

OVERCOMING THE DYSFUNCTIONS OF ISRAEL'S PATRIARCHS

XIX. Dealing Respectfully With Formidable Relatives

(Genesis 33:1-17)

I. Introduction

- A. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Israel's patriarchs and their respective wives and families, though blessed of God, were imperfect people who at times made huge mistakes that led to serious marital and family dysfunction.
- B. Thankfully, Romans 15:4 states that we can learn from whatsoever things were written in the Old Testament for our edification, and that includes our learning how to overcome the dysfunctions of Israel's patriarchs.
- C. We view Genesis 33:1-17 on dealing respectfully with formidable relatives for our insight and application:

II. Dealing Respectfully With Formidable Relatives, Genesis 33:1-17.

- A. After Jacob had wrestled with the Preincarnate Christ and come to trust completely in God to bless him, Jacob looked up and saw his brother Esau approaching him with four hundred men, Genesis 33:1a.
- B. Fully vulnerable now to Esau as he limped along due to Christ's having touched his thigh during the wrestling match to deform Jacob's hip socket, Jacob was initially very respectful to his brother Esau, Genesis 33:1b-11:
 - 1. Jacob divided his family up into three groups, Genesis 33:1b-2.
 - 2. He then passed on ahead of these groups and bowed to the ground seven times until he came near to Esau, Genesis 33:3. This bowing activity was a widely attested sign of homage that was fit for a king, so "Jacob was taking no chances" of irritating Esau! (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Genesis 33:3)
 - 3. Regardless what other motives Esau may have had in taking four hundred men with him to meet Jacob, when he actually saw his brother, God so worked in Esau's heart that he ran to meet Jacob, fell on his neck and kissed him, and the relief of the meeting led both men to break down and weep, Genesis 33:4!
 - 4. Esau then spotted Jacob's three groups of his family, so he asked who they were, and Jacob replied that they were the children God had graciously given him, Genesis 33:5. Jacob consistently used gracious, humble language with Esau in order not to anger him! Jacob's family then came forward to meet Esau, and each of these three groups bowed down in homage to Esau, Genesis 33:6-7.
 - 5. Esau then asked Jacob about all the animals that he had met prior to Jacob's arrival, and Jacob explained that they were intended to be gifts for Esau, Genesis 33:8. Esau said that he had enough livestock, and told Jacob to keep his animals, but Jacob insisted that Esau receive his gift, Genesis 33:9-10a. "Esau's acceptance would be the surest token of his having been reconciled to his brother . . . (T)he acceptance of the gift of the person seeking reconciliation would have been the surest proof that all was well." (H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, 1974, Vol. II, p. 889)
 - 6. Jacob explained that seeing Esau's face in such a positive atmosphere was like seeing the face of God, a reflection of Jacob's belief that the Lord had softened Esau's heart regardless of his having taken four hundred warriors to accompany him to meet Jacob! (Genesis 33:10b) Jacob thus urged Esau to take his gift of the livestock, and Esau took it, a sign of his acceptance of Jacob, Genesis 33:11!
- C. However, Jacob then deceived Esau again out of fear that undercut his reliance on God, Genesis 33:12-17!
 - 1. Esau then suggested that his men join Jacob's group to travel together, but Jacob declined, claiming that his flocks and young family would not be strong enough to accompany Esau's fast moving warriors, Genesis 33:12-13. Jacob thus proposed that Esau go ahead of his group and that he would follow with his flocks and family to meet up with Esau at Seir in Esau's country of Edom, Genesis 33:14.
 - 2. Esau then suggested that he leave some of his men with Jacob to accompany Jacob's group apparently to provide them safe travel, but Jacob answered that he had no need for Esau's men, Genesis 33:15.
 - 3. Thus, Esau returned that day to his land of Seir in Edom expecting Jacob to follow him there, Gen. 33:16.
 - 4. However, instead of going south to Esau's land of Seir as Jacob had told Esau he would do, Jacob crossed the Jabbok River to his north and went to Succoth, Genesis 33:17; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 82.
 - 5. Jacob had once again deceived his brother Esau! Though Jacob may have thought it wise to avoid excessive contact with his somewhat impulsive and unpredictable brother, deceiving Esau again in front of his four hundred warriors would only have tempted Esau to become angry at Jacob all over again!

Lesson: *Jacob initially showed great respect for his estranged brother Esau, and God caused Esau to be gracious toward Jacob. However, in unbelief, Jacob then deceived Esau again, sabotaging his own efforts to respect Esau!*

Application: *In facing formidable relatives, may we consistently show them respect to make our respect believable!*