

***Remarkable Reversals, Relatives Reconciled,
Ruinous Revenge and Required Returns***

I. Remarks

- A. Tonight's session tells of the resolution of the conflict between Jacob and Esau with which the whole Jacob epic had begun, and it records (as it must) Jacob's victory, in the sense that Esau returned to Seir and abandoned the land of promise to him. The one whom God "loved" was about to enter upon his inheritance, while the one whom he "hated" (see Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13) was left outside in the cold. But though in the purpose of God Jacob had to win, the real victor in human terms was undoubtedly Esau.
- B. It might be infinitely more truthful of us to admit that in our human judgment God made the "wrong" choice or, to put it more circumspcctly, that he did not make the choice we would have made. In human terms Esau *does* emerge at the end of their lifelong conflict as a better and nicer man than Jacob.
- C. The dilemma is not that of deciding whether Jacob deserved his success and Esau his failure. We can, if we wish, try to draw up the balance sheets. Jacob was most of the time uncaring of others, vindictive, selfish, plotting, partial—yet he loved Rachel wit an undying love and was ready to suffer anything to win her. Most of the time he never gave a thought for God—and yet when at Peniel the crunch came, he put God first and showed it by being ready to fight God himself for his blessing. Esau sold his birthright for a single meal—yet his cry of despair when he found Isaac had blessed Jacob instead of him proved that he was not careless of his heritage. He vowed to kill Jacob—and yet with the passing of the years he came to accept his exclusion from the blessing as God's will, and he made amends nobly for the sins of his youth by forgiving the brother who he had wronged far less than he was wronged by him. If we judge the epic by such human standards, we may well conclude that Jacob was a greater man than Esau, and Esau a nicer man than Jacob. And as we look at the outcome of their conflict we may well conclude that each got the prize he merited. Jacob got the chieftainship of the clan and a free entry into the land of Canaan but, as we have just seen, it was a victory that turned very quickly to ashes in his hands. Esau, on the other hand, was obviously at their parting a man at peace with himself. He had been forced from the land of his birth, but he was happy in Seir and prospering. It seems a just distribution of the spoils, and we are content enough.
- D. It is only when we lift the reckoning onto a higher level that we begin to lose our bearings. For Genesis does not allow us to rest in our human judgment, but presses insistently upon us the judgment of God. The grace of God bestrides the epic like a colossus, and it is centered on Jacob and makes no room for Esau. It was through Jacob and the people he fathered that God intended one day to save the world, but he had not special task for Esau to perform. To put it as its crudest (with Mal. 1:2-3 and Paul in Rom. 9:13), he "loved" Jacob and "hated" Esau.
- E. If at this level of reckoning we cry "unfair", we only reveal the terrifying gap that separates our human judgment from God's. Therein lies the real dilemma of the chapters we have been studying. As men we cannot help crying "unfair"; as

believers we know we ought to trust and accept God's grace. We cannot therefore go from this turbulent tale uplifted and heartened and satisfied. It flings our human balance sheets contemptuously back in our faces.

II. Reconciliation

A. Approach

1. ***33:1 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 And he put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. 3 He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.***
2. The first thing Jacob did as he saw his brother approaching was to put his plan for dividing up his family into operation (see 32:7-8). Only he made three companies instead of two, placing the maids Zilpah and Bilhah with their children in front, then Leah with hers, and at the back Rachel with Joseph. If trouble was coming, it would come to Rachel last. What a time to be showing favoritism!
3. Then with a deference that in the annals of the time is only recorded of suppliants in the presence of Egypt's Pharaoh, he himself moved slowly forward, prostrating himself seven times as he got nearer to his brother. This was not the elder serving the younger of Rebekah's private oracle (25:23), nor was it his mother's sons bowing down to Jacob as forecast in the blessing he had stolen (27:29). Rather, it was as if Rebekah had been hopelessly deluded and as if Isaac had pronounced the blessing on Esau as he had meant to. But Jacob had reckoned without a changed Esau. He had expected the worst from his brother and had been for days petrified by fears which were now to prove groundless.

