

Genesis 33:1-20 and 34:1

After an absence of 20 years, Jacob's introduction to Canaan had been rather daunting.

First of all, his uncle had pursued him over the border, and had it not been for God's intervention, probably would have finished him off.

Now he faced the prospect of a very angry brother whom he knew he had greatly wronged, a brother that was swiftly approaching, **"and four hundred men with him."**

Understandably, Jacob was terrified, so in desperation he called upon the Lord.

Genesis 32:11 **"Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he**

will come and smite me, and the mother with the children."

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Having sent a generous present ahead to appease his brother, and having made camp for his family, **"Jacob was left alone."**

At least he thought he was alone, but then he noticed a movement in the shadows.

V 24-25 **"---and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.**

25: And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him."

Jacob could not prevail, but he still held on, in spite of the pain.

V 26 "I will not let thee go, except thou
bless me," and God did.

V 28 "Thy name shall be called no more
Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast
thou power with God and with men, and
hast prevailed."

His old name spoke of his old nature, and
God said, "Thy name shall be called no
more Jacob, but Israel," for it is
always God's purpose to exalt the new
nature while putting the old nature to
death.

However, as we go through the book of
Genesis, we will find the Holy Spirit
using his old name and his new name
quite interchangeably, and,
unfortunately, that is often the way it
is with the God's child.

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Genesis 32:31 **"And as he passed over Penuel
the sun rose upon him, and he halted
upon his thigh."**

It was a broken man that stumbled into camp
that morning, but he was a man that had
passed a great milestone in his life.

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We have now accompanied Jacob past several
milestones, some good and some bad.
Standing by his old blind father, we heard
Jacob *lying*.

And then we found Jacob *listening*, as God
spoke to him in a dream, assuring him
of the Abrahamic Covenant and His own
special care.

Then we have those 20 long years of
learning.

Like many of us, Jacob had been very slow to
learn God's lessons.

And now we find Jacob *limping*--a broken man,
but a *blessed* man, a man with a new
name!

Lying, listening, learning, and now limping.
How patiently God had wrestled with
Jacob over the years.

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Genesis 33:1-2 **"And Jacob lifted up his
eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau
came, and with him four hundred men.
And he divided the children unto Leah,
and unto Rachel, and unto the two
handmaids.**

**2: And he put the handmaids and their
children foremost, and Leah and her
children after, and Rachel and Joseph
hindermost."**

There's no doubt, from Jacob's reaction,
that Esau's men were armed.

Also, as we look at these two companies, we find that they graphically portray the fulfillment of God's blessings.

God had promised Jacob material wealth closely connected to agriculture---

"the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine," and there he stood with his tremendous flocks and herds.

God had not promised Esau agricultural wealth, but rather his father's blessing had assured him that **"by thy sword shalt thou live."**

So that morning, it was two very different companies that met each other, and, humanly speaking, Jacob seemed to be very much at Esau's mercy, if, indeed, there was any mercy to be had.

Yes, it was a tense moment!

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Down in the rock city of Seir, Esau had carved out a reputation for himself as a man of military ability.

And it seemed quite obvious to Esau that he had the upper hand, for he certainly couldn't see Jacob's *angel escort*.

Also, Esau had been assured that Jacob possessed no great military force---

"And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight."

But could he trust him?

I'm sure he remembered his father's words,

---"**Behold, I have made him thy lord.**"

He had always been such a schemer, so how could he be sure that Jacob didn't have soldiers hidden in ambush?

No, Esau didn't really know whether Jacob was armed or not, nor could he be sure what his real ambitions were.

Esau's little army looked quite threatening, but was he on the offensive or defensive?

The fact of the matter was, neither brother knew what the other one was thinking.

V 3 **"And he (that is Jacob) passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother."**

Leaving his family and servants behind, Jacob advanced alone and unarmed toward Esau's waiting army.

Although he was always cautious when it came to his family's safety, Jacob did not lack personal courage.

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And it is this same kind of courage that is required of Israel's officers today.

They must take commando or paratroop training, and they must be willing to demonstrate their personal courage on all occasions.

The words "Forward march!" have been erased from their military vocabulary, being replaced by the words "Follow me!"

Yes, by Israeli military code, unless an officer is prepared to put himself up front in the place of danger, he simply does not qualify to command other troops.

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As Jacob move forward, he had no illusions as to the possible danger he faced.

Genesis 32:7 says "--**Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed,**" and in V 11 he

had implored the Lord to--"**Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.**"

So Jacob was scared, but he was not a coward.

His willingness to step out in front of his company was the act of a courageous man, the act of an Eastern Shepherd who would put himself between danger and his little flock.

