

Genesis

Chapter 33



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The reconciliation of Jacob and Esau. The keynotes of this chapter are Jacob's obsequiousness and Esau's gracious forbearance. The murderous revenge that the former had feared (32:12) and the latter had vowed (27:41) thus averted, Jacob succeeds in effecting a definitive separation from his brother and maintaining his own distinctive identity.

Genesis 33:1

And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids.

[four hundred men] He either brought this many men to take vengeance (as he had vowed in Genesis 27:41), to honor Jacob, or to make a show of his own power. If vengeance was the motive, God changed his mind. If to honor or show power, he had the satisfaction of seeing his brother greatly humbled before him (Genesis 27:3). Four hundred soldiers were eighty-two more than the number Abraham had in his war with the kings of the East (Genesis 14:14). This indicates several thousands were in his kingdom. Though he failed morally otherwise, Esau did show manly traits in burying his resentments and forgetting his injuries. His forgiveness seems to have been complete.¹

Behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men—It has been generally supposed that Esau came with an intention to destroy his brother, and for that purpose brought with him four hundred armed men. But, 1. There is no kind of evidence of this pretended hostility. 2. There is no proof that the four hundred men that Esau brought with him were at all armed. 3. But there is every proof that he acted towards his brother Jacob with all openness and candour, and with such a forgetfulness of past injuries as none but a great mind could have been capable of. Why then should the character of this man be perpetually vilified? Here is the secret. With some people, on the most ungrounded assumption, Esau is a reprobate, and the type and figure of all reprobates, and therefore he must be everything that is bad. This serves a system; but, whether true or false in itself, it has neither countenance nor support from the character or conduct of Esau.²

Genesis 33:2

And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.

[Rachel and Joseph hindermost] Either leaving them the better opportunity to escape or planning to exhibit the beautiful Rachel and his favorite son, to impress Esau.

¹ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

He put the handmaids and their children foremost—There is something so artificial in this arrangement of Jacob’s family, that it must have had some peculiar design. Was Jacob still apprehensive of danger, and put those foremost whom he least esteemed, that if the foremost met with any evil, those who were behind might escape on their swift beasts? Genesis 32:7, 8. Or did he intend to keep his choicest treasure to the last, and exhibit his beautiful Rachel and favourite Joseph after Esau had seen all the rest, in order to make the deeper impression on his mind?³

Jacob still showed weakness and fear when he met Esau. He lined up his children and wives in order of their importance to him, with Rachel and Joseph in the rear, the safest place.

Jacob graphically reaffirms his preference for Rachel (now extended to her son Joseph), which once caused so much ill will between his wives (29:31-30:21). His preference for Joseph will be the cause of the next tear in the fabric of family relations. It will nearly result in his beloved son’s death (chapter 37).⁴

Genesis 33:3

And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

He lined them up in order of their importance to him,

[bowed himself to the ground seven times] Bowing and greeting was an Arab custom (Genesis 33:3-4).

bowing seven times. One way that a person showed respect for a superior in the ancient world was by bowing to the ground. To magnify the honor being given and the subservience of the person who bowed, this gesture could be repeated seven times. Some Egyptian texts from El Amarna (fourteenth century B.C.) portray vassals bowing seven times to Pharaoh.⁵

he bowed himself . . . seven times—The manner of doing this is by looking towards a superior and bowing with the upper part of the body brought parallel to the ground, then advancing a few steps and bowing again, and repeating his obeisance till, at the seventh time, the suppliant stands in the immediate presence of his superior. The members of his family did the same. This was a token of profound respect, and, though very marked, it would appear natural; for Esau being the elder brother, was, according to the custom of the East, entitled to respectful treatment from his younger brother. His attendants would

³ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁵ Bible Background Commentary

be struck by it, and according to Eastern habits, would magnify it in the hearing of their master.⁶

Sevenfold prostration appears in the Amarna Letters (14th century BCE) as a gesture of homage to one's suzerain. The scene reverses the dominance of Jacob over Esau prophesied in 25:23 and 27:29, 37.⁷

McGee: I would love to have a picture of Jacob meeting his brother Esau! I suppose that while he was a mile away from him, he started bowing. He is coming with his hat in his hand because Esau has four hundred men with him, and Jacob doesn't know if he is coming as friend or foe.⁸

Genesis 33:4

And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

Esau ran to meet him—How sincere and genuine is this conduct of Esau, and at the same time how magnanimous! He had buried all his resentment, and forgotten all his injuries; and receives his brother with the strongest demonstrations, not only of forgiveness, but of fraternal affection.

And kissed him – *vaiyishshakehu*, In the Masoretic Bibles each letter of this word is noted with a point over it to make it emphatic. And by this kind of notation the rabbins wished to draw the attention of the reader to the change that had taken place in Esau, and the sincerity with which he received his brother Jacob. A Hindoo when he meets a friend after absence throws his arms round him, and his head across his shoulders, twice over the right shoulder and once over the left, with other ceremonies according to the rank of the parties.⁹

Chumash: Classic Questions: “Was Esau's kiss sincere?”

Rashi: There are dots over the word (“*and he kissed him*”) and there is a difference of opinion about this matter found in a teaching of the Sifri. Some interpret the dots to mean that he did not kiss him wholeheartedly. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: the fact that Esau hates Jacob is obvious and [incontrovertible, like] a running in Jewish Law. However at the moment Esau's compassion was warmed and he kissed him wholeheartedly.

Sefer Hazikaron: Dots on a word indicate that the word has a weaker meaning than one would have otherwise presumed. According To Rashi's first interpretation (“he did not

⁶JFB Commentary

⁷ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁸McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:135). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

kiss him wholeheartedly”) this is understood – even though the verse states that “he kissed him,” this was a “weak,” insincere kiss.

However, **Rabbi Shimon** was troubled by this interpretation, since even without the dots we would have realized that Esau did not kiss Jacob wholeheartedly, for, “the fact that Esau hates Jacob is obvious and [incontrovertible, like] a ruling in Jewish Law.”

Therefore, according to Rabbi Shimon, in this case the dots teach us that the kiss was not insincere, as one would presume, but to the contrary, “Esau kissed him wholeheartedly.”

Rabbi Shimon, explained that Esau’s kiss was indeed sincere, but only at that moment of his encounter with Jacob. This sincerity was temporary, and totally uncharacteristic of Esau, since, “the fact that Esau hates Jacob is obvious and [incontrovertible, like] a ruling in Jewish Law.”¹⁰

Life can bring us some bad situations. We can feel cheated, as Esau did, but we don’t have to remain bitter. We can remove bitterness from our lives by honestly expressing our feelings to God, forgiving those who have wronged us, and being content with what we have.

He kissed him is missing in the Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Torah produced by Jewish scholars in Egypt. In the Masoretic Text (the traditional rabbinic version codified in the later first millennium CE), dots appear over the phrase probably to indicate its doubtful status in the manuscript tradition. One midrash interprets the dots to mean that uncharacteristically, Esau felt compassion for Jacob and kissed him wholeheartedly. Another midrash, however thinks that Esau intended to “bite” (“*nashakh*”) rather than to “kiss” (“*nashak*”) his brother, but God hardened Jacob’s neck, foiling his brother’s deceitful attack (Gen. Rab. 78:9).¹¹

Cyril of Alexandria: “Christ will be reconciled with Israel”

At the end of time our Lord Jesus Christ will be reconciled with Israel, his ancient persecutor, just as Jacob kissed Esau after his return from Haran. No one who listens to the words of Holy Scripture can actually doubt that with the passing of time Israel also will have to be received again into the love of Christ through faith. The Lord proclaims to everybody through the voice of one of the holy prophets: “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice and without an altar, and without priesthood and without manifestations. And afterward the children of Israel shall return and shall seek the Lord, their God, and David, their king, and shall be amazed at the Lord and at his goodness in the latter days.” While Christ, the Savior of us all, gathers believers from the nations, Israel is deserted, since it has no law to elect its leaders, and it cannot offer to the divine altar the sacrifices prescribed by the laws. It therefore awaits Christ return from his action of converting the nations, so that he may receive it as well and unite it with the law of his love to the others. See how Jacob, who rejoiced in the generation of his children and in his numerous herds of sheep, came back from Haran and received again Esau into his friendship. In time Israel itself

¹⁰ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

¹¹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

will be converted after the calling of the nations and will admire these riches in Christ. (Glaphyra on Genesis, 5:3.)¹²

Chumash: Classic Questions: “Why did Esau weep?”

