

Chapter Outline

Jacob's vision at Mahanaim, His fear of Esau.	(1–8)
Jacob's earnest prayer for deliverance, He prepares a present for Esau.	(9–23)
He wrestles with the Angel.	(24–32)

Verses 1–8

The angels of God appeared to Jacob, to encourage him with the assurance of the Divine protection. When God designs his people for great trials, he prepares them by great comforts. While Jacob, to whom the promise belonged, had been in hard service, Esau was become a prince. Jacob sent a message, showing that he did not insist upon the birth-right. Yielding pacifies great offences, Ec 10:4. We must not refuse to speak respectfully, even to those unjustly angry with us. Jacob received an account of Esau's warlike preparations against him, and was greatly afraid. A lively sense of danger, and quickening fear arising from it, may be found united with humble confidence in God's power and promise.

Verses 9–23

Times of fear should be times of prayer: whatever causes fear, should drive us to our knees, to our God. Jacob had lately seen his guards of angels, but in this distress he applied to God, not to them; he knew they were his fellow-servants, Re 22:9. There cannot be a better pattern for true prayer than this. Here is a thankful acknowledgement of former undeserved favours; a humble confession of unworthiness; a plain statement of his fears and distress; a full reference of the whole affair to the Lord, and resting all his hopes on him. The best we can say to God in prayer, is what he has said to us. Thus he made the name of the Lord his strong tower, and could not but be safe. Jacob's fear did not make him sink into despair, nor did his prayer make him presume upon God's mercy, without the use of means. God answers prayers by teaching us to order our affairs aright. To pacify Esau, Jacob sent him a present. We must not despair of reconciling ourselves to those most angry against us.

Verses 24–32

A great while before day, Jacob being alone, more fully spread his fears before God in prayer. While thus employed, One in the likeness of a man wrestled with him. When the spirit helpeth our infirmities, and our earnest and vast desires can scarcely find words to utter them, and we still mean more than we can express, then prayer is indeed wrestling with God. However tried or discouraged, we shall prevail; and prevailing with Him in prayer, we shall prevail against all enemies that strive with us. Nothing requires more vigour and unceasing exertion than wrestling. It is an emblem of the true spirit of faith and prayer. Jacob kept his ground; though the struggle continued long, this did not shake his faith, nor silence his prayer. He will have a blessing, and had rather have all his bone put out of joint than go away without one. Those who would have the blessing of Christ, must

resolve to take no denial. The fervent prayer is the effectual prayer. The Angel puts a lasting mark of honour upon him, by changing his name. Jacob signifies a supplanter. From henceforth he shall be celebrated, not for craft and artful management, but for true valour. Thou shalt be called Israel, a prince with God, a name greater than those of the great men of the earth. He is a prince indeed that is a prince with God; those are truly honourable that are mighty in prayer. Having power with God, he shall have power with men too; he shall prevail, and gain Esau's favour. Jacob gives a new name to the place. He calls it Peniel, the face of God, because there he had seen the appearance of God, and obtained the favour of God. It becomes those whom God honours, to admire his grace towards them. The Angel who wrestled with Jacob was the second Person in the sacred Trinity, who was afterwards God manifest in the flesh, and who, dwelling in human nature, is called Immanuel, Ho 12:4, 5. Jacob halted on his thigh. It might serve to keep him from being lifted up with the abundance of the revelations. The sun rose on Jacob: it is sun-rise with that soul, which has had communion with God.

Chapter 33

Chapter Outline

The friendly meeting of Jacob and Esau. (1–16)

Jacob comes to Succoth and Shalem, He (17–20)
builds an altar.

Verses 1–16

Jacob, having by prayer committed his case to God, went on his way. Come what will, nothing can come amiss to him whose heart is fixed, trusting in God. Jacob bowed to Esau. A humble, submissive behaviour goes far towards turning away wrath. Esau embraced Jacob. God has the hearts of all men in his hands, and can turn them when and how he pleases. It is not in vain to trust in God, and to call upon him in the day of trouble. And when a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Esau receives Jacob as a brother, and much tenderness passes between them. Esau asks, Who are those with thee? To this common question, Jacob spoke like himself, like a man whose eyes are ever directed towards the Lord. Jacob urged Esau, though his fear was over, and he took his present. It is well when men's religion makes them generous, free-hearted, and open-handed. But Jacob declined Esau's offer to accompany him. It is not desirable to be too intimate with superior ungodly relations, who will expect us to join in their vanities, or at least to wink at them, though they blame, and perhaps mock at, our religion. Such will either be a snare to us, or offended with us. We shall venture the loss of all things, rather than endanger our souls, if we know their value; rather than renounce Christ, if we truly love him. And let Jacob's care and tender attention to his family and flocks remind us of the good Shepherd of our souls, who gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with young, Isa 40:11. As parents, teachers or pastors, we should all follow his example.

