



# BEGINNINGS

## A Study of the Book of Genesis

Sanctuary Bible Studies – Woodbury Lutheran Church

### Session 26: Jacob and Esau Reunited (Genesis 33)

In Genesis 32 we saw Jacob wrestle with God. In that struggle, he received a new name, Israel (which means “one who wrestles with God”). With a new name he also became a new person, ready to fulfill his covenant obligations. He was given a limp, a constant reminder of his humility before God and the end to an approach to life characterized by self-sufficiency and deceit. This “face to face” encounter with God also opened Jacob to what happens in chapter 33 – a reunion with his brother, Esau.

#### 1. HERE COMES ESAU (33:1-3)

- Vss. 1-2: Immediately at Peniel, as the encounter with God ends, Jacob looks and sees Esau coming with his 400 men.
  - As a security measure, Jacob puts the maidservants and their children (Zilpah and Bilhah) out front, then Leah and her children, and then Rachel and Joseph at the rear. His favoritism toward Rachel is again shown.
- Vs. 3: Jacob’s seven bows to the ground as he approaches Esau constitute a customary practice before kings in this region in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century BC (*Armana Tablets*, about 100 letters written mostly correspondence from Canaan and area nations to Egypt, revealing social and political customs and relationships between Canaan and Egypt at this time). Jacob’s seven bows before Esau reveal more of his own humility than self-preservation.

#### 2. CATCHING UP (33:4-11)

- Vs. 4: Esau’s run to embrace Jacob shows his own willingness to be “humiliated” in public for his brother’s sake since men did not run publicly at this time; it was seen as unbecoming a man’s dignity. A parallel to this is the run, embrace, and kiss of the father in Jesus’ story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20). Both Jacob and Esau have come to the point of wanting to take the initiative in healing their broken relationship. Their tears are the tears of brotherly peace. Time and circumstances have left them both wealthy men (see vs. 9 on Esau) so that the inheritance issue between them has been dissolved.
- Vss. 5-7: In a touching scene Jacob introduces his family to Esau who seems genuinely interested in them.
  - His willingness to bring his family forward in the face of Esau and his 400 men confirms the genuineness of the reunion.
  - Note how Jacob acknowledges that all he has is a gift from God (vs. 5b and vs. 11).
- Vss. 8-11: Jacob hopes that Esau will accept the generous gift of herds and servants in compensation for having stolen Esau’s inheritance and blessing. The word for “present” in vs. 11 is the same Hebrew word for “blessing” in Genesis 27:35.

- Acceptance of the gifts in this culture meant acceptance of the person. Refusal of the gifts meant rejection of the person.
- Esau also had a right to kill his brother but instead shows mercy. His acceptance of the gift shows his forgiveness of his brother.
- The spiritual blessing which Jacob took from Esau could not be returned to Esau. God has now confirmed that the blessing belongs to Jacob. Though Jacob had obtained the blessing by deceit, God had meant it for him anyway.

### 3. JACOB'S STEP BACK IN A NEW RELATIONSHIP (33:12-15)

- Vss. 12-14: Esau offers to escort Jacob's family to Seir (vs. 14), but Jacob refuses on the premise that they will slow Esau and his men down. Children and young livestock are in his care. Readers have a right to wonder if Jacob is still not trusting his brother's kind forgiveness.
- Vs. 15: A second attempt at grace by Esau (who maybe senses Jacob's being intimidated by Esau's 400) has him offering to leave some of the men behind to protect Esau's family and herds. This offer too is courteously refused.

### 4. JACOB IN SUCCOTH AND THEN SHECHEM (33:16-20)

- Vss. 16-17: Jacob's "step back" in the relationship is shown further by the fact that he never goes to Seir but to Succoth instead.
  - Seir would later be known as Edom, the land where Esau and his descendents would live, SE of the Dead Sea.
  - Succoth was located near where the Jordan and Jabbok Rivers meet. "Succoth" means "huts" or "booths," which Jacob likely builds for his flocks and herds. Jacob would stay there perhaps as long as 10 years and so builds a house for his family there as well. Succoth is still in the area of Paddan Aram.
- Vss. 18-20: As Jacob crosses W of the Jordan, he arrives back "home" in Canaan near the city of Shechem.
  - For 100 pieces of silver (kesitah is the word used for this weight or "currency," also used in Job 42: 11 and Joshua 24: 32), he must buy a piece of land near the well-established city.
  - The land would become "his" only in the conquest 500 years later.
  - Jacob not only pitched his tent at Shechem but also dug a well there. The site of Jacob's well at Shechem can still be seen today and is the well of John 4: 5-6.
  - Here also Jacob builds an altar and calls that place, El Elohe Israel, which means "God, the God of Israel." For Jacob, though, the altar is the last thing he builds (See 26: 25). He really belongs at Bethel not Shechem (28: 22). Lingering at Shechem would bring tragedy to Jacob's family (Chapter 34).

## BEGINNINGS

1. Time and circumstances bring healing.
2. Forgiveness calls for humility and initiative.
3. It can be hard to trust – even those who have proven their love.
4. Staying too long in one place can blur one's vision and purpose.
5. It is difficult to worship God in spirit and in truth when we are not where we belong.