Ibn Ezra: At the literal level it appears that Esau did not intend to harm his brother Jacob. The proof of this is that he wept, just like Joseph wept when he confessed to his brothers.¹³

Chumash: Toras Menachem: “Was Esau Sincere?”

To explain Esau’s embrace, Rashi writes, “[Esau’s] compassion was aroused when he saw [Jacob] prostrate himself all those times.” I.e. the exceptional honor which Jacob showed Esau in bowing to him progressively seven times (vs.3), caused a sudden emotional change on Esau’s part, and he hugged his brother.¹⁴

Genesis 33:5

And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who *are* those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.

Genesis 33:6

Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves.

Genesis 33:7

And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves.

Genesis 33:8

And he said, What *meanest* thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, *These are* to find grace in the sight of my lord.

Genesis 33:9

And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

[I have enough] Proving that God had also blessed Esau, as predicted by Isaac in Genesis 27:39-40.

¹² Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

¹³ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

¹⁴ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

Enough (“rav”) may echo the prophecy that “the older (rav) shall serve the younger” (25:23). Esau, confronted with his brother’s conspicuous obeisance, renounces any claim to his younger brother’s property.¹⁵

Genesis 33:10

And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.

Receive my present at my hand—Jacob could not be certain that he had found favor with Esau, unless the present had been received; for in accepting it Esau necessarily became his friend, according to the custom of those times, and in that country. In the eastern countries, if your present be received by your superior, you may rely on his friendship; if it be not received, you have every thing to fear. It is on this ground that Jacob was so urgent with Esau to receive his present, because he knew that after this he must treat him as a friend.¹⁶

Jacob’s explanation, that seeing Esau’s face was like seeing the face of God, showed he knew this deliverance from harm by Esau was of God. At Peniel Jacob had seen the face of God and was delivered (32:30). Having lived through that, he then survived Esau. Thus Esau’s favorable reaction was God’s gracious dealing.

Humanity, Image of God—The forgiveness and acceptance which people see in another’s face may remind them of God. Forgiveness is not a natural human trait but one which is more Godlike than human. The best way to reflect God to others is to forgive them freely, expecting nothing in return.

Genesis 33:11

Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it.

[he took it] The acceptance of a gift under such circumstances was a token and pledge of peace. Absolute refusal would have indicated intentions of hostility and revenge, so Esau took it (Genesis 33:11).¹⁷

Why did Jacob send gifts ahead for Esau? In Bible times, gifts were given for several reasons. (1) This may have been a bribe. Gifts are still given to win someone over or buy his or her support. Esau may first have refused Jacob’s gifts (Genesis 33:9) because he didn’t want or need a bribe. He had already forgiven Jacob, and he had ample wealth of his own. (2) This may have been an expression of affection. (3) It may have been the

¹⁵ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

¹⁶ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

¹⁷ Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

customary way of greeting someone before an important meeting. Such gifts were often related to a person's occupation. This explains why Jacob sent Esau—who was a herdsman—sheep, goats, and cattle.¹⁸

Accept my present can also be translated as “take my blessing.” Jacob acknowledges the truth in Esau's charge that “he has taken away my blessing” (27:35-36) and offers amends. It is precisely God's generosity toward the chosen son that enables him to be generous, in turn, to his unchosen brother.¹⁹

Torah Class: The dizzying events of the night before had prepared Jacob, in a nick of time, for what was coming next.

The question of Jacob's (and his family line's) survival was about to be answered as he spotted Esau leading his band of 400 men. He placed his family in a specified order, that may have some kind of meaning; but the only apparent thing I can draw from it is that he put the LEAST important people to his way of thinking, up front, and the most important to rear. That is, his concubines and THEIR children were placed up front in immediate harms way, and his most beloved wife, Rachel, and her child, his favorite, Joseph, at the rear, who might have a better chance of escape should Esau attack. Then, Jacob ran to the front of them all and prostrated himself, bowed low, to his brother...actually, he lay completely prostrate on the ground and bowed SEVEN times.....and waited for the shoe to fall. This was absolute capitulation. By Middle Eastern standards, Jacob presented himself and his entire clan to Esau as subject to Esau's mercy or wrath. The irony of this situation is hard-hitting; the blessing of Isaac upon his two sons was, at this moment in history, exactly reversed. For, Jacob's blessing was that Jacob would be master over his brothers (meaning his tribe), and Esau's was that he would be under the yoke of his kin. Instead, Jacob has laid his life at his brother's feet.

Esau has forgiven him, and the two brothers reconcile. The years had softened Esau's anger.....just as Rebecca, the twins mother had said would happen. And, the unbelievably generous gift offering to Esau by Jacob showed Esau the complete sincerity and repentance of Jacob for his misdeeds. In Mid-Eastern style greeting, with the greatest respect, Jacob offers gifts to his brother and introduces his family. Esau at first refuses the gifts, but eventually accepts. Jacob is wise, though, and even after Esau has been gracious, Jacob continues to talk with Esau as an inferior speaking to his superior. By the way, Middle Eastern custom demands that all gifts be initially refused, before they're accepted. This little Kabuki dance we see with Jacob offering, Esau refusing and then finally accepting could have gone no other way; there is no special spiritual meaning to it.²⁰

McGee: This is almost a humorous scene. Up to this time, each was trying to get something from the other. This was especially true of Jacob. Now we find Jacob in a new role altogether. Here he is insisting that his brother take a gift. Esau says, “You don't have to give it to me. I have plenty.” But Jacob *insists* that he accept it. Believe me, something has happened to Jacob!

¹⁸ Life Application Notes

¹⁹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

²⁰ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

He reminds me of Zacchaeus in the New Testament. When our Lord called him down and went with him into his house, something happened to Zacchaeus. He wasn't the same man that climbed up into the tree. He said he would no longer be the tax collector who had been stealing from people and had been dishonest. He wanted to return, not only anything that he had taken in a wrong way, but he wanted to restore it fourfold. What a change had taken place! You could certainly tell which house Jesus had visited.

Certainly there is a change that has taken place in Jacob. Before he had traded a bowl of stew to get a birthright; now he is willing to give flocks and herds to his brother for nothing! In fact, Jacob *insists* that he take them. Esau finally accepted the gift. In that day and in that land if one refused to take a gift which was urged upon him, it was considered an insult. Therefore, Esau takes the gift.²¹

Genesis 33:12

And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee.

Missler: The acceptance of a gift is equivalent to the striking of a covenant of friendship. If your present is received by your superior you may rely on his friendship; if it is declined you have everything to fear. It was on this ground that Jacob was so urgent in pressing Esau to accept his present. Esau took it and so gave Jacob an assurance of his complete reconciliation.²²

And he said, Let us take our journey—Esau proposed to accompany Jacob and his family through the country, both as a mark of friendship and as an escort to guard them. But the proposal was prudently declined. Jacob did not need any worldly state or equipage. Notwithstanding the present cordiality, the brothers were so different in spirit, character, and habits—the one so much a man of the world, and the other a man of God, that there was great risk of something occurring to disturb the harmony. Jacob having alleged a very reasonable excuse for the tardiness of his movements, the brothers parted in peace.²³

Genesis 33:13

And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children *are* tender, and the flocks and herds with young *are* with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.

[My lord knoweth that the children are tender ...] Jacob really did not desire to go to Seir. He knew Canaan was the country given to him by covenant promise. He never went to Seir.

²¹ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:135). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²² Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

²³ JFB Commentary

McGee: Jacob says, “I’m moving my family, and we have little ones, also we have young among the flocks and herds. We can’t go very fast. You, of course, with that army of four hundred will probably want to move much faster; so you go ahead.”²⁴

Genesis 33:14

Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir.

