

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Reconciled At Last!”

Genesis 33:1-20

2003

Introduction

Genesis 33 is a pivotal chapter in Jacob’s life. 20 years earlier, Jacob had left his home because his brother had sworn to kill him for stealing his birthright and the blessing of his father, Isaac (Gen 27:41-45). Rebekah had told Jacob “*when your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I’ll send word for you to come back from there. Gen 27:45.* But since she never sent for him, Jacob had every reason to believe that 20 years had not diminished Esau’s anger.

Story: A reporter was interviewing an old man on his 100th birthday.

“What are you most proud of?” he asked.

“Well,” said the man, “I don’t have an enemy in the world.”

“What a beautiful thought! How inspirational!” said the reporter.

“Yep,” added the centenarian, “I outlived every last one of ‘em.”

But outliving Esau was not an option for Jacob. Because for Jacob to fulfill his divine calling to be a blessing to all nations, he had to go back home and face his brother Esau. As I have stated before, sometimes you have to first go back in order to advance.

I Jacob Prepared To Meet Esau

A. He **looked up** and saw Esau and his 400 men [Verse 1a]

This was a meeting that Jacob knew would one day have to happen. But he had been dreading it for 20 years.

Now we know that Esau wasn’t coming with any hostile intentions. But because of Jacob’s guilty conscience, he could only assume the worst. The text tells us that Jacob looked up and saw his estranged brother and his heart was filled with fear.

Fear = Yare' = “To dread”

Application:

I was listening to a teaching by Jon Courson recently and he was making the point that we often lift our eyes only high enough to see our problems, but not high enough to see God who has the power to solve every problem we will ever face. <https://www.joncourson.com/teachings>

Jacob should have said as Jehoshaphat did, “Lord, I don’t know what to do, but my eyes are on you.” (2 Chron 20:12)

Ps 121:1-2 “I lift up my eyes to the hills -- where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

B. He divided his children among his wives [Verse 1b]

The fact that Jacob made preparation for his encounter with Esau wasn't necessarily carnal. In fact, the Lord will often lead us to do very practical things when we follow Him. But we must take action only after prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Application:

Isa 50:10-11 “Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.”

C. He strategically **positioned** his family [Verse 2]

1. Zilpah, Bilhah, Leah and Rachel

a. Rachel and Joseph were last

Jacob's tendency to favor Rachel and Joseph over his other wives and children was an ungodly pattern passed on by his own parents. It was a significant factor in the dysfunction of his own family life.

James 2:1 “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.”

D. He went on ahead to meet Esau [Verse 3]

A remarkable and important transition is taking place here. Jacob – the self-serving, greedy, self-promoting, self-protective heel-catcher is being transformed by his relationship with God. He is beginning to take responsibility for the consequences of his own sinful past. After all, it wasn't his wives or children who had cheated Esau out of his birthright and inheritance. It was Jacob. If anyone was going to suffer for sin, Jacob didn't want it to be his family. He himself would suffer first and die if necessary that his family might be spared.

Application:

John 11:49-50 “Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation.”

1. He **bowed down** to Esau 7 times

Bowed down = Shachah = “To prostrate one's self in homage”

Jacob had already sent Esau gifts giving evidence that he didn't want to take anything materially from Esau. But by bowing down low seven times in humility to his brother, shows that he wants no social power over him.

Matt 5:25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison."

II Esau Accepted Jacob's Overture

A. He **ran** to meet Jacob [Verse 4a]

We can only imagine what Jacob must have been thinking when he saw Esau, a man in his early 90's, running at full speed toward him. He must have thought, "This is it! My number is up!"

Instead, even as God had been working in Jacob's life for the past 20 years, God had been working in Esau. To Jacob's astonishment, Esau wasn't running to kill him, but to reconcile with him and to bless him. He came as a forgiving friend and brother rather than as a foe.

B. He embraced Jacob [Verse 4b]

C. He **kissed** Jacob [Verse 4c]

1. They **wept** together

Esau's humility, love and forgiveness are a magnificent picture of God's grace and forgiveness. His words of greeting to Jacob are remarkably similar to those of the father of the prodigal son at his return (compare Genesis 33:4 with Luke 15:20).

Illustration:

The prodigal son:

Luke 15:17-24 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

And you know the rest of the story: There was joy and feasting in the house that night!

Application:

The story of Jacob and Esau and the story of the prodigal son are recorded for us to show us what God's heart is like toward us who have sinned against him. We were all at one time like Jacob -- scoundrels, self-centered, abusive, selfish people deserving death. Our own conscience condemned us and we had an appropriate

sense of anxiety that God was going to punish us. But as we made our way toward Him in our sincere effort at reconciliation, He came running toward us, not to harm us, but to embrace us and kiss us. This is the heart of God. It is the heart of the cross. It is the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. He questioned Jacob [Verse 5]

1. "Who are these women and children?"
 - a. They were graciously given by God to your servant
James 1:17 "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."
 - b. They all bowed down to Esau [Verse 6-7]
2. "What do you mean by all these droves I met?" [Verse 8-9]
 - a. Esau was content with what he had ("I already have plenty")

Illustration: Conversation with a successful Kauai businessman who is winning the financial race, but is losing the race of life. His life is being consumed by the pressure and demands of his success.

Application: The importance of contentment

1 Tim 6:6-10 "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

III Jacob Insisted On Making Restitution

A. He encouraged Esau to accept his presents [Verse 10]

Present = Berakah = "Blessing"

Jacob had stolen Esau's blessing and the birthright and Jacob understood that for genuine reconciliation to take place, he would need to make restitution for his theft.

"Reconciliation with our enemies is a precondition to reconciliation with God"

Application:

Luke 19:8-9 "But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house."

