



Sunday School Lesson
Gen. 32:22-33:17
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I Context

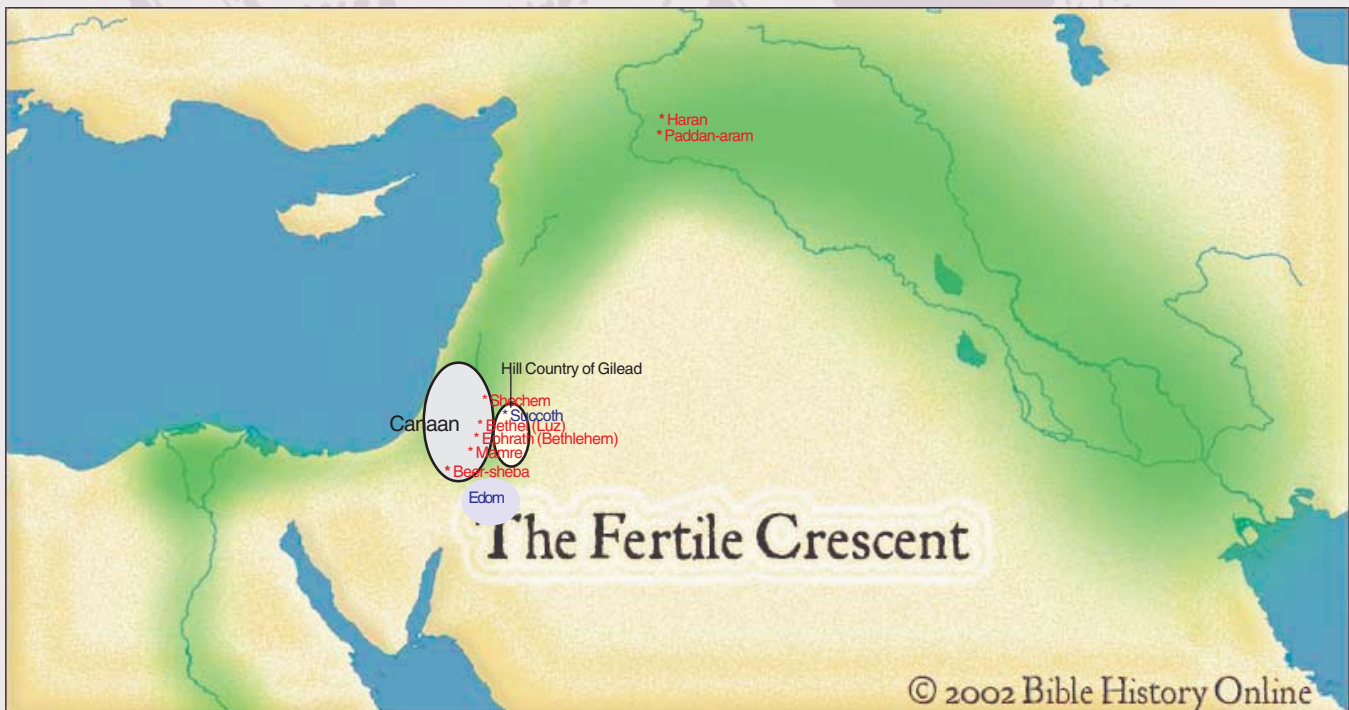
The basic contextual issues for chapters 32 and 33 remain much the same as they were for chapter 25. You can check this out in the discussion posted at Cranfordville.com under [Bible Studies](#).

a Historical

External History. The history of the composition of the book of Genesis has already been discussed in the study on chapter 25, and thus will not be repeated here. Go to [that study](#) for the details.

Internal History.

The time frame for these episodes is much later in Jacob's life. After Jacob deceived both his father



and his brother over the 'blessing' (cf. 27:1-40), he had to flee the region of [Beer-sheba](#) where the clan was residing at that time. His mother, Rebekah, helped secure permission from his father, Isaac, for him to go to the region of Haran ([see map on page 1](#)) where her brother Laban lived. The official reason for the trip was to seek a wife from the larger clan in order to prevent the taking of a Hittite wife as Esau had done (27:46).

On the trip from Beer-sheba northward to Haran Jacob had an encounter with God through a dream while camping at a place he later named Bethel ([see map on page 1](#)). Promises were made to serve God as a consequence (cf. 28:10-22).