V 3 "**And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.**"

But, in spite of his bravery, he had come in humility.

He was not there to make excuses for his conduct.

And he made no claim to the stolen blessing, although he knew for a fact that it had always been intended for him.

No, he came to ask his brother's forgiveness.

Advancing a few feet and bowing, advancing a little more and bowing again, he drew closer and closer to those 400 fighting men, who quite likely were looking down on him from horseback.

Yes, Jacob made quite a humble figure.

Behind him stood his defenceless family of women and children, and the vast herds of livestock just waiting to be taken.

And by this time it would be quite obvious
to his brother that there was no
opposing army to trouble him.

What would Esau do?

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V 4 **"And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced
him, and fell on his neck, and kissed
him: and they wept."**

The sight of his brother, bowing so humbly
before him, had completely disarmed
him.

Esau forgave him freely, fully, and
forever.

It was an attitude that would not be shared
by his descendants, but at least for
these brothers, their tears had washed
away 20 years of bitterness.

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In past chapters, we have seen a lot of the wrong side of Esau.

Certainly he was a man of the world, with no appreciation for spiritual things.

And we saw his uncontrolled anger when he had been so despitefully cheated by his brother.

But in many ways, he was a more likable fellow than his Jacob.

Certainly the ladies thought he was quite a man, and here also he had shown a most forgiving spirit.

Yes, he had some very agreeable qualities about him, but he was lost.

Sometimes it is most distressing to see the loveliness of the lost, and more often than we would like to admit, the smallness of the saved.

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Robert Laidlaw, a successful New Zealand businessman noticed this distressing situation and wrote about it in a little book called "The Reason Why."

I don't want to give the impression that shabby behaviour in the life of God's children is ever acceptable, for we have been commanded to **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."**

But rather, I would like to point out the undeniable value of our new life in Christ.

Let me quote a few words from Mr. Laidlaw's book:

"I know a polished, cultivated gentleman who is not a Christian, and I know a

rather crude, uncultured man who is a Christian.

Do you mean to tell me that God prefers the uncultured man simply because he has accepted and acknowledge Christ as his Saviour?"

That was his problem, and here is how he solved it:

"A Christian is not different in degree from a non-Christian. He is different in kind, just as the difference between a diamond and a cabbage is not one of degree but one of kind.

The one is polished, the other is crude, but the one is dead while the other is alive, therefore the one has what the other has not in any degree whatsoever - life!

*And such is the difference God sees between
the Christian and the non-Christian."*

End of quote.

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That was the basic difference between Esau
and Jacob.

In many ways, Esau was a very fine fellow,
but he was spiritually dead.

On the other hand, Jacob was a natural-born
schemer.

He had been well named, but with all his
glaring faults, he had *spiritual life*.

Yes, he was more of a cabbage than a
diamond, but like a cabbage, he had
life.

There's nothing to be proud of here, but
there's a lot to be thankful for.

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Now that the brothers were reconciled to one another, it was time for formal introductions.

V 6-7 **"Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves.**

7: And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves."

Never again, during the lifetime of Esau and Jacob, would the old animosities appear.

The brothers were united as they had never been before.

V 8 **"And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord."**

Jacob's present had been offered in fear,
but now it was given in friendship, and
I think in repentance for the ill
treatment of his brother.

V 9 **"And Esau said, I have enough, my
brother; keep that thou hast unto
thyself."**

This shows a lot about Esau's character.

No, he was not a covetous man, and in one
generous action, he cancelled out all
his brother's debt.

V 10-11 **"And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee,
if now I have found grace in thy sight,
then receive my present at my hand: for
therefore I have seen thy face, as
though I had seen the face of God, and
thou wast pleased with me.**

**11: Take, I pray thee, my blessing that
is brought to thee; because God hath**

dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it."

By Eastern custom, the acceptance of a gift sealed the friendship, and it was very evident to Esau that Jacob was most anxious to heal old wounds, so he accepted the gift.

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However, with all of Esau's most generous nature, we see an essential difference between him and his brother.

Both men had said "**I have enough,**" but only Jacob gave testimony to God---"**because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.**"

In this very clear testimony to God's faithfulness, Jacob had not used His covenant name Jehovah.

Jehovah speaks of God's promises, and Esau knew nothing about that.

No, when Jacob spoke to his brother about God's faithfulness, he used the name "Elohim," the God of creation.

It was a concept that Esau could understand, and no doubt Jacob hoped that his testimony would stir some chord in his brother's dead soul.

After all, Esau was a man of the field, a man surrounded by God's creation. But there was no response.

Jacob's testimony fell on deaf ears.

