 plus years was overwhelming. Esau then noticed all the children and their mothers who had come up to them, Esau asked Jacob what relation they were to him. Jacob then gave his testimony concerning the large family with which God had blessed him since he had last seen his brother. Each of his wives and their children then came up to be introduced to their uncle and brother-in-law, in the order Jacob had assigned to them, each showing full and proper respect.

V8 *So Esau said, “What do you mean by this whole procession I met?” “To find favor with you, my lord,” he answered. (HCSB)*

V9 *But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” (ESV)*

V10 *Jacob said, “No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me. (ESV)*

V11 *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. (ESV)*

After seeing the family, Esau viewed the large flocks and herds of animals in the band that was still with Jacob (one had been sent away when he had divided them into two bands - See Genesis 32:7-8). This may have reminded him of the five droves that had met him earlier as he approached. Though the shepherds had told Esau they were meant as a present for him, he felt it proper that he should inquire more specifically about them from Jacob himself. It seemed out of proportion that he should receive such a large gift. Jacob, however, assured him that they were indeed intended as a present, in hopes that he would be found acceptable to Esau.

Although Esau greatly appreciated Jacob’s generosity he felt it was unnecessary to accept it. He himself had great wealth and he was more than happy to be reunited with

his brother without his favor having to be influenced by any gift. He therefore declined, urging Jacob to keep the animals for himself and his family. Jacob, however, insisted.

Many commentators point out that even though the two phrases *“I have enough”* translated the same in English, the phrase used by Esau (verse 9) uses the Hebrew word *rab*, meaning “much,” where the word in Jacob’s phrase uses the word *kol*, meaning “everything.” Esau may quite likely have had more actual possessions than Jacob by this time; but Jacob knew that, in the Lord, he had an inexhaustible resource. God had blessed him beyond measure, most of all now in this joyous reunion with his long-estranged twin brother.

Esau, realizing the sincerity of Jacob’s motives, and also desiring that there be no question that he also earnestly desired full reconciliation with his brother, finally agreed to accept the gift.

V12 *Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you.”* (ESV)

V13 *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.* (ESV)

V14 *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.”* (ESV)

V15 *Esau said, “Let me leave some of my people with you.” But he replied, “Why do that? Please indulge me, my lord.”* (HCSB)

V16 *So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.* (ESV)

V17 *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.* (ESV)

No doubt, the two brothers spent some time in telling each other all that had happened since they had separated so long ago. Esau also had a large family and great possessions (See Genesis 36:1-8), and he had undergone many experiences, which he probably shared with Jacob. Jacob was undoubtedly anxious to hear about his mother and father. Esau probably told him about them, however for some reason no further mention is made in Genesis concerning Rebekah or Isaac except in connection with their deaths and burials (See Genesis 35:27-29; 49:31). Quite probably, Rebekah had died by this time and Isaac was not only blind but also completely incapacitated with age. We do know that Isaac died at the age of 180 and was probably around 153 years old when Jacob returned to Canaan.

Isaac was presumably living in Hebron, where he later died, and Esau assumed Jacob would be journeying on southward in that direction. He offered to accompany him, with the two companies traveling together. Jacob, however, declined the offer, not because

he did not trust Esau, but because he knew it would be impractical. Esau's band of armed men would probably be impatient with the slow pace they would have to follow, desiring to get back home as soon as possible. Jacob's company would have to travel very slowly. Jacob's children were all young, the oldest probably not more than 12 or so and the animals were all but exhausted from their long trek, many of them even nursing their young. They had already been under great strain in escaping from Laban, and now that the anticipated danger from Esau had also been removed, they would want to take it a little slower for a time. Jacob assured Esau that they would follow behind, and would eventually see him again back in his own land of Seir.

Esau then offered to leave at least a portion of his men with Jacob for protection, but Jacob assured him that even this was not necessary. Though he did not say so, Jacob no doubt also realized that he should remain separate and independent from Esau, as far as the future accomplishment of God's plans for his children was concerned; and it would be better to establish such a separation from the beginning.

Esau therefore agreed to Jacob's request, and headed back to Seir. Jacob also planned to continue south, but went much more slowly, actually stopping for considerable intervals at both Succoth and Shechem. Succoth (in Hebrew means "booths") is probably the same place mentioned later in the time of Joshua (See Joshua 13:27) and Gideon (See Judges 8:5-16). It was still east of the Jordan and either north of the Jabbok River or in the valley of the Jordan at the mouth of the Jabbok in a plain where there was pasture for the flocks and where they could rest awhile to regain their strength. It seemed like a good place to stay temporarily; so Jacob built booths (stalls) for the cattle and a simple house for himself, until they were ready to continue on across the Jordan into Canaan proper.