Verses 17–20

Jacob did not content himself with words of thanks for God's favour to him, but gave real thanks. Also he kept up religion, and the worship of God in his family. Where we have a tent, God must have an altar. Jacob dedicated this altar to the honour of El-elohe-Israel, God, the God of Israel; to the honour of God, the only living and true God; and to the honour of the God of Israel, as a God in covenant with him. Israel's God is Israel's glory. Blessed be his name, he is still the mighty God, the God of Israel. May we praise his name, and rejoice in his love, through our pilgrimage here on earth, and for ever in the heavenly Canaan.

Chapter 34

Chapter Outline

Dinah defiled by Shechem. (1–19)

The Shechemites murdered by Simeon and Levi. (20–31)

Verses 1–19

Young persons, especially females, are never so safe and well off as under the care of pious parents. Their own ignorance, and the flattery and artifices of designing, wicked people, who are ever laying snares for them, expose them to great danger. They are their own enemies if they desire to go abroad, especially alone, among strangers to true religion. Those parents are very wrong who do not hinder their children from needlessly exposing themselves to danger. Indulged children, like Dinah, often become a grief and shame to their families. Her pretence was, to see the daughters of the land, to see how they dressed, and how they danced, and what was fashionable among them; she went to see, yet that was not all, she went to be seen too. She went to get acquaintance with the Canaanites, and to learn their ways. See what came of Dinah's gadding. The beginning of sin is as the letting forth of water. How great a matter does a little fire kindle! We should carefully avoid all occasions of sin and approaches to it.

Verses 20–31

The Shechemites submitted to the sacred rite, only to serve a turn, to please their prince, and to enrich themselves, and it was just with God to bring punishment upon them. As nothing secures us better than true religion, so nothing exposes us more than religion only pretended to. But Simeon and Levi were most unrighteous. Those who act wickedly, under the pretext of religion, are the worst enemies of the truth, and harden the hearts of many to destruction. The crimes of others form no excuse for us. Alas! how one sin leads on to another, and, like flames of fire, spread desolation in every direction! Foolish pleasures lead to seduction; seduction produces wrath; wrath thirsts for

revenge; the thirst of revenge has recourse to treachery; treachery issues in murder; and murder is followed by other lawless actions. Were we to trace the history of unlawful commerce between the sexes, we should find it, more than any other sin, ending in blood.

Chapter 35

Chapter Outline

God commands Jacob to go to Beth-el, He puts away idols from his family.	(1–5)
Jacob builds an altar, Death of Deborah, God blesses Jacob.	(6–15)
Death of Rachel.	(16–20)
Reuben's crime, The death of Isaac.	(21–29)

Verses 1–5

Beth-el was forgotten. But as many as God loves, he will remind of neglected duties, one way or other, by conscience or by providences. When we have vowed a vow to God, it is best not to defer the payment of it; yet better late than never. Jacob commanded his household to prepare, not only for the journey and removal, but for religious services. Masters of families should use their authority to keep up religion in their families, Jos 24:15. They must put away strange gods. In families where there is a face of religion, and an altar to God, yet many times there is much amiss, and more strange gods than one would suppose. They must be clean, and change their garments. These were but outward ceremonies, signifying the purifying and change of the heart. What are clean clothes, and new clothes, without a clean heart, and a new heart? If Jacob had called for these idols sooner, they had parted with them sooner. Sometimes attempts for reformation succeed better than we could have thought. Jacob buried their images. We must be wholly separated from our sins, as we are from those that are dead and buried out of sight. He removed from Shechem to Beth-el. Though the Canaanites were very angry against the sons of Jacob for their barbarous usage of the Shechemites, yet they were so kept back by Divine power, that they could not take the opportunity now offered to avenge them. The way of duty is the way of safety. When we are about God's work, we are under special protection; God is with us, while we are with him; and if He be for us, who can be against us? God governs the world more by secret terrors on men's minds than we are aware of.