B. Affection

1. ***4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.***
2. The man who, as Jacob was fleeing from Canaan, had sworn to kill him (27:41) and who is called in the New Testament (Heb. 12:16) "immoral and irreligious" for selling his birthright had, it appears, long since renounced his hatred and come to terms with his exclusion. He had already settled in Seir and was prospering there. He had not come for revenge or to fight with his brother over land or inheritance, but to welcome him home. As Jacob stumbled pathetically forward, Esau ran to meet him and embraced him enthusiastically.

C. Acknowledgments

1. ***5 And when Esau raised his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6 Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; 7 Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.***

2. He shows genuine pleasure at Jacob's success and greeted his wives and children with obvious sincerity.
3. Here is a graciousness that exceeds what we have ever seen in Jacob. God does not always choose the best or the brightest.

D. Amends

1. ***8 Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company which I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." 10 Jacob said, "No, I pray you, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favor have you received me. 11 Accept, I pray you, my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." Thus he urged him, and he took it.***
2. He at first declined the droves of animals ("all this company which I met") with which Jacob had hoped to curry his favour—and only accepted them when Jacob pressed them urgently upon him.
3. Jacob, who originally intended these gifts as a bribe, now seems to present them in order to make amends. Making amends is an important aspect of the moral life. When we harm others by our behavior, it is well that we seek to repair the harm we have done and restore the person from their loss

E. Assistance

1. ***12 Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go before you." 13 But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the flocks and herds giving suck are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. 14 Let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle which are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir." 15 So Esau said, "Let me leave with you some of the men who are with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." 16 So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. 17 But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.***
2. And to seal the reconciliation, he offered to accompany Jacob on the rest of his journey. Jacob's relief knew no bounds and, rather extravagantly, he compared the meeting to another meeting with God—"for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God". But even through his tears of joy, he could not bring himself to accept Esau's offer of company and protection. His excuses sound touching ("the children are frail, and the flocks and herds giving such are a care to me"), but are they genuine? Probably not; for he promises to follow Esau to Seir, and yet the story ends: "So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. But Jacob journeyed to Succoth". That laconic and poignant sentence says it all. Embarrassingly almost, the

story-teller adds a note that Jacob built a house at Succoth and some “booths” (Hebrew *sukkoth*) to shelter his cattle, from which the place got its name.

3. But in its context the note rather underlines the fact that Jacob had not intention of having anything to do with his brother again, if he could help it. He was glad to have been reconciled with him, glad too that both of them were prospering and that there would be not unseemly quarrels over property, but glad above all simply that Esau was out of his way. The author’s discomfiture is acute, for he knows that all of this was God’s will.

F. Arrival in Canaan

1. ***18 And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city. 19 And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. 20 There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.***
2. Shechem was at the time ruled by a family of Hivites. The family was related to the Hurrian people of northern Mesopotamia and Syria. At any rate, the family was non-Semitic. It had adopted some Semitic names, their chief being called Hamor, which means an “ass” or “donkey”; but, as we find out later, it did not practice circumcision.

III. Rape -

A. *34:1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land; 2 and when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humbled her.*

B. It was Dinah's ill fate to attract Shechem's attention, and like the squire's son in my a modern novel he had his pleasure of her by rape. It is a brutal crime but as we shall see there is some repentance of it and a wish to make reparation that is horribly rejected by Jacob's sons. .

IV. Reconciliations (attempted)

A. *3 And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob; he loved the maiden and spoke tenderly to her. 4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this maiden for my wife." 5 Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. 6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. 7 The sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard of it; and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had wrought folly in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done. 8 But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; I pray you, give her to him in marriage. 9 Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. 10 You shall dwell with us; and the land shall be open to you; dwell and trade in it, and get property in it." 11 Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. 12 Ask of me ever so much as marriage present and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; only give me the maiden to be my wife." 13 The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. 14 They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. 15 Only on this condition will we consent to you: that you will become as we are and every male of you be circumcised. 16 Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people. 17 But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone." 18 Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 19 And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his family. 20 So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, 21 "These men are friendly with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters in marriage, and let us give them our daughters. 22 Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. 23 Will not their cattle, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us." 24 And all who went out of the gate of his city hearkened to Hamor and his son Shechem;*

and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

- B. But then he fell in love with her, and decided that he must do the right thing. He asked his father to arrange a marriage and to offer an inflated bride-price, in the hope that this would assuage the injured feelings of her family. His father, however, extended this into a general invitation to intermarriage, proposing in effect that Jacob and his clan be absorbed into the indigenous community. Jacob was already a small landowner, and perhaps Hamor thought that this was what he wanted.
- C. At this point the sons of Jacob took over the lead in the negotiations.
- D. They appeared to go along with Hamor's proposal, asking only that the men of the city first be circumcised.
- E. The negotiations *appear* to be reasonably cordial but, alas, wickedness is at hand as we shall see

