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Genesis 33

(2019)

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Genesis 33

Topics.

- Jacob, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zillah and their children meet Esau.
- Esau runs to meet Jacob and kissed him and they wept.
- Bilhah, Zilpah, Leah, Rachel and their children bow down before Esau.
- Jacob tells Esau, his acceptance of him was like seeing the face of God.
- Jacob tells Esau to go on ahead of him and he will meet him at Seir.
- Esau returned to Seir and Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built a house.
- Jacob camps before the city of Shechem, in the land of Canaan.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

The previous chapter: in chapter thirty-two the focus was upon Jacob sending messengers with gifts to Esau to win his favour because Esau with four hundred men was coming to him and Jacob greatly feared. Jacob wrestled with a man and strove with God and his hip socket was put out of joint. His name was changed from Jacob to Israel after which he said, he has seen God face to face and his life has been delivered."

GENESIS 33:1-3

Jacob, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah and their Children meet Esau.

- **Genesis 33:1-3:** And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. ²And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

This is a continuation of the previous chapter which focused upon Jacob's great fear for himself and his family when his messengers told him that his older brother Esau was coming toward him with four hundred men. Ponder for a moment, the last time Jacob saw Esau was at least twenty years ago (Gen 31:41) when he by cunning trickery deceived their father Isaac into giving him the blessing rather than giving it to Esau who he had desired to give it to and Rebekah their mother saying to Jacob:

- Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you. ⁴³Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran ⁴⁴and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away— ⁴⁵until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. (Gen. 27:42-44).

Esau had such extreme hatred toward Jacob that he was planning to murder him (the full story is in Genesis chapter twenty-seven). Now twenty years later he is walking toward Esau with his two wives, their female servants and his eleven sons and daughter Dinah behind him with Joseph (Rachel's only child at this time born of her) being last of all. As soon as he sees Esau he humbles himself bowing seven times as he approached him. Jacob being a wise man was very aware that the best way to win the favour of a perceived enemy was to give them gifts which

manifest a kindness toward them and humbling oneself before them which in turn exalts and esteems those that are being bowed too. Humble, submissive behaviour goes a long way toward turning away wrath.

GENESIS 33:4

Esau Runs to Meet Jacob and Kissed Him and they Wept.

- **Genesis 33:4:** But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

All the hatred Esau had toward his younger brother twenty years ago has now become past history as soon as he sees his younger brother past times of their troubled childhood are set aside and his heart is overcome with brotherly love and it seems that from here on this brotherly affection between Esau and Jacob did not waver. This unexpected, but pleasant and surprising change in Esau's attitude toward Jacob did not stem from the great present of livestock Jacob had sent to him as some suppose, but from a genuine brotherly affection. We know this because Esau later tells Jacob to keep the gifts for himself saying, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself," Jacob had to persuade Esau to keep the gifts he had sent him (v9-11). The hatred and enmity Esau had toward Jacob some twenty years ago had dissipated over the years, his hatred and desire to murder him was laid aside and replaced with the warmest affection which was equally reciprocated by Jacob. Esau the skilful hunter and no doubt great warrior is so completely overwhelmed at the sight of his younger brother, he breaks from his walk and runs with excitement toward him weeping with joy as he embraces him in a warm family hug and brotherly kisses, probably one on each side of the neck. It is easy to imagine the great joy and relief Jacob would have been filled with when he saw Esau running toward him with arms open to receive him rather than with weapons to attack him, especially after he had such fear of Esau and had gone to such great trouble to prepare and protect his family should Esau still be hostile toward him.

GENESIS 33:5-8

Bilhah, Zilpah, Leah and Rachel Bow Down Before Esau.

- **Genesis 33:5-8:** And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." ⁶Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. ⁷Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. ⁸Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor in the sight of my lord."

To the question "Who are those with you?" Jacob says, "They are the children who God has graciously given him," showing that his mind was forever set upon the LORD and that he saw all good things in his life especially his children as a blessing of the LORD.

- Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. (Psalm 127:3).
- The LORD gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. (Psalm 113:9).
- The LORD raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. (Psalm 107:41).

Jacob had organised that those with him would walk toward Esau in the following three separate groups with some distance between each group:

1. The first group to approach Esau was Bilhah and Zilpah and their children.
2. The second group to approach Esau was Leah and her children.
3. The last group to approach Esau was Rachel and her son Joseph.

He arranged his family according to their preciousness in his eyes and walks himself in front of them all. Each group humbled themselves before Esau and in this way exalted and esteemed him above themselves. Though Jacob the younger brother had the rights and promise of the first-born, they nevertheless all gave Esau the older brother the honour of the firstborn.

GENESIS 33:9-11

Jacob tells Esau, Acceptance of Him was Like Seeing God's Face.

- **Genesis 33:9-11:** But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." ¹⁰Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me. ¹¹Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." Thus he urged him, and he took it.

The expression, "I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God," (v10) is a hyperbole (i.e., an exaggeration to highlight what he is saying) and expression that conveys the enormous joy Jacob has at seeing Esau (especially now that Esau is equally joyful at seeing him). It carries the idea that meeting Esau in this peaceable and kind manner is evidence of God's favour and love toward him and by extension God's love and grace working on the heart of Esau. Being accepted with such favour as Esau has shown him is like being accepted by God Himself and a clear sign of God's omnipresence, mercy and grace. Esau not only showed Jacob friendliness and brotherly love, but was also very generous in that he attempted to spare his brother from giving such a large present, it was only at Jacob's persuasion that Esau accepted it. The great value of Esau's present also shines a spotlight upon how abundantly God had blessed Jacob. This goodwill that Esau had toward his brother magnifies how wonderfully God answered Jacob's prayer to be kept safe and how faithfully He kept the following promise He made to Jacob:

- The LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you." (Gen. 31:3).

GENESIS 33:12-14

Jacob tells Esau to go Ahead and that He Will Meet Him at Seir.

- **Genesis 33:12-14:** Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you." ¹³But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

Esau suggests that he travels in front of Jacob to Seir, but Jacob realizing he would be travelling at a much slower pace, because of the women and their children and the multitude of livestock and their newborns that he and his servants are shepherding across the countryside it would be better for Esau to go on ahead and Jacob will catch up with him in Seir.

Seir: refers to a mountainous and extremely rugged country about 100 miles long called the land of Seir and Mount Seir, but later called Edom, because it was afterwards occupied by the descendants of Edom (Esau).

(Gen. 32:3) (Num. 24:18). Though it is not recorded that Jacob actually meet Esau in Seir it is possible he either visited him for a brief time since he was so close or after setting up camp in Succoth (v17) he went with his family on a caravan of camels and spent some time with him and then returned. It is common for Scripture to be silent on historical details especially if they are not important to the story or the main message of the Bible.

GENESIS 33:15-17

Esau Returned to Seir and Jacob Journeyed to Succoth.

- **Genesis 33:15-17:** So Esau said, "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." ¹⁶So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

Esau leaves Jacob that same day to return to Seir, while Jacob began his journey toward Seir, but stopped at a place now known as Succoth in or near the land of Seir. This was the first station that Jacob rested at on his arrival in the land of Canaan.

Succoth: the word Succoth comes from the Hebrew word (*Cukkowth*) it literally means booths (i.e., a hut, tabernacle and tent) and carries the idea of a cover that protects and gives shelter. It is also the name of a place in Egypt and three places in Palestine. The land of Succoth that Jacob set booths upon is on the Eastern side of the River Jordan. At the time Jacob halted here and set up booths, which most likely were temporary tents, huts or shelters that would not only give the shepherds shelter, but also give shelter for the weak and frail of his flock and the new born animals the place was probably not officially named Succoth, but called Succoth, because Jacob had set up multitudes of booths there. It later became officially known as Succoth when his descendants settled here in stone houses and built a city. They named the city Succoth to commemorate the fact that their ancestor Jacob a Syrian had first dwelt there in booths (i.e., tents). Jacob rested his cattle here for a period of time and erected a temporary house for the convenience of himself, his family and his servants. Since he was not intending to make this his permanent residence it is unlikely that it would be a building of stone, but more likely a very large and upmarket Arabian tent with many partitions and rooms or a number of tents. Though the Scripture is silent concerning Jacob visiting Esau in Seir it is very likely (since he was so close) that once he had set up the booths in Succoth and settled his livestock he and his family took a caravan of camels and visited Esau for a short time and afterward returned to their camp at Succoth.

GENESIS 33:18-20

Jacob Camps before the City of Shechem, in the Land of Canaan.

- **Genesis 33:18-20:** And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem (to Shalem a city of Shechem in KJV), which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. ¹⁹And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money (*q^esiytah*) the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. ²⁰There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

Canaan: comes from the two Hebrew words (Kena`an and Kana) it literally means humiliated and carries the idea of bending the knee and to bring low or into subjection. The actual name Canaanites serves as an ethnic catch-all name that embraces a number of home-grown populations and others that settled there. When the Bible talks of the Canaanites as a nation it often embraces several nations that dwell in the vast area of the whole of the land referred to as Canaan.

Shalem: (v18) comes from the Hebrew word (*shalam*) it literally means complete, friendly, peaceable and perfect. It carries the idea of being safe (in mind, body or estate) to be at peace, to be perfect, to be prosperous and to make an end of or to finish. Figurative it means to be complete or make complete and by extension to reciprocate, to make amends, to restore, to make restitution, to reward and to make good.

Shechem: (v18) comes from the Hebrew word (*Shekem*), it literally means ridge (i.e., the spur of a hill) and stems from the Hebrew word (*shakam*), meaning the neck (between the shoulders) as the place of burdens. The previous verses tell us that Jacob stopped at Succoth on the East side of the River Jordan in Seir and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock (v17), and now we are told that he went to Shalem a city of Shechem on the west side of the River Jordan in Canaan. Some commentators feel that Shalem was not a city, but is used to signify that Jacob arrived safely and in peace so the verse would read, "He came to Shalem, the city Shechem." Many Jewish writers also understand it of his coming in peace, health, and safety. However, the majority accept Shalem was a literal city of Shechem," that carries the idea that he came safely and in peace. The site is marked by one of the little villages about two miles to the northeast in the valley below Shechem. The fact he arrived safely and in peace to this city in Canaan is a testimony and witness to the following promise of God to him:

- I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (Gen. 28:15).

Clearly the name of the city Jacob arrives at in Canaan is very apt considering his circumstances and where he had travelled from with such a large family and a multitude of livestock.

On his way from Paddan-aram: (v18) the word Paddan-aram comes from the Hebrew word (*Paddan*) it literally means to extend, to be elevated and can refer to a plateau; the table-land or a highland in this context it refers to a region of Syria.

Jacob's journey: he travelled from Padanaram to Haran (where he stayed with Rachel's brother Laban). From there he travelled to Succoth on the east of the River Jordan and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock (Gen. 33:17), from here, he travelled to Shechem in the land of Canaan on the west side of the Jordan River. This was the first place he came to in the land of Canaan, here he purchased a piece of land for a hundred pieces of money (Gen. 33:19) so it seems that he was intending to stay here for a long time. It is most likely he would have if his sons hadn't taken Dinah and killed Hamour and his son Shechem, plundered the city of its livestock and wealth because Shechem had raped Dinah their sister. When Jacob heard what his sons had done he greatly feared the inhabitants of Canaan would gather together and attack him (the full story is in Genesis 34). After this horror God told Jacob to go up to Bethel and dwell there. (Gen. 35:1).

He camped before the city: (v18) means that he set up his camp near the city, but outside of it, naturally with such a multitude of sheep, goats, donkeys and cattle he could not find accommodation in the city.

He bought land for a hundred pieces of money: (v19) Jacob purchases a parcel of land from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem, following are two possible reasons Shechem is the only son that is named:

1. He was the most honored son of all his father's house (Gen. 34:19) and as such would have had the greatest authority and been looked up to by the others as the head of the family and therefore would have been the main son involved in the sale of the land to Jacob.
2. He is the primary focus of the following chapter (he rapes Dinah the daughter of Jacob) and the reason Simeon and Levi the brothers of Dinah slaughter him and his father Hamor and all the males because he defiled their sister. (Gen. 34:25-29).

Money: the word money comes from the Hebrew word (*q^esiyah*) it literally means to weigh out a definitely estimated nugget (i.e., of gold, silver or bronze etc.), to be stamped for a coin to be used as money. Though Jacob was heir of the whole country as yet the time had not come for him or his to take possession of it so with this money he purchased from the hand of the sons of Hamor some land where he had set up his camp so he could make it a permanent resting-place that he could call his own.

He erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel: (v20) the word, "El-Elohe-Israel," comes from the Hebrew word (*'El 'elohey Yisra'el*) (*'elohiyim*) and (*Yisra'el*), it literally means the mighty God of Israel and was the title Jacob gave to an altar he erected on the land he pitched his tent on that he had purchased from the sons of Hamor. He calls it the altar of the Mighty One, the God of Israel in which signalizes the omnipotence of God who had brought him in safety to the land of promise through many hardships. The following verse shows that Abraham had also built an altar in this neighbourhood:

- Abram passed through the land (of Canaan) to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. (Gen. 12:6-7).

Jacob follows his father's example setting up an altar as a memorial to the goodness of God and his protection and abundant blessings. Jacob fled from his family in Canaan with nothing and in great fear that Esau would kill him and now returns with two wives, eleven sons, male and female servants, one daughter, great wealth and a multitude of sheep, goats, donkeys camels and cattle. This was not only an altar of thanksgiving for the many mercies and blessings he had received since he went out of the land of Canaan and especially of thanksgiving for the promise and the honour God gave him when he changed his name from Jacob to Israel, but also a beautiful evidence of his heartfelt gratefulness and faith.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.