

JACOB AND ESAU MEET AGAIN

TEXT: GENESIS 33:1-20

INTRODUCTION:

1. Genesis 32:30 says, "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."
2. Jacob saw God face to face, but the next morning, Jacob still had to face his brother Esau. Genesis 33:1 says, "Jacob lifted up his eyes," and saw his brother Esau coming toward him with four hundred men.
3. At Peniel, God broke Jacob, and God blessed Jacob, but Jacob still had to face Esau.
4. The wrestling match at Peniel provided Jacob with the means of victory over his fears if only he had used the opportunity. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "God does not always see fit to remove obstacles from our pathway, but He always gives power to triumph over them" (*Genesis*).
5. But unfortunately, Jacob was still very fearful, and when he saw Esau approaching with his four hundred men, Jacob advanced very carefully, and with great circumspection and obeisance.
6. Verse 3 says Jacob "bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother." Bowing to the ground seven times signifies Jacob's complete submission to his older brother.
7. Jacob divided his family, with Rachel and Joseph way in the back, and the two handmaids and their children up in the front, and Leah and her children behind the handmaids and their children, but ahead of Rachel and Joseph (33:1, 2).
8. Albert Barnes said Jacob "arranged them according to their preciousness in his eyes, and walks himself in front."

I. ESAU FORGAVE JACOB'S TRANSGRESSION

II. ESAU ACCEPTED JACOB'S PRESENT

III. ESAU LEFT JACOB'S COMPANY

I. ESAU FORGAVE JACOB'S TRANSGRESSION

1. Jacob prepared for the worst. He thought his brother Esau would surely seek vengeance. And when we consider how badly Jacob had

- mistreated Esau, it is very interesting to note Esau's warm greeting, and his unexpected kindness (33:4).
2. Apparently God had softened Esau's heart, and so "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (33:4).
 3. "Jacob's fears were proved to be groundless, and all his elaborate precautions for safety seen to be entirely unnecessary" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis*). After all those years of separation, Esau's anger was gone.
 4. At that point, Jacob should have stopped relying on his schemes, and should have trusted God, but he didn't. Jacob was still self-willed and crafty.
 5. Esau noticed all of the women and children that accompanied Jacob, and inquired who they were. Jacob told him that God had graciously given him the children (33:5). Jacob talked much about God, but Jacob acted as if he had to do everything on his own.
 6. The women and children then approached Esau in succession, and "they bowed themselves" (33:6, 7).

II. ESAU ACCEPTED JACOB'S PRESENT

1. Next, Esau inquired of the large caravan ("all this drove") that came with Jacob (33:8).
2. "These are to find grace in the sight of my lord" (33:8b). It is obvious that Jacob wanted to reconcile with his brother Esau. He "valued highly the good-will of his brother" (Albert Barnes).
3. But Jacob was trying to appease Esau with presents (cf. 32:17-20). In Jacob's mind, if Esau accepted Jacob's present, it would guarantee Esau's goodwill, and it would guarantee safety and protection from Esau and his four hundred men.
4. So even after Peniel, Jacob still had not learned the lesson of absolute trust in God. His excessive deference shown to Esau demonstrated a servile fear.
5. Jacob acknowledged God's graciousness (33:5, 10, 11), but Jacob still felt he had to continue on with his clever planning and scheming.
6. At first, Esau declined Jacob's present, saying that he already had enough (33:9). Esau was well off, and no presents from Jacob were necessary to heal the breach between them.

7. Esau's words – “I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself” (33:9) – shown the futility and needlessness of Jacob's scheming. But nevertheless, Jacob kept at it (33:10, 11).
8. Jacob had spent much time and effort scheming and figuring out a way to appease Esau. He had gone to much expense and trouble, but it accomplished absolutely nothing.
9. After being urged by Jacob, Esau accepted the gift (33:9-11). This finally relieved Jacob of all his anxiety, but Jacob would not have been fearful and anxious had he been trusting in God.
10. *Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest, Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.* — Frances R. Havergal
11. “Therefore, have I seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me” (33:10). Jacob wanted Esau to be pleased with him, but if he were truly trusting in God, he would not have been so fearful and anxious.
12. The Bible says, “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).
13. Back at Peniel, the angel of the LORD said to Jacob, “As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed”(32:28), but now that Jacob was face to face with Esau, he seems weak and powerless as he bows down to Esau and urges him to take his presents. Jacob was attempting to purchase Esau’s good will.
14. Jacob’s life illustrates the fact that conversion (Bethel) and consecration (Peniel) do not guarantee an abiding faithfulness in the spiritual life.

