

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Esau, with four hundred men, meets Jacob, Genesis 33:1. He places his children under their respective mothers, passes over before them, and bows himself to his brother, Genesis 33:2, Genesis 33:3. Esau receives him with great affection, Genesis 33:4. Receives the homage of the handmaids, Leah, Rachel, and their children, Genesis 33:5-7. Jacob offers him the present of cattle, which he at first refuses, but after much entreaty accepts, Genesis 33:8-11. Invites Jacob to accompany him to Mount Seir, Genesis 33:12. Jacob excuses himself because of his flocks and his children, but promises to follow him, Genesis 33:13, Genesis 33:14. Esau offers to leave him some of his attendants, which Jacob declines, Genesis 33:15. Esau returns to Seir, Genesis 33:16, and Jacob journeys to Succoth, Genesis 33:17, and to Shalem, in the land of Canaan, Genesis 33:18. Buys a parcel of ground from the children of Hamor, Genesis 33:19, and erects an altar which he calls El-elohe-Israel, Genesis 33:20.

Verse 1

Behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men - It has been generally supposed that Esau came with an intention to destroy his brother, and for that purpose brought with him four hundred armed men. But, 1. There is no kind of evidence of this pretended hostility. 2. There is no proof that the four hundred men that Esau brought with him were at all armed. 3. But there is every proof that he acted towards his brother Jacob with all openness and candour, and with such a forgetfulness of past injuries as none but a great mind could have been capable of. Why then should the character of this man be perpetually vilified? Here is the secret. With some people, on the most ungrounded assumption, Esau is a reprobate, and the type and figure of all reprobates, and therefore he must be everything that is bad. This serves a system; but, whether true or false in itself, it has neither countenance nor support from the character or conduct of Esau.

Verse 2

He put the handmaids and their children foremost - There is something so artificial in this arrangement of Jacob's family, that it must have had some peculiar design. Was Jacob still apprehensive of danger, and put those foremost whom he least esteemed, that if the foremost met with any evil, those who were behind might escape on their swift beasts? Genesis 32:7, Genesis 32:8. Or did he intend to keep his choicest treasure to the last, and exhibit his beautiful Rachel and favourite Joseph after Esau had seen all the rest, in order to make the deeper impression on his mind?

Verse 4

Esau ran to meet him - How sincere and genuine is this conduct of Esau, and at the same time how magnanimous! He had buried all his resentment, and forgotten all his injuries; and receives his brother with the strongest demonstrations, not only of forgiveness, but of fraternal affection.

And kissed him - וַיִּשָׁקֵהוּ (vaiyishshakehu). In the Masoretic Bibles each letter of this word is noted with a point over it to make it emphatic. And by this kind of notation the rabbins wished to draw the attention of the reader to the change that had taken place in Esau, and the sincerity with which he received his brother Jacob. A Hindoo when he meets a friend after absence throws his arms round him, and his head across his shoulders, twice over the right shoulder and once over the left, with other ceremonies according to the rank of the parties.

Verse 10

Receive my present at my hand - Jacob could not be certain that he had found favor with Esau, unless the present had been received; for in accepting it Esau necessarily became his friend, according to the custom of those times, and in that country. In the eastern countries, if your present be received by your superior, you may rely on his friendship; if it be not received, you have every thing to fear. It is on this ground that Jacob was so urgent with Esau to receive his present, because he knew that after this he must treat him as a friend.

Verse 14

Until I come unto my lord unto Seir - It is very likely that Jacob was perfectly sincere in his expressed purpose of visiting Esau at Seir, but it is as likely that circumstances afterwards occurred that rendered it either improper or impracticable; and we find that Esau afterwards removed to Canaan, and he and Jacob dwelt there together for several years. See Genesis 36:6.

Verse 17

Journeyed to Succoth - So called from סוּכּוֹת (succoth), the booths or tents which Jacob erected there for the resting and convenience of his family, who in all probability continued there for some considerable time.

Verse 18

And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem - The word שָׁלֵם (shalem), in the Samaritan שְׁלָם (shalom), should be translated here in peace, or in safety. After resting some time at Succoth, which was necessary for the safety of his flocks and the comfort of his family, he got safely to a city of Shechem, in health of body, without any loss of his cattle or servants, his wives and children being also in safety. Coverdale and Matthews translate this word as above, and with them agree the Chaldee and the Arabic: it is not likely to have been the name of a city, as it is nowhere else to be found. Shechem is called in Acts 7:16, Sychem, and in John 4:5, Sychar; in the Arabic it is called Nablous, and to the present day Neapolis. It was near to Samaria; and the place where the wretched remains of the sect of the Samaritans were lately found, from whom Dr. Huntington received a perfect copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch.