Verses 6–15

The comfort the saints have in holy ordinances, is not so much from Beth-el, the house of God, as from El-beth-el, the God of the house. The ordinances are empty things, if we do not meet with God in them. There Jacob buried Deborah, Rebekah's nurse. She died much lamented. Old servants

in a family, that have in their time been faithful and useful, ought to be respected. God appeared to Jacob. He renewed the covenant with him. I am God Almighty, God all-sufficient, able to make good the promise in due time, and to support thee and provide for thee in the mean time. Two things are promised; that he should be the father of a great nation, and that he should be the master of a good land. These two promises had a spiritual signification, which Jacob had some notion of, though not so clear and distinct as we now have. Christ is the promised Seed, and heaven is the promised land; the former is the foundation, and the latter the top-stone, of all God's favours.

Verses 16–20

Rachel had passionately said, Give me children, or else I die; and now that she had children, she died! The death of the body is but the departure of the soul to the world of spirits. When shall we learn that it is God alone who really knows what is best for his people, and that in all worldly affairs the safest path for the Christian is to say from the heart, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. Here alone is our safety and our comfort, to know no will but his. Her dying lips called her newborn son Ben-oni, the son of my sorrow; and many a son proves to be the heaviness of her that bare him. Children are enough the sorrow of their mothers; they should, therefore, when they grow up, study to be their joy, and so, if possible, to make them some amends. But Jacob, because he would not renew the sorrowful remembrance of the mother's death every time he called his son, changed his name to Benjamin, the son of my right hand: that is, very dear to me; the support of my age, like the staff in my right hand.

Verses 21–29

What a sore affliction Reuben's sin was, is shown, “and Israel heard it.” No more is said, but that is enough. Reuben thought that his father would never hear of it; but those that promise themselves secrecy in sin, are generally disappointed. The age and death of Isaac are recorded, though he died not till after Joseph was sold into Egypt. Isaac lived about forty years after he had made his will, chap. 27:2. We shall not die an hour the sooner, but much the better, for timely setting our hearts and houses in order. Particular notice is taken of the agreement of Esau and Jacob at their father's funeral, to show how God had wonderfully changed Esau's mind. It is awful to behold relations, sometimes for a little of this world's goods, disputing over the graves of their friends, while they are near going to the grave themselves.

Chapter 36

Esau and his descendants.

—The registers in this chapter show the faithfulness of God to his promise to Abraham. Esau is here called Edom, that name which kept up the remembrance of his selling his birth-right for a mess of pottage. Esau continued the same profane despiser of heavenly things. In outward prosperity and honour, the children of the covenant are often behind, and those that are out of the covenant get the start. We may suppose it a trial to the faith of God's Israel, to hear of the pomp and power

of the kings of Edom, while they were bond-slaves in Egypt; but those that look for great things from God, must be content to wait for them; God's time is the best time. Mount Seir is called the land of their possession. Canaan was at this time only the land of promise. Seir was in the possession of the Edomites. The children of this world have their all in hand, and nothing in hope, Lu 16:25; while the children of God have their all in hope, and next to nothing in hand. But, all things considered, it is beyond compare better to have Canaan in promise, than mount Seir in possession.

Chapter 37

Chapter Outline

Joseph is loved of Jacob, but hated by his brethren.	(1–4)
Joseph's dreams.	(5–11)
Jacob sends Joseph to visit his brethren, They conspire his death.	(12–22)
Joseph's brethren sell him.	(23–10)
Jacob deceived, Joseph sold to Potiphar.	(31–36)

Verses 1–4

In Joseph's history we see something of Christ, who was first humbled and then exalted. It also shows the lot of Christians, who must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom. It is a history that has none like it, for displaying the various workings of the human mind, both good and bad, and the singular providence of God in making use of them for fulfilling his purposes. Though Joseph was his father's darling, yet he was not bred up in idleness. Those do not truly love their children, who do not use them to business, and labour, and hardships. The fondling of children is with good reason called the spoiling of them. Those who are trained up to do nothing, are likely to be good for nothing. But Jacob made known his love, by dressing Joseph finer than the rest of his children. It is wrong for parents to make a difference between one child and another, unless there is great cause for it, by the children's dutifulness, or undutifulness. When parents make a difference, children soon notice it, and it leads to quarrels in families. Jacob's sons did that, when they were from under his eye, which they durst not have done at home with him; but Joseph gave his father an account of their ill conduct, that he might restrain them. Not as a tale-bearer, to sow discord, but as a faithful brother.

Verses 5–11

God gave Joseph betimes the prospect of his advancement, to support and comfort him under his long and grievous troubles. Observe, Joseph dreamed of his preferment, but he did not dream of his imprisonment. Thus many young people, when setting out in the world, think of nothing but