

15. Esau and Jacob continued - Genesis 29-36



I. Jacob with Laban : wives and sons Genesis 29

1. Jacob works of Laban for seven years to earn the right to marry Laban's daughter, Rachel.
2. Laban tricks Jacob by giving him Leah, Rachel's elder sister.
'It is not done in our country – giving the younger before the firstborn' (29:26). [echoes of Esau and Jacob!]



1. Jacob with Laban : wives and sons Genesis 29

3. Finally, Laban gives Rachel to Jacob. 'Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah ... When YHWH saw that Leah was unloved he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren' (29:30-31).

4. 'When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him **Reuben**; for she said, "Because YHWH has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me" (29:31-32).

5. 'She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because YHWH has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also"; and she named him **Simeon**' (29:33).

6. 'Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons"; therefore he was named **Levi**' (29:34).

7. 'She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise YHWH"; therefore she named him Judah; then she ceased bearing' (29:35).

2. Jacob becomes rich Genesis 30

1. In a story that parallels that of Sarah [see 16:4], Rachel gives her maid to Jacob, and she bears him two sons: **Dan** and **Naphtali** (30:1-8)
2. When Leah can no longer conceive she gives Jacob her maid who bears him two sons: **Gad** and **Asher** (30:9-13).
3. Reuben fetches mandrakes to help his mother Leah conceive again. Rachel asks for the mandrakes and in exchange lets Leah sleep with Jacob. Leah bears Jacob two more sons: **Issachar** and **Zebulun**. **'Now my husband will honour me because I have borne him six sons. Afterwards she bore a daughter and named her Dinah'** (30:14-21).

4. Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, “God has taken away my reproach”; and she named him Joseph, saying, “May YHWH add to me another son!” (30:22-24).

5. Laban tried to cheat Jacob (memories of Jacob and Esau) by entering into an agreement about goats and sheep of a certain colour. But, ever the trickster, Jacob deceived Laban and ended up with a huge flock (30:25-43).

3. Jacob flees from Laban Genesis 31:1-3

‘Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, “Jacob has taken all that was our father’s; he has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father.” And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him as favourably as he did before.

Then YHWH said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you.”

Jacob explains to his wives that it was God who showed him how to counter Laban’s plot, and has told him to leave ‘and return to the land of your birth’. His wives agree (31:4-16).

‘So Jacob arose, and set his children and his wives on camels; and he drove away all his livestock, all the property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan’ (31:17-18).

Rachel steals Laban's household gods, and Jacob departs, unaware of Rachel's theft (31:19-21).

Laban catches up with Jacob but is instructed by God not to harm him. Rachel tricks him, so that he fails to discover his stolen gods (31:22-35).

Laban and Jacob make a covenant setting up border posts between Aram and what would become Israel (31:36-55).

4. Jacob prepares for meeting with Esau Genesis 32:1-22

1. After twenty years Jacob returns.

He sends messengers ahead to his brother Esau:

‘Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob: I have lived with Laban as an alien, and stayed until now; and I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male and female slaves; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favour in your sight’ (32:4-5).