Esau continued to be most generous, but the subject of God was closed.

V 12-16 **"---Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee. 13: And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender,**

and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.

14: Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir.

15: And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me. And he said, What needeth it? let me find grace in the sight of my lord.

16: So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir."

It appears that Esau held no hard feelings, and he continued to be a model of generosity.

First, he offered to go along with Jacob, even though his men were probably mounted, and it would be most awkward for them.

And when Jacob declined his offer because of the obvious differences in their companies, Esau still offered to provide a guard.

However, although Jacob was grateful, and certainly expressed his appreciation, he felt it was not necessary.

Perhaps he had finally remembered his *heavenly guard*.

And besides all that, these two companies were most incompatible.

Yes, it would be impractical to link Jacob's vast, slow-moving flocks and herds with Esau's fast-moving cavalry unit.

And, you know, there is a spiritual lesson here.

In spite of the friendliness and generosity of many men of the world, an unequal yoke, be it in business, marriage, or social entanglement, never works out well for either party.

Jacob was careful to not give offence, and certainly Esau could see his point.

And a Christian must do his best to be friendly and inoffensive, but he is equally responsible not to become fettered by the unsaved.

What works for them does not usually work for us.

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V 17-20 **"And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of**

the place is called Succoth.

18: And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram; and pitched his tent before the city.

19: And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money.

20: And he erected there an altar, and called it El-elohe-Israel."

We have just passed a spiritual high point in Jacob's life, but I am afraid we have now come to a very low point.

In the power of his new name, he had borne a good testimony before his brother, but now we see the old Jacob making his appearance again.

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V 17 **"And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth."**

Certainly Succoth was not his divinely appointed destination.

The Lord had not said, *I am the God of Succoth*, He had said **"I am the God of Bethel."**

However, as far as Jacob was concerned, this would be home, at least for a little while, so he had erected permanent enclosures for his livestock, and more importantly, he built a *house*. Of course, we don't know any details about this structure. It could have simply been a temporary dwelling to accommodate a short stay.

However, given the fact that he was a wealthy man, it could have been quite a substantial dwelling.

Certainly a house of any kind would indicate a settled condition.

This was the first sign of the loss of Jacob's pilgrim character.

Even though his father and grandfather had been wealthy men, they had always been pilgrims, their manner of life being characterized by two things: They lived in *tents* in order to follow their herds, and they built *altars* to worship the one true God.

It was a life of separation.

They walked in a wicked world, but were not *of* the world.

They never put their roots down too deeply,
so they were always willing and able to
obey God's call when it came.

Jacob was the first patriarch to change his
pilgrim status by building a permanent
dwelling.

This decision indicated, at least for a
time, that he wanted to leave his
wandering life behind.

Yes, he built a permanent dwelling, and why
not? He could afford it, and everyone
else had one.

And not only did he build a permanent
dwelling, but he built it in the wrong
place.

He was supposed to be going to Canaan, and
probably to Bethel, but his journey had
been long and hard, with a lot of tense

moments along the way, and Jacob was tired.

Yes, sometimes we get tired of the pilgrim journey, and that is usually when we make bad decisions.

Jacob settled down, at least for a little while, at Succoth, on the east side of Jordan, just outside the Promised Land.

Yes, he decided to take it easy, even if it meant stopping short of Canaan and abandoning his pilgrim lifestyle, at least for a little while.

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We don't know how long Jacob was satisfied to live just outside of Canaan, but eventually he did move on.

V 18 **"And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of**

**Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram;
and pitched his tent before the city."**

The little statement "**when he came from Padan-aram**" might indicate that he had not been content to live in Succoth very long.

However, his second move did not indicate a return to the pilgrim life.

Actually, it indicated the very opposite.

And I don't think he would have ever considered living near Shechem when he had first arrived, but after a little time of taking it easy in Succoth, the next move seemed much more feasible.

Although this city had never gained the notoriety that Sodom and Gomorrah had for their wicked homosexual behaviour, it was still a Canaanite city with all the low moral standards of that nation.

Yes, it was a little surprising and quite discouraging to note that Jacob

"pitched his tent before the city."

I'm sure he could have given us many good reasons economically for his move, just as Lot could have defended his choice, but, in both cases, their decision led to disaster.

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The only positive aspect of Jacob's decision was the fact that he had finally moved into the Promised Land, but, unfortunately, not far enough *into* the Promised Land.

He would have been much better off if he had gone back to Bethel, the place where he had first met God, and the place where he had seen the ladder to heaven.

But, unfortunately, he was content to live and bring up his children just outside of a very wicked Canaanite city.