Until I come unto my lord unto Seir—It is very likely that Jacob was perfectly sincere in his expressed purpose of visiting Esau at Seir, but it is as likely that circumstances afterwards occurred that rendered it either improper or impracticable; and we find that Esau afterwards removed to Canaan, and he and Jacob dwelt there together for several years. (See Genesis 36:6).²⁵

until I come unto my lord—It seems to have been Jacob's intention, passing round the Dead Sea, to visit his brother in Seir, and thus, without crossing the Jordan, go to Beer-sheba to Isaac; but he changed his plan, and whether the intention was carried out then or at a future period has not been recorded.

Jacob never comes to his brother in Seir, but instead journeys to Succoth. He once again succeeds in securing his independence from the larger family, thus maintaining the distinctive identity of his lineage against the threat of assimilation into the surrounding nations.²⁶

Chumash; Classic Questions: “Why did Jacob tell Esau that he would meet him in Se’ir? Jacob broadened the journey for him, for he only intended to go as far as Sukos. He said to himself, “‘If he [Esau] intends to do me harm, he’ll wait until I come to him.’” But Jacob didn’t go [to Se’ir]. And when will he go? In the days of Mashiach, as the verse states, “deliverers will go up.. etc.”

Midrash: We have searched through all of scripture and we have not found that Jacob ever went to Mt. Se’ir. Could it be that Jacob who was such a truthful person, deceived him? Actually, he was truthful, for he will come to him in the future, as the verse states, “Deliverers will go up on Mt. Tziyon to judge the Mt. of Esau”

Maharsha: The Talmud and Midrash appear to be contradictory. The Talmud suggests that Jacob lied to Esau in order to protect himself, whereas the Midrash suggests that he did not lie. How could Rashi’s commentary on the Chumash combine both the interpretation of the Talmud and that of the Midrash when they are contradictory? However, it could be argued that Jacob made a statement which he knew would deceive Esau. Nevertheless, since Jacob was such a righteous person, even his misleading

²⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:136). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁵ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

²⁶ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

statements will ultimately be fulfilled (i.e. his promise will be fulfilled in the Messianic era).

Maharsha explains that Jacob lied to Esau but, being a righteous person, even his “lie” will ultimately come true.

However, this is difficult to accept because the Talmud states explicitly, “If he asks you, “Where you are traveling to ?” you should broaden the journey for him, just like Jacob did to Esau the wicked one.” I.e. we are told to speak to the non-Jew in exactly the same manner (“just like”) that Jacob did to Esau. Therefore, if Jacob lied, we must also lie; and if he told the truth we must also tell the truth. Thus, to answer that only Jacob is capable of telling a “truthful lie,” and that we cannot emulate him at all, is unacceptable. Therefore we must find an answer that explains: a.) How Jacob told the truth and b.) How he told the truth in a way that a normal person can copy.

Thus, at the literal level, Jacob did not lie. He merely explained to Esau that his journey was going to be extremely time consuming – as the Torah states explicitly, “My master knows that the children are tender. The flocks and the cattle, (which) are raising their young, depend upon me.

The Last Word: A Jew should never feel “at home” while we are still in exile. Rather, we must always be aware that the exile is only a temporary state, for in truth; we are in the process of a journey heading towards redemption – like Jacob whose journey will be completed only in the Messianic Era. (Based on Likutei Sichos vol. 20 p. 164)²⁷

Genesis 33:15

And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee *some* of the folk that *are* with me. And he said, What needeth it? let me find grace in the sight of my lord.

[**let me find grace in the sight of my lord**] Jacob was perhaps still distrustful of Esau. He himself had been cunning and deceitful and now was harassed by the fear of others, when in reality there was no cause. He did plan to visit Esau, but possibly circumstances later made it impractical. As soon as Esau left, Jacob built Succoth on the east of Jordan by Jabbok before entering Canaan.²⁸

Genesis 33:16

So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir.

Seir. This region comprises the hill country stretching to the southeast of the Arabah, between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah, in territory later inhabited by the Edomites (see Genesis 36:20; Judges 5:4). Because of its relatively high annual rainfall and elevation, the area has sufficient water and snow melt to support scrub forests and bushes. This may be the origin of the name Seir, which means “hairy.”

²⁷ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

²⁸ Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

Esau lived in Southern Canaan in Seir, the “land of Edom,” at this time. After their father’s death, he moved to Mount Seir, which God subsequently gave to Esau for a possession (Deut. 2:5).

Genesis 33:17

And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

[house] The first reference to a house in connection with the patriarchs (Genesis 33:17). It could refer to temporary quarters.

[Succoth] Jacob built Succoth on the east of Jordan near the river Jabbok which flows into the Jordan from the east. *Succoth* (from *saccac*, to entwine): *i.e.* booths.

Journeyed to Succoth—So called from *Succoth*, the booths or tents which Jacob erected there for the resting and convenience of his family, who in all probability continued there for some considerable time.

Succoth. A town situated east of the Jordan River near its confluence with the Jabbok River (Judges 8:5). A number of archaeologists have identified it with the site of Tell Deir `Alla, based on Egyptian records (the stele of Shishak) and cultural remains which date from the Chalcolithic to Iron Age II. The name, which means “booths,” would be appropriate for the temporary housing of this region’s mixed population of pastoral nomads and miners (evidence of smelting has been found in Iron I levels).²⁹

Jacob cleverly avoided traveling with Esau. He led Esau to think that he needed to travel slowly because of his young children and young animals, and that he would meet with Esau at Seir. But Jacob headed in the opposite direction—north to Succoth, east of the Jordan River and north of the Jabbok River, instead of south to Seir! He may have been wise to avoid Edom, but he did not need to deceive his brother again.³⁰

Thus miracles were worked in Jacob and Esau. In Jacob, God brought about a spirit of humility and generosity. Esau was changed from seeking revenge to desiring reconciliation. These changes were proof that God had delivered Jacob in answer to his prayer (32:11).

Why did Jacob imply that he was going to Seir but then stop at Succoth? We don’t know the answer, but perhaps Jacob decided to stop there as they journeyed because Succoth is a beautiful site on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Whatever the reason, Jacob and Esau parted in peace. But they still lived fairly close to each other until after their father’s death (Genesis 36:6-8).

²⁹ Bible Background Commentary

³⁰ Bible Knowledge Commentary

McGee: Now let us not pass by so quickly and easily here that we do not pay attention to what has happened. A great change has come over this man Jacob. You see, all of Jacob's clever scheming to present a gift to his brother Esau has just come to naught. God had prepared the heart of Laban not to harm Jacob, and God had prepared the heart of Esau to receive Jacob. Now he has peace on both fronts. Esau did not want the gift of Jacob because Esau himself had an abundance. When Jacob insisted, he took the gift out of courtesy. Both these brothers seem to be generous and genuine in their reconciliation. We have no reason to doubt it. Since Esau is now prosperous, and since he attached no particular value to his birthright anyway, there is no reason why he should not be reconciled to his twin brother.

Now the sunshine is beginning to fall on Jacob's life. Laban is appeased and Esau is reconciled. God had arranged all of this for him. Had Jacob been left to his own cupidity and his own cleverness, he would have come to his death in a violent manner. Before too long Jacob is going to look back over his life, and when he does, he is going to see the hand of God in his life, and he is going to give God the glory. However, the evil that he has sown is yet to bring forth a full harvest. Trouble is in the offing for this man. It is there waiting for him.

Esau rides off to Seir, and we bid good-bye to him for the time being. He will be back, however, for the funeral of his father Isaac, as we will see in chapter 35.³¹

Genesis 33:18

And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padanaram; and pitched his tent before the city.

[**Shalem**] Jacob's next move was Shalem on the west of Jordan in Canaan. Here he bought his first property and erected his first altar (Genesis 33:17-20).

