

Jacob Looked Up and There was Esau, Coming with His Four Hundred Men

33: 1-17

DIG: As Esau ran to meet Jacob, and as Ya'akov limped toward Esau, who was more surprised when they finally met? Why?

REFLECT: When have you forgiven an offense against you? When have you needed forgiveness? What can you learn about forgiveness from Esau's example?

The next day, **Jacob** crossed the River **Jabbok** back to the southern bank. No sooner did he return to his family, than he looked up and there was **Esau**, coming with his four hundred men. As a final precaution, he divided his family into three groups. He divided the children with their mothers, **Leah**, **Rachel** and the two maidservants **Bilhah** and **Zilpah**. The rabbis teach that he arranged them to give protection to those he loved the most. He put the maidservants and their children in front, **Leah** and her children next, and **Rachel** and **Joseph** in the rear (33:1-2). **Jacob's** favoritism of **Joseph** was displayed long before he gave him his coat of many colors (37:23 NKJ). He himself went on ahead of the three groups. If **Esav** chose to attack, **Jacob** would take the brunt of it, while his wives and children could possibly escape. These are not the actions of a coward. He bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother (33:3). This was common in ancient eastern protocol. **Ya'akov** recognized **Esav** as ruler of the region.

But **Esau** ran to meet **Jacob** (Hebrew: **Ya'akov**) and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. **Jacob** was a different man than he was twenty years previously, but so was **Esav**. The rabbis did not believe that **Esau** actually came to kiss **Jacob**. They interpreted this, and kissed him, to mean that he came and bit him. Twenty years of emotion came on like a flood and they wept (33:4). For a while, neither brother could speak a word. Each had doubts and fears about the other for so long, and now that those fears were gone, it was too wonderful for words. **God** had transformed them both.

ADONAI can also transform *us*, and resolve the conflict that is the result of *our* character flaws. Sometimes we pray that **God** would work in the *other* person's life so that we can be at peace with them. But perhaps we need to be willing to pray that **the Lord** would change *us*, that he would take away our bitterness, overcome our habits, help us to step back from our expectations, and take away our pride. We must be willing to cut these things out of our lives. The first step is to trust the Master Surgeon.

A remarkable story about transformation from hate and hostility to healing and harmony is found in the intertwined lives of Mitsuo Fuchida and Jacob DeShazer. The former expressed his hatred for the *white demons* as the pilot who led the attack on Pearl Harbor. The latter was an American bombardier involved in bombing raids against the *despised Japanese* in Doolittle's Tokyo raid. After their respective famous raids, DeShazer had the harder time. Without enough fuel to return to the aircraft carrier, he and the other members of his crew abandoned the plane deep in Chinese territory, parachuting to what they hoped was safety. Unfortunately, they landed in an area held by the Japanese, and he spent over three years as a prisoner of war. A trial in Tokyo sentenced him to death, and that frequently seemed preferable to the abusive conditions he and his fellow prisoners were forced to endure.

Needless to say, this only increased the hate he felt for his captors. When his death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, it was little consolation. But one of his comrades was a believer. About halfway through the period of imprisonment the man died and somehow, as a result, the prisoners were given a Bible by the Japanese. They all began to read it. This led to DeShazer's conversion.

*Suddenly I discovered that **God** had given me new spiritual eyes, and that when I looked at the Japanese officers and guards who had starved and beaten my companions and me so cruelly, I found my bitter hatred for them changed to loving pity. I realized that these Japanese did not know anything about my Savior and that if Messiah is not in a heart, it is natural to be cruel.*

When Americans parachuted into the camp at the end of the war and released the prisoners, DeShazer returned home. But by then he was determined that He was going to be a missionary to the Japanese. He returned to Japan in 1948, where his preaching to the Japanese impressed them with how his hatred had turned to love. Eventually even some of those who had been his guards responded to his message and gave their lives to Yeshua.

While DeShazer suffered the torment of the POW camp, Fuchida became a national hero. He took place in numerous raids. His life was miraculously spared at the end of the war when he was called home to headquarters and was partway through a series of meetings in Hiroshima the day before the atomic bomb was dropped. But **God** had different plans for Fuchida. While taking a train to testify at war crimes trials, he received a tract about the life-changing experience of DeShazer.