Once he arrived at Haran, he met Rachel the younger daughter of Laban and fell for her immediately. An agreement was reached with her father Laban to work for him seven years in order to claim her as his bride. But on the wedding night Laban switched daughters and instead gave Jacob the older sister Leah as his wife. The deceiver now was on the receiving end of deception, and because of his attraction to Rachel he agreed to work an additional seven years in order to have her as his second wife (cf. 29:1-30).

Once the two sisters were taken as Jacob's wives, the narrative shifts to the issue of which wife could produce more children for Jacob (29:31-30:24). Rachel's inability at first to produce children led to her turning her slave girl Bilhah over to Jacob as a means of giving him children connected to her; this especially after Leah had produced three sons -- Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. From Bilhah then came two sons -- Dan and Naphtali. When Leah seemed unable to get pregnant, she followed suit and turned over her slave girl Zilpah to Jacob and from this union came two more sons -- Gad and Asher. From a trade out between Rachel and Leah came a night with Jacob by Leah that eventually produced two more sons -- Issachar and Zebulum -- and a daughter -- Dinah. Finally, Rachel was able to produce a son, Joseph. This amounted to a total of ten sons and a daughter.

During all this time, Jacob was managing his father-in-law's flocks and doing quite well. But gradually the yearning to return back home to Beer-sheba began to surface in Jacob's heart. With an agreement between Jacob and Laban over pay for his service, Jacob once again used deception to build his flocks to mammoth proportions over those of Laban (30:25-43). Tensions increased to the point that Jacob decided that he must flee with his possessions and family in order to escape his father-in-law's wrath (31:1-32:1). Laban came after him intending to do harm but after an encounter three days out they came to terms and Jacob was allowed to continue southward toward Beer-sheba in peace.

As Jacob neared the region of home in Canaan, he sent out messengers to try to arrange terms of peace with his brother Esau (32:2-21). The returning messengers reported that Esau was coming to meet Jacob with armed men. Scared Jacob prepared to face doing battle with his brother and arranged his family and possessions into two groups in the hope that at least one group could escape the anticipated conflict. As a peace offering he sent out ahead of the main group some of his servants with a huge array of sheep, goats, camels, donkeys and cattle.

Our scripture passage ([32:22-33:17](#)) picks up the story at this point.

b. Literary

The larger literary context of the Jacob Story (25:19-36:43) has already been treated in [the previous lesson](#) and thus won't be repeated again here. To some degree this passage compliments the earlier narrative depicting the rift between the two brothers (25:19-34; 27:1-45). Some nervous moments take place as the two brothers wearily approach one another, after being apart for some many years in hostility toward each other. But this story helps bring the Jacob Story to a happier close with the 'prodigal' son now returning home in order to rebuild relationships with family and to live out the rest of his life in relative peace.

II. Message

The internal literary structure of 32:22-33:17 flows as follows. First, there is the encounter with God (32:22-32), and, then, the meeting with Esau (33:1-17). Interestingly, both of these meetings involve ten-

sion and difficulty on Jacob's part. Reconciliation would not come lightly nor easily for Jacob. But through struggle something good would result.

a. Meeting God (32:22-32)

NASB

22 Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.

24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." 31 Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. 32 Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

NRSV

22 The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

24 Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." 27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then the man^{F122} said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,^{F123} for you have striven with God and with humans,^{F124} and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. 30 So Jacob called the place Peniel,^{F125} saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Footnotes:

F122: Heb [he]

F123: That is [The one who strives with God] or [God strives]

F124: Or [with divine and human beings]

F125: That is [The face of God]

NLT

22 But during the night Jacob got up and sent his two wives, two concubines, and eleven sons across the Jabbok River. 23 After they were on the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

24 This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until dawn. 25 When the man saw that he couldn't win the match, he struck Jacob's hip and knocked it out of joint at the socket. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is dawn." But Jacob panted, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 "What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob." 28 "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "It is now Israel,^{F100} because you have struggled with both God and men and have won." 29 "What is your name?" Jacob asked him. "Why do you ask?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there. 30 Jacob named the place Peniel – "face of God" – for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." 31 The sun rose as he left Peniel,^{F101} and he was limping because of his hip. 32 That is why even today the people of Israel don't eat meat from near the hip, in memory of what happened that night.