And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem—The word *shalem*, in the Samaritan *shalom*, should be translated here in peace, or in safety. After resting some time at Succoth, which was necessary for the safety of his flocks and the comfort of his family, he got safely to a city of Shechem, in health of body, without any loss of his cattle or servants, his wives and children being also in safety. Coverdale and Matthews translate this word as above, and with them agree the Chaldee and the Arabic: it is not likely to have been the name of a city, as it is nowhere else to be found. Shechem is called in Acts 7:16, Sychem, and in John 4:5, Sychar; in the Arabic it is called Nablous, and to the present day Neapolis. It was near to Samaria; and the place where the wretched remains of the sect of the Samaritans were lately found, from whom Dr. Huntington received a perfect copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch.³²

Shechem. Identified with Tell Balata in the central highlands, about thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem, Shechem is known from many ancient sources, including the

³¹ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:136). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

Egyptian records of Sen-User III (nineteenth century B.C.) and the El Amarna tablets (fourteenth century B.C.). Nearly continuous occupation is evidenced through the second and first millennia, demonstrating the importance of this strategic city on the highway network running north from Egypt through Beersheba, Jerusalem and on to Damascus. It was Abram's first stop in Canaan (see comment on Genesis 12:6). The fertile soil in this area promoted agriculture as well as good grazing.³³

Shalem—that is, "peace"; and the meaning may be that Jacob came into Canaan, arriving safe and sound at the city Shechem—a tribute to Him who had promised such a return (compare Genesis 28:15). But most writers take Shalem as a proper name—a city of Shechem, and the site is marked by one of the little villages about two miles to the northeast. A little farther in the valley below Shechem "he bought a parcel of a field," thus being the first of the patriarchs who became a proprietor of land in Canaan.³⁴

Chumash: Classic Question: "How was Jacob "whole" when he arrived?"

Rashi: He was physically whole, for he was cured of his limp; financially whole, for he did not lose anything because of the entire gift that he had given Esau; and whole in his Torah knowledge, for he had not forgotten his Torah knowledge in Laban's house.

Talmud: Rav said, "He was physically whole, financially whole and whole in the Torah knowledge"

Midrash: Also, his family was whole, as the verse states, "If Esau comes to one camp and strikes it down, the remaining camp [will survive]," but now his family was whole.

The last Word: While a Jew believes that he will ultimately emerge victorious from this long and bitter exile, he might think that the exile will nevertheless have taken its toll. Even after the redemption comes, one would presume that the Jewish people will be permanently "scared" – both physically and spiritually – from the long and horrid tribulations of exile.

However, from the Torah's account of Jacob's arrival back in the Land of Israel, we can learn that this will not be the case! Jacob not only arrived safely – a point the Torah presumed too obvious for the Torah to mention – but, "he was physically whole,, financially whole and whole in his Torah knowledge." Likewise the Jewish people will emerge from this final exile unscarred from the experiences of exile, undrained of our physical resources and devoid of any spiritual compromise. (Based on Likutei Sichos vol. 25, pp. 173).³⁵

Genesis 33:19

And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money.

[hundred pieces of money] What kind of money is not stated, but if these were pieces of silver, each piece was equal to \$2.50, making the total purchase price \$250. Literally, "lambs"; probably a coin with the figure of a lamb on it.

³³ Bible Background Commentary

³⁴ JFB Commentary

³⁵ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

For a hundred pieces of money—The original, pieces of money, *bemeah kestah*, has been a matter of long and learned discussion among critics. As *kesitah* signifies a lamb, it may imply that Jacob gave the Hamorites one hundred lambs for the field; but if it be the same transaction that St. Stephen refers to in Acts 7:16, it was money, a sum or price of silver, which was given on the occasion. It has been conjectured that the money had the figure of a lamb stamped on it, because it was on an average the value of a lamb; and hence it might be called a *kesitah* or lamb from the impression it bore. It is certain that in many countries the coin has had its name from the image it bore; so among our ancestors a coin was called an angel because it bore the image of an angel; hence also a Jacobus, a Carolus, a Lewis, (Louis d' Or), a Joe, because certain coins in England, Spain, France, and Portugal, bore on one side the image of the kings of those countries, James, Charles, Lewis, Joseph, or Johannes. The Athenians had a coin called βουϚ, an ox, because it was stamped with the figure of an ox.³⁶

purchase of land. As in the case in Genesis 23, this land transaction includes an exact price (one hundred pieces of silver), thereby marking this as a deeded sale rather than a fee for usage of the property. Since he is settling within the landed territory of the town, Jacob must purchase the property he settles on. The amount he pays is uncertain because the value of the unit of money referred to here is unknown. As in Genesis 23 the eventual use of this land is for burial (see Joshua 24:32).³⁷

As his grandfather had purchased land for a burial place for Sarah (ch. 23), so Jacob bought a **parcel of land**. Even though God promised the entire land to Abraham's family (see 12:7), they had to buy it one little piece at a time.

Jacob is sometimes criticized because he stopped here at Succoth and at Shalem and did not proceed on to Beth-el. Actually, we ought not to expect too much of Jacob at this time. He's been crippled, and he is just learning to walk with his spiritual legs.

Genesis 33:20

And he erected there an altar, and called it Elelohe-Israel.

[El-elohe-Israel] Hebrew: for God—the God of Israel.

And he erected there an altar—It appears that Jacob had a very correct notion of the providence and mercy of God; hence he says, Genesis 33:5: The children which God hath GRACIOUSLY given thy servant; and in Genesis 33:11 he attributes all his substance to the bounty of his Maker: Take, I pray thee, my blessing—because God hath dealt GRACIOUSLY with me, and because I have enough. Hence he viewed God as the God of all grace, and to him he erects an altar, dedicating it to God, the God of Israel, referring particularly to the change of his own name, and the mercies which he then received; and hence perhaps it would be best to translate the words, The strong God (is) the God of Israel; as by the power of his grace and goodness he had rescued, defended, blessed, and

³⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

³⁷ Bible Background Commentary

supported him from his youth up until now. The erecting altars with particular names appears in other places; so, Exodus 17:15, Moses calls his altar Jehovah-nissi, “the Lord is my banner.”

1. WHEN a man’s way’s please God, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. When Jacob had got reconciled to God, God reconciled his brother to him. The hearts of all men are in the hands of God, and he turns them howsoever he will.

2. Since the time in which Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the covenant. We see in him much dependence on God, accompanied with a spirit of deep humility and gratitude. God’s grace alone can change the heart of man, and it is by that grace only that we get a sense of our obligations; this lays us in the dust, and the more we receive the lower we shall lie.

3. “The first thing,” says good Bishop Wilson, “that pious men do, is to provide for the honor and worship of God.” Jacob buys a piece of ground, and erects an altar on it in the land of a heathen, that he might acknowledge God among his enemies, and turn them to the true faith; and there is every reason to believe that this expedient would have been successful, had it not been for the base conduct of his sons. How true is the saying, One sinner spoileth much good! Reader, beware, lest thy conduct should become a stumbling block to any.³⁸

altar significance. Altars function as sacrificial platforms. Their construction can also mark the introduction of the worship of a particular god in a new land. One tie between the generations of covenantal leaders is their construction of altars in order to worship Yahweh in the Promised Land (Genesis 12:7-8; Genesis 13:18; Genesis 26:25). The name given to Jacob/Israel’s altar, “El Elohe Israel,” is an acknowledgment of his own name change and his acceptance of the role of covenantal heir that had been promised at Bethel (Genesis 28:13-15). For another example of naming an altar, see Exodus 17:15.³⁹

and he erected . . . an altar—A beautiful proof of his personal piety, a most suitable conclusion to his journey, and a lasting memorial of a distinguished favor in the name "God, the God of Israel." Wherever we pitch a tent, God shall have an altar.

Through this confession El, the supreme Canaanite deity, is identified as the God of Israel.

McGee: Jacob builds an altar here, just as his grandfather Abraham was accustomed to building altars wherever he went. The fine feature is that Jacob identifies his new name with the name of God. He calls it El-elohe-Israel which means, “God, the God of Israel.” This indicates real growth in a man who is just learning to walk.⁴⁰

³⁸ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

³⁹ Bible Background Commentary

⁴⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:137). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Torah Class: Esau now figures that Jacob and his clan will come and join his own in the land of Edom, and offers to accompany his kin along the way. Jacob says that's not workable, because these hardened Bedouin desert dwellers would move at a pace far too much for the herds and flocks that Jacob must drive in front of him. So, Esau offers an armed escort. Jacob refuses that as well, and says he will trust God to protect him. Esau agrees, and leaves for home, journeying south, back into Edom.