V. Revenge

- A. ***25 On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came upon the city unawares, and killed all the males. 26 They slew Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. 27 And the sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled; 28 they took their flocks and their herds, their asses, and whatever was in the city and in the field; 29 all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and made their prey.***
- B. The negotiations were a subterfuge, for when the male population were still "sore" from the operation, two of them—Simeon and Levi—raided the city, slew all the men, took the women and children captive, carried away as much booty as they could, and rescued Dinah, who had apparently (as part of the arrangement?) Gone to live in Shechem's house.

VI. Regrets -

- A. ***30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household." 31 But they said, "Should he treat our sister as a harlot?"***
- B. Jacob was appalled at this act of treachery, but his sons answered him sharply, "Should he treat our sister as a harlot?"
- C. A Hebrew audience would have been pleased that Jacob and his sons resisted the temptation to intermarry with the people of the land, and they would have approved of his sons rushing to the defense of their sister's besmirched honor. But even they must have been shocked—as Jacob himself was shocked—at their treachery and the savagery of their revenge.
- D. To us, who have no national axes to grind, the story is rather another instance of

humanity's general barbarity, and alas! it is a barbarity to which God's people contributed just as much as the other side. With its unvarnished picture of raw passion and treachery, it is one of the darkest tales in the Bible.

- E. Nor can we absolve Jacob himself of guilt, though he protested strongly at what his sons did. He "held his peace" until they arrived on the scene; and his repudiation of their vicious conduct is laced with a cowardly concern for its effect on himself—"you have brought trouble on me by making me obvious to the inhabitants of the land...I shall be destroyed, both I and my household."
- F. There is a lot of righteous indignation in this chapter, but little if any of the milk of human kindness. Its only gentle moment is when the young man, whose lust sparked off the wholesorry episode, finds himself warming to the girl he had wronged. "He loved the maiden and spoke tenderly to her." Did she, one wonders, seeing him remorse, warm to him in return? Certainly, it never seems to have crossed the minds of her outraged brothers to ask her what she thought.

VII. Required Return - Chapter 35

- A. Jacob really never had any business leaving Bethel.
1. He had fled Esau despite the reassurances of God (Gen 28:10ff)
 2. Recall that Abraham had never allowed Isaac to go leave the promised land but sent instead a servant to fetch him a wife.
 3. Though it is true he found a wife (wives!) and acquired wealth there, it was at a cost of great hardship and servile labor for 20 years.
 4. So God had to command Jacob to return, at least twice:
 - a. Gen 31:3 *Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you."*
 - b. But Jacob, so weighed down with goods, takes his sweet time
 - c. Gen 35:1 *God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."*
- B. JACOB'S INVITATION - 35:1 *God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."*
1. Go back to the House of God, the place where you met God.
 2. Jacob had met God at Bethel back in 28:10ff
 3. God is the God of the second chance and he invites Jacob to return to his spiritual roots at Bethel.
- C. JACOB'S DETERMINATION - 2 *So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; 3 then let us arise and go up to Bethel, that I may make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." 4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.*
1. Look at the things that mark his determination
 - a. A DECIDED CHOICE - *Put away the foreign gods that are among you*
 - (1) Get rid of your idols
 - (2) An idol is anything that means more to you than God
 - b. A DIVINE CLEANSING - *and purify yourselves,*
 - (1) Forsake your sins and be cleansed by God of your defilement
 - (2) In modern terms we would say of these two steps: repent and be baptized
 - c. A DEFINITE CHANGE - *and change your garments;*
 - (1) Symbolic of a changed life.
 - (2) Put on the long white robe which is the righteous deeds of all the saints - Rev 19:8