2. The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him” (32:6).

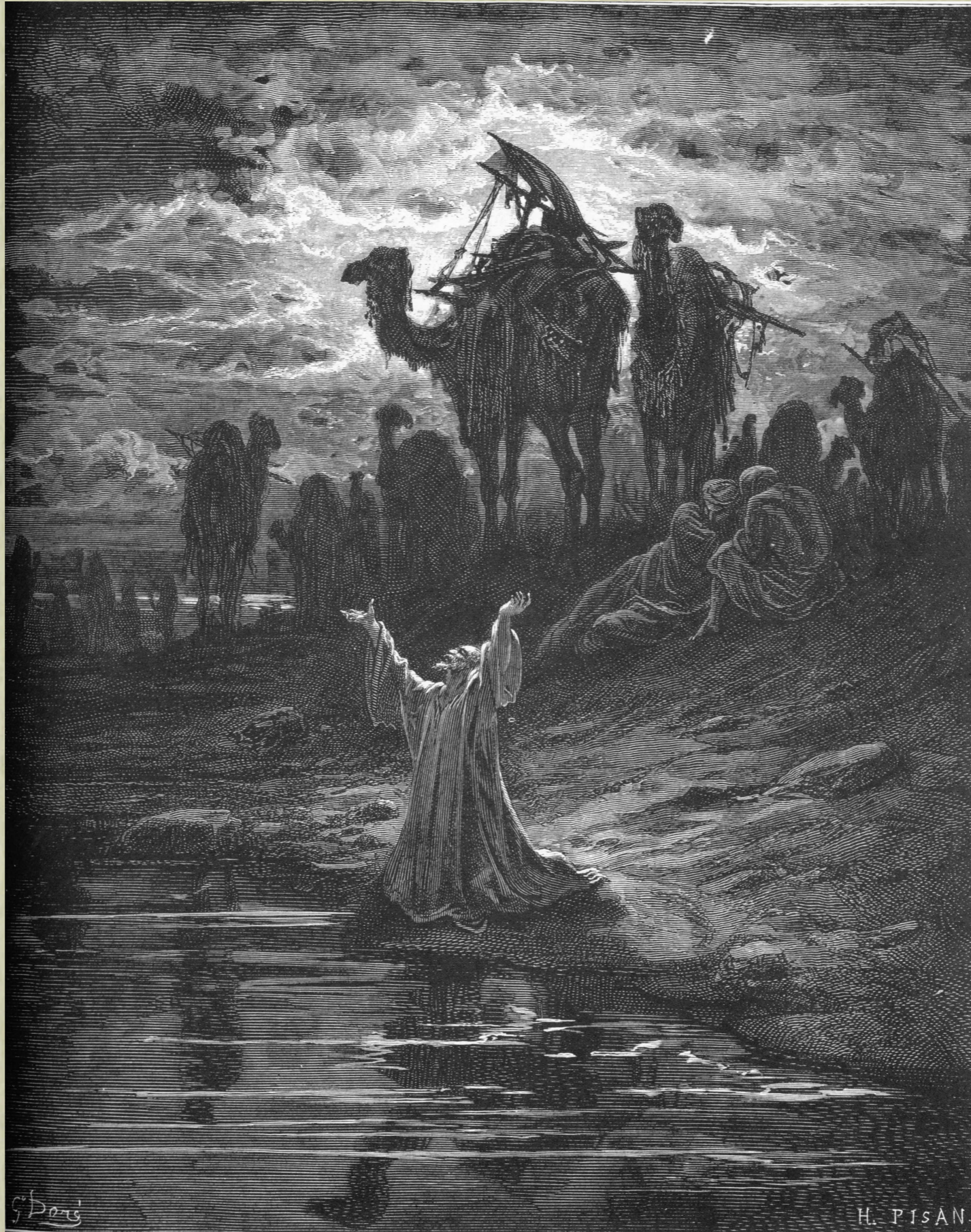
3. Jacob hears that Esau is coming to meet him with four hundred men, and ‘Jacob became exceedingly afraid and distressed’(32:7).

4. “Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies, thinking, “If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company that is left will escape” (32:7-8).

Genesis 32:9-12

‘Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O YHWH who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,’ I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. Yet you have said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.’”

Jacob is humbler now.



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Genesis 32:13-18

So he spent that night there, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. These he delivered into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on ahead of me, and put a space between drove and drove.”

He instructed the foremost, “When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you, ‘To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?’ then you shall say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob; they are a present sent to my lord Esau; and moreover he is behind us.’”

Genesis 32:19-23

He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, “You shall say the same thing to Esau when you meet him, and you shall say, ‘Moreover your servant Jacob is behind us.’” For he thought, “I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me.” So the present passed on ahead of him; and he himself spent that night in the camp.

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. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

5. Jacob wrestles with 'God' Genesis 32:24-30

'At the ford of Jabbok ('struggle with YHWH') Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket ('genitals?'); and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but **Israel**, for **you have striven with God** and with humans, and have prevailed." 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. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For **I have seen God face to face**, and yet my life is preserved."