Jacob had no intention of following Esau into Edom unless he had been forced to.....which had been a distinct possibility. In fact, the cunning that had always been Jacob's.....now called Israel..... earmark, is evident as he implies to Esau that he and his family indeed are going to join Esau in Edom; a deception to be sure. Rather, once Esau and his troops leave, Jacob turns and heads northwest, back to quite near the area where the wrestling match with the angel took place; into land that will eventually become the territory of his son Gad. He stops, apparently for a couple of years, and he names the place Succoth.....meaning booths or hutsbecause he built these shelters for his family and some of the animals on a temporary basis; this was not where he intended on settling down.

In some amount of time for which we aren't privy (Hebrew tradition is that it was 18 months), Jacob moves on to Shechem, the same place his grandfather Abraham had come to when he first entered Canaan (notice that, once again, we see history repeat itself). But, this was quite a changed place from the time when Abraham and Sarah camped on its lovely grounds. There was no city, not even a village; at that time it was just a "place". It would not even have been called Shechem at the time Abraham was there. Let me explain and give you a little tip about understanding the Bible. If you and I were to talk about the Chumash Indians that inhabited the Los Angeles basin, long before the Mexicans even arrived, you would have no trouble with me referring to it as Los Angeles, as I just did. It certainly was NOT called Los Angeles in those days.....and I'm sure you're well aware of that..... but it is simply a way for me to communicate to you the area I'm talking about. It is the same in the Bible. Since it was in Moses' era that the Scripture we are reading was first written down as a comprehensive document, it was looking back to a time some 500 – 600 years earlier. So, in Moses' era, Shechem was a well-established and widely known city. Therefore, when we're told in Genesis that Abraham arrived at Shechem, it was simply an easy and common way of identifying the place using contemporary terms. In fact, because the various books of the Old Testament were written over a span of about 1000 years, city and place names came and went. Places and cities may have been called one thing in the earliest books, but several hundred years later, they were called something else. Therefore, we'll find the same place given two or more different names in the Bible, because at times they're talking about the current name, and other times they're talking about an earlier name.

But, now, in Jacob's time, a walled city had been built. There he purchased some land from the sons of Shechem's King, King Hamor. King Hamor was from one of the many tribes of Canaan, and his particular tribe was the Hivites. We also find out, here, that the city was named after one of King Hamor's sons, Shechem.

Rather than live inside the city walls, Jacob pitches his tents well outside the city walls. He is a shepherd; living inside a city is not anything he would choose. On the other hand, living next to a city gave him an opportunity to make a mutual security treaty for his family's protection, and to have nearby the staples of life. The amount he pays for the

land outside the city walls, is important: because a) it records that he DID purchase land, and b) he paid a proper price for it so he could not be accused of cheating of the king. In principle, it operates in the same way as Abraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah as a burial place; every element for proof of permanent ownership, without dispute, is provided. This would prove to be important at a later time. For, we are told in Genesis 48 that this particular piece of land Jacob willed to his son Joseph. Further, Joseph was initially buried there after the Exodus.....for the Israelites brought his remains with them.....although apparently his bones were later moved to another spot.

What is even more interesting is that in the future, at this very spot (that little piece of land just outside the walls of Shechem), Yeshua would demonstrate a principle that most of us in this room should be thankful for.

(John 4:1-14 ¹*When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,* ²*(Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)* ³*He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.*

⁴*And he must needs go through Samaria.* ⁵*Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.* ⁶*Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.* ⁷*There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.* ⁸*(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)* ⁹*Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.* ¹⁰*Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.* ¹¹*The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?* ¹²*Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?* ¹³*Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:* ¹⁴*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

Notice that at this moment in history, Shechem is now going by the name Sychar but they are one in the same place. And, here, at the very well Jacob dug to provide water for his family and his animals, we find Jesus encounter with the Samaritan woman. It is interesting, is it not, that the FIRST non-Jewish person to be offered a drink of the living

water that brings everlasting life was a) a woman, and b) a hated Samaritan. And, it occurred at the very first place Jacob, Israel, settled when he came back into the Promised Land from Mesopotamia.

By the way: today Shechem is in the West Bank, goes by the Arab name of Nablus, and the Palestinians claim that they had always held this land.

Feeling he has come to a place that is likely his clan's new and permanent home, Jacob, now called Israel, erects an altar and calls it El-Elohe-Israel. Those Hebrew words mean...El, the God of Israel. They won't be staying long, though.⁴¹

Alfred Edersheim, Bible History

As Jacob passed over Jabbok in the early morn, the glittering of spears and lances in the sunlight, among the dark pine forests, betokened the approach of Esau with his four hundred men. But Jacob had nothing more to fear: the only real contest was over. It was necessary, when Jacob returned to take possession of the land and of the promises, that all that was past in his history should be past - it was so! Never, after that night, did Jacob again contend with carnal weapons; and though the old name of Jacob reappears again and again by the side of his new designation, it was to remind both him and us that Jacob, though halting, is not dead, and that there is in us always the twofold nature, alike of Jacob and of Israel. What now followed we cannot tell better than in the words of a recent German writer: "Jacob, who in his contest with the Angel of Jehovah had prevailed by prayer and entreaty, now also prevails by humility and modesty against Esau, who comes to meet him with four hundred men." As already hinted, Esau had probably been just engaged in that warlike expedition to Mount Seir, which resulted in his conquest of the land, where he afterwards settled.(Genesis 36:6, 7) This accounts for his appearance at the head of an armed band. Possibly, he may, at the same time, have wished to have the revenge of giving anxiety to his brother, and of showing him the contrast between their respective positions; or he may to the last have been undecided how to act towards his brother. At any rate, under the overruling guidance of God, and "overcome by the humility of Jacob, and by the kindness of his own heart, Esau fell upon the neck of his brother, embraced and kissed him. With reluctance he accepted the rich presents of Jacob, and he offered to accompany him to the end of his journey with his armed men - a proposition which Jacob declined in a friendly spirit. Thus the two brothers, long separated in affection, were reconciled to each other. Their good understanding remained undisturbed till the day of their death."

There was nothing in Jacob's language to his brother which, when translated from Eastern to our Western modes of conduct and expression, is inconsistent with proper self-respect. If he declined the offer of an armed guard, it was because he felt he needed not an earthly host to protect him. Besides, it was manifestly impossible for cattle and tender children to keep up with a Bedouin warrior band. While Esau, therefore, returned to Mount Seir, there to await a visit from his brother, Jacob turned in a north-westerly direction to Succoth, a place still east of Jordan, and afterwards in the possession of the tribe of Gad. Here he probably made a lengthened stay, for we read that "he built him an house, and made booths for his cattle," whence also the name of Succoth, or "booths." At

⁴¹ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

last Jacob once more crossed the Jordan, "and came in peace* to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan." The words seem designedly chosen to indicate that God had amply fulfilled what Jacob had asked at Bethel: to "come again in peace." (Genesis 28:21) But great changes had taken place in the country. When Abram entered the land, and made this his first resting-place, there was no city there, and it was only "the place of Shechem." (Genesis 12:6) But now the district was all cultivated and possessed, and a city had been built, probably by "Hamor the Hivite," the father of Shechem, who called it after his son. (Comp. Genesis 4:17) From "the children of Hamor" Jacob bought the field on which he "spread his tent." This was "the portion" which Jacob afterwards gave to his son Joseph (Genesis 48:22), and here the "bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought out of Egypt," were, at least at one time, buried. (Joshua 24:32) Far more interesting than this, we know that by the well which Jacob there dug, sat, many centuries afterwards, "David's greater Son," to tell the poor sinning woman of Samaria concerning the "well of water springing up unto everlasting life" - the first non-Jewess blessed to taste the water of which "whosoever drinketh" "shall never thirst." (John 4:14) Here Jacob erected an altar, and called it El-elohe-Israel, "God, the God of Israel."