- D. **JACOB'S PRESERVATION - 5** *And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were round about them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.*
1. Jacob's enemies were terrified by God, so as not to touch Jacob, despite his crimes.
 2. So for us: Demons tremble at the name of Jesus: (Mat 8:29; James 2:19)
- E. **JACOB'S REVELATION - 6** *And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, 7 and there he built an altar, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.*
1. God reveals to Jacob:
 - a. **The GLORY OF HIS PERSON -**
 - (1) On his first pass through, Jacob called the place Bethel - house of God
 - (2) Now he calls it, El-Bethel - God of the House of God
 - (3) See, you can go to the house of God but not really experience God himself. You can go to the church, the house of God but experience the God of the house of God!
 - (4) Religion, ritual, etc are not the same as God himself, they can lead us to God but are not God.
 - (5) You can Go to the place of God but not encounter the Person of God
 - b. **THE GREATNESS OF HIS POWER - 9** *God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. 10 And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So his name was called Israel.*
 - (1) We saw this last week. But here Jacob is reminded of it.
 - (2) God had to remind Jacob that he had striven with God and had survived (prevailed) but ultimately lost.
 - (3) Here Jacob is reminded of God's power and sovereignty
 - (4) Jacob do you remember you were changed when you were saved and that there is a power in you that is greater than what is in the world?
 - (5) 1 John 4:4 *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*
 - c. **The GRACE OF GOD'S PROMISE - 11** *And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. 12 The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you."*
 - (1) Jacob is reminded of God's age old promise
 - (2) This promise was not made because Jacob was good, but because God is good and he is faithful. What he promised

to Abraham and Isaac, he again renews with Jacob

(3) God saves and keeps us.

F. JACOB'S DEDICATION - *13 Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. 14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. 15 So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.*

1. Now Jacob responds to God's renewal by an act of worship
2. He sets up a stone, or pillar
3. A drink offering is poured out.
4. Drink offerings depict our total dedication to God, our life poured out. The water or liquid is poured out, disappears into the ground and/or eventually evaporates never to be seen again.
5. Phil 2:17 *I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.*

VIII. Rambling -

- A. *16 Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath,*
- B. Oops! Where is Jacob going?
- C. Well at least he is not leaving the promised land. He is going to see his father and mother
- D. Yes they are still alive!

IX. Rachel

- A. *Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor. 17 And when she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her, "Fear not; for now you will have another son." 18 And as her soul was departing (for she died), she called his name Benoni; but his father called his name Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), 20 and Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. 21 Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. 22 While Israel dwelt in that land Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it.*
- B. Hardly has Jacob left Bethel than his beloved Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin. Rachel was in many ways most fortunate. She envied Leah's fruitfulness and had to wait long years for her own child. She was cruel to her father when she stole his idols and crueller still when she let him search for them in vain. She may even have had half a belief in them herself. But she owned early the love of Jacob and retained it through thick and then, and her at last some success was coming his way, and she was expecting another baby. How unutterably sad—how ironic too—that she should die just at that moment!
- C. We are not told that Jacob wept for her, as Abraham had wept for Sarah (23:2). Maybe his grief was too deep for tears. He must have been sorely tempted to let the name the dying woman gave her new-born son stand—*Ben-oni*, meaning “son

of my sorrow”. But he changed the name to Benjamin (Hebrew ben-yamin), meaning “son of the south” or “son of the right hand” and of good fortune. We see him, though heartbroken, glimpsing some sunshine through the darkness that was at that moment enveloping him. We see him this time, though generally scheming on his own behalf, genuinely putting his truth for the future in God.

X. Review

A. *Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. 23 The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's first-born), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. 24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25 The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali. 26 The sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.*

XI. Reunion -

A. *27 And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriatharba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. 28 Now the days of Isaac were a hundred and eighty years. 29 And Isaac breathed his last; and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.*

B. Here is the death of Isaac. Perhaps we thought he died chapters ago. But evidently he rose from his “deathbed” to live another 20 years! Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Was Rebekah there? We do not know. Had she died or is she merely not mentioned

C. We then see the second arrival and then departure of Esau. The two brothers never met again after this incident . It is nevertheless very appropriate that we should be reminded in chapter 36 of the parting of the ways between Jacob and Esau. For it is this parting which poses in its acutest form the basic dilemma of the whole epic. Now the focus shifts entirely to Jacob (Israel) and his descendants.