Footnotes:

F100: Israel means "God struggles" or "one who struggles with God."

F101: Hebrew Penuel, a variant name for Peniel.

Comments:

Awareness of the soon expected meeting with his brother Esau left Jacob extremely nervous. The huge peace offering of animals etc. had been sent out a day ahead, and Jacob spent the evening making preparations for this encounter with Esau anticipating that some, if not a large part, of his family would not survive.

In preparing for the meeting with his brother, Jacob first took his family and possessions across the River Jabbok, which flows into the Jordan River from the east about midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea (vv. 22-23). He was traveling through the land of Gilead, headed south.

He arranged to be alone on the north side of the river during the night. Perhaps to contemplate his future. The text isn't clear. But he wasn't alone for long. The text simply declares, "a man wrestled with him until daybreak." Who was this person? Not until the end of the pericope do we get a clue, when the text declares, [v. 28] "you have struggled with both God and men and have won," and [v.30] "Jacob named the place Peniel – 'face of God' – for he said, 'I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared.'" Jacob had wrestled with God during the night. What was the point of the struggle? Although the text isn't clear, it seems to imply that the struggle was to prevent Jacob from crossing back over the river until God had dealt with him in order to prepare him for what lay ahead. Jacob suffered a dislocated hip during the contest.

But more importantly Jacob underwent a name change. His name became Israel. The meaning of this name is not absolutely clear, as footnote 123 in the NRSV indicates, "That is *The one who strives with God* or *God strives*." In either case, the point of the name is the struggle that took place between Jacob and God on this occasion.

Jacob demanded to know his opponent's name, but the request was refused. He did hang on until there was a divine blessing pronounced on him. At that point this mysterious person left before sun up. The experience was life changing for Jacob, and he named the place "Peniel," 'the face of God' (sometimes spelled Peneul; see footnote 101 in the NLT on previous page.). Now, Jacob was ready to move south to meet his brother.

What can we learn from this? Perhaps one possible implication of the text has to do with how God relates to us. Evidently the only way God could get Jacob's attention was through confrontation and struggle. Jacob experienced the 'fight of his life' with God and was able to prevail to the extent that God blessed him. On occasion we may experience similar struggles in our relationship with God. Hopefully we are sensitive to the Lord sufficiently so that He doesn't have to "smack across the forehead with a two-by-four" in order to get our attention. But one thing is sure: God cares enough about us that He will resort to whatever means necessary to get through to us.

One thing this text doesn't suggest: we can argue God down to our viewpoint. We would make a big mistake to read from this text a legitimization of trying to argue God over to our side on issues. Such a posture simply masks arrogance and contempt for who God is. This posture is spiritual suicide! Remember what Satan sought to get Jesus to do from the roof top of the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus refused to jump off the temple roof and warned Satan against 'tempting' God. Humility and reverence are the appropriate postures when encountering God in the fullness of the presence.

b. Meeting Esau (33:1-17)

NASB

1 Then Jacob lifted 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 He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3 But he himself

NRSV

1 Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 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 ahead

NLT

1 Then, in the distance, Jacob saw Esau coming with his four hundred men. 2 Jacob now arranged his family into a column, with his two concubines and their children at the front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3 Then Jacob went on ahead. As he approached his

passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. 4 Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

5 He lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, "Who are these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6 Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. 7 Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down. 8 And he said, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" And he said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own." 10 Jacob said, "No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. 11 "Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty." Thus he urged him and he took it. 12 Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you." 13 But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. 14 "Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir." 15 Esau said, "Please let me leave with you

of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. 4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

5 When Esau looked up 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 finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. 8 Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor with my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." 10 Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God — since you have received me with such favor. 11 Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it. 12 Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you." 13 But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. 14 Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that 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 people who are with me." But he said,

brother, he bowed low seven times before him. 4 Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him affectionately and kissed him. Both of them were in tears.

