

Jacob and Esau Meet Peacefully

Genesis 33

Genesis 33 - *“Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants. ² And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. ³ Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. ⁴ But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, “Who are these with you?”*

So he said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” ⁶ Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down. ⁷ And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.

⁸ Then Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company which I met?”

And he said, “These are to find favor in the sight of my lord.”

⁹ But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” ¹⁰ And Jacob said, “No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. ¹¹ Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” So he urged him, and he took it.

¹² Then Esau said, “Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you.” ¹³ But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. ¹⁴ Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

¹⁵ And Esau said, “Now let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” But he said, “What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.” ¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷ And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

¹⁸ Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. ¹⁹ And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred pieces of money. ²⁰ Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.”

Background Notes

After the wrestling match with the Angel of the Lord, Jacob moved forward to meet Esau. But when Jacob saw Esau on the horizon, coming with 400 men, he quickly divided his family and put his favorite wife, Rachel, and favorite son, Joseph, in the most protected position. Then he met Esau with a greeting fit for a king. He bowed all the way to the ground seven times to Esau, and he said, *“I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God”* (v10). Maybe Jacob was overdoing it a bit, but this was considered an honorable greeting in that culture.

Well, it all worked out for a peaceful meeting. Esau ran to meet Jacob, embraced him, kissed him, and they wept together. God answered Jacob’s prayer for a peaceful meeting. Jacob urged Esau to accept his large gift, and Esau finally did. This was very important. In that culture, once a gift was accepted by one of the feuding parties it meant that the feud was over and forgotten.

Esau urged Jacob to join him on the trip home. “No,” said Jacob, “I’ve got wives and young kids, and all these animals. We can’t move quickly. You go ahead and I’ll follow at a slower pace.” “OK,” said Esau, “but at least let me leave some of my people with you to help you out.” “Oh no,” said Jacob, “that won’t be necessary. We’ll do just fine by ourselves. You go ahead - I’ll follow later!” So Esau went on his way back to Seir.

As soon as Esau was out of sight, Jacob went in the opposite direction and settled in Succoth, which was nowhere near Seir. In other words, Jacob lied to Esau. All that talk about wives and children and animals was just a smoke screen. He never had any intention of following Esau. Of course, we would **never** do anything like that - or would we?!

Doctrinal Points

1. Jacob is not Israel.

After the wrestling match, God changed Jacob’s name to Israel. Jacob means “supplanter,” or “grasper,” or “cheater” - and that is exactly what Jacob was. Israel means “Prince with God,” or “prevails with God,” or “God prevails.” The name change indicated a change in Jacob’s life. It meant that God was working in his life.

However, Jacob was not always “Israel” from that point on. Sometimes Scripture refers to him as Israel, but sometimes (as here) the inspired text refers to him as Jacob. Even though he had come a long way in the School of God, the “old Jacob” was still there. Jacob and Israel are not synonymous. Jacob was not always “Israel.” Sometimes he acted in line with his new name, and sometimes he acted in line with his old name.

There's a spiritual lesson for us here. We're all like Jacob, when it comes to our sinful human nature. We're naturally self-centered and "out for Number One." We may even cheat and deceive and lie to get what we want, just as Jacob did. When we became Christians we were given a new nature, a divine nature that "prevails with God." But as long as we are on this earth, in these fleshly bodies, the old sinful nature (the old "Jacob") is still around. And many times, like Jacob, we act in line with our old sinful natures, and not in line with our new divine natures.

It's important to understand that the new nature is **not** the old nature that has been reformed or cleaned up. No - Jacob is **not** Israel! The new nature is brand new! It is part of the "package of salvation." The old nature is **never** reformed, and it is with us until we receive our resurrected bodies. The old nature will dominate us if we don't live in obedience to God, in line with the new divine nature that He has given us. Read 1 Corinthians 1 - it is possible to live our lives a "carnal," fleshly, worldly Christians!

Let's be careful not to distort this biblical truth. As believers we have two distinct natures, the new divine nature, but also the old sinful nature. Remember - "Jacob" is not "Israel."

2. Shechem is not Bethel.

Jacob lived for a while at Succoth. He built a house and barns there. But Succoth was on the east side of the Jordan River, so Jacob was still not where God wanted him, back in the land of promise. Then Jacob moved across the Jordan River and back into the land, to a place called Shechem. He even built an altar there, and called the place "El Elohe Israel," meaning "God, the God of Israel."

But Shechem was not Bethel. Jacob had all kinds of problems at Shechem, and his life was not be blessed at Shechem. I believe that God always wanted Jacob to return to Bethel. In Genesis 31:13, when God told Jacob to return home, God said, *"I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family."* Now look at Genesis 35:1: *"Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.'"* In other words, God was saying, "Jacob, don't stay here in Shechem. I want you to go back to Bethel. Make an altar **there**, not here at Shechem."

Just as Lot settled in Sodom for what he could gain from Sodom, so Jacob settled in Shechem for what he could gain from Shechem. But Jacob's life was not blessed at Shechem, because that is not where God wanted him. Shechem is not Bethel!

Do you see the spiritual lesson? Go back to Bethel! When Jacob settled in Shechem, he was only **partially** obedient. Oh, he was back in the Land, and he built an altar there - but Shechem is not Bethel. God wanted Jacob to come back to Bethel.

Are you living in Shechem - or in Bethel? For example, do you have a **Christ-centered** home, or just a Christian home? There is a difference! Do you have family devotions, or just go to church on Sunday? Does the spiritual growth of your family take priority over your job and career or your hobbies or sports? Are you living in Shechem or Bethel? There is a difference! Shechem is not Bethel.

Where are we in our walk with the Lord? Are we at Bethel, where God wants us? Remember, Bethel means "house of God." Or are we living in Shechem? Shechem represents partial obedience.

Practical Applications

1. Don't re-hash past mistakes!

Jacob and Esau had a peaceful reunion. It's important to notice that **they didn't re-hash the past**, ugly detail by detail! Jacob's attitude and his gift conveyed that he was sorry for what he had done. Esau forgave Jacob without demanding a formal apology. Thus they had a peaceful reunion.

That's a good lesson for us. Although we shouldn't just sweep past mistakes or sin under the rug, we should be ready and willing to forgive. And we don't have to re-live the past mistakes, or bring the problems up again and again and again!

I know an older and mature Christian woman who cannot live at peace or have rest of soul because she refuses to forgive and let go of some past family mistakes. She re-lives the situation over and over in her own mind and in her conversation with others. It is so sad! She doesn't have to live like that. What a great lesson: Don't re-hash past mistakes!

2. Do stand behind your word!

Jacob told Esau that he was going to follow him back home, but he lied! He should have been truthful - but he didn't keep his word.

How does that apply to us? Do our families and friends and colleagues know that we will always keep our word? Do they know that we'll follow through - that we'll do what we said we would do?

Stand behind your word!