* So the words should be translated.⁴²

Gleanings in Genesis – Arthur Pink

JACOB MEETING ESAU

GENESIS 33

“AND Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.” (33:13.) Here again we meet with one of those strange and sudden transitions in this living narrative of our patriarch’s history. Truth is stranger than fiction, it is said, and no doubt this is so, but certainly truth is more accurate than fiction. In the Epistle of James the one who is a hearer of the Word and not a doer is said to be “like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass” (1:24.) There is no other book in the whole range and realm of literature which so marvelously uncovers the innermost recesses of the human heart, and so faithfully delineates its workings. In the biographical portions of Scripture the Holy Spirit, as everywhere, paints human nature in the colors of truth. An uninspired writer would have followed Jacob’s wondrous experience at Peniel by a walk which was henceforth flawless. But not so the Holy Spirit. He has recorded just what did happen, and shows us Jacob distrusting God and yielding to the fear of man. Thus it is all through. Abraham in faith obedience to the call of God went out “not knowing whither he went,” but after his arrival in Canaan, when a famine arose, he seeks refuge in Egypt. Elijah displays unexampled courage on Mt. Carmel, as alone he confronted the four hundred

⁴² Alfred Edersheim, Bible History, Old Testament, studylight.org

priests of Baal; but the next we hear of him he is fleeing from Jezebel! David dares to meet Goliath, but later, he runs away from Saul. And thus we have recorded the sad inconsistencies of the noblest of God's saints. So it was again here with Jacob: what a change from clinging to the Divine Wrestler to prostrating himself before Esau!

There is a lesson and warning for each of us here which we do well to take to heart. It is one thing to be privileged with a special visitation from or manifestation of God to us, but it is quite another to live in the power of it. Jacob's experience at this point reminds us of the favored disciples who were with Christ in "the holy mount." They were deeply impressed with what they saw, and heard, and Peter, acting as spokesman, said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." But observe the sequel. Next day a father brought his lunatic son to the disciples, but "they could not cure him," (Luke) and when they asked the Lord the cause of their failure He said, "Because of your *unbelief*." Is not the juxtaposition of these two scenes—the Transfiguration witnessed by the disciples, and their failure in the presence of need—intended to teach us the lesson that unless faith remains active we shall cease to live in the power of the Vision of Glory. Such is also the lesson we learn from Jacob's failure following immediately the visitation from God from Peniel. Ah, there was but One who could say "I do *always* those things that please Him." (John 8:29.)

Let us mark for our instruction just *wherein* Jacob failed. He failed to use in faith the blessedness of his new name. The lessons which the all-night wrestle ought to have taught him were the worthlessness and futility of all his own efforts; that instead of putting confidence in the flesh, he needed to cling to God; and in the new name he received—Israel, God commands—he should have learned that God is the Orderer of our lives and can well be trusted to undertake for us at every point. But O, how slow we are to appropriate and live in the blessedness of the meaning of the new names which God has given its "Saint!" "Son!" "Heir!" How little we live our daily lives under the comfort, the inspiration, the strength, the elevation, which such titles ought to bring to us and produce from us. Instead of trusting God to manage Esau for him Jacob at once resorts to his old devisings and subtleties.

Hardly had Jacob passed over the brook Jabbok and regained his family when, lifting up his eyes, he beheld his brother approaching accompanied by four hundred men. To flee was impossible; so at once he took whatever precautionary measures were possible under the circumstances. He had just sufficient time before Esau came up to arrange his family, placing his different children with their respective mothers, and putting those in the rear that he had the most love for. This shows that though outwardly he appeared to treat Esau with confidence nevertheless, he was secretly afraid of him. He was obliged, however, to put the best face he could upon it, and goes out at the head of his company to meet his brother—"and he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother." This betokened the fact that Jacob was ready to take the place of *complete submission* to his elder brother. His action reveals plainly the real state of Jacob's heart, he was anxious to impress upon Esau that he intended to make no claim of pre-eminence but rather was willing to be subordinate to him. This will be even more apparent when we attend to the words he used on this occasion.

"And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (33:4.) It seems to us that most of the commentators have missed the point of this. Instead of discovering here the power, goodness, and faithfulness of God, they see only the

magnanimity of Esau. Personally we have no doubt that had Esau been left to himself his reception of his erring brother would have been very different from what it was. But he was not left to himself. Jacob had prayed earnestly to God and had pleaded His promise. And now, He in whose hands is the king's heart and who "turneth it whithersoever He will" (Proverbs 21:1), inclined the fierce and envious heart of Esau to deal kindly with Jacob. Mark it: and he "fell on his neck and kissed him!" Is not the hand of God further to be seen in the fact that Jacob's wives and children *all* uniformly "bowed" too, to Esau—"Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves; and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves." (33:6-7.)

"And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord." (33:8.) Esau desired to know the meaning of those droves of cattle which had been sent on to him earlier as a present. Jacob's answer is quite frank, but it shows what it was in which he placed his confidence—he was depending on his present, rather than upon God, to conciliate his brother. Note, too, as in verse 5 he had spoken of himself to his brother as "thy *servant*," so here, he terms Esau "my lord." Such obsequious cringing ill-became a child of God in the presence of a man of the world. The excessive deference shown to the brother he had wronged evidenced a servile fear: the fawning obloquy was manifestly designed to imply that he was fully prepared to acknowledge Esau's seniority and superiority.

"And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself." (33:9.) Whether we are to admire these words of Esau or not is not easy to determine. They may have been the language of independency, or they may, which is more likely, have expressed the generosity of his heart. Esau was no pauper; in any case, no such present from Jacob was needed to heal the breach between them. Such was the plain implication of Esau's words, and in them we are shown the futility and needlessness of Jacob's scheming. Jacob had devoted much thought to the problem how he could best propitiate the brother whose anger he feared, and had gone to much expense and trouble to this end. But it accomplished nothing! It was all labor lost as the sequel shows. *God* had "appeased" Esau, just as before *He* had quietened Laban! How much better then had Jacob just been "still" and trusted in the Lord to act for him. Let us seek grace to learn this important lesson, that not only are all our fleshly plannings and efforts dishonoring to God, and that they are quite uncalled for and unnecessary, but also that in the end God sets them aside as they accomplish NOTHING.

Jacob was not satisfied with the generous words of his brother, and proceeded to press his present upon him, urging him to receive it as a token of goodwill. "And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand; for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me." (v. 10.) The receiving of a present at the hands of another has always been regarded as a pledge of amity and goodwill. None will receive a present from the hand of an enemy. The same principle underlies God's dealings with us. *He* will receive no offering from His sinful creatures until they are reconciled to Him by faith in the Atonement of His Son. Inlet the reader make no mistake upon this score. The Lord God will receive nothing from your hands until you have first received from His hands, received the Saviour which His love has provided for sinners. Many there are who suppose they must first bring something to God in order to win His favor. But no matter

how beautiful their offering may be, no matter what self-sacrifice it has entailed, if Christ is still rejected God will not accept it. To offer God your own works while continuing to despise Christ is but to *insult* Him and to walk in the way of Cain. The teaching of Scripture on this point is most emphatic—“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.” (Proverbs 15:8.)

Jacob continues to press his suit. To have his present accepted would be proof to him that his brother no longer bore him any ill-will. Hence, he continues to assure him how highly his favor was regarded, yea, to have seen his face, was, he says, “as though I had seen the face of God.” Finally, he adds “take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” (v. 11.) In the end, he prevailed upon Esau to accept his present—“And he urged him, and he took it.”