Jacob emerges from the struggle with a new name and a new blessing.





Louis Leloir

6. Jacob and Esau meet Genesis 33:1-3

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. He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on ahead of them, **bowing himself to the ground seven times**, until he came near his brother.

Genesis 33:4

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

Genesis 33:5-7

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.” Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.

Genesis 33:8-11

Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?”

Jacob answered, “To find favour with **my lord**.”

But Esau said, “I have enough, **my brother**; keep what you have for yourself.”

Jacob said, “No, please; if I find favour with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face [Isaac was blind!] is like seeing the face of God – since you have received me with such favour. Please accept the **blessing** that is brought to you [the blessing he deceived Isaac into giving; 27:28-29, 36], because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.”

So he urged him, and he took it.

Genesis 33:12-16

Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you.” 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. 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.”

So Esau said, “Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” But he said, “Why should my lord be so kind to me?” So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.

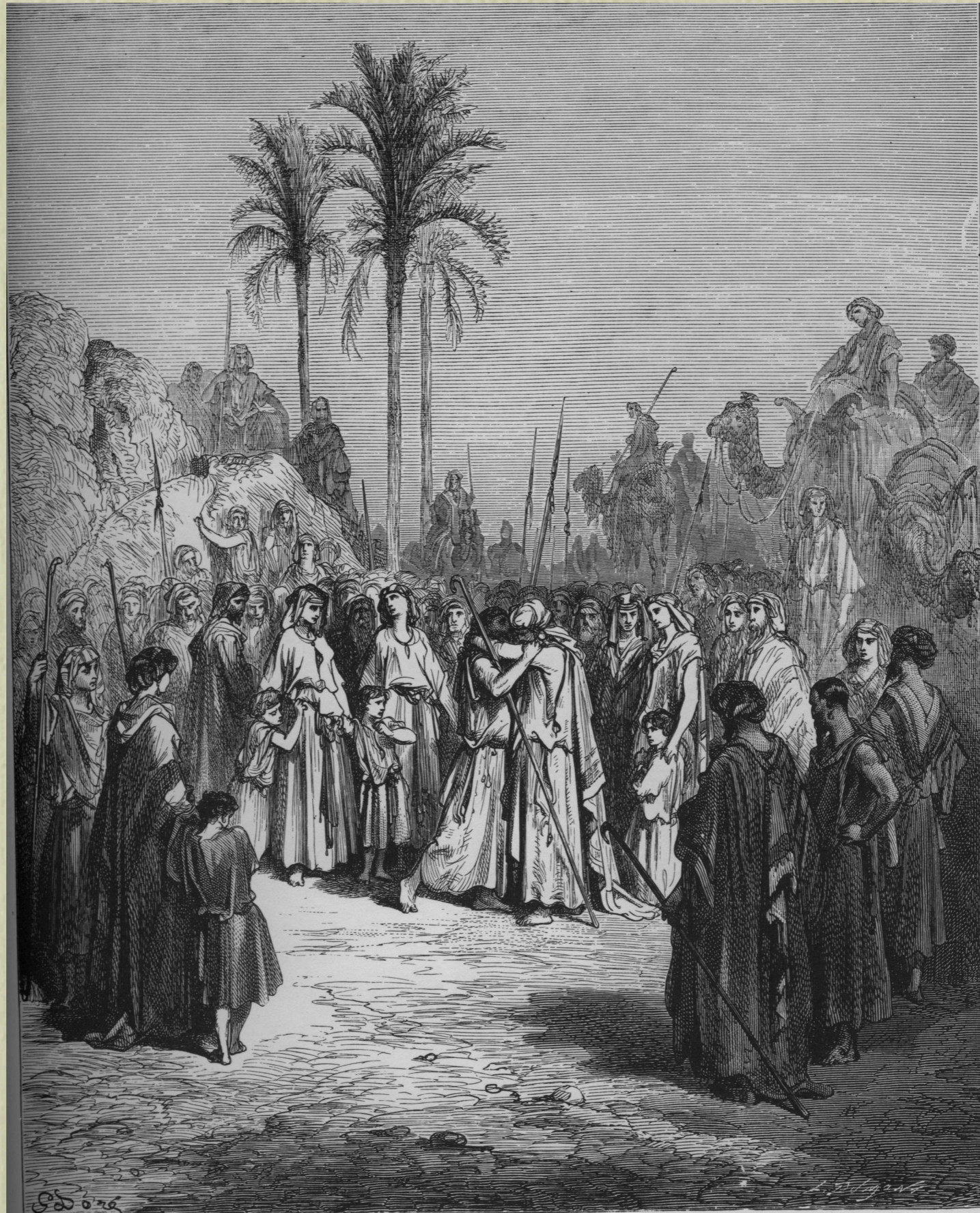
Last time they were together, 22 years earlier, Esau swore he would kill Jacob!