V18 *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.* (ESV)

V19 *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.* (ESV)

V20 *There he erected an altar and called it El-elohe-israel.* (ESV)

Jacob eventually moved on and headed westward across the Jordan River. After crossing the Jordan, they came to a valley near the city of Shechem, and there Jacob pitched his tent. This was not very far from Succoth, but it was definitely in the land of Canaan and was the place where God had first appeared to Abram as he entered the land (See Genesis 12:6-7).

Shechem was the first spot in Canaan proper where Jacob set up an encampment. Expecting that some day in the future his seed would inherit the whole land, he desired to purchase a portion right here, which would serve as a token of his confidence in God's future fulfillment of the complete promise. The plain was fertile and would make an excellent place for pasturing the flocks. He would also dig a well here, in order to have an independent water supply. The well is not mentioned in Genesis but is referred to in John 4:6 (Jesus talks to Samaritan woman at a well in Sychar near Shechem).

Shechem was a prominent city throughout Biblical history, located on Mount Gerizim in what later became the territory of the tribe of Ephraim. It was very close to the future city of Samaria, which became the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.

When Jacob arrived there the city was controlled by the Hivites, a Canaanite tribe, whose leader was a man named Hamor. Jacob arrived safely (peacefully) at Shechem, and they were apparently welcomed. He arranged to purchase a substantial tract of property. Jacob rightly considered this acquisition of his property in Canaan as an important milestone in his life. Accordingly, he wanted first of all to build an altar there, dedicating it to "El-Elohe-Israel," saying in effect that his God was the true and mighty God. "God was the God of Israel." It is significant that, in naming the altar, he used his new name "Israel." There, in the center of an idolatrous land, he had established a new center of worship of the true God.

Excerpt from Easton Bible Dictionary

Shechem: shoulder.

(1.) The son of Hamor the Hivite (Gen. 33:19; 34).

(2.) A descendant of Manasseh (Num. 26:31; Josh. 17:2).

(3.) A city in Samaria (Gen. 33:18), called also Sichem (12:6), Sychem (Acts 7:16). It stood in the narrow sheltered valley between Ebal on the north and Gerizim on the south, these mountains at their base being only some 500 yards apart. Here Abraham pitched his tent and built his first altar in the Promised Land, and received the first divine promise (Gen. 12:6, 7). Here also Jacob "bought a parcel of a field at the hands of the children of Hamor" after his return from Mesopotamia, and settled with his household, which he purged from idolatry by burying the teraphim of his followers under an oak tree, which was afterwards called "the oak of the sorcerer" (Gen. 33:19; 35:4; Judg. 9:37). (See MEONENIM.) Here too, after a while, he dug a well, which bears his name to this day (John 4:5, 39-42). To Shechem Joshua gathered all Israel "before God," and delivered to them his second parting address (Josh. 24:1-15). He "made a covenant with the people that day" at the very place where, on first entering the land, they had responded to the law from Ebal and Gerizim (Josh. 24:25), the terms of which were recorded "in the book of the law of God", i.e., in the roll of the law of Moses; and in memory of this solemn transaction a great stone was set up "under an oak" (comp. Gen. 28:18; 31:44-48; Ex. 24:4; Josh. 4:3, 8, 9), possibly the old "oak of Moreh," as a silent witness of the transaction to all coming time.

Shechem became one of the cities of refuge, the central city of refuge for Western Palestine (Josh. 20:7), and here the bones of Joseph were buried (24:32). Rehoboam was appointed king in Shechem (1 Kings 12:1, 19), but Jeroboam afterwards took up his residence here. This city is mentioned in connection with our Lord's conversation with the woman of Samaria (John 4:5); and thus, remaining as it does to the present day, it is one of the oldest cities of the world. It is the modern Nablus, a contraction for Neapolis, the name given to it by Vespasian. It lies about a mile and a half up the valley on its southern slope, and on the north of Gerizim, which rises about 1,100 feet above it, and is about 34 miles north of Jerusalem. It contains about 10,000 inhabitants, of whom about 160 are Samaritans and 100 Jews, the rest being Christians and Mohammedans.

The site of Shechem is said to be of unrivalled beauty. Stanley says it is "the most beautiful, perhaps the only very beautiful, spot in Central Palestine."