

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 33

33:1-2 Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. (NIV)

Maidservants, Leah, Rachel

The order of placement shows the level of concern Jacob had for each.

33:3 He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. (NIV)

Bowing Down

Jacob intended to show Esau that he really was sorry for stealing the blessing from him and does what Isaac's blessing said Esau should do to him: "*Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you*" (27:29).

33:4 But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. (NIV)

Esau's Happiness

God had prepared the way for Jacob by pacifying Esau prior to their meeting.

33:5-7 Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant." Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. (NIV)

Respecting Esau

Jacob had likely instructed all of his household to bow, showing Esau respect.

33:8 Esau asked, "What do you mean by all these droves I met?" "To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said. (NIV)

This act also showed Esau that Jacob was repentant for what he had done, because in presenting all the livestock, Jacob was in effect servicing his brother!

33:9-10 But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself." "No, please!" said Jacob. "If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. (NIV)

Esau's Plenty

God had substantially blessed Esau by driving out the Horites and helping him to increase his family and possessions.

33:11-14 Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it. Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you." But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the droves before me and that of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir." (NIV)

Visiting Esau

We are never told about Jacob going to Seir to visit Esau, although he could have done so numerous times before going into Egypt with his sons.

33:15-17 Esau said, "Then let me leave some of my men with you." "But why do that?" Jacob asked. "Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord." So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place [NKJ, REB, TAN: "house"] for himself and made shelters [NKJ: "booths"] for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth. (NIV)

Shelters

The indication from this verse is that Jacob built fairly permanent buildings because he intended to remain there for at least several months. The location was on the north bank of the Jabbok River about four miles east of the Jordan River.

33:18 So having journeyed from Paddan-aram, Jacob arrived safely at the town of Shechem in Canaan and pitched his tent to the east of it. (REB)

Succoth and Shechem

We are not told how long Jacob stayed at Succoth before moving into central Canaan. Shechem was about a 35 mile journey through rough terrain from his camp at Succoth.

33:19 For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. (NIV)

Purchasing Land

This is only the second time we read of one of the patriarchs purchasing land. The first instance was when Abraham bought the field and cave of Machpelah. This land would later be used to bury the bones of Joseph (JOS 24:32).

33:20 There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel ["God the God of Israel"]. (NIV)