1. "If I have found favor in your eyes"

Esau tried politely to refuse the gift as unnecessary, but Jacob persisted and prevailed.

Job 33:26 “He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state.”

2. “Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God”
Either this is a blatant example of flattery and overstatement, or a recognition of God’s character of grace in the life of his brother, Esau.

Application:

There is no greater compliment for a believer than for people to see in us the face of God!

Eph 5:1 “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ...”

3. “You have received me favorably”

B. He may have had **mixed** motivations for the gifts [Verse 11]

1. **Spoken** motivation:

- a. “God has been gracious to me”
- b. “I have all I need”

Both Esau and Jacob have a testimony of God’s faithfulness.

Esau: “**I have enough**” = Rab = “An abundance”- Genesis 33:9

Jacob: “**I have all I need**” = Kol = “Everything”- Genesis 33:11

Esau may very well have had more material wealth than Jacob, but Jacob knew that he was the recipient of God’s inexhaustible riches.

Application:

In the same way, regardless of whether we are rich or poor in this life, as believers we are heirs of the inexhaustible and glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19). We don’t just have an abundance, we have everything in Christ!

2. **Unspoken** motivation:

- a. Guilt over his past sins against Esau
- b. An attempt to appease Esau

Prov 18:16 “A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great.”

In accepting these gifts, Esau was communicating his willingness to forgive and to be reconciled to his Jacob.

IV Jacob Remained Separate From Esau

A. Esau offered to **accompany** Jacob [Verse 12-14]

1. Jacob declined because of the children and animals

Prov 12:10 “A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal ...”

Isa 40:11 “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.”

Application: He had an undershepherd’s heart for his family

As I was thinking about this, I felt like the Lord was reminding me be careful not to allow the demands of ministry and the expectations of others to upset my God-given priority of caring for my own family.

B. Esau offered to provide men for **security** [Verse 15]

1. Jacob once again declined

Jacob indicated that an escort was unnecessary and that all he desired was his brother’s favor.

C. Esau returned to Seir expecting Jacob to join him [Verse 16-20]

1. Jacob, however, went to Succoth

Possible reasons for Jacob’s deception:

1. He didn’t want to face his father, whom he had deceived 20 years earlier.
2. He was glad to reconcile with Esau, but didn’t want to live too close to him.
3. He had made a vow to pay a tithe to God at Bethel in Genesis 28:22. Perhaps he was not eager to do this now that God had greatly prospered him.
4. He knew that his herds would do much better in the rich pastures of the Jordan Valley where Succoth was located, while Bethel was in the mountains.

Derek Kidner summarizes Jacob’s journey to Succoth:

“Succoth was a backward step, spiritually as well as geographically . . .”

<https://bible.org/seriespage/35-one-step-forward-and-three-backward-genesis-331-3431>

God had first appeared to Jacob at Bethel, and it was there that Jacob vowed to someday return to build an altar and give a tithe to God (28:20-22). When God instructed Jacob to return to Canaan, He identified Himself as the “God of Bethel” (31:13). Jacob was instructed to return “to the land of your fathers and to your relatives” (31:3). Succoth was in the opposite direction of Seir where Jacob had told Esau he was coming.

The next time we find Jacob and Esau together in scripture is 27 years later at the graveside of their father, Isaac (Gen. 35:29).

a. He built a place for **himself**

b. He built shelters for his **livestock**

Shelters = Cukkah (sook-kaw’) = “Booths or huts”

2. Jacob came to a place called Shalem, a city of Shechem

Shalem = “Complete or peaceful”

Approximately four miles east of Shechem

- a. He pitched his tent in the **sight** of Shechem
- b. He bought a plot of ground in Shechem

Illustration: Gen 13

Jacob's gradual transition into Shechem is reminiscent of Lot's ever-closer association with the city of Sodom; first pitching his tent facing Sodom, then moving into Sodom and finally sitting as an elder in Sodom's gates.

Application:

Ps 1:1 "Blessed is the man who does not **walk** in the counsel of the wicked or **stand** in the way of sinners or **sit** in the seat of mockers."

- c. He set up an **altar** and called it El Elohe Israel
'El 'elohey Yisra'el = "The mighty God if Israel"
While it was admirable that Jacob built an altar to the Lord, God wanted Jacob to go to Bethel (Gen. 35:1), not Shechem.

Application:

1 Sam 15:22 "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."

And as we will see in our study of Genesis 34, disastrous consequences await Jacob and his family in Succoth for his failure to fully obey the Lord.

Conclusion

I would like to suggest several obvious applications of this text:

1. If you are in conflict with someone today, make a point to reconcile with them. You can refer to Matthew 5:23-26 and 18: 15-17 for God's instructions on how to go about doing it.
Besides the fact that by doing so you will be imitating the reconciling heart of God, reconciling has a number of wonderful practical benefits:
 - a. It will give you a clear conscience
 - b. It will produce in you personal and spiritual growth
 - c. It will serve to advance the kingdom of God
2. If you have never been reconciled to God, you can be reconciled to Him today!
We are naturally children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), and are at enmity with God (Eph. 2:11-15); but, "...we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son..." (Rom. 5:10). But this offer of reconciliation must be received.
 - a. Repent of your sins
Repent = Metaneo = "To think differently and to change course."

Acts 3:19 “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ...”

b. Reconcile your relationship to God through Jesus

Reconcile = Apokatalasso = “To put right a broken relationship”

1 Peter 3:18 “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

c. Realign your loyalty & allegiance to Christ.

2 Cor 5:15 “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

d. Respond to God’s command to make a public profession of your faith through water baptism.

3. Share this wonderful message of reconciliation with others.

2 Cor 5:17-19 “God ... reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”

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