*Since the American pilot had found something in the Bible, I decided to purchase one myself, despite my traditionally Buddhist heritage. In the ensuing weeks, I read the Bible eagerly. I came to the climactic drama - the Crucifixion. I read **Luke 23:24** the prayer of Jesus Christ at his death, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." I was impressed that I was certainly one of those for whom He had prayed. The many men I had killed had been slaughtered in the name of patriotism; for I did not understand the love which Christ wished to implant within every heart.*

In 1950, Fuchida committed his life to Messiah. Despite the disbelief of his friends and scornful accusations from countrymen, Fuchida's resolve remained strong, and he became a traveling evangelist for the gospel of Christ. He too had put his hatred behind him.

The years drew Fuchida and DeShazer close together as brothers in the faith. Once bitter enemies, now they were brothers through the saving power of Yeshua Messiah. The ultimate example of **ADONAI's** ability to overcome hostility and change character in these two men was seen time and time again as they preached together, telling of **the Lord's** love at rallies and conventions.⁵¹³

Then after some time, Esau looked up and saw the women and children. He asked: Who are these with you? 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 (33:5-7).

After seeing **Jacob's** family, **Esau** saw the large flocks and herds of animals that were still with **Ya'akov**. This reminded **him** of the five groups of animals **he** had met as **he** approached **Jacob** the day before. Although the shepherds had told **him** they were gifts from **his brother**, **he** respectfully inquired: **What do you mean by all these droves I met? Ya'akov** replied: **To find favor in your eyes, my lord. But Esav** had also become wealthy and didn't need it. **I already have plenty, my brother.** The gift **Jacob** had given **him** was larger than some cities gave to kings as tribute and it seemed that the gift was much too large. **Esau** said: **Keep what you have for yourself (33:8-9).**

But **Jacob** insisted. **No, please!** said **Ya'akov**. **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. He** knew **Esau** didn't need it in a material sense, but **he** pleaded: **Please accept my present, literally meaning my blessing, that was brought to you. This was a reference to the patriarchal blessing now to be shared with Esau. And** the reason was: **for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.** In Hebrew it actually says: **I**

have everything. Esau had plenty, but Jacob had everything because God had blessed him beyond measure. And because Ya'akov insisted, Esau accepted it (33: 10-11). A refusal to receive a present is, throughout the East, interpreted as an evidence of hostility. This is why Jacob was anxious about Esau accepting this gift.

No doubt, the two brothers then spent considerable time in telling each other all that had happened since they had separated twenty years earlier. They had a lot to catch up on. Esau had a large family and great possessions (36:1-8), and had undergone many experiences, which he shared with his brother. Jacob told him about his stay in Haran, and how ADONAI had led him through the years. No doubt Ya'akov was anxious to hear about his parents. Rebekah had probably died by this time, and Isaac was not only blind, but also completely incapacitated with age. Isaac died when he was 180 years old, and was probably about 160 when Jacob returned to Canaan.⁵¹⁴

Isaac was living in Hebron, where he later died. Esau assumed that Jacob would be traveling south in that direction. Apparently the four hundred armed horsemen were not meant to attack Ya'akov, but escort him home. Esau said: Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you. But Jacob said to him: My lord knows that the children are young and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. Ya'akov knew that Esau's men would be annoyed with the slow pace they would have to follow, wanting to get back home as soon as possible. Jacob's caravan, on the other hand, would need to move very slowly. 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. I will come to visit my lord in Seir at a later time. And later Ya'akov did visit him from Shechem. Then 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 (33:12-15). This was a polite refusal, saying that there was no need for an armed escort. It was a great blessing to see his brother, but they were still vastly different from one another. They would see each other again at their father's funeral (35:29), but he wisely determined that they needed to live their lives separately to achieve their own destinies.

So that day Esau went south on his way back to Seir. Ya'akov, however, could not bring himself to live in close contact with Esau, and he went north to Succoth on the east side of the Jordan River outside of the Promise Land, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth which is the Hebrew name for booths or shelters (33:16-17). The rabbis teach that Jacob stayed there for eighteen months, first living in booths in the summer, then in a house in the winter, and then another summer in the booths again.

Even though **Ya'akov** had just come down from **his** mountaintop experience with pre-incarnate Messiah at the **Jabbok** River, **Jacob** had forgotten **his** **vow** to return to Bethel (**28:20-21**). **ADONAI** had even reminded **Ya'akov** of this when **He** had called **him** to leave Haran (**31:3**). But **Jacob** put it out of **his** mind and settled down, for a time, in earthly ease and prosperity in **the city of Shechem**. Like Lot, **Jacob** settled **within sight of** a godless Canaanite **city**. But because of **his** disobedience, trouble would be waiting for **him** there.