III. ESAU LEFT JACOB’S COMPANY

1. Esau suggested that they should travel together, with he and his 400 men going ahead of Jacob and his group (33:12). Esau was offering to protect Jacob and those with him.
2. This indicates Esau’s good will and his friendliness. There certainly were no hard feelings on his part.
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, “Warmth, generosity, unselfishness, willingness to help, friendliness — all these features characterized him. Men of the world often put to shame the children of God in the

manifestation of the practical virtues of life. Yet this ought not to be so” (*Genesis*).

4. Now that Esau had accepted his present, Jacob was anxious to get rid of him, so he spoke of the little children and the flocks and herds with their young, and asked that they proceed slowly, to make it easier for the small children and the cattle (33:13, 14). It was a typical deception from Jacob.
5. Jacob led Esau to believe that he would follow him slowly and then meet up with him in Seir, a mountain range in the land of Edom.
6. But God did not want Jacob to go to Seir. God had already told Jacob that he was to return to his father and to go to Bethel. Jacob knew all this, but he failed to tell Esau that he was supposed to be following God's plan.
7. Instead, Jacob lied to Esau and told him that he would meet him in Seir.
8. Jacob had a strong bent toward backsliding. Jacob started backsliding soon after Bethel, and he also started backsliding soon after Peniel.
9. Sometimes the higher the rise, the lower the fall. Wonderful spiritual experiences, such as Bethel and Peniel, do not exempt from danger; rather they “call for greater watchfulness” (W.H. Griffith Thomas).
10. A Christian can attain to a great level of spiritual experience, but fail to keep it. Jacob had reached a very high level of spiritual experience – he actually wrestled with the pre-incarnate Christ; and Jacob saw God face to face. God had blessed him and had given him a new name, but Jacob soon returned to his old ways.
11. As a pastor, I can understand Jacob, because many Christians are just like Jacob – they are up and down, up and down, etc.
12. Because of his weaknesses and fears, Jacob deliberately misled Esau.
13. It was because Jacob was still afraid of Esau, that he resorted to deceit, which was customary for Jacob. Jacob's besetting sin was deceitfulness.
14. Even after Peniel, where Jacob saw God face to face. It has been rightly said that it is one thing to be privileged with a special visitation from God, but it is quite another to live in the power of it.
15. But Jacob feared Esau's temper more than he feared God's disfavor.
16. The wrestling match at Peniel should have taught Jacob the worthlessness and futility of all his own efforts. Instead of putting confidence in the flesh, Jacob needed to continue to cling to God (cf. 32:26, 27).
17. But instead of trusting God to work everything out with Esau, Jacob resorted to his old scheming and subtleties. He was an expert schemer.

18. Jacob lied to his brother because he did not have the courage to tell him he was supposed to be following God's direction. It is very strange, but there are certain Christians who would rather lie to unsaved friends or relatives than share the Gospel with them, or invite them to church, etc.
19. This is one of the reasons why many churches today are so dead and ineffective. If church members are not upfront and direct in taking a stand for God, and if they resort to half-truths and timidity, they will never be successful in winning people to Christ.
20. In his conversation with Esau, Jacob did mention the goodness of God (33:5, 10, 11), but he failed to tell Esau that God had given him clear instructions to return to the promised land (cf. 31:3, 13).
21. By telling Esau to go on ahead, Jacob was not being honest. He told his brother Esau he would follow him to Seir, but he went to Succoth instead, which was in the opposite direction (33:14-17). Seir is down to the southeast and Sukkoth is up to the northwest. Jacob was lying again.
22. Esau offered some of his men to be Jacob's guard and convoy while passing through the wild and dangerous country (33:15). But Jacob declined his offer, because he never had any intention of meeting up with Esau at Seir (33:15b).
23. Even after God wonderfully reconciled Jacob and Esau, Jacob still didn't trust Esau, and he (politely) refused his offer of protection (33:14, 15).
24. (Note: deceivers are usual very polite!)
25. Jacob should not have been afraid to give the right reason for refusing Esau's offer. So Esau departed, and instead of going to Seir to meet Esau, Jacob went to Succoth, thereby deceiving his brother once again.
26. We can only wonder what Esau must have thought when he found Jacob did not arrive in Seir. He probably said, "Same old Jacob!"
27. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "We wonder whether Esau discounted Jacob's references to God which he had made on their meeting together. What is the use of our pious verbal acknowledgment of God if we deny Him by our actions and give cause to the men of the world to reflect on our profession of religion and even to blaspheme it? How long will it be before we learn that orthodoxy of profession with unreality of conduct is the most deplorable combination in this world?" (*Genesis*).
28. Once he arrived in Succoth, Jacob "built him a house and made booths for his cattle" (33:17).