“And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee. And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me; and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die. Inlet my lard, I pray thee, pass over before his servant; and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir.” (33:12-14.) If there can be any question raised as to Jacob’s secret fears when he met his brother, what we read of in these verses surely settles the point. The old Jacob is here very evident. Now that his brother had accepted his present, he was only too anxious for them to separate again. Esau suggests they resume the journey in each other’s company. But this was not what Jacob wanted. Old memories might revive in Esau’s mind, and when that time came Jacob wished to be far away. However, he could not afford to offend his brother, so Jacob, at once, begins to frame excuses as to why they should journey separately. Then Esau suggested that some of his own company should stay behind with Jacob—“And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me.” This was probably to afford protection for Jacob and his herds while passing through a wild and dangerous country. But Jacob seems to have suspected some unfriendly design lay behind Esau’s offer, and so he declined it—“What needeth it? Let me find grace in the sight of my lord.”

The sequel is indeed a sad and humbling one. Not only was Jacob distrustful of his brother but he lied unto him. Jacob had said “let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant... until I come unto my lord unto Seir.” (v. 14.) But after Esau had taken his departure we read, “And Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built him a house, and made booths for his cattle.” (v. 17.) Instead of making for Seir, the appointed meeting place, he journeyed in another direction entirely. Even after the unexpected Lordiality which Esau had displayed, Jacob would not believe that God had permanently subdued his brother’s enmity; therefore did he mistrust Esau, refusing his offer of protection, and sought to avoid another meeting by a deliberate untruth. Alas, what is man! How true it is “that every man at his best state is altogether vanity.” (Psalm 39:5.)

Jacob’s unbelief explains why his journey back to the Land was delayed, for instead of pressing on home he settled down in Succoth. Not only so, but we are told that “Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-Aram; and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for a hundred pieces of money.” (33:18, 19.) And this in the very face of God’s word “return

unto the land of thy fathers, *and to thy kindred*, and I will be with thee.” (31:3.) But he had to pay a dear price for his unbelief and disobedience. Divine retribution did not sleep. We have only to read what happened to his family while Jacob abode at Shechem to discover how, once more, Jacob was called upon to reap that which he had sown—Jacob’s sojourn in Succoth was followed by the ruining of his only daughter!

Little light seems to have been given as yet upon the closing verse of our chapter—“And he erected there an altar, and called it God the God of Israel.” (33:20.) That this was an act of faith on the part of Jacob cannot be doubted, but as to how high his faith rose the best of the expositors are not agreed. When Jacob denominated this altar “God the God of Israel” was he losing sight of Jehovah’s *covenant relationship* with Abraham and his seed, and thinking of God merely as *his God*, was he appropriating to himself his new name of Israel? Whichever view be the true one it should be carefully noted that in the very next word our patriarch received from the Lord it concerned the “altar” and intimated that God was not pleased with the altar he had erected in Succoth—“and God said unto Jacob, arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell *there*, and make *there* an altar unto God.” (35:1.) But this belongs to our next Genesis study. In the meantime may Divine grace open our eyes fully to see the wickedness, as well as the vanity of placing any confidence in our fleshly devisings and bring us to trust the Lord with all our heart.⁴³

Studying the Old Testament

There are many approaches to take in studying Scripture. Each has its role and function. Each is appropriate; each gives us insight into the meaning and the message of the sacred text.

Among the ways we might study Genesis 25–36 are these: the archeological, the theological, and the devotional, and what we might call the comparative; looking at the rest of Scripture to see what God seeks to emphasize.

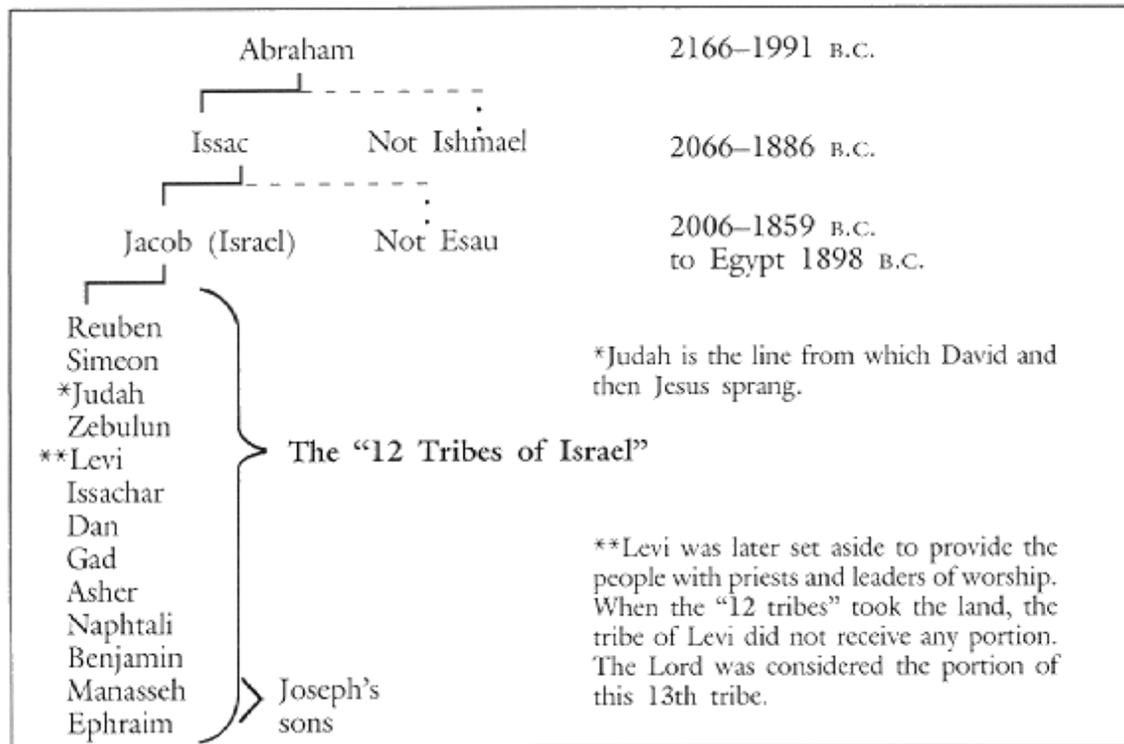
The archeological. This approach involves examining the customs and folkways of Bible times to help us understand actions reported in the Bible.

This method is helpful on two counts. First, we’re kept from reading motives and causes into the actions of Bible characters which really are not there. For instance, in Genesis 31 we read that Rachel, Jacob’s wife, stole her father’s household gods (idols). The immediate reaction might be, “Ah ha! The family is involved in pagan worship, and Rachel wants to hold on to her religion. The family may go back to Palestine, but Rachel will keep on being pagan.” I’m sure sermons must even have been preached on this text, on the danger of bringing along our old “gods” when we turn to Jesus and journey toward our own “promised land.”

There’s only one thing wrong with such an application. The interpretation of Rachel’s action is in error. In those days the household gods were a symbol of family headship. The heir was the one to possess the household gods. When Jacob fled with his family, Rachel’s theft was her way of laying claim for her husband and children to all her father had. It’s possible this theft and the claim it implies were major factors leading Laban and his sons to pursue Jacob so far.

⁴³Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (295). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Archeology also gives us insight into Jacob’s “gift” to Esau when he sent herds of animals on ahead to his brother (Gen. 32–33). When the two brothers met, Esau at first politely protested that he had plenty and did not need the gifts. Jacob urged him to accept. This urging was not from mere politeness, nor even a salve to a guilty conscience. In Jacob’s time, to refuse such a gift would have meant that Esau was declaring himself to still be an enemy. Acceptance of the gift bound Esau to friendship. It was a visible sign to all that the rift between the two brothers was healed.



The Covenant Line in Genesis

Without some knowledge of the customs of Bible times, it is dangerous to make hasty judgments about the meaning or application of such incidents. We’re too inclined to read into them meanings that are not there.

The second value of the archeological approach to the study of a passage is found in the way the biblical record is confirmed. The customs are those of Palestine or Egypt, or wherever the location is, and at just the time when the events were supposed to take place. We are compelled to believe that, whatever else the Bible may be, it is an accurate record. It is a historical document in which we can have full confidence.

The theological. When we look at a portion of Scripture from a theological perspective, we’re concerned about what it reveals of God and/or of His ways.

