

# CHAPTER 33

## INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 33

In this chapter we find Esau meeting Jacob in a friendly manner, contrary to his fears and expectation, having set his family in order in case of the worst, (<sup><01301></sup>Genesis 33:1-4); putting questions to Jacob concerning the women and children with him, who make their obeisance to him as Jacob had done before, (<sup><01305></sup>Genesis 33:5-7); and concerning the drove he met, which was a present to him, and which he refused at first to take, but at the urgency of Jacob accepted of it, (<sup><01308></sup>Genesis 33:8-11); proposing to travel with him, unto which Jacob desired to be excused, he, with the women, children, and flocks, not being able to keep pace with him, (<sup><01312></sup>Genesis 33:12-14), and to leave some of his men with him to guard him, which Jacob judged unnecessary, upon which they parted friendly, (<sup><01315></sup>Genesis 33:15,16); and the chapter is concluded with an account of Jacob's journey, first to Succoth, then to Shalem, where he pitched his tent, bought a field and built an altar, (<sup><01317></sup>Genesis 33:17-20).

**Ver. 1.** *And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked,* etc.] After he had passed over the brook, and was come to his wives and children; which was done either accidentally or on purpose, to see if he could espy his brother coming: some think this denotes his cheerfulness and courage, and that he was now not distressed and dejected, as he had been before:

*and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men;* (see <sup><01316></sup>Genesis 32:6);

*and he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids;* some think he made four divisions of them; Leah and her children, Rachel and her son, Bilhah and hers, and Zilpah and hers: but others are of opinion there were but three: the two handmaids and their children in one division, Leah and her children in another, and Rachel and her son in the third; which seems to be confirmed in (<sup><01312></sup>Genesis 33:2), though the word for "divide" signifies to halve or divide into two parts; according to which, the division then must be of the two wives and their

children in one company, and of the two handmaids and theirs in the other: and this Jacob did partly for decency and partly for safety.

**Ver. 2.** *And he put the handmaids and their children foremost*, etc.] In the first division, as being less honourable and less beloved by him:

*and Leah and her children after*; still according to the degree of honour and affection due unto them; Leah being a wife that was imposed and forced upon him:

*and Rachel and Joseph hindermost*; being most beloved by him, and therefore most careful of them; Rachel being his principal and lawful wife, and who had the greatest share in his affection, and Joseph his only child by her.

**Ver. 3.** *And he passed over before them*, etc.] At the head of them, as the master of the family, exposing himself to the greatest danger for them, and in order to protect and defend them in the best manner he could, or to endeavour to soften the mind of his brother by an address, should there be any occasion for it:

*and bowed himself to the ground seven times*; in a civil way, as was the manner in the eastern countries towards great personages; and this he did to Esau as being his elder brother, and as superior to him in grandeur and wealth, being lord of a considerable country; and at the same time religious adoration might be made to God; while he thus bowed to the ground, his heart might be going up to God in prayer, that he would appear for him at this instant, and deliver him and his family from perishing by his brother; and so the Targum of Jonathan introduces this clause,

“praying, and asking mercies of the Lord, and bowed, etc.”

seven times, perhaps, may not design an exact number, but that he bowed many times as he came along:

*until he came near to his brother*; he kept bowing all the way he came until they were within a small space of one another.

**Ver. 4.** *And Esau ran to meet him*, etc.] If he rode on any creature, which is likely, he alighted from it on sight of his brother Jacob, and to express his joy on that occasion, and affection for him, made all the haste he could to meet him, as did the father of the prodigal, (<sup><15></sup>Luke 15:20),

*and embraced him*; in his arms, with the greatest respect and tenderness:

*and fell on his neck*; laid his head on his neck, where it remained for a while, not being able to lift it up, and speak unto him; the word is in the dual number, and signifies, as Ben Melech thinks, the two sides of the neck, the right and the left; and he might lay his head first on one side, and then on the other, to show the greatness of his affection:

*and kissed him*; in token of the same: there are three pricks over this word in the original more than ordinary, directing the attention of the reader to it, as something wonderful and worthy of observation: the Jewish writers <sup>f1547</sup> are divided about it; some think that this points at the insincerity of Esau in kissing his brother when he hated him; others, on the contrary, to his sincerity and heartiness in it, and which was matter of admiration, that he who laid up hatred in his heart against his brother, and had bore him a grudge for so many years, and it may be came out now, with an intention to destroy him, should have his heart so turned toward him, as to behave in this affectionate manner, which must be owing to the power of God working upon his heart, changing his mind, and making him thus soft, flexible, and compassionate; and to Jacob's humble submission to him, subservient to divine Providence as a means; and thus as he before had power with God in prayer on this same account, the effect of which he now perceived, so he had power with men, with his brother, as it was intimated to him he should:

*and they wept*; they "both" wept, as the Septuagint version adds, both Jacob and Esau, for joy at the sight of each other, and both seriously; and especially there can be no doubt of Jacob, who must be glad of this reconciliation, if it was only outward, since hereby his life, and the lives of his wives and children, would be spared.

**Ver. 5.** *And he lift up his eyes, and saw the women and children*, etc.] After the salutation had passed between him and his brother Jacob, he looked, and saw behind him women and children, Jacob's two wives and his two handmaids, and twelve children he had by them,

*and said, who [are] those with thee?* who do those women and children belong to that follow thee? for Jacob had made no mention of his wives and children, when he sent his messengers to him, (<sup>(CXXIII)</sup>Genesis 32:5); and therefore Esau might very well ask this question, which Jacob replied to:

*and he said, the children which God hath graciously given thy servant*; he speaks of his children as gifts of God, and as instances and pledges of his favour and good will to him, which he thankfully acknowledges; and at the same time speaks very respectfully to his brother, and in great condescension and humility owns himself his servant, but says nothing of his wives; not that he was ashamed, as Abarbinel suggests, that he should have four wives, when his brother, who had less regard for religion, had but three; but he mentions his children as being near kin to Esau, and by whom he might conclude who the women were, and of whom also he might give a particular account, though the Scripture is silent about it; since Leah and Rachel were his own first cousins, (<sup><0290></sup>Genesis 29:10,16); and who they were no doubt he told him, as they came to pay their respects to him, as follows.

**Ver. 6.** *Then the handmaids came near, they and their children*, etc.] Being foremost, and next to, Jacob, as Bilhah and her two sons, Dan and Naphtali, and Zilpah and her two sons, Gad and Asher:

*and they bowed themselves*; in token of respect to Esau, as Jacob had done before them, and set them an example, and no doubt instructed them to do it.

**Ver. 7.** *And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves*, etc.] Who were in the next division or company; their children were seven, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah, six sons and one daughter:

*and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves*; it is observed that Joseph is mentioned before his mother; it may be, because they might put him before her in the procession, for greater safety; or she might present him to Esau, being a child of little more than six years of age, and teach him how to make his obeisance to him, which she also did herself.

**Ver. 8.** *And he said, what [meanest] thou by all this drove which I met?* etc.] Not as being ignorant of the design of it; for no doubt the several drovers, according to their instructions from Jacob, had acquainted him with it; but he chose not to take the present on what they said, but was willing to have it from Jacob's own mouth, and that he might have the opportunity of refusing it:

*and he said, [these are] to find grace in the sight of my lord*; to gain his favour and good will; and which, as it was a token of Jacob's good will to him, so, by his acceptance of it, he would know that he bore the same to him also. It was usual in the eastern countries to carry presents to friends, and especially to great men, whenever visits were paid, as all travellers in general testify to be still the usage in those parts, to this day.

**Ver. 9.** *And Esau said, I have enough, my brother*, etc.] Or "I have much"<sup>f1548</sup>, and stand in no need of this present, or have much more than thou hast:

*keep that thou hast unto thyself*; for the use of himself and family, which is large; in this Esau showed himself not only not a covetous man, but that he was truly reconciled to his brother, and needed not anything from him, to make up the difference between them.

**Ver. 10.** *And Jacob said, nay, I pray thee*, etc.] Do not say so, as the Targum of Jonathan supplies it, or do not refuse my present:

*if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand*; signifying, that the acceptance of his present would be a token to him, and give him full satisfaction that he bore a good will to him, and did not retain anger and resentment against him:

*for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God*; or of princes, as Onkelos, as the face of some great personage, as he was; or as the face of an angel, very pleasant and lovely; or as the face of God himself, he observing the love and favour of God to him, in working upon the heart of Esau, and causing him to carry it so lovingly to him; wherefore for this reason receive it, because I have had such an agreeable sight of thee:

*and thou wast pleased with me*; accepted of me, and kindly received me:

**Ver. 11.** *Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee*, etc.] The present he had sent him, now carrying home to his house, which was a part of what God had blessed Jacob with; and which he from a beneficent generous spirit gave his brother, wishing the blessing of God to go along with it; it was an insinuation, and so he would have it taken, that he wished him all happiness and prosperity;

*because God hath dealt graciously with me*; in giving him so much substance, and now in giving him so much favour in the sight of Esau, whom he dreaded:

*and because I have enough*; a sufficiency of all good things, being thoroughly contented with his state and circumstance; or “I have all things”<sup>f1549</sup>, all kind of good things, everything that was necessary for him; the expression is stronger than Esau’s; and indeed Jacob had besides a large share of temporal mercies, all spiritual ones; God was his covenant God and Father, Christ was his Redeemer, the Spirit his sanctifier; he had all grace bestowed on him, and was an heir of glory:

*and he urged him, and he took [it]*: being pressing on him, or importunate with him, he accepted of his present.

**Ver. 12.** *And he said, let us take our journey, and let us go*, etc.] To Seir, where Esau lived, and whither he invited Jacob to stop a while, and refresh himself and his family:

*and I will go before thee*; to show him the way to his palace, and to protect him on the road from all dangers; or “besides thee”<sup>f1550</sup>, alongside of him, keeping equal pace with him, thereby showing great honour and respect, as well as in order to converse with him as they, travelled.

**Ver. 13.** *And he said unto him, my lord knoweth the children [are] tender*, etc.] The eldest being but thirteen years of age, and the youngest about six; and Esau might easily perceive by their stature that they were young and tender, and not able to bear either riding or walking very fast:

*and the flocks and herds with young [are] with me*; or “upon me”<sup>f1551</sup>; the charge of them was upon him, it was incumbent on him to take care of them, and especially in the circumstances in which they were, being big with young, both sheep and kine; or “suckling”, giving milk to their young, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan, and so having lambs and calves, some of them perhaps just yeaned and calved, they required more attendance and greater care in driving them, not being able to travel far in a day:

*and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die*; if he, and the servants under him, should push them on too fast, beyond their strength, even but one day, all in the above circumstances would be in danger of being lost through overmuch fatigue and weariness.

**Ver. 14.** *Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant,* etc.] He desired in a very respectable manner that he would not keep his pace in complaisance to him, but proceed on in his journey, and go on with his men, and he with his family and flocks would follow after as fast as he could, and their circumstances would admit of:

*and I will lead on softly;* slowly, gently, easily, step by step:

*according as the cattle that goeth before me, and the children be able to endure;* or “according to the foot”<sup>f1552</sup> of them; of the cattle, whom he calls the “work”<sup>f1553</sup>, because his business lay in the care of them, and these were the chief of his substance; and of the children, as the feet of each of them were able to travel; or because of them, for the sake of them, as Aben Ezra, consulting their strength, he proposed to move on gently, like both a wise, careful, and tender father of his family, and shepherd of his flock:

*until I come unto my lord unto Seir;* whither, no doubt, he intended to come when he parted with Esau; but for reasons which after appeared to him he declined it: or more probably he did go thither then, or quickly after; though the Scripture makes no mention of it, he might go with some of his servants directly, and send his family, flocks, and herds, under the care of other servants, forward on their journey, and quickly come up to them again; for that he should tell a lie is not likely, nor does he seem to be under any temptation to it: and besides, it would have been dangerous to have disobliged his brother when on his borders, who could easily have come upon him again with four hundred men, and picked a quarrel with him for breach of promise, and destroyed him and his at once.

**Ver. 15.** *And Esau said, let me now leave with thee [some] of the folk that [are] with me,* etc.] To show him the way, and guard him on the road, and he appear the more honourable when he entered into Seir:

*and he said, what needeth it?* Jacob saw not the necessity of it; he knew the direct way very probably; he thought himself in no danger, since he was at peace with Esau, and he did not affect the grandeur of an equipage:

*let me find grace in the sight of my lord;* having his favour and good will, that was enough for him; and among the rest of the favours he received from him, he begged this might be added, that he might be excused retaining any of his retinue with him.

**Ver. 16.** *So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir.*] Took his leave of Jacob the same day he met him, and proceeded on in his journey towards Seir; whether he arrived there the same day is not certain, probably it was more than a day's journey.

**Ver. 17.** *And Jacob journeyed to Succoth,* etc.] Perhaps after he had been at Seir, and stayed there some little time. Succoth was on the other side of Jordan, so called by anticipation, for it had its name from what follows; as yet there was no city built here, or at least of this name; afterwards there was, it lay in a valley, and belonged to Sihon king of Heshbon, and was given to the tribe of Gad, (<sup><0637></sup>Joshua 13:27); it is mentioned along with Penuel, and was not far from it, (<sup><0708></sup>Judges 8:8). It is said to be but two miles distant from it <sup>f1554</sup>, but one would think it should be more:

*and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle;* an house for himself and family, and booths or tents for his servants or shepherds, and for the cattle they had the care of, some for one, and some for the other. This he did with an intention to stay some time here, as it should seem; and the Targum of Jonathan says he continued here a whole year, and Jarchi eighteen months, a winter and two summers; but this is all uncertain:

*therefore the name of the place is called Succoth;* from the booths or tents built here, which this word signifies.

**Ver. 18.** *And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem,* etc.] Not Salem, of which Melchizedek was king, much less Jerusalem, for it was forty miles from it <sup>f1555</sup>; more likely Salim near Aenon, where John was baptizing, (<sup><0423></sup>John 3:23); though it perhaps is the same with Shechem; for the words may be read, he “came to Shalem, the city Shechem”, a city which Hamor had built, and called by the name of his son Shechem, the same with Sychar, (<sup><0405></sup>John 4:5); this was on this side Jordan, and therefore Jacob must have passed over that river, though no mention is made of it; it is said to be about eight miles from Succoth <sup>f1556</sup>: though some think Shalem is not the name of a place, but an appellative, and to be rendered “safe [and] sound”, or “whole”; and so the Jewish <sup>f1557</sup> writers generally understand it of his coming in peace, health, and safety:

*which [is] in the land of Canaan;* it belonged to that tribe of the Canaanites called Hivites; for Hamor, the father of Shechem, from whom it had its name, was an Hivite, (<sup><0342></sup>Genesis 34:2), so that Jacob was now got into the land of Canaan, his own country, and where his kindred dwelt:



*when he came from Padanaram*; from Mesopotamia, from Haran there; Shechem was the first place in the land of Canaan he came to, when he came from thence, and whither he came in the greatest safety, he himself, wives, children, and servants, in good health, without any loss of any of his cattle and substance; and without any ill thing befalling: him all the way thither, being delivered from Laban and Esau, and from every danger, and from every enemy: and to signify this is this clause added, which may seem otherwise superfluous:

*and pitched his tent before the city*; the city of Shechem, not in it, but near it.

**Ver. 19.** *And he bought a parcel of a field*, etc.] Not the whole, but a part of it; this he did, though he was heir of the whole country, because, as yet, the time was not come for him or his to take possession of it:

*where he had spread his tent*; the ground that it stood upon, and what was adjoining to it, for the use of his cattle: this he bought

*at the hand of the children of Hamor*; of some one of them, in whose possession it was, and perhaps with the consent of the rest, and before them, as witnesses:

*for an hundred pieces of money*; Onkelos, the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Samaritan, Syriac, and Arabic versions render it a hundred lambs or sheep, cattle being used to be given in exchange for things in trade and commerce; but as money was in use before the times of Jacob, and Stephen expresses it as a “sum of money”, (<sup><4076></sup>Acts 7:16); and this best agrees with the use of the word in (<sup><1821></sup>Job 42:11), the only place besides this, excepting (<sup><1242></sup>Joshua 24:32), in which it is used, it seems best so to interpret it here; and the pieces of money might be such as were of the value of a lamb or sheep, or rather had the figure of one impressed upon them. Laban, from whom Jacob might have them, or his neighbours, and also Jacob himself, being shepherds, might choose thus to impress their money; but the exact value of these pieces cannot be ascertained: the Jewish writers generally interpret them of a “meah”, which was the value of one penny of our money, and twenty of them went to a shekel; so that a hundred of these must make a very small and contemptible sum to purchase a piece of ground with.

**Ver. 20.** *And he erected there an altar*, etc.] To offer sacrifice upon to God, by way of thanksgiving, for the many mercies he had received since

he went out of the land of Canaan, whither he was now returned; and especially for his safety in journeying hither from Padanaram, and for deliverance from Laban and Esau, and for all other favours that he and his had been partakers of. And this he also erected for the sake of religious worship, to be continued in his family; he intending to reside here for some time, as appears by the purchase he had made, and as it is certain he did:

*and called it Elelohe-Israel:* God, the God of Israel; that is, he called the altar the altar of God, who is the God of Israel, who had been his God, his preserver and protector; and had lately given him the name of Israel, and had made good what answered to it, and was designed by it, that as he had had power with God, and prevailed, so he should with man; and as a memorial of all these favours and mercies, he erected this altar, and devoted it to God and his service, and called it by this name: or “he called upon God, the God of Israel”, as the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions; he prayed unto him at the time he offered sacrifice on the altar, and gave him praise for all the great and good things he had done for him. Jacob must have stayed at Succoth, and at this place, many years, especially at the latter; since, when he came into those parts, Dinah was a child of little more than six years of age, and Simeon and Levi were very young, not above eleven or twelve years of age; and yet, before he left Shechem, Dinah was marriageable, and Simeon and Levi were grown strong and able bodied men, and did a most strange exploit in slaying all the males in Shechem, as recorded in the next chapter.