29. Up to this point, Jacob had been a pilgrim, like his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham. Hebrews 11:13 says they “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”
30. First Peter 2:11 says, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”
31. But Jacob decided to build a permanent house. A tent was no longer sufficient for him. Some have wondered why this was wrong.
32. First of all, Jacob had forgotten his vow at Bethel (28:21; 31:13).
33. God had already revealed Himself to Jacob as “the God of Bethel” (Genesis 31:13), meaning this is where Jacob was meant to be.
34. Secondly, by making Succoth his home Jacob was showing himself to be on a very low spiritual level, which helps to understand why he had so many horrible problems later on (cf. 34:1, 2, 25-31).
35. Jacob missed out on God’s will. He failed to rise to the full height of God's purpose. He had overlooked all of this, and he settled down in earthly ease and prosperity. But there was big trouble in store for Jacob (cf. 34:1, 2).
36. After spending some time in Succoth (perhaps a few years), Jacob moved on. Bethel and his vow (28:22) were apparently either forgotten or ignored.
37. Genesis 33:18 says, “And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem.”
38. Shechem was a Hivite city, and Hamor, the father of Shechem, was the man in charge. He was the “prince of the city” (34:2).
39. In pitching his tent “before the city” (33:18b), we see another indication of Jacob’s low spiritual condition. If Jacob had been right with God, he would have recognized his danger in the close proximity to the inhabitants of the land.
40. Backsliding comes with a heavy price tag. For Jacob, the cost of drifting back towards the world, and associating with worldly people was rape, treachery, massacre, and reproach upon the name of God (cf. 34:1, 2, 25-31).
41. Jacob bought some property in Shalem, purchasing the land on which his tent was pitched (33:19).
42. Jacob paid money for land, but God had already promised to give him the land (cf. Genesis 13:14-17; 15:7; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3, 4; 28:4, 13).
43. Why would Jacob pay for something God had already promised to give him? Apparently Jacob could not believe the promises of God, because his faith was weak.
44. Maybe Jacob was too impatient to wait for God’s promises to be fulfilled.

45. W.H. Griffith Thomas said that “the grace of continuance is the greatest need of all. Have we not, perhaps, heard of some servant of God who had been honored and blessed, and afterwards fell into sin and shame? Can we not, perchance, think of some who commenced their Christian life, and it may be their ministry, full of hope and promise, but who are now ‘unfulfilled prophecies,’ by reason of lack of faithfulness to the heavenly vision? They have virtually ceased to pray, practically ceased to meditate on the Bible, ceased to be unworldly; they have adopted unworthy methods in their ministry, pandered to worldliness and earthly ambitions, and the result is dullness, darkness, dryness, deadness in life and ministry, souls not being saved, believers not being quickened, everything stale and unprofitable in their service. They are ‘cast away,’ not in the sense of losing their salvation, but of having lost their usefulness. They are ‘disapproved,’ rejected, set aside. While the regenerate can never become unregenerate, he can, alas! become degenerate, and herein lies one of the gravest perils of the Christian life. Moody once said to Canon Hay Aitken that the one thing he feared most was the loss of his testimony for Christ” (*Genesis*).
46. Genesis chapter 33 ends with a mention of Jacob’s altar in Shalem (33:20). This is to remind us that backsliders do not completely forget about God. They are often quite religious. They often do things in order to make an impression on other people.
47. Jacob called his altar, El-elohe-Israel, meaning, “God, the God of Israel.”
48. Jesus said, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).
49. Jacob built an altar, but this was not the worship God wanted or expected. What God wanted was for Jacob to go to Bethel and fulfill his vow (cf. 28:20-22; 35:1-3).

CONCLUSION:

1. Instead of obeying the voice of God and pressing on home, Jacob settled down in Succoth (33:17), and then in Shalem (33:18)
2. This was after God had already told Jacob to "return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee" (Gen. 31:3).
3. A.W. Pink said that Jacob “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!" (*Gleanings in Genesis*).

4. Just as Lot's daughters were corrupted in Sodom, Jacob's daughter Dinah was corrupted in Shalem (cf. 34:1, 2).