5 Then Esau looked at the women and children and asked, "Who are these people with you?" "These are the children God has graciously given to me," Jacob replied. 6 Then the concubines came forward with their children and bowed low before him. 7 Next Leah came with her children, and they bowed down. Finally, Rachel and Joseph came and made their bows. 8 "And what were all the flocks and herds I met as I came?" Esau asked. Jacob replied, "They are gifts, my lord, to ensure your goodwill." 9 "Brother, I have plenty," Esau answered. "Keep what you have." 10 "No, please accept them," Jacob said, "for what a relief it is to see your friendly smile. It is like seeing the smile of God! 11 Please take my gifts, for God has been very generous to me. I have more than enough." Jacob continued to insist, so Esau finally accepted them. 12 "Well, let's be going," Esau said. "I will stay with you and lead the way." 13 But Jacob replied, "You can see, my lord, that some of the children are very young, and the flocks and herds have their young, too. If they are driven too hard, they may die. 14 So go on ahead of us. We will follow at our own pace and meet you at Seir." 15 "Well," Esau said, "at least let me leave some of my men to guide and protect you." "There is no reason for you to be so kind to me," Jacob insisted.

16 So Esau started back to Seir that same day. 17 Meanwhile,

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."

16 So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. 17 Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth.

"Why should my lord be so kind to me?"

16 So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. 17 But Jacob journeyed to Succoth,^{F126} and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.

Footnotes:
F126: That is [Booths]

Jacob and his household traveled on to Succoth. There he built himself a house and made shelters for his flocks and herds. That is why the place was named Succoth.^{F102}

Footnotes:
F102: Succoth means "shelters."

Comments:

Jacob noticed Esau coming with his armed men and it scared him. But he did take the initiative and went on ahead of his family to meet his brother, all along the way attempting to show humility and peaceful intent toward Esau (vv. 1-3). Perhaps the bowing also represented acknowledgment of wrongdoing. In any case, Jacob took the lead in engaging Esau, followed by his family with his most loved wife and son, Rachel and Joseph, at the back of the line -- either for safety and/or in the most esteemed position when introduced to Esau.

What Jacob experienced from Esau (vv. 4-11) was not hostility but love and gracious acceptance. The two brothers reunited and embraced in the midst of a tearful reunion. Esau then noticed the large entourage of people and asked who they were. At that point Jacob formally introduced his entire family with Rachel and Joseph coming last. Everyone did the proper bowing before Esau thus showing respect. Once this was complete Esau inquired about the earlier group that he had met on the way before reaching Jacob. What Jacob had sent on ahead hopefully as a bribe to buy off Esau's hostility was declined by Esau with the declaration that he had enough and needed nothing more. Whether sincerely or just being able to shift on the spot, Jacob then insisted on Esau taking these animals as a gift of gratitude for Esau's gracious acceptance of him (vv. 10-11). Thus the meeting resulted in reconciliation between these two estranged brothers.

Esau proposed that Jacob join his group as they journeyed southward back home to Edom (vv. 12-17). But Jacob reflected apprehension about this new relationship and excused himself to follow behind in order to take care of animals etc. Jacob politely refused the offer of Esau to leave some of his men behind to help Jacob, perhaps suspicious of Esau's intent. Esau then began his trek southward back to the land of Seir, that is, Edom southeast of the Dead Sea. Jacob, however, turned westward and headed toward Succoth, north of the Dead Sea near the Jordan River. As vv. 18-20 go on to indicate, he eventually made his way across the Jordan River westward and settled near Shechem, which would later become a major worship center for the Israelites when they settled the Promised Land after the exodus. The two brothers would not come together again until their father's funeral years later (35:29).

Thus Jacob has come full circle. Years before he had to flee this region to escape Esau's wrath. Now he returned back and reconciled with his brother before settling down permanently in the land of Canaan.

Again, what insights are provided us from this episode? One obvious thing is the importance of reconciliation, especially with family members. Although sometimes such is impossible to achieve, we should seek to live in peace and harmony with others in so far as is possible. At one level of meaning, this episode underscores a foundational biblical principle of the vertical/horizontal relationships. Proper relationships with people around us depend upon and grow out of proper relationship with God. Had Jacob not wrestled first with God, his encounter with Esau would most likely have had a different outcome. The ancient Hebrew narrator stitched his sources together to especially highlight this point. When we have healthy relationships both with God and with others, we will enjoy a healthy, productive spiritual life.

To be sure Jacob was far from perfect, even after this experience. His family would endure some severe hardships after these events in our scripture text. But Jacob reached out to God and God reached out to him. From this Jacob became Israel, a father of the Jewish people. Who knows what God wants to achieve through our life and our children?