

RECONCILIATION WITH ESAU

The morning sun was high in the sky, as Jacob, now 'Israel' limped, exhausted, into the day that he had anticipated as the greatest fight of his life. Wrestling with the angel, had made him ready, not in body, but in Spirit, to meet his brother Esau. The events that unfold demonstrate the principles through which Christians can bring about reconciliation with God, themselves and one another, transforming negativity into a loving embrace.

ESAU AND HIS MEN v 1-3 – looking into the distance, Jacob finally saw Esau and his four hundred men advancing towards them. Turning to his family, Jacob arranged his wives and children into three groups – Bilhah and Zilpah first, then Leah and finally Rachel and Joseph. Then he stood in front of them all. As Esau neared them, Jacob bowed, completely to the ground, seven times, honouring the custom of the day. The Tell el Amarna tablets record that anyone approaching a king should bow seven times before them. Jacob therefore acknowledged to Esau that he recognised him as ruler of the region. There was no need for Esau to be on the attack. Jacob was not on the defence. He was full of respect and contrition.

INTRODUCTIONS v 4-7 – after his seventh bow, Jacob looked up to find Esau running towards him, to embrace, hug and weep together. Any angry thoughts Esau might have set out with, had been transformed into a desire for reconciliation. The reunion over, Esau saw Jacob's wives and children standing in their orderly groups and enquired after them. Jacob explained they were the children God had given him. In doing so he claimed God's protection and avoided the word 'blessing' that had previously brought so much sorrow to their relationship. Jacob's wives then followed his example, bowing low as each was introduced. It is important to acknowledge God as the source of all forgiveness and blessing.



EXCHANGING GIFTS v 8-11 – finally, Esau enquired about the droves of gifts given to him. Jacob explained that they were to bring about Esau's forgiveness and urged him to take them since they were evidence that Esau was reconciled to him. It was important that Esau accepted them, because according to their customs, acceptance of an offered gift, acknowledged reconciliation. Therefore, Jacob believed that if Esau accepted the gifts, then God had forgiven him too. Both brothers said they had enough, but Jacob used a different word, 'kol' meaning 'everything'. Jacob, as 'Israel' felt he had all the riches he needed through his faith in God. His grasping nature had been transformed to receive the generosity of spiritual forgiveness that only God can give.

NEGOTIATING THE JOURNEY v 12-16 – the introductions completed, Esau suggested he accompanied Jacob back to his home. In doing so, he offered fellowship as a sign that all past hostility was resolved. However, Jacob wanted to keep control of their journey, explaining the cattle and the young children needed to travel slowly. He also declined Esau's offer of men to accompany them. He had nothing to fear now he was reconciled to his brother. However, their reconciliation did not mean that their everyday life and walk with God was compatible. They had differing expectations. It was enough that they were at peace with one another.

Who initiated our reconciliation with God? (Romans 5:6-11)

Why is being reconciled to people an important characteristic of those who follow Christ? Why is it necessary? (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Think of someone that you need to be reconciled to...

How could you communicate your humility and desire for peace?

What kindness could you show to communicate your love for them?

How could you testify of your faith in Christ?

To what extent could your lives continue together afterwards?

*'And all things are of God,
who hath reconciled us to himself, by Jesus Christ,
and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation'.
2 Corinthians 5:18*

READ

REFLECT

APPLY