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V 18 **"And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram; and pitched his tent before the city."**

Translators believe that the actual city mentioned in V 18 was Shechem, not Shalem.

The word *Shalem* should have been translated peace, so the real meaning was--Jacob came *peaceably* to the City of Shechem.

Shechem was a prominent city located on Mount Gerizim.

That mountain became famous in later Hebrew history as the place from which the blessings of the Law were proclaimed.

Just across the way stood Mount Ebal where the corresponding curses of the Law were heralded.

Shechem was near the site where the great capital city of Samaria would be built some time later.

It was here that Jacob dug that famous well upon which the Lord Jesus sat when He talked to the woman of Samaria about the water of life.

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V 20 says, **"And he erected there an altar, and called it El-elohe-Israel."**

Although he was living very close to the world, he gave his unseparated life-style the appearance of religious respectability.

Yes, he called the altar **"El-elohe-Israel"** (God the God of Israel), but for all

practical purposes, it was the old Jacob, not the new *Israel* that was running the show now.

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When Jacob first met Esau, he told him that

"the children are tender," so

apparently it was with a rather young family that he settled down in Succoth.

However, by this time, Jacob's sons were young men, and his daughter Dinah was at least in her mid teens.

The passage of time had brought about a problem in Jacob's life.

He would soon need to consider suitable partners for his older sons, so it was not a good time for him to be living just outside of Shechem.

This had also been a problem for his grandfather and father.

Abraham had been very concerned lest Isaac married a Canaanite wife.

As a result, he had sent his eldest servant all the way to Padan-aram to seek a bride from among his brethren.

And his own father had personally sent him to Padan-aram for the same purpose.

But Jacob had a much bigger problem.

First of all, he had 12 sons, and although he was very much acquainted with Padan-aram, having lived there for 20 odd years, he had effectively burned his bridges behind him.

And not only would it be hard to find suitable wives for all his sons, I'm not sure he still had the parental authority to guide them.

Yes, pressures were building up in Jacob's life, and his decision to live near

Shechem would ultimately be the straw that broke the camel's back.

V 19 **"And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money."**

It was probably during this time of land purchase, and Jacob's close association with Hamor, that Dinah met Hamor's son, Shechem, and it is in this setting that Chapter 34 begins.

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However, before we commence this chapter, I would like to spend a little time to consider some very remarkable words in Numbers 23:21---"**He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his**

God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them."

This, of course, is speaking both of the man and the nation, but today I would like to think about the first part of this verse:---"**He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob.**"

Considering what we already know about Jacob's failures, and what we will continue to see in his life, it is hard to understand how God could say, I have "**not beheld iniquity in Jacob.**"

Herein we find a most wonderful truth that should gladden our hearts.

God did not say *there was no iniquity in Jacob.*

He said *I cannot see any iniquity in Jacob.* You see, there was sin *in* him but there was no sin *on* him.

And this is the blessed condition of all who
have trusted Christ as their Saviour.
God cannot say there is no iniquity in us,
for certainly there is.

However, because of Christ's sacrifice, and
because God now sees the believer *in*
Christ, He is perfectly justified in
saying, "**He hath not beheld iniquity
in**" him.

In the light of this great truth, I think we
are better prepared to face this rather
dismal chapter.

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Not once is God's name mentioned in the
events of Chapter 34, and I don't think
this chapter would have even existed
had Jacob retained his pilgrim
character.

Dinah had always been a country girl, but now she was a country girl living just outside of Shalem, and the lights of the big city looked very attractive to her.

Genesis 34:1 **"And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land."**

We can't help but wonder why Jacob would allow Dinah to wander off alone to such a wicked city.

Nevertheless, she did, and to her, the city girls seemed so cool.

She had grown up in a family of brothers, and it was nice to talk girl-talk for once.

And what do girls talk about?

How should I know? But I wouldn't be surprised if *boys* were the main topic.

Now that would have been fine, but as Dinah listened, she realized that this kind of conversation would not be allowed in her home.

But, of course, her parents were kind of old-fashioned in many ways.

And not only was she fascinated with the big city and her new friends, but there was someone else who was quite fascinated with her.

And he was not just any young man!

Not only was he handsome, but his father was the prince of the country.

She just couldn't imagine why this fantastic young man was interested in a country girl like her.

But he was, and he swept her off her feet!

Before long, Dinah had forgotten all about her parents' principles, and had gone

along with his principles, which, of course, fitted into the lifestyle of all Canaanites.

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Yes, things were deteriorating very quickly. Jacob had sidestepped his responsibility as a pilgrim and as a parent, and he would soon suffer the consequences.

But that sad tale will have to wait until next week, when Jacob faces a very dark period in his life.