Rebekah had been told that ‘the elder the younger will serve’ (25:23). In the blessing given by Isaac to Jacob, Jacob was told: ‘Rule over your brothers, and may your mother’s son bow down to you’ (27:29).

All is now reversed. Esau has the blessing that was his right.

Five times Jacob addresses Esau as ‘My lord’, and twice speaks of himself as Esau’s ‘servant’.

At the Jabbok river Jacob found his true identity. He has the covenant blessing, children and land (28:3-4) Here he is giving back the blessing he stole many years before. The only blessing Jacob needs is his own, the one God wants for him.



7. Jacob arrives at Shechem Genesis 33:17-20

Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth. Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city. And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for one hundred pieces of money the plot of land on which he had pitched his tent. There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

Conclusion

The surface narrative follows the logic of the saga. Isaac dies. One son, Jacob, outwits the other, Esau, and wins.

The counter-narrative subverts the expected story with its rivalry, displacement, anger, violence, revenge

Jacob wrestles with God, with the other, and with himself. He comes to realise that his true blessing is given by God. He has no need of disguise or deception.

Israel is called, not to wealth and power, but to covenant

‘You are passing by the borders of your brothers,
the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir.

Although they fear you, be very careful not to provoke them.

I will not give you even so much as a foot’s length of their land,
since I have given Mount Seir as Esau’s inheritance’(Deuteronomy 2:4-5).

The choice of Jacob does not mean the rejection of Esau.

Each is precious in God’s eyes.

‘The people of the covenant must wrestle, as did Jacob, in the depths of the soul to discover the face, the name and the blessing that is theirs. Before Jacob could be at peace with Esau and himself, he had to overcome mimetic desire, abandon sibling rivalry and learn that he was not Esau but Israel – one who wrestles with God and never let’s go.’

(Jonathan Sacks ‘Not in God’s Name’. Hodder&Stoughton 2015, 143).

8. Trouble at Shechem Genesis 34

1. Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, has intercourse with Jacob's daughter, Dinah. He loves her and wants to marry her (34:1-12).
2. Dinah's brothers agree provided all males agree to circumcision. (34:13-24)
3. Simeon and Levi attack and slaughter all the males. They plunder the city and take all the animals. Jacob is unhappy. "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household" (34:25-31)

9. Jacob at Bethel Genesis 35

Jacob goes to Bethel in obedience to God (35:1-8)

Genesis 35:9-13

‘God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him. God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he was called Israel. God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” Then God went up from him at the place where he had spoken with him.’

10. Genesis 35:16-20

‘Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labour. When she was in her hard labour, the midwife said to her, “Do not be afraid; for now you will have another son.” As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni (‘son of my sorrow’); but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar at her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel’s tomb, which is there to this day.’

Reuben revolts against Jacob by having intercourse with one of Jacob’s concubines. His attempt to take over power fails (35:21-22).

11. Death of Isaac

‘Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had resided as aliens. Now the days of Isaac were one hundred eighty years. And Isaac breathed his last; he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.’(35:27-29).

12. Descendants of Esau Genesis 36