

So the day Jacob dreaded had finally arrived, for the time of his reunion with Esau, the brother he'd defrauded decades earlier, was now at hand. But Esau wasn't alone, for he was accompanied by four hundred other men who were coming to meet Jacob as well. That encounter threatened to escalate into a violent, destructive confrontation, a fact that was not lost upon Jacob.

So, let's see how Esau received his brother Jacob...

“Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants. And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last” (Genesis 33:1-2).

The verses detail the last-minute series of precautionary measures taken by Jacob in advance of his meeting with Esau. That strategic formation placed Leah and Rachel's maidservants and their children out front. Leah and her children then followed, along with Rachel and Joseph in the rear.

The idea behind these preemptive steps seems clear: if anything went wrong during Jacob's encounter with Esau, Rachel and Joseph would have the best opportunity to escape. Of course, this also meant that everyone could easily see which family members Jacob favored most.

This obvious expression of personal favoritism must have been difficult for some of these family members to accept, especially those at the forefront of this potentially hostile confrontation. Perhaps this is why the New Testament book of James tells us, ***“...how can you claim that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people more than others?” (James 2:1 NLT).***

“Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother” (Genesis 33:3).

Even though his partiality was obvious, Jacob deserves credit for leading the way in this meeting with his brother. This marked a genuine change in attitude for Jacob. In contrast to his deceptive past, Jacob now stepped forward to confront the consequences that might follow.

Jacob then bowed before his brother as he approached, an act that is still recognized as a universal demonstration of respect. In fact, Jacob took that approach one step further in bowing seven times, just as one might do in the presence of royalty during that era.

So Jacob clearly showed great deference to his brother. But how would Esau respond to his demonstration of respect? Well, happily for Jacob, that answer comes in the following verse...

“But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (Genesis 33:4).

It seems clear that God moderated Esau's attitude towards Jacob during their period of separation. For instance, why would Esau bring four hundred men out to the desert just to watch him hug and kiss his brother? While it's possible that Esau brought these men to help protect him from any potential hostilities, it seems more likely that God changed his internal attitude toward Jacob and thus allowed a genuine reconciliation to occur.

But Jacob also demonstrated a change of attitude as well. Remember that Jacob prayed and asked for God's help regarding this situation. That took place in Genesis 32:11 where Jacob prayed, ***“Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children” (NIV)***. The fact that Jacob and Esau met as friends and not as enemies is attributable to God's answer to that prayer.

Jacob also demonstrated his change of attitude by giving some gifts to his brother as well. For instance, Jacob sent more than five hundred animals to Esau. That costly gift served to demonstrate Jacob's change of heart. Unlike the Jacob of old, who schemed to take away the inheritance his father planned to give Esau, Jacob had become someone who sought to bless his brother.

We should also notice that Jacob approached his brother with an attitude of humility. This serves as a real life example of the wisdom that underpins the following passage from the Old Testament book of Proverbs: ***“Humility and reverence for the Lord will make you both wise and honored” (Proverbs 15:33 TLB)***. The New Testament book of James offers a similar reminder: ***“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:10)***.

So Jacob's attitude of humility helped lead to a reconciliation. The same is true for those who seek to demonstrate a similar attitude of humility today. And now that Esau and Jacob were reunited, it was time to meet the rest of the family...

“And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, 'Who are these with you?' So he said, 'The children whom God has graciously given your servant.' Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down. And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.

Then Esau said, 'What do you mean by all this company which I met?' And he said, 'These are to find favor in the sight of my lord.' But Esau said, 'I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.'

And Jacob said, 'No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.' So he urged him, and he took it” (Genesis 33:5-11).

It's possible to view Jacob and Esau's interaction as a simple exchange of pleasantries. However, this exchange of gifts was more than just a social courtesy. You see, the act of accepting a gift from an enemy was a breach of social protocol in that culture. Jacob's bountiful gifts to his brother thus served as a form of apology. Esau's acceptance of those gifts signified his forgiveness and signaled an end to their long-standing conflict.

But before we leave this family reunion, there is an important detail to remember for later. You see, these acts of forgiveness and reconciliation were particularly relevant to one of these family members. That person will be given an opportunity to apply those lessons on a broader scale later in the book of Genesis.

“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.”

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.

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” (Genesis 33:12-20).

These verses seem to imply that Esau wished to continue their family reunion, at least for a while. But it also appears that Jacob devised several excuses that were designed to maintain their distance and prevent further any interaction between them. Those excuses included...

- The children are too small.
- The livestock can't be driven too hard.
- We can find our way without any help.

We find the clearest indicator concerning the deliberate nature of Jacob's attempt to avoid Esau in Genesis 33:17. Remember that Jacob previously informed Esau that he'd meet him later in Seir (Genesis 33:14). So Esau began his journey towards Seir, but Genesis 33:17 tells us Jacob traveled to Succoth instead. Since there was a considerable distance between those geographic areas, why would Jacob tell Esau one thing, but then do something else?

While we can't justify Jacob's apparent duplicity, we can look at the rationale behind his choice. For instance, Jacob may have recognized the need to preserve his independence from Esau. Since Jacob and Esau were very different in terms of [personality and appearance](#), Jacob may have concluded that the best way to maintain the peace was to maintain their distance.

We should also note that Jacob was growing in his relationship with God while Esau was someone who cared little for such things. Since these two brothers were headed in opposite spiritual directions, this may have led Jacob to change his mind and head to another geographic direction as well.

So It appears Jacob accepted this peaceful reconciliation with his brother and then moved on with his life. Although Jacob and Esau may have stayed in contact in the years following this reunion, the two brothers will not meet again in the Biblical record for quite some time. The next time we'll see Jacob and Esau together again is when they meet at the funeral of their father Isaac in Genesis 35:28-29.

After leaving Succoth, Jacob and his family eventually made their way to the town of Shechem. Shechem was about twenty miles (32 km) from the town of Bethel, the place where Jacob had his first encounter with God as recorded in Genesis twenty eight.

Following that encounter, Jacob said, “...***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***” (Genesis 28:20-21). Since God had now enabled Jacob to return in peace, Jacob was ready to follow through on his vow.

Jacob did so by erecting an altar, a place that was set apart to offer sacrifices or serve as a memorial. In Jacob’s day, these altars were typically constructed of earth or uncut stone and served as a place of communion with God.

Jacob named this altar “*El Elohe Israel*,” meaning, “*God, the God of Israel*,” or, “*The mighty God of Israel*.”⁽¹⁾ So in constructing this altar, Jacob employed the name God had given him, Israel, as he declared to all that the Lord was his God.

(1) See *El-Elohe-Israel - Encyclopedia of the Bible* - Bible Gateway. (n.d.).

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/El-Elohe-Israel> and *El-elohe-Isreal Meaning - Bible Definition and References*. (n.d.). Bible Study Tools. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/el-elohe-isreal/>