

Jacob's first actions, upon God's contact with him promising protection, appear to have been more human bravado than wisdom from faith. His apparently well intentioned desire to meet and greet his long estranged brother had quickly dissolved into frantic preparations when he heard Esau was coming with 400 men. First he made plans to curry Esau's favor and then carefully planned to limit his losses if Esau should be belligerent and vengeful.

When Esau with his 400 men did show up he behaved as a long separated brother, a wealthy man, albeit courteous, in his own right. The "afterthought" blessing Isaac had given Esau in response to his plaintive pleading had "paid off." In the twenty years of Jacob's absence Esau was thriving in Seir. Seir, a rocky mountainous land located southeast of Canaan had become Esau's adopted homeland outside of the land of Canaan. Esau had apparently accepted the fact that Canaan had been granted to Jacob. (It is not revealed here if he had accepted the fact that he had despised the birthright due the elder.)

Was Jacob's exhibition of fawning and groveling before Esau a genuine and welcomed apology or simply a sickening put on act? Were their hearty greetings and mutual tears genuine or simply a ceremony for show? Such demonstrative actions are not so common in Minnesota, so we may have some difficulty in relating to them in our culture. But the principle of repentance followed by forgiveness is never "culture bound." It is a universal principle set by God for humans to come to God, and then for enjoying this relationship with God. This same principle, Repentance followed by Forgiveness is for establishing and restoring relationships between all individuals upon this sinful earth.

*Luke 17:4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.*

*Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:*

*Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

How could Esau stand it? Or was he simply mature enough to accept Jacob's fawning greeting as a genuine, although immaturely expressed, confession and apology for his sin against Esau? The sight of his brother groveling might have turned his stomach and caused him to despise his brother. Scripture records "Edom" historically hating and opposing Israel with ill will and doing them much harm. Was Esau being two faced here?

Jacob's mistrusting fear of Esau led him to deceive him and to evade him as soon as he could. Therefore he didn't return to Bethel right away despite its significance to his life with God. It had been his last stop when he had left Canaan as a lonely refugee. And Bethel was where he had first met God. There he had received (albeit bargaining with a counter proposal) God's unsolicited promise of His presence while

gone and for his safe return. From there wouldn't he have been eager to return to Beersheba where Isaac, his father, and Rebekah, his mother, were? He didn't! He detoured to some cities to the north of Bethel. He first stopped at Succoth, just east of the Jordan, where he built him a house and temporary shelters for his livestock. (Succoth means "booths.") Then he moved on across the Jordan into Canaan itself and set up housekeeping in a small city near Shechem. Why? Lingering suspicion and fear of Esau? Lack of faith? Lack of dependance and prayerful consulting with God? All of the above.

Now compare the relative status of the brothers upon Jacob's return. Esau had conquered and displaced (and perhaps absorbed) native tribes in Seir and had settled into their cities in his adopted homeland. He had become an established nation of his descendants. This is documented in chapter 36. Meanwhile Jacob had returned from Padan-Aram from a life tending flocks and herds of his uncle. They lived in a "civilized" community situated on a major trade route. Though he managed his uncles flocks and spent days in the field he lived with the families of his wives in a house in the city. Returning to Canaan, he found himself faced with a return to living in tents as did Abraham and Isaac. They had been pilgrims and aliens for the last 180 years since Abraham left Haran. Though unstated in scripture, one can imagine the difficulty of facing the rigors of tent life again, not to mention the protest of his city-bred wives and family. No, he was not yet ready to be an alien there again.

Distrustful of others by nature, and therefore self sufficient, Jacob apparently had lost sight of God's promises. He had frantically taken all kinds of measures and precautions to prepare for Esau's coming with 400 men. These actions reveal his self centered mind set and his true attitude toward his large family. His discriminating valuation of them was divisive and was demeaning to many of them. He was raising a truly dysfunctional household. He and his offspring would pay dearly for his misguided leadership. These weren't mere flocks and herds he was managing, they were spirit and soul human beings with distinct personalities and feelings. Examples:

- Jacob's preference and valuation of Rachel over Leah.
- His valuation and preference for Rachel's son over Leah's sons.
- And his valuation of Leah's sons over the sons of the handmaids, who are undifferentiated themselves.
- How could Leah's children feel loved, much less real respect for their father—and for God? We will see instances of this lack of respect as the story unfolds.

These situations were symptomatic of a situation that was to endure to near the end of Jacob's life and cause him and his family much grief. We will read next of the grief he brought upon himself by these attitudes and actions.

By Ronald Canner, November 10, 2010