If we look at Genesis 25–36 this way, our attention is drawn at once to the centrality of the covenant. After Abraham died, God spoke to Isaac. He told Isaac to stay in Palestine and promised to fulfill the oath which He swore to Isaac’s father (26:3). The

obedience of faith had kept Abraham in the place of blessing; now Isaac was exhorted to trust and obey, and assured that through his line the original promise would be kept.

An express personal promise is communicated as well. God promised to be with this man, Isaac, to bless him (v. 3). God was not making a new covenant. The covenant had already been established with Abraham. Abraham's descendants were simply invited to participate in it; there was no need to constantly renew a promise once given.

It's the same with Jacob. Isaac, Jacob's father, blessed him as inheritor of the covenant. (Note: Archeological discoveries indicate that a father's deathbed blessing had the force of a will in patriarchal times.) Then God appeared to Jacob, identifying Himself as "the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac" (28:13). In this appearance God told Jacob that the promises were now given to him; he was the heir and inheritor. Then, while returning to the Promised Land after being away 20 years, Jacob called on God as the covenant-keeping God (32:9–13), and God appeared to him, reconfirming again the promises.

These repeated affirmations of the covenant promise to Isaac and Jacob make it clear that the announced purpose of God will be fulfilled through the family line, a line that has its source in Abraham both as its physical progenitor and as an example of faith.

In these passages we see that God is working out His promises. The purpose is sure, restated to each generation of patriarchs. The land, the special relationship with God, the blessing, and being a blessing are the very root of each generation's sense of identity. These are a people chosen "for the sake of My servant [your father] Abraham" (26:24).

The theological approach, then, allows us to keep the main emphasis of a section of Scripture in view. It lets us trace what God is doing and what He views as important by noting the repeated concepts and the personal interventions of God, which give us our clues.

The comparative. In this approach to studying a section of Scripture, we look at other parts of the Bible to find some divine commentary. What application has the Holy Spirit made of incidents recorded here?

Both direct and indirect application are made in the Old and New Testaments of earlier incidents. The main theme of a passage may be directly commented on, as in Romans 4 where Paul examines the meaning of Abraham's experience with God, exploring what it is that makes him the father of all who believe. At times, incidents may be pointed out simply as illustrations of principles which are not themselves the central message of the earlier passage. This is an indirect application.

For instance, in Romans 9 Paul looks back to the patriarchs to demonstrate a point he is arguing. It seems that some Jewish people in Paul's time had looked at Christianity as an implicit rejection of the covenant and the covenant people. They could not believe that God would abandon His promises, and so they rejected this new faith in Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

In answer, Paul pointed out that not every Hebrew is a spiritual descendant of Abraham, even though he may be able to trace his physical descent to him. Isaac and Ishmael were both Abraham's children, but God said the covenant promise applied only to Isaac's seed. A reader may object at this point. Ishmael was also the son of a slave! But Paul goes on to point out that Isaac fathered and Rebekah bore twins: Jacob and Esau. Yet God chose Jacob and rejected Esau, even before the boys were born.

The point is made. God has freedom to choose some as recipients of the covenant blessings while rejecting others. And this choice does not in any way indicate a repudiation of the covenant. Nor does God's decision to extend the benefits of the covenant to Gentiles repudiate the promise to Abraham. The Gentiles who believe in God find a relationship with God through faith just as Abraham did, thus fulfilling the intention of God that in Abraham all the nations of the earth should share in the blessings.

This then is an indirect use of the Old Testament. The main message of the Genesis record is not that God is free to choose those who will benefit under the covenant. But the historical events do demonstrate that God makes just this kind of choice, and that the covenant itself is not violated by the selection of some but not all of Abraham's descendants as benefactors.

The covenant was made with *Abraham*. Those who, like Abraham, have faith are invited to share its blessings. Even an entire generation's unbelief could never invalidate the promise and the purpose of the Lord.⁴⁴

The Book of Jasher: Chapter 32

49 And at the break of day the man left Jacob there, and he blessed him and went away, and Jacob passed the brook at the break of day, and he halted upon his thigh.

50 And the sun rose upon him when he had passed the brook, and he came up to the place of his cattle and children.

51 And they went on till midday, and whilst they were going the present was passing on before them.

52 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold Esau was at a distance, coming along with many men, about four hundred, and Jacob was greatly afraid of his brother.

53 And Jacob hastened and divided his children unto his wives and his handmaids, and his daughter Dinah he put in a chest, and delivered her into the hands of his servants.

54 And he passed before his children and wives to meet his brother, and he bowed down to the ground, yea he bowed down seven times until he approached his brother, and God caused Jacob to find grace and favor in the sight of Esau and his men, for God had heard the prayer of Jacob.

55 And the fear of Jacob and his terror fell upon his brother Esau, for Esau was greatly afraid of Jacob for what the angels of God had done to Esau, and Esau's anger against Jacob was turned into kindness.

56 And when Esau saw Jacob running toward him, he also ran toward him and he embraced him, and he fell upon his neck, and they kissed and they wept.

57 And God put fear and kindness toward Jacob in the hearts of the men that came with Esau, and they also kissed Jacob and embraced him.

⁴⁴Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987). *The teacher's commentary*. Includes index. (63). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

58 And also Eliphaz, the son of Esau, with his four brothers, sons of Esau, wept with Jacob, and they kissed him and embraced him, for the fear of Jacob had fallen upon them all.

59 And Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women with their offspring, the children of Jacob, walking behind Jacob and bowing along the road to Esau.

60 And Esau said unto Jacob, Who are these with thee, my brother? are they thy children or thy servants? and Jacob answered Esau and said, They are my children which God hath graciously given to thy servant.

61 And whilst Jacob was speaking to Esau and his men, Esau beheld the whole camp, and he said unto Jacob, Whence didst thou get the whole of the camp that I met yesternight? and Jacob said, To find favor in the sight of my lord, it is that which God graciously gave to thy servant.

62 And the present came before Esau, and Jacob pressed Esau, saying, Take I pray thee the present that I have brought to my lord, and Esau said, Wherefore is this my purpose? keep that which thou hast unto thyself.

63 And Jacob said, It is incumbent upon me to give all this, since I have seen thy face, that thou still livest in peace.

64 And Esau refused to take the present, and Jacob said unto him, I beseech thee my lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand, for I have therefore seen thy face, as though I had seen a god-like face, because thou wast pleased with me.

65 And Esau took the present, and Jacob also gave unto Esau silver and gold and bdellium, for he pressed him so much that he took them.

66 And Esau divided the cattle that were in the camp, and he gave the half to the men who had come with him, for they had come on hire, and the other half he delivered unto the hands of his children.

67 And the silver and gold and bdellium he gave in the hands of Eliphaz his eldest son, and Esau said unto Jacob, Let us remain with thee, and we will go slowly along with thee until thou comest to my place with me, that we may dwell there together.

68 And Jacob answered his brother and said, I would do as my lord speaketh unto me, but my lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with their young who are with me, go but slowly, for if they went swiftly they would all die, for thou knowest their burdens and their fatigue.

69 Therefore let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will go on slowly for the sake of the children and the flock, until I come to my lord's place to Seir.

70 And Esau said unto Jacob, I will place with thee some of the people that are with me to take care of thee in the road, and to bear thy fatigue and burden, and he said, What needeth it my lord, if I may find grace in thy sight?

71 Behold I will come unto thee to Seir to dwell there together as thou hast spoken, go thou then with thy people for I will follow thee.

72 And Jacob said this to Esau in order to remove Esau and his men from him, so that Jacob might afterward go to his father's house to the land of Canaan.

73 And Esau hearkened to the voice of Jacob, and Esau returned with the four hundred men that were with him on their road to Seir, and Jacob and all belonging to him went that day as far as the extremity of the land of Canaan in its borders, and he remained there some time.

CHAPTER 33

1 And in some time after Jacob went away from the borders of the land, and he came to the land of Shalem, that is the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, and he rested in front of the city.

2 And he bought a parcel of the field which was there, from the children of Hamor the people of the land, for five shekels.

3 And Jacob there built himself a house, and he pitched his tent there, and he made booths for his cattle, therefore he called the name of that place Succoth.

4 And Jacob remained in Succoth a year and six months.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT