

Genesis 32:3-36:43 Jacob returns to Canaan

Introduction

This portion of scripture finds Jacob in between two powerful forces, both intent on destroying him. His father-in-law Laban has just caught up with him, and through divine intervention wisely chose to not cause Jacob harm. Now, he is on his way to meet his brother, Esau, who still holds a death grudge against the brother who stole not only his birthright, but his paternal blessing as well. Again, divine intervention will intercede for Jacob and assuage the anger and hatred of his brother, allowing Jacob to return home in relative peace.

We ended last week's study with Jacob realizing God has intervened with Laban; Laban has departed leaving Jacob in peace, and Jacob proclaims this place a "Godly camp" and calls it "Mahanaim". This is in the hill country of Gilead located south of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River, along the major trade route heading south along the east side of the Rift Valley.

Chapter 32 Jacob prepares to meet Esau

Vs 4-7 Jacob sends messengers to Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. Esau is not living in the proximity of his father, Isaac, in Canaan, but rather has chosen to live east of there in Seir and Edom. This is a land located south of the Dead Sea and going east from the Negev, a rugged desert mountainous region. The trade route Jacob is near is many miles north of Edom.

- Some versions suggest Jacob sent angels, perhaps those who met with him as cited in vs. 2. Other versions suggest Jacob sent trusted servants to intervene with Esau.
- The Book of Jasher tells that Laban sent emissaries to Esau to warn him of Jacob's return and relay that Jacob has treated Laban as dishonestly as Jacob had treated his brother so many years before. Remember in Genesis 29:13 Jacob told Laban all that had happened that lead up to Jacob's arrival in Haran. It was after the emissaries from Laban arrived that Esau amassed an army of 400 soldiers and set out to meet his brother.
- The emissaries sent by Jacob returned with the bad news that Esau was approaching with 400 warriors. Jasher reports that 60 of these are from the house of Esau and the remaining 340 are from surrounding communities.

Vs. 7-8 Jacob becomes greatly afraid. On his way out of Beer-sheba 34 years earlier, Esau attempted to have him killed by his son Eliphaz. Now upon his return, Esau is

bearing down on him, presumably to complete his threats of murder. Jacob devised a plan to hopefully, on one hand, appease his brother, and on the other hand, protect at least some of his entourage. He divided his people, flocks, and herds into two camps.

V 9-12 Out of his great fear, Jacob offers a most impassioned prayer of deliverance. He acknowledges his deep fear and reminds God that it was God Himself who summoned Jacob to return to Canaan.

Vs 13-21 As an offering of appeasement, Jacob assembled gifts for Esau of all his flocks and herds. One of his motivations is to let Esau know that even though Jacob had received the birthright and the blessing, he has become wealthy without ever dipping into the great wealth of their father, Isaac. He could live very well without the wealth of Isaac and he is more than happy to share his wealth with his brother.

- Three droves were formed for tribute, and each tribute for Esau included:
 - 200 she goats and 20 he-goats
 - 200 ewes and 20 rams
 - 30 nursing camels with their colts
 - 40 cows and 10 bulls
 - 20 she donkeys and 10 he donkeys

Vs 22-32 In the final preparations to meet Esau, Jacob sent the rest of his family and possessions across the Jabbock River, but he remained behind to pray. It is during this alone time, late at night that Jacob encounters a being and wrestles with this being till early in the morning. Scripture indicates Jacob sees this as wrestling with God Himself, the Almighty, and did not die. Some commentators suggest Jacob wrestled with an angel of God, for how could God have any difficulty in wrestling with a mere mortal? Others suggest Jacob wrestled with the angel of Edom, the spirit established over the affairs of Edom, and in this case, Esau's angel, or Satan.

It is believed every nation has a spiritual being, or angel, to guide its affairs. Israel had God Himself as their overseeing spiritual protector or guide because Israel is God's first born. We see this evidenced in Daniel 10:10-14, when the angel is restrained from attending to Daniel because he has been in conflict with the "Prince of Persia" for 21 days. Some believe Jacob wrestled with this prince of darkness, and survived through the night. This is the epitome of the conflict between good versus evil, the struggle of all mankind.

So what of the spiritual pronouncement that Jacob's name would become Israel? One explanation is that this spiritual being was not of God and was usurping righteousness by making this pronouncement prior to God doing so. Through the spiritual universe this being had knowledge of God's plan to change Jacob's name and this 'being of darkness' sought to interfere with God's timing in making this name change. God formally appears to Jacob in Genesis 35:9-12 to make this name change. Israel represents the spiritual election of Jacob and his descendents for all time.

Chapter 33 The brothers finally meet after 34 years

The story of Jacob and Esau is the story of conflict between good and evil, God and Satan, light versus darkness. Esau represents the seed of the serpent and Jacob represents the seed of the woman. This is the same conflict with Cain and Abel, Noah and the world, Nimrod versus Abraham. It will be the story of David and Goliath and many more.

Vs 1-4 Jacob crossed the river and somewhere soon he looked up and saw Esau coming, along with his 400 soldiers. There was still some distance between them so Jacob divided his family up in units according to mothers - the maid servants and their children first, then Leah and her children and finally, in the rear, his beloved Rachel and Joseph.

Jacob led the way, well in front of his family, and as he approached his brother, he bowed seven times. This bowing seven times show complete submission to Esau.

“And Esau ran toward him, embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him”.

V 5-11 Esau raised his eyes to look at the family units and asked, *“Whose are these?”*

The answer given by Jacob is carefully chosen. Jacob wished to make the point he is returning a wealthy man and none of it has come from the birthright or the blessing. Esau well knows Jacob reached Laban's home with completely empty pockets. He has returned with large amounts of wealth, including a nice large family. **Again, none of this wealth is from Isaac!**

Introductions of family ensue. Esau asked the meaning of all the droves who met him first, and Jacob's answer, *“to find favor in my lord's eyes”.*

Esau initially refused the gifts as he stated he *“has plenty”*. Jacob responded in insisting Esau accept the gifts because *“God has given him everything”*.

Plenty versus everything - This is a spiritual statement. Plenty is from the earth. Everything comes from God.

"I have seen your face and it is as though I have seen the face of God". This is not to be counted as Esau looks like deity. It is more a statement that I have seen your face and you did not try to kill me. Therefore, God is gracious and I see His hand in this reunion and my salvation. It is the answer to the prayer Jacob prayed for deliverance in 32:9-12.

Vs 12-17 - Esau suggested they all travel together and go to his home in Edom. That is not the destination of Jacob and it is not part of the Promised Land. Jacob begs off because they needed to travel slowly for the sake of the livestock.

Esau offered to leave some of his men to assist them in the process of arriving safely in Edom, but Jacob is able to convince Esau that no assistance is required.

Remember, this is a spiritual story about spiritual conflict. Jacob cannot find safety or peace in the world as represented by Esau. He cannot blend with the world, for God has called him to be unique. When we think about what we can learn from scripture on how God would have us live and conduct our lives, this lesson of being in the world but not of the world is huge. God calls us to be distinctly different from the world and we must continually assess our place and function in the world and ask ourselves, "Am I keeping myself distinct from the world?"

Jacob visits Esau - Prophecy

Jacob does not go to Edom to visit Esau at any time as recorded in Genesis. However, recorded in Numbers 20, Israel attempts to cross the land of Edom towards the end of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. After asking for permission to cross Edom, promising to stay on the roads and not drink any water from wells, Edom refused to allow the passing through. After another attempt to gain permission, Edom responded by sending out armed warriors ready to do battle if Israel sets one foot on Edomite soil.

The very short book of Obadiah is a prophesy against Edom for their part in assisting Babylon in destroying Israel in 587 BC, as the Children of Israel are taken into Babylonian captivity. Edom attacks Israel militarily at this time and Obadiah argues Edom should have assisted Israel rather than attacking her. Edom received retribution in 582BC when the same Babylonian armies they assisted 5 years earlier now turned their vengeance on Edom and destroyed her.

Herod the Great was an Idumean Edomite and rose to great power under Roman rule. However, after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD, the Edomites virtually disappeared from history.

Jacob settles for a while in this area

Esau relented and returned to Edom, leaving Jacob and his entourage alone. Jacob went to “Succoth”, a place of tents or huts - more of a concept than a true location. This is a first reference of the Feast of Sukkot, or Tabernacles, a feast to celebrate the time the Children of Israel lived in tents in the wilderness, and God literally dwelt among them.



Vs 18-20 Jacob arrived safely, or intact, at Shechem. This means he is whole, perfect, recovered from his displaced hip socket and unharmed by Esau.

Succoth is the general area and within that general area, Jacob settled specifically in Shechem on the west side of the Jordan River. Jacob purchases land there, the second purchased land recorded in scripture as a lasting testimony to the land Israel can lay claim to. (Genesis 23 Abraham buys a burial place; II Samuel 24

David purchases the threshing floor on Mount Moriah).

Joshua 24:32 records that the bones of Joseph, carried up from Egypt, are buried on this parcel of land purchased by Jacob (Jacob is entombed in the Cave at Macphela purchased by Abraham).

Jacob set up an altar here and sacrificed a sacrifice of praise to HaShem, fulfilling the promise that God would bring Jacob back to this place and Jacob names the place “El,-Elhoe-Israel”, or, “God, the God of Israel”.

Chapter 34 The treachery at Shechem

Vs 1-4 So what happens when a child of God decides to move in closer to the children of Satan? Just as in the Lot story, moving into Sodom, Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob (Leah) decides to go to town and hang out with the Shechemite women. Sounds natural. Bad things happen in the world. Shechem, son of Hamor, the king of the region, became infatuated with her, took her and raped her, though perhaps Dinah was a willing “victim”. Shechem pledged his love for Dinah and requested his father obtain her for him as a wife.

Vs 5 Jacob learned of this treachery while his sons are tending cattle in the field, and said nothing till their return.

Vs 6-12 Hamor the king approached Jacob regarding a marriage and while they are speaking, the brothers of Dinah return home. They learn of the treachery and are outraged - a daughter of Jacob should not be treated in such a manner.

But Hamor pleads the case of his son, Shechem, who loved this girl deeply and longs to make her his wife. In fact, Hamor is willing to pay any price, even a highly inflated bride price, to obtain this girl for his son. Hamor argued further that in fact, it would be a very good thing for both Shechem and Jacob’s people if we intermarry freely. Intermarriage was one of the oldest and surest ways for two distinct peoples to create peace and strength and increased wealth for the community.

Politically this was a shrewd move on Hamor’s part. He knew this is no ordinary clan that has moved in to his region. They are wealthy, powerful, and are protected by a mighty God. He had no doubt heard the stories of Abraham and Isaac. He probably knew well the story of Esau to the south, Jacob’s brother. Not only was there the possibility of great wealth with these people, but great military protection as well. A strong alliance will be a good thing, and what better way to develop the alliance than to intermarry?

Vs 13-17 *“But Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor with deceit, because he had defiled their sister, Dinah”.*

- We can only allow the marriage if you and every male of you becomes like us, circumcised.
- It would be a disgrace to us to give our sister to a man who is not circumcised.

- If every male becomes circumcised, we will gladly intermarry with you.
- If you do this we will live among you and become one people - **political, economic and military protection the king is looking for!**
- If you do not agree, we will take our daughter and sister and leave - **smacking at the vulnerability of Shechem, the son of Hamor.**

Vs 18 -24 *“Now the words seemed reasonable to Hamor and his son Shechem”.*

- Shechem did not delay in becoming circumcised.
- Shechem was more respected than any other son of Hamor so he and his father met with all the men at the city gate to convince them of this great wind fall - uniting with their rich and powerful new neighbor.
- Just one catch - every male in our community must be circumcised! **“Oh, ok. By the way, what exactly is circumcision? You want us to do what!!!”**
- World’s best salesmen!
- We will become rich and well protected - all of us! This is the treachery of the world. Join the world and you too will become rich and well protected, just sell your soul and all will be well.
- **Everyone agreed and all males were circumcised that day!**

Vs 25-29 The true plan unfolds. On the third day following the mass circumcision, the most painful of all days, Simeon and Levi entered the city without being noticed and killed Hamor and Shechem, and every male of the city with a sword, and then took Dinah home with them.

- The sons of Jacob took all the flocks, herds and donkeys from the town
- They looted all the wealth of the city
- They captured the women and children as slaves
- They took all the wealth they found in the houses

Vs30-31 The boys reported to Jacob all they had done and Jacob responded out of a sense of great fear.

- You have brought trouble on me today
- You have made me odious among the inhabitants of the land

- We will be targeted by them for attack because our men are few in number
- I will be destroyed, me and my household

Is this the response we would expect of Jacob? After everything he has endured, that God has carried him through, this is what scares him? What do you think of Jacob's response to what his sons have done? Would Jacob have given in to Hamor's request for Dinah to marry his son if his sons had not stood firm on their objection?

Chapter 35 Return to Beth-El

Vs 1 - God instructed Jacob to leave Shechem and return to Beth-El, the site of the dream of the staircase ascending to heaven, the site where the covenant was made between God and Jacob.

Vs 2- 7 Prepare yourselves to meet with God!

- Discard all alien gods; those from Laban's house, Shechem, or perhaps acquired from Esau and his men
- Take a bath (purify yourselves through mikvah) and change your clothes (think about baptism here)
- Remove the rings from your ears
- And we will travel to Beth-El

There is something very special about entering into the presence of the Living God. These commands are similar to the instructions given the Children of Israel in preparation of meeting God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:10)

All the household of Jacob complied. All the idols and earrings were buried under the oaks near Shechem. As they traveled God placed a great terror on the communities around them so that no one was able to follow them or attack them.

They traveled to Beth-El, Mount Moriah, and Jacob erected an altar there, and Jacob called the place, El-Bethel, God, House of God.

Vs 8 Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah died here and was buried under the oak at Beth-El. Many commentators write this is a euphemism meaning Rebekah died here, indicating a reunion with Rebekah took place at this spiritual convocation. The scripture does not reveal anything about the reunion with Jacob's parents, Isaac and Rebekah. Almost as a footnote it is indicated that as the reunion took place, Rebekah

died - perhaps fulfilled at seeing her beloved Jacob one more time before death overtook her.

V 9-15 God appeared to Jacob again at this sacred place and re-named Jacob, Israel. (foretold by the being Jacob wrestled with through the night 32:24-32)

And God pronounces a blessing on Israel and restates the covenant promises with him.

- *“I Am God Almighty*
- *Be fruitful and multiply*
- *A nation and a company of nations shall come from you*
- *And kings shall come forth from you*
- *The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give to you*
- *And I will give the land to your descendents after you”*

Jacob erected a pillar and anointed it with drink (wine) and oil, (blood and spirit) and restated the name of the place, Beth-El, House of God.

Vs 16-20 They journeyed from there south to go to Ephrath (Bethlehem). While they were some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began birth pains, the birth is complicated, yet a son is born. Rachel names him Ben-oni, “son of my mourning”, but Jacob renamed him Benjamin, “son of the right or strength”. Rachel died shortly after giving birth and was buried just north of Bethlehem or Ephrath.

Vs 21-22 Israel traveled on and pitched his tent toward the tower of Eder (Migdaler). Here, Reuben, the oldest son of Leah, does the unthinkable, he enters the tent of Bilhah, maid servant of Rachel, and has relations with her. This is not done in secret, it is a veritable protest. Now that Rachel is dead, Reuben is making the statement that his father’s only wife is Leah, and he can have relations with Leah’s handmaid, Zilpah. Bilhah has been defiled. Reuben will pay for this in the prophecies and blessings in the days to come.

Vs 23-26 A restatement of the descendents of Israel is given in these verses, according to the mothers:

- Leah - Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun
- Rachel - Joseph and Benjamin
- Bilhah (Rachel) - Dan and Naphtali
- Zilpah (Leah) - Gad and Asher

Vs 28,29 Isaac's days are 180 years and he breaths his last. He was an old man of ripe age, and his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him with Rebekah in the Cave of Macphela, near Hebron, in the burial place purchased by his father Abraham.

Chapter 36 The descendents of Esau

Chapter 36 provides a lengthy description of the genealogy of Esau. It is difficult to understand how such a lengthy discussion could be provided so much space in the Torah.

To us today it may not carry a lot of meaning. However, in the spiritual context, Edom lies in opposition to Israel. The descendents of Esau will be enemies of the descendents of Israel. The sages teach that many of the kings listed in this genealogy were begot by incest, something that is an abomination to God. Honor came to Esau because he was the son of Isaac, son of Abraham. Beyond that, his descendents were not honored because Esau chose the world rather than Torah. Similarly, Solomon was honored because he was the son of David. Therefore, God did not destroy Solomon's rule while he lived. As soon as Solomon had died, Israel was divided into two nations and civil war broke out, and the nations would never be reunited till the end of time.