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WRESTLING WITH GOD:
JACOB’S REPENTANCE AND RECONCILIATION

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INTRODUCTION

The God created the universe and human beings and he found them good. And God appointed human beings as his stewards over his entire creation. For, it was God’s design that human beings live in communion and intimacy with the Creator and among themselves, and be in harmony with the whole creation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church names this as a “state of holiness and justice” (cf. CCC. 375). But enticed by the evil one human beings sinned against God; and as a result human beings lost their state of holiness and justice. The consequence of sin was instantly felt by them: They lost their intimacy with God and with each other, and the harmony between human beings and the universe got broken. However, the loving God did not abandon them. On the contrary, he tried to reconcile human beings with him by entering into covenant relationship with the fallen humanity. God made with Abraham his first covenant which was later passed on to his legitimate descendants.

Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, whose story is under discussion, is chosen by God as the bearer of the patriarchal covenant. However, the life history of Jacob was not at all good; rather it was full of deceit, treachery and disintegration of families, a story muddled with sin and confusion. This is evident even before his birth. Jacob and his brother Esau struggle in the womb of their mother (Gen.25:22). It appears, at times, as if God has washed his hands. But as one reads the story, one could not be more wrong. Shakespeare has a line in Hamlet:

“There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will” (Hamlet Act V). This line perhaps could be an excellent description of the life of Jacob; for the shaping hands of God was, in fact, working in the life of Jacob, shaping him, correcting him and moulding him into a person worthy for bearing God’s covenant. Jacob’s story is also a wonderful illustration of how God deals with covenant people. God’s election of the deceiving and crafty Jacob as the bearer of his covenant is, in fact, to convey the message that reconciliation or salvation is not the work of man but of God.

Genesis 32-33 deals about the reconciliation or reunion of the two brothers. This reconciliation episode of both the rival brothers could be summed under three points: the fear

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1 “The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. The invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence” (cf. GS. 19§1). “Man lives a fully human life only if he freely lives by his bond with God” (cf. CCC, 44).

of meeting Esau, the need of meeting God and the restoration of relationship. This paper has four chapters. The first chapter deals with Jacob’s preparation to encounter with Esau: At the command of God Jacob returns to his homeland after twenty years. Jacob sends at first messengers to Esau thinking time might have cured the enmity. But as he receives the message that Esau is coming with 400 men to him, he is terrified. In great panic he divides his camp, prays to God and finally he strategizes to appease Esau with a large sum of gifts.

The second chapter is about the Wrestling between Jacob and the mysterious man at Jabbok, in which the man dislocates Jacob’s thigh just by a gentle touch. However, Jacob does not give up. In spite of his dislocated thigh, he holds on his antagonist and asks for his blessing. In that Jacob prevails against the man in a rather mysterious way; not by his strength or deception but by the genuine confession of his true identity and by earnest and persistent prayer for blessing. In response the man blesses him with a new name, **Israel**, suggesting his transformation. Soon Jacob realizes that it was God with whom he was wrestling the whole night, yet he survived. This perhaps gives him the assurance that God is with him and he will protect him to face Esau on the following day.

The third chapter deals with Jacob’s encounter with Esau. The Peniel experience blessed Jacob not only with courage but also with humility. A miraculous reconciliation between both the brothers takes place with a climax scene of reunion: while Jacob limps and walks bowing seven times to Esau, Esau runs, throw his arms around Jacob, falls on Jacob’s neck and kisses him, and both embrace and weep. Jacob could not believe himself how the things turned out to be in his favour, except relating the meeting with his encounter with the divine mysterious man on the night, which turned out to be a great blessing. However, both peacefully separate from each other to different directions as their goals and destinies for life are different.

The fourth chapter deals with God reconciling human being in Christ. The driving force for God’s reconciliation with sinners is his love, which is manifested in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the personification of God’s love and forgiveness. Therefore, it is in Christ human beings have their reconciliation with God. God has in Christ reconciled the world once and for all. However, this reconciliation is realised in the individual by opting for Christ through repentance for one’s sins and by believing in Jesus and his message. And once a person enters into this relationship he/she is entrusted with the message of reconciliation for the world as ambassadors for Christ in the world, beseeching men and women to open their mind and heart for the gospel of reconciliation.
CHAPTER - I
JACOB PREPARES TO RECONCILE WITH ESAU

Introduction:

As Jacob departs from Canaan to escape from Esau, God appears to him in a dream and promises His blessing – I am with you, I will protect you, I will bring you back to this land and I will not leave you until I have done all I have spoken to you (28:13-15). Holding on to God’s unconditional promise, he enters Paddan-aram as a fugitive. In fact this promise of God is the agenda in the following few chapters, in which God’s project is to make Jacob into Israel. Chapters 29-30 are the records of his twenty eventful years in the household of Laban, and Jacob summarises this twenty years in two speeches to his wives and to Laban (cf.ch.31).

These twenty years are also a period of transformation in Jacob’s life. If one describes it in a pastoral term it would be a period of progressive sanctification in his life. Derek Kinder describes: “In Laban Jacob met his match and his means of discipline. Twenty years (31:41) of drudgery and friction were to weather his character.”3 The two speeches of Jacob provide number of indications to the changes and spiritual growth that have been taking place in Jacob – he has become more and more God-conscious, God-dependent and God-obedient. He recognizes and acknowledges that it is God, who had protected him from Laban. “If the God my father… had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labour of my hand, and rebuked you last night (31:42).”

So Jacob sees clearly that God has kept his promise, and now it is his turn to fulfil his vow (31:13; 28:20-22). Therefore, in obedience to God’s command (31:3) Jacob sets out for his homeland. But entering into his homeland would mean confronting Esau, who suffered Jacob’s deceptions. Therefore, Jacob needs to prepare carefully now in order to win the heart of Esau, his brother and settle the past frictions between them. So Jacob prepares very meticulously. His preparation consists of three stages: 1. sending message to Esau, 2. praying to God for the deliverance, and 3. sending present to Esau.

Kinder summarises this beautifully: “In Jacob’s pilgrimage, the way to the heights now led through a valley of humiliation which he made no attempt to skirt. Geographically, the call to Beth-el would take him nowhere near Esau, ensconced in the far south at Mount Seir; spiritually, he could reach Beth-el no other way. God has promised him the land (28:13, 14), and its borders must march one day with Esau’s; besides, to meet God he must ‘first be reconciled’ with his brother.”

1.1. Jacob is met by the Angels of God vv.1-3 [31: 55-32:2]:

The encounter of the angels of God with Jacob on his way back to his homeland in 32:2-3 serves on the one hand as a conclusion to Jacob-Laban Episode and on the other hand as an introduction to the Jacob-Esau Episode II. This short narrative is considered to be from the Elohist tradition. It mentions that Jacob was returning to the Promised Land in the presence of God’s angels. But the singular use of the term mahaneh in Jacob’s exclamation – “this is God’s army,” and the dual form mahanaim in naming the place suggests that the use of the dual in the naming of the place is probably based on an independent ancient tradition.

The reason for combining two different texts could be due to the importance of the name of the city mahanaim in Israel’s history and “the theological relevance of the tradition about Jacob’s encounter with God’s realm, or God’s camp (mahaneh elohim).” Another possible reason could be assimilating the word with Jacob’s division of his possessions into two camps (lisne mahanot). However, the expression, mahaneh elohim zeh! (v.3), indicates that the name is meant to be singular.

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4 Ibid., 167.
5 Eugene H. Maly, “Genesis,” in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, ed. Raymond E. Brown, et al. (Wimbledon: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 33, col.1. F.N. Yoreh argues that vv.2-3a is neither a parallel to Gen.32:1 (“he (Laban) departed and returned home”) nor an introduction to the rest of the narrative (vv.4-23), which also focus on “camps.” Instead, vv. 2-3a forms the introduction to the Elohist story of Jacob’s encounter with a shadowy man on the bank of the Jabbok river (vv.24-30). It thus becomes clear that Jacob wrestled with one of the Angels of vv. 2-3a. cf. Jeremy M. Hutton, “Jacob’s ‘two Camps’ and Transjordanian Geography,” in ZAT 122/1 (2010), 21f.
6 Cf. Joze Krasovec, The Transformation of Biblical Proper Names (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 24. Mahanaim was a town of Gad (cf. Josh. 21:38; 1Ch. 6: 80 MT. 65), located east of the Jordan. It was the second royal administrative centre of Gilead, mentioned in 1Kgs 4:14. It is the place, where King David took refuge from his revolting son Absalom (2 Sam. 17:24, 27). Though the historical value of these reports cannot be verified, it was regarded as a place suitable for taking refuge in case of danger. Cf. Edward Lipinski, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta: On the Skirts of Canaan in the Iron Age, Historical and Topographical Researches (Louvain: Peters & Faculty of Oriental Studies, 206), 280.
7 Krasovec, The Transformation of Biblical Proper Names, 24.
8 Ibid. The Vulgate uses a plural in both parts of the sentence: castra Dei sunt haec / Manaim id est Castra.
The Parallels between Mahanaim and Bethel Encounter:

Many scholars and commentators have observed strong parallels between the angels’ encounter with Jacob at Mahanaim (32:2-3) and Jacob’s dream at Bethel (28:10-22), because both the incidents share several elements of language and style. For example: The expression “the angels of God” (malake elohim) occurs only in 32:2 and in 28:12 in the whole of the Old Testament. There is the use of the Hebrew word paga be in both (28:11 “reached/came to” 32:2 “met”). In both the encounters the angels appear but they remain silent, and at the end of both the visions/encounters Jacob names the places: the former as Bethel and the latter as Mahanaim. These factors suggest that the two passages are obviously correlated.

But the difference between Bethel incident and Mahanaim incident are: First, at Bethel God Himself promises Jacob that he will be with him, but at Mahanaim Jacob is not given any message, neither from God nor from the angels. Second, the kind of language and terms (such as paga be and mahane) used to describe the event in vv.2-3. For the verb pg could mean either hostile encounter or an accidental meeting. The noun Mahaneh is formed from verb stem hnh, which means to set up a camp or encamp, and the noun form refers often to army camp. Therefore, it is not quite evident whether the encounter with the messengers of God has a hostile or an amicable implication.

According to C. Houtman Mahaneh is the encampment of the messengers/angels of God, from where they go out to fulfil the task of their Master. He adds further, “in the light of xxviii 10-12 it is obvious that a hostile sense of pg + be is excluded.” Therefore, Houtman concludes that the encampment was peaceful in nature. Waltke assumes that the angels that met Jacob as he left the Promised Land (28:10-22) met him also on his return. Therefore, it is “a sign to Jacob of God’s protective presence and the fulfilment of God’s promise, ‘I am with

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11 Ibid.
12 The verb pg, which appears 46 times in the Old Testament, could mean arrive, meet, reach, kill, make intercession or place/lay. Of the 46 occurrences of the verb, 26 are in the Qal stem with the preposition be, as in the construction in 32:2. Cf. Michael A. Grisanti, “pg,” in *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol.3, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, et al. (Cumbria: Paternoster, 1997), 575.
13 The word mahaneh occurs especially during the wilderness wanderings and times of war, where the army had to move frequently and quickly. Israel believed that God, their divine warrior, was in their midst in the camp. Cf. Temper Longman, “mahanneh,” in *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol.2, ed. William A. VanGemeren et al., (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997), 918.
15 Cf. Ibid.
you’ (28:15), even he faces Esau.” He also adds a vertical dimension to the story saying that before Jacob settle his case with Esau, Jacob has to settle his case at first with God. Describing this event from the perspective of Jacob, Georg Fischer says: “Jakob steht in dieser Diskrepanz zwischen Wirklichkeit (hier durch den Erzähler geschildert) und eignen, verzerrender Wahrnehmung und Benennung:”

Thus, it seems that through the Mahanaim incident the narrator tries to introduce to the readers a deeper theological dimension to the Esau-Jacob-Reconciliation episode. And that is God’s assistance and presence in the act of reconciliation between men. With this assurance of God’s presence Jacob can now take courage to contact Esau.

1.2. The First Phase of Preparation: Sending Messengers vv.4-6 [3-5]:

After twenty years of his sojourn in Laban’s house, Jacob sets out for Canaan at the command of God, but he is not certain, if Esau had forgiven him. Therefore, the unresolved conflict between the brothers surfaces again in his mind; and it begins to haunt him. Gerhard Von Rad says, “Jacob clearly feels that the matter has not improved at all during his twenty years absence.” However, being encouraged by the presence of the angels/messengers of God at Mahanaim, Jacob takes the first step to contact Esau through messengers. Fokkelman observes “Jacob organises this mission so formally and solemnly because now it is all-important to him that the first impression made on Esau should be as correct as possible.” Therefore, he takes minute care in taking each and every step, and the basic thrust of this mission is to win Esau’s favour.

1.2.1. The Method and the Message:

The method that Jacob adopts to contact Esau seems to reflect God’s way of contacting Jacob as portrayed in vv.2-3. The narrator’s descriptions of the destination of the messengers as

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17 Cf. *Ibid*.
the land of Se’ir \[23\], the country \[24\] of Edom \[25\] identify the features of Esau; and they also remind the readers “the three sources of tension between the brothers – birth, birthright, and blessing.” \[26\] Thus, they also indicate the fear and the tension in Jacob concerning Esau that Esau has not yet forgiven and forgotten Jacob’s deception. \[27\]

The contents of the message in vv.5-6 \[6-5\] also give evidence to the fear and tension in Jacob concerning Esau. The contents of the message are brief and only the essential, and the purpose of them is to “find favour” in Esau’s sight. \[28\] This conciliatory message of Jacob acknowledging the self as servant to Esau, and Esau as his lord, is meant to convey Esau that Jacob does not consider himself superior to Esau and he has no desire to rule over him. The mention of his wealth in the message is meant to convey of his disclaiming of the family inheritance. His shrewd summery about his twenty years stay in the house of Laban as an alien is perhaps to arouse pity in the heart of Esau and also to make clear to Esau that his stay with Laban was only temporary. \[29\] In the message it is quite clearly implied that the blessing of Isaac – the elder was to serve the younger (27:29), have been clearly turned the other way round. Thus, in his message there is an admission of his fault -“his actions have brought him in diametrical contrast to his destiny.” \[30\]

The purpose of the mission - “that I may find favour in your sight,” is placed at the last in order to create a lasting and the desired impression on Esau. “In fact, that is the only possible things left to restore the relationship” \[31\] By using the phrase “to find favour” \((li\ \text{misah}\ \text{hen})\) Jacob wants to present himself as an inferior before Esau. By using such expressions, he is appealing to Esau for his generosity and good will, so that the rift between them might be healed. \[32\]

Jacob’s flight to Paddan-aram was only a temporary solution to escape from the imminent threat. His twenty years absence has only put the matter under the carpet, but has not solved

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23 Seir recalls earlier references to Esau being hairy, both at birth \((se\text{’ar}25:25)\), and later in life \((sa\text{’ir}\ 27:11)\). Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis Chapter* 18-50, 320.
24 The reference to the country \((se\text{ eh})\) of Edom recalls earlier references to Esau as a “man of the field” \((is\ sadeh,\ 25:27)\) and one who hunted in the field \((hassadeh,\ 25:29)\). Cf. Ibid.
25 The reference to Edom recalls the redness associated with Esau’s appearance at his birth \((adomoni,\ 25:25)\) and his attraction to the “red stuff” \((adom,\ 25:30)\) that Jacob was preparing. Cf. Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Cf. Ibid.
30 Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 200.
31 Ibid., 201.
it. Therefore, his appearance in front of Esau would only remind Esau of his agony and
disappointment that he had endured because of Jacob’s deception; and therefore, it could
reopen the conflict once again. Therefore, the circumstances would demand an early solution
before Jacob comes face-to-face with Esau. The first and immediate solution would be that
the offender had to amend the loss of the offended. Therefore, as a first step he surrenders his
lordship by acknowledging himself as thy servant, and Esau as my lord. However, the deceit
itself cannot be retrieved therefore he needs to request for mercy from the offended. The
message that Jacob sends through his emissary is one of such request, asking Esau indirectly
his favour (hen).

1.2.2. The Return and the Reporting of the Messengers v.7 [6]:

The enigma and the suspense in the episode is intensified with the returning of the
messengers, who bring no word from Esau, but simply report that Esau is on his way to meet
him with four hundred men. Wenham remarks, “The messengers’ return is eerie, for they
bring no reply from Esau but simply reply that he is on his way with four hundred men.”
This makes Jacob all the more perplexed and terrified because it is not clear to Jacob, what
the intention of Esau is: Is he coming to welcome or attack? The absence of any message from
Esau heightens the suspense in the story. Commenting on this verse Kinder says, “Nothing
could be more ominous than Esau’s silence and his rapid approach.”

The messengers’ words, “he is (already) coming to meet you” (wagam holek liqrateka) are
ambiguous. It could mean just to meet as in Gen. 24:65, but it could also be taken in a hostile
sense with the intention of harming a person. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the verb halak
with the infinitive qara with prefixed preposition le is used to describe a situation fraught with
danger (1Kgs. 20:27; 2Kgs. 23:29). Moreover, the accompaniment of four hundred men
with Esau does not sound to be good. Abraham assembled 318 men for a rescue mission to
chase down the kings of the East (Gen 14:14). David’s army consisted of four to six hundred
confederates only (1Sam. 22:2; 25:13; 27:2; 30:9). Therefore, Jacob fears that the intention

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34 Kinder, *Genesis*, 168.
of Esau “is a search-and-destroy mission.”\textsuperscript{37} Probably Jacob must be recalling at this moment the words of his father Isaac (blessing) to Esau “By your sword you shall live” 27:40.\textsuperscript{38}

But the ambiguity in this event is, if Esau intended to attack Jacob, why did he let his messengers return unharmed? He could have killed them and made a surprising attack on Jacob, which could be easier and would make Jacob even more vulnerable.\textsuperscript{39} But still this argument does not solve the ambiguity. Probably Esau “wants to create a cat-and-mouse-situation via the messengers”\textsuperscript{40} because Esau is by profession a hunter, who may like to have a face-to-face encounter than just attacking from behind. One could also assume that Esau might be intending to produce remorse-fear in Jacob as Joseph did with his brothers, when they went to buy grain from Egypt (Gen. 44).\textsuperscript{41}

Whatever could be the intention of Esau, one could assume the following from the narrator’s point of views: firstly the narrator wants to maintain and to raise step by step the suspense of the story in order to arouse curiosity in the readers; and secondly, more than curiosity he wants to emphasise the most important event in the life of Jacob that is going to take place.

1.2.3. The Reactions of Jacob to the Report of the Messengers vv.8-9 [7-8]:

In Jacob’s perception the approach of Esau seems very dangerous and threatening. This perception could be due to his guilt conscience, which has its root in the amount of anguish that he caused to his brother and to their father (27:33-34).\textsuperscript{42} Therefore, the reaction of Jacob at the report is one of great fear and anxiety, which is highlighted in the text with the string of verbs in close order “Jacob was greatly afraid … distressed … divided” v.8 [7].\textsuperscript{43}

The mention of Jacob dividing his “people” in “two camps” in v.8b [7b], before he divides his flocks, herds and camels into two camps reveals that his first concern was for his family.\textsuperscript{44} His strategy to divide his family and his property into two camps\textsuperscript{45} is with the intention of saving

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Cf. Hamilten, \textit{Genesis 18-50}, 322.
\item Fokkelman, \textit{Narrative Art in Genesis}, 201.
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, 550.
\item The idea for dividing the family and the flock might have come to him from the event at Mahanaim, but by his actions he has been divider in the family from the beginning. Cf. Fokkelman, \textit{Narrative Art in Genesis}, 202.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
at least one if anything worst falls upon them.⁴⁶ According to Fokkelman’s opinion this is “no more than an emergency dressing….It is a poor stratagem: one half of the troop is to be jeopardized for the salvation of the other.”⁴⁷ Hamilton comments, “In splitting his family into two camps Jacob creates cleavage among his own for the second time. For Jacob’s family has already been divided into two camps: one represented by Esau and Isaac, the other by Lea and Rebekah.”⁴⁸

In normal relationship people are sometimes subjected to misperception, fear and anxiety either due to one’s own selfish behaviour or reservation/prejudice about others. Such psychological and social factors and misperceptions would continue to prevail and hinder the interpersonal relationship till one faces the situation through proper channels with the person concerned; and try to heal the hurting past even if they are somehow buried under the carpet, because they will consciously or unconsciously influence our behaviour pattern with the concerned party time and again. How often relationships are hurt and people are divided in pursuit after material advancement, positions, name and fame? If a conflict is not properly addressed in due course of time, it would pave way for further divisions in the family, friendship and neighbourhood as in Jacob’s case. Thus, Jacob has to face his past, but with a new approach and motive and that will cost him a lot, even his personal prestige and position.

1.3. The Second Phase of Preparation: The Prayer of Jacob vv.9-12 [10-13]:

Jacob seems to have reached the limits of his self-reliance and he is running short of ideas. This moment seems to him as the most vulnerable in his life. He seems to understand that the division of his family and his property into two camps is not a good idea. Therefore he turns to God in prayer, whose constant presence and protection he has experienced from the time of his departure from Canaan till the recent theophany at Mahanaim.⁴⁹ His prayer is essentially a prayer for deliverance from the imminent danger and it is the longest recorded prayer in the book of Genesis.⁵⁰ It should be noted that till now it is God who had been taking the initiative to keep in contact with Jacob, but here is for the first time Jacob takes the initiative to meet God. For this reason and for its theological significance these three versus are the most

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⁴⁷ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 201.
important part in his preparation to meet Esau.  

According to G. von Rad, “This prayer is extremely significant for the whole Jacob story, as the Yahwist wanted it to be understood. It is a sign that the narrator, in spite of all the intricacy of the transactions in which Jacob was constantly involved, still did not lose sight of Jacob’s relationship to God. One will not be wrong if one interprets this prayer also as the expression of a purification taking place in Jacob.”

1.3.1. The Source Analysis of the Text:

The reference to the Jordan in v.11 suggests that the prayer is a later development of Yahwist’s story, because in the context, the reference would have been to the Jabbok River (cf. v.23). By this prayer, Yahwist has artfully united all the traditions concerning Jacob’s earlier and later life. Westermann holds that it is largely a late insertion into the story and the original text of the prayer is v.12 only; he considers vv.10-11, 13 to be expansions because the starting (wa amar yakob “and Jacob said”) in v.10 seems to be a poor introduction to a prayer and therefore redaction. Hermann Gunkel observes that vv.10-13 differs from the preceding versus; and he gives the following reasons: First, in the preceding passages the shrewdness of Jacob is highlighted, but here all of a sudden a deep religious sentimentality is attached to Jacob. Second, the prayer also interprets the division into “two camps” somewhat differently than the preceding (vv.8, 9). Third, the reference to the Jordan contrasts to Jabbok (cf. v.23). Fourth, the passage employs motifs and expressions from vv.4-9, therefore it stems from Yahwist’s tradition.

1.3.2. An Examination on Jacob’s Prayer:

The prayer of Jacob is basically a prayer for deliverance from the hand of Esau, whom, he thinks, is set out to destroy him and his whole progeny. George W. Coats sub-divides the prayer into four components: 1. Invocation, 2. Self-abasement, 3. Petition and 4. Reason.

The prayer begins with an invocation that places responsibility for the conflict on God. “The invocation first connects the name Yahweh with the God of patriarchs, than expands the name

52 Cf. Wenham, Genesis 16-50, 290.
53 Rad, Genesis, 318.
with a participial clause citing God’s command to Jacob to return to Canaan.”\textsuperscript{58} The second part highlights the unworthiness of Jacob as against the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. In the third part, which is actually the essence of the prayer, Jacob asks for God’s intervention to deliver him. The fourth part presents his fear and God’s promise as the reasons for his prayer.

1.3.2.1. Intercession v.10 [9]:

The prayer begins with intercession, and the intercession is deeply rooted on the foundation of YHWH’s covenant, command and promise.\textsuperscript{59} Jacob addresses God as the God of the covenant: “God of my father Abraham and God my father Isaac.” This form of addressing God expresses the historical and covenantal relationship that Jacob has with God by virtue of his fathers.\textsuperscript{60} Thus, he invokes God indirectly that he is the progeny of patriarchal covenant and promise; therefore, he is entitled to God’s favour and protection.\textsuperscript{61} Secondly, he reminds God that “his present predicament is the result of obeying the divine command”\textsuperscript{62} – “Return to the Land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with your” (31:3). Thus, he reminds YHWH that it is His duty to make safe his journey to the Promised Land. According to Brueggemann, “Jacob asserts that the entire matter of homecoming has been God’s idea, not his. (In 27:43, clearly the idea of flight was that of neither Jacob nor Yahweh, but Rebekah. But the larger sojourn of Abraham was indeed in response to the call of YHWH. The same device of reminder is used by Moses in Num. 11:11-15 to motivate YHWH to act).”\textsuperscript{63} Thirdly, he reminds God of the promise, made to him at Bethel by God Himself, pertaining to His protection and ultimate restoration to his homeland (28:15; 31:3).

Here, Jacob’s changing of the words of the promise of God – “I will be with you” (28:15; 31:3) into “I will do you good” (vv.10 and 13 [9 and 12]) has raised different interpretation by scholars on the motive of his prayer: some commentators suggest that Jacob, despite his dire situation, continues to manipulate God whenever he can.\textsuperscript{64} But many other eminent scholars

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 226.
\textsuperscript{59} Cf. Kidner, Genesis, 168.
\textsuperscript{60} Cf. Mathew, Genesis 11:27-50:26, 551.
\textsuperscript{61} Cf. Augustine Pagolu, The Religion of the Patriarchs (Sheffield: Mansion House, 1998), 114.
\textsuperscript{62} Wenham, Genesis, 291.
\textsuperscript{63} Brueggemann, Genesis, 264.
such as Westermann, Wenham, etc hold that in his prayer Jacob has only paraphrased the promise of God; and there is no intention of manipulating of God from the part of Jacob. 65

1.3.2.2. Self-abasement v.11 [10]:

Jacob now humbles himself and acknowledges God’s steadfast kindness and faithfulness, and his unworthiness, by describing himself qatonti (I am small/unworthy). The term qatonti connotes that he lacks legal credentials to make any claim, and implies that he is totally dependent on another for his welfare. 66 In 27:15, 42 Jacob was described as “the younger” (haqatan), a status, against which he struggled all through. But now he admits voluntarily the status of littleness. He had already acknowledged his littleness before Esau through his messengers by acknowledging the self as “your servant Jacob” (v.5 [4]), and now before God he acknowledges himself as “thy servant” (v.11 [10]). Fokkelman says, “On one and the same day in his life he asks his brother for mercy, as a servant asks his lord, and he confesses to be dependent on God’s hessed and aemet, as a servant of God.” 67 Commenting on this verse Mann Wryly says, “If there is a moment of righteousness in Jacob’s life, it is surely here, where he acknowledges that the blessing he enjoys is not one he has earned, but the gift of a gracious God.” 68 Saul, David and Solomon expressed the same sentiment of unworthiness at their selection as king by God (1Sam. 9:21; 15:17; 2Sam. 7:19; 1Kgs. 3:7). This self-description of Jacob as little is also a description of the nation Israel (cf. Amos. 7:2, 5). 69

The concepts “Kindness” (hessed) and “faithfulness” (aemet) often occur together in the Bible 70 and often they stand for a strong relational commitment among human or between God and man. 71 But if the word is used in plural in Hebrew (hassadim), as it is here, it expresses depth and intensity of the relation. 72 When Jacob says “I am not worthy of all the steadfast love and faithfulness which thou hast shown,” he acknowledges that he could not have accomplished anything at all if God was not by him. Thus, his statement expresses not only his total acknowledgement of God’s goodness to him, but also witnesses his sincere humility in front of God’s greatness.

67 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 302.
70 Cf. Ex. 34:6; Josh. 2:14; 2 Sam. 2:6; Ps 115:1; Prov. 3:3.
71 Cf. Ibid., 336.
72 Cf. Ibid., 551.
By admitting himself before God as “thy servant,” he submits himself before God as Abraham (Gen. 18:3, 5); Moses (Ex. 4:10) and David (2Sam. 7:19, 25). This acknowledgement also indicates his future role in the history of the nation Israel and God’s plan. By this status the author presents Jacob as a model for Israel, as the servant of YHWH. By acknowledging his servant status before God Jacob is also reminding God of His responsibility towards His servant. As he mentions in his prayer – “for with only staff I crossed this Jordan” in v.11b (10b), he recalls the poverty he suffered when he fled from his country. He hoped only for sustenance to survive (28:20-21), but God had bountifully blessed him beyond his imagination. (31:9-13; 33:5-11). By mentioning “staff” and “Jordan” the narrator wants perhaps to remind the readers/listeners the Passover scene in Ex 12:11 and the wandering of the Israel in camps in the desert and the struggle in order to enter the Promised Land.

1.3.2.3. Petition for Deliverance v.12a [11a]:

The prayer reaches its culmination in v.12 [11], with the abrupt imperative, “deliver me.” The verb here is not the same as in the prayer of Hezekiah (Is. 37:15-20). It is nsl (snatch). The verb is used elsewhere in referring to snatching someone desperately from the fire (Amos. 4:11; Zech. 3:2) or to snatch someone from the paw of a lion (1Sam. 17:37). Thus, his prayer emphasises the urgency and desperation of the situation. The same verb is also used in 31:9, 16 to describe God’s action: by taking from what is Labans and giving it to Jacob. In his cry Jacob is also reminiscent of the psalmists’ laments. The repetition “from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau,” reinforces that he is being held firmly in the grasp of Esau. Therefore, it implies that only God can rescue him from his adversary.

73 Cf. Shreiner, „Das Gebet Jakobs“, 300.
74 Cf. Fischer, Der Jakobs Weg der Bibel, 68.
76 The expression “I crossed this Jordan; and now I have two companies” does not fit into the context of the story because Jacob is not standing before the Jordan but before the Jabbok. This indicates that this is a later addition to the text. Cf. Schreiner, „Das Gebet Jakobs,” 301.
78 Cf. Ibid. The word nsl is widely used of rescuing a victim, as when David snatched a sheep from the jaws of a wild animal (1Sam 17:35; cf. Amos 3:12). Cf. Mathew, Genesis 11:27-50:26, 552.
80 Cf. Mathew, Genesis 11:27-50:26, 552. miyyad (from the hand) could indicate the deliverance of Israel from the hand of Egyptians (Ex 3:8; 18:9f.). cf. Rupper, Genesis, 347.
1.3.2.4. The Reason for his Prayer v.12b [11b]:

His open confession of his fear on the imminent threat to his life and those around him – mothers and children, emphasises his utter helplessness and hopelessness. In v.9 [8] Jacob hoped to save at least half of his family and property, but here in v.12b [11b] he foresees the complete destruction.\(^{81}\) Referring to this verse Wenham comments “The idea that brother should kill brother should fill God with horror (cf. 4:2-14), and even more so that defenceless women and children should suffer (a perennial concern of the law and the prophets: Ex. 22:21 [22]; Deut. 14:29; Hos. 10:14; Mal. 3:5).”\(^{82}\) Jacobs’s prayer for deliverance implies that with the attack on Jacob and his camps the whole history of his descendants will come to an end,\(^{83}\) therefore, to let that to happen is incomprehensible for God. By mentioning divine promise once again at the conclusion of his prayer, the narrator intents to inform the readers that it is not merely a promise of personal salvation but rather the whole progeny of Jacob. Thus, in this prayer the narrator has beautifully woven the general patriarchal promise into the particular incident recorded.\(^{84}\) Jacob concludes his prayer by emphatically reminding God of his promise once again (v.13 [12]). Thus, he places his confidence upon God’s word.

The concluding words regarding promised offspring (as “the sand of the sea”) appears nowhere else in Jacob narrative, but resemble God’s words in 22:17, where God emphatically repeats and intensifies his promises to Abraham following the near sacrifice of Isaac, the climax of the Abraham-cycle.\(^{85}\) However, this metaphor should not be understood literally in numerical sense, but in the sense of the significance of his descendants, the nation Israel.

According to Schreiner: “Die Unzählbarkeit ist ein Hinweis auf die Größe und Bedeutung des Volkes. Der Vergleich mit dem Sand am Ufer des Meeres malt die unvorstellbare Menge, aber auch eine erdrückende Übermacht, gegen die ein Widerstand kaum möglich ist. So möchte sich Israel zweifellos gegenüber Edom sehen.”\(^{86}\)

\(^{81}\) Cf. Fokkelman, *Narrativ Art in Genesis*, 204.

\(^{82}\) Wenham, *Genesis*, 291. This verse indicates that Jacob prays here with the lament of Israel, who at the danger of Edom prayed to God for his protection (cf. Ps. 60). Cf. Schreiner, „Das Gebet Jakobs,“ 301.

\(^{83}\) Cf. Rupper, *Genesis*, 347.

\(^{84}\) Cf. Maly, “Genesis,” 33, col.2.


\(^{86}\) Schreiner, „Das Gebet Jakobs,“ 302.
1.3.4. Jacob’s Prayer as a Model Prayer:

The prayer in vv.10-13 [9-12] is the central and crucial text in the section on Jacob’s preparation to meet Esau (4-22 [3-21]). The prayer lays out an excellent insight into his faith journey. His previous record was – I will prevail with my shrewd strategies and cleaver planning. But his prayer demonstrates his change in his attitude, revealing, how far Jacob has come in his faith journey.\(^\text{87}\) It contains both theological and practical implications to Israel and others. It teaches, to whom a faithful/servant of the Lord should approach, when things go beyond one’s control and comprehension. It would be a great thing to go to God and sincerely pour out once case to him and plead for his intervention: “Lord, here I am in the very centre of thy will. You know the circumstances that have arisen. They are beyond me, but they are your responsibility, because I am right where you want me to be, right now.”\(^\text{88}\) So, take care of the situation and deliver me from it.

It also sheds light, how covenant people have approached God, when they were in great distress and faced with imminent destruction and crisis. Even before life and death situation Jacob does not waver in his confidence and faith in the promise of God. His prayer highlights the steadfast kindness and the faithfulness of God even in the midst of distress and life-threatening situation. Thus, Jacob stands here as a model for the Israelites and all believers in God that in dangers and difficulties one must not lose confidence but trust in God’s promise.\(^\text{89}\) Jacob’s acknowledgement of God’s steadfast love and faithfulness is a profound gesture of gratitude and his classical expression of humility – the feeling of unworthiness for God’s benefits, are great lessons, how one must approach God.\(^\text{90}\) Thus, the very structure of this prayer itself makes it the model, especially for prose prayers.\(^\text{91}\)

Through this passage the narrator tries to impart a message to Israel, since it refers to the flight and return, the occupation of the Promised Land is the work of God. Therefore, Israel should like the Patriarch depend on God and seek His help in prayer in order to enter, occupy and live peacefully in the Promised Land.\(^\text{92}\) Moreover, together with Yahwist context it could

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\(^{89}\) Cf. Rupper, *Genesis*, 348.


\(^{91}\) Cf. *Ibid*, cf. Is. 37:16ff.; Jer. 32:16ff.; 1Kgs. 8:23ff.; Dan. 9:4ff.; 1Macc. 4:30ff.; Tob. 3:2ff., 11ff.; Ps. 9; 16; 41; 44; etc.

\(^{92}\) Cf. Schreiner, „Das Gebet Jakobs,“ 303.
also be understood that the deliverance of Jacob from Esau plays an important role in the salvation history.

1.4. The Third Phase of Preparation: Sending Gift to Esau vv.14-22 [13-21]:

In his prayer Jacob had demonstrated his spiritual maturity and the change of his attitude. He is perhaps beginning to translate this changed attitude into action. In his prayer he poured out his sincere heart to God, but he received no answer or sign from God. So he decides to do, whatever he can to address the crisis personally, therefore, he returns again to his own devise. One could also assume that his devise could be a better method, which he could have drawn as fruit of his prayer and further reflection, to address the crisis. The devise consists of two important elements: 1. sending gifts for Esau, and 2. the specific instruction to the servants and the message to be delivered to Esau. The purpose of this dramatic presentation of gifts is designed to impress Esau and win his favour. Fokkelman describes this act of Jacob in the following words, “Now, after the prayer, the development continues for a whole phase. By verbalizing and thus facing his fear, by humbling himself before Yahweh, Jacob makes important progress towards humanization. He matures enough to see a solution more real and worthy of a human being, reconciliation with Esau.”

1.4.1. Source Analysis of the Text vv.14-22 [13-21]:

The source-critical analysis of Gen. 32-33 ascribes 32, 14b-22 to Elohist tradition. This Elohist account of Jacob’s preparation lays out an alternative plan of Jacob, one different from the Yahwist account in vv.4-6 [3-5]. According to Elohist tradition Jacob instead of dividing his company into two camps, plans to present Esau with a lavish gift expecting that Esau will be appeased by the gifts and will forgive Jacob. The boundary of this unit is been indicated by phrase - “he lodged (there) that night (in the camp)” (vv.14, 22 [13, 21]), which suggests that it comes from a different tradition.

93 Cf. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 204.
1.4.2. **Jacob sends Gifts to Esau 14-16 [13-15]**

After a good and sincere prayer Jacob takes new recourse to pacify his brother through another diplomatic means. This time he sends him “present” (*minhah*) to appease him. The present is a substantial number of animals: “two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten he-asses” (v.15 [14]). “The breath and number of the animals selected evidences how lucrative Jacob’s sojourn in Padan-aram had been (cf. 30:43). All the animals included were valuable stock, especially the female and young that would provide prospective herds,”\(^\text{96}\) because four-hundred and ninety are female.\(^\text{97}\) Gunkel says, “ein kluger Mann dieser Jaqob, der so grosse Geschnke macht; sicherlich wird Esau dem nicht widerstehen können!"\(^\text{98}\) It is indeed an attempt by Jacob to pay back in kind for the loss and hurts caused to Esau in the past.\(^\text{99}\)

Commenting on this strategy of Jacob, Fokkelman writes, “Phase A (vv.2-13) can be characterized with an alliteration from the text itself: Jacob is far away from the *hen* he is in search of because of his *mahane*-position. Phase B (vv.14-22) proceeds with the alliterations. It is an important step towards the *hen* to use a *minha* instead of *mahane*.”\(^\text{100}\)

The word “present” is the central word in vv.14-22 [13-21].\(^\text{101}\) The Hebrew word for “present” is *Minha*, which (ca. 211x in Heb. and 2x in Aram.) is used in the cultic and non-cultic context. In the Old Testament it is often used in the cultic or in the religious context. In the cultic/religious context it is a general term for “offering,” which could be crops or flocks/herd (Gen. 4:3-5). In the non-cultic context it stands for “gift” or “present” between people in the ordinary sense; and in a special sense it stands for “tribute” owed to a superior in the political context (Judg. 3:15, 17, 18).\(^\text{102}\) According to Hamilton, “Jacob is not providing any tribute Esau has imposed on him; rather he is acting independently, trying as much as possible to win Esau’s good grace.”\(^\text{103}\)


\(^{100}\) Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 205.

\(^{101}\) Cf. *Ibid*.


\(^{103}\) Hamilton, *Genesis Chapter 18-50*, 325.
There have been differences of opinion on the sincerity or the morality of Jacob’s present to
Esau. H.J. Fabry considers that Jacob tries through these presents to buy the good will of
Esau. Fokkelman remarks, “The reconciliation Jacob now attempts is still impure, for it
reminds in fact an attempt to bribe Esau with gifts.” However, Westermann holds that this
act of Jacob demonstrates that Jacob is giving back the blessing that he has stolen by
deception. Therefore, one can conclude that it is a sincere sign of repentance in Jacob.

1.4.3. Instruction and Message to the Servants vv. 17-21 [16-20]:

Jacob takes very meticulously each and every step in order to obtain the right result – winning
Esau’s favour. He tries to overwhelm Esau with waves after wave of gifts. Each herd of
animals is entrusted to servants according to their kind. And each group of servants is given
the same instruction and the same message: “They belong to your servant Jacob; they are a
present sent to my lord Esau; and moreover, he is behind us.” John Skinner says “By
arranging the cattle in successive droves following at considerable intervals, Jacob hopes to
wear out Esau’s resentment by a series of surprises.”

Fokkelman says, “By determining the position of his shepherds (“before” me v.17b, 21b, 22a)
Jacob determines his own position, “behind you” (vv.19b, 21) therewith, however, Jacob has
betrayed his moral and psychological position in a revealing way.” These two propositions
of place and time, “before” and “after/behind,” prove to be an important pair of key-words in
the text. This indicates Jacob is beginning to relinquish his first position. The person, who had
previously sought first place “before” (lifne) others, now retreats to arrive behind (ahare).
The designations mentioned in the message: Jacob as Esau’s “servant” (your servant Jacob)
and Esau as “my lord” (my lord Esau) are meant to dissolve his anger and to find favour in his
sight.

In vv.21-22 some forms of the Hebrew word paneh (face) is used five times. In fact the word
“face” begins in v.16 - “pass on before me” (pass on before my face). According to Hamilton,

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104 Cf. Rupper, Genesis, 354.
105 Vrolijk, Jacob’s Wealth, 225.
106 Cf. Westermann, Genesis 16-36, 621. R.R. Reno holds a contrary view. He argues that Jacob cannot renounce
God’s promise and the future that God has assigned for him. Therefore, he cannot renounce the blessing received
107 Cf. Wenham, Genesis 16-50, 290.
109 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 205.
110 Cf. Ibid., 206.
the repeated use of the different forms of this term “face” in the text highlights a Jacob, who
would rather die than face his brother, secondly it prepares the reader for the following event
(vv.23-33), in which Jacob names the place peni el (face of God), where he had a mysterious
encounter with the mysterious man.\footnote{112} Thomas W. Mann says it is necessary that Jacob must
at first face the mysterious “man” before he faces Esau.\footnote{113}

1.4.4. The Purpose of the Present v.21-22:

There have been differences of opinion among the scholars about the morality of the motive
and the method of Jacob in presenting gifts to Esau. While some hold that it is a mere act of
appeasement to win the favour from Esau in order to save his life,\footnote{114} most other scholars hold
that the intention of Jacob is to reconcile with Esau and to win his forgiveness.\footnote{115} Jacob’s
purpose in sending the gift is that he might propitiate Esau. Hamilton observes that