Verse 19

For a hundred pieces of money - The original, שְׁמֹנֶטֶס (shemoneh kesitah), has been a matter of long and learned discussion among critics. As (kesitah) signifies a lamb, it may imply that Jacob gave the Hamorites one hundred lambs for the field; but if it be the same transaction that St. Stephen refers to in Acts 7:16, it was money, שְׁמֹנֶטֶס, a sum or price of silver, which was given on the occasion. It has been conjectured that the money had the figure of a lamb stamped on it, because it was on an average the value of a lamb; and hence it might be called a (kesitah) or lamb from the impression it bore. It is certain that in many countries the coin has had its name from the image it bore; so among our ancestors a coin was called an angel because it bore the image of an angel; hence also a Jacobus, a Carolus, a Lewis, (Louis d'Or), a Joe, because certain coins in England, Spain, France, and Portugal, bore on one side the image of the kings of those countries, James, Charles, Lewis, Joseph, or Johannes. The Athenians had a coin called an ox, because it was stamped with the figure of an ox. Hence the saying in Aeschylus:

ἄλλοι μὲν ἄλλα κέρματα ἔχουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ βοῦν
 ἔχουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ ἀγέλας, ἄλλοι δὲ ἄλλα
 ἔχουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ ἄλλα ἔχουσιν.
 Agam. v. 36.

ἄλλοι must be silent concerning other matters, a great ox has come upon my tongue; ἄλλοι to signify a person who had received a bribe for secrecy, i.e., a sum of money, on each piece of which an ox was stamped, and hence called an ox. The word opes, riches, is a corruption of the word oves, sheep, because these animals in ancient times constituted the principal riches of their owners; but when other cattle were added, the word pecunia, (from pecus, cattle), which we translate money, and from which we still have our English term pecuniary, appears to have been substituted for oves, because pecus, pecoris, and pecus, pecudis, were used to signify all kinds of cattle large and small. Among our British and Saxon ancestors we find coins stamped with the figure of an ox, horse, hog, goat, etc., and this custom arose in all probability, both among them and other nations, from this circumstance, that in primitive times the coin was the ordinary value of the animal whose image it bore. It is, all circumstances weighed, most likely that a piece of money is here intended, and possibly marked with the image of a lamb; but as the original word שְׁמֹנֶטֶס (kesitah) occurs only here, and in Joshua 24:32, and Job 42:11, this is not sufficiently evident, the word itself being of very doubtful signification. Mr. Parkhurst is of opinion that the (kesitah) bore the image of a lamb; and that these lamb coins of the ancient Hebrews typified the Lamb of God, who in the Divine purpose was considered as slain from the foundation of the world, and who purchased us unto God with his own blood. The conjecture is at least pious, and should lead to useful reflections. Those who wish to see more on this subject may consult the writers in the Critici Sacri, and Calmet.

Verse 20

And he erected there an altar - It appears that Jacob had a very correct notion of the providence and mercy of God; hence he says, Genesis 33:5: The children which God hath Graciously given thy servant; and in Genesis 33:11 he attributes all his substance to the bounty of his Maker: Take, I pray thee, my blessing - because God hath dealt Graciously with me, and because I have enough. Hence he viewed God as the God of all grace, and to him he erects an altar, dedicating it to God, the God of Israel, referring particularly to the change of his own name, and the mercies which he then received; and hence perhaps it would be best to translate the words, The strong God (is) the God of Israel; as by the power of his grace and goodness he had rescued, defended, blessed, and supported him from his youth up until now. The erecting altars with particular names appears in other places; so, Exodus 17:15, Moses calls his altar Jehovah-nissi, ἄλλοι the Lord is my banner. ἄλλοι

1. When a man's way please God, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. When Jacob had got reconciled to God, God reconciled his brother to him. The hearts of all men are in the hands of God, and he turns them howsoever he will.
2. Since the time in which Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the covenant. We see in him much dependence on

God, accompanied with a spirit of deep humility and gratitude. God's grace alone can change the heart of man, and it is by that grace only that we get a sense of our obligations; this lays us in the dust, and the more we receive the lower we shall lie.

3. "The first thing," says good Bishop Wilson, "that pious men do, is to provide for the honor and worship of God." Jacob buys a piece of ground, and erects an altar on it in the land of a heathen, that he might acknowledge God among his enemies, and turn them to the true faith; and there is every reason to believe that this expedient would have been successful, had it not been for the base conduct of his sons. How true is the saying, One sinner spoileth much good! Reader, beware, lest thy conduct should become a stumbling block to any.