

Jacob Promised to Visit Esau

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children, by our example, how to be a blessing to others in their lives. Jacob was given a blessing by the Lord, and he then gave a blessing to his brother. In this topic, we will see that Jacob promised he would come to Seir, where Esau lived, to visit him.

Genesis 33:12-14 says, “Then Esau said, ‘Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you.’ But Jacob said to him, ‘My lord knows that the children *are* weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing *are* with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir.’” Here, we see that Esau made a suggestion to Jacob. He suggested that they travel together until they came to the place where Esau lived in Seir. However, Jacob realized that it would not be wise for them to travel together. Esau only had men traveling with him, so they could travel rapidly. In contrast, Jacob had his family with young children and his flocks needed to be able to spend part of each day eating food so they could stay strong. In addition, many of the animals in his flocks were nursing their young.

As a result, Jacob explained to Esau why it would not be good for them to travel together. He said that his children were weak. The word translated “weak” means *young, tender or soft*. The first use of this word in the Old Testament is in Genesis 18:7, where we read, “And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave *it* to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it.” A tender calf would be a young calf. The meat from a young calf is called veal because it is very tender and easy to eat. Jacob used the word in this verse to speak of his children. He had eleven sons and one daughter, and they were all twelve years old or younger. It takes much longer to get that many young children ready to travel each morning and they are not able to travel rapidly. The same was true for the animals that had young lambs, calves or other animals. Jacob had been a shepherd who cared for the flock of Laban for twenty years and for his own flocks as well as they developed. He knew what would happen if the men tried to drive them too rapidly. Many of the young animals would die if they were driven too rapidly.

Jacob told Esau, “‘Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant.’” Here, we see that Jacob continued to use words that recognized Esau as the older son and he as the younger son. He also said that he would come visit Esau in Seir, but he would come at a pace the animals and the children were able to endure. Jacob knew that the men would have to drive the animals because they would want to move at a rapid pace to get home. In contrast, Jacob would lead the animals at a slow pace with many stops along the way to give adequate rest to the animals and the children. It was important to travel only a few days and then allow the animals to rest for a period of time before moving any further. Jacob had already moved the animals as quickly as he could to escape from Laban. Now, they needed to rest for a period of time before moving very far. We will see that they stopped at Succoth, which was a few miles east of the Jordan River.

Succoth was actually just a short distance from the place where they had crossed the Jabbok and a good place to stop for a period of time before going any further. Genesis 33:15-17 says, “And Esau said, ‘Now 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.’ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.” Here, we see that Esau made a second offer to Jacob. He offered to leave some of the men, who had traveled with him to meet Jacob, to help Jacob and his servants drive the flocks. This would create the same problem because those men would still be anxious to get back to Seir. Seir was a mountain range south of the Salt Sea (Dead Sea) in the land of Edom. It extended from the Salt Sea all the way to the Gulf of water to the south. We will see that it was necessary for Jacob to stop for several periods of time as he, his family, his livestock, his servants, and everything he had, traveled south.

Jacob said he did not need any of the men to help him since his servants had been caring for his cattle and flocks and would continue to do so. Jacob just wanted to know that he had found favor with Esau. He thanked him for the offer of help but said he did not need the help. Esau understood and so he and the men with him left that day to begin their return to Seir. Meanwhile, Jacob traveled only as far as Succoth for their first period of rest. That was only a little over five miles from Peniel where Jacob had wrestled with the Lord. When they arrived in Succoth, Jacob built a house and then they made booths (corrals) for all of the livestock to use at night while they were in that location. In fact, the name “Succoth” means *booths*. They probably spent an extended period of time at this location because it takes time to build a house and enough corrals for all of the animals. This area was also good grazing land for the cattle and sheep. The two-and-a-half tribes of Israel that later settled east of the Jordan River wanted to settle in that general area because they had a lot of cattle.

The next move that Jacob, and everyone with him, made was to cross the Jordan River and move to the city of Shechem. Because of the fact that Jacob had so many animals, the crossing of any river was a major project that probably took an extended period of time. Genesis 33:18-20 says, “Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which *is* in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred pieces of money. Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.” The fact that these verses mention that Jacob came safely to Shechem means that even though the process of getting across the Jordan River may have taken an extended period of time, they were able to get all of the animals across the river safely.

Shechem was located in the land of Canaan. The name “Canaan” means *lowland* because it is the area located west of the Jordan River and extended from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. God had spoken to Jacob when he was in Padan Aram. God had told him, in Genesis 31:3, “Then the LORD said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.’” Once Jacob had crossed the Jordan River, he was in the land of Canaan. We see that Jacob pitched his tent near the city of Shechem. Jacob then bought the land where he had pitched his tent. This is the first recorded parcel of land that Jacob bought. Jacob later gave this land to his son Joseph, as John 4:5 says, “So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.” Because of what

happened in Genesis 34, we read in Genesis 48:22, “...Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.” Jacob bought the piece of land where he pitched his tent, but later two of his sons destroyed all of the men of the city of Shechem with the sword. Jacob bought this piece of land from Hamor, the father of Shechem.

One of the first things Jacob did after he returned to the land of Canaan was to build an altar where he could offer sacrifices to the Lord. This is the first recorded altar Jacob built. Jacob had set up a pillar when he fled from his brother Esau and went to the land of Padan Aram, but he did not build an altar at that time. Genesis 28:18-21 says, “Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God...’” Although Jacob made this vow, he did not offer a sacrifice to God. In fact, that vow to God was only a vow that God would be his God if the Lord brought him back to his father’s house in peace. That peace had become real when he was accepted by Esau when they met after Jacob crossed the Jabbok Brook.

We learn a very important lesson from the name Jacob gave to this altar. He called the altar “El Elohe Israel”. That name means *God, the God of Israel or a Mighty God is the God of Israel*. Here, we see that Jacob used the new name that had been given to him, by the Lord, when he wrestled with the Lord. God had brought Jacob back to this land in peace and had given him a new name. Jacob had said in his vow that the Lord would be his God if God brought him back in peace. We saw that the Lord changed the attitude of Esau and he had spoken kindly to Jacob when they met. As a result, we see here that Jacob was back in the land, and he built an altar to the Lord. The name given to this altar showed that Jacob recognized the true and living God as his God. Over the many years Jacob had been away from the land of his fathers, the Lord had protected and preserved him. Jacob had known God throughout this time, but now he was ready to worship God and begin building a personal relationship with Him.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that true worship means that after we come to the Father through Christ, we want to build a personal relationship with the Father and develop true fellowship with Him. 1 John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand what it means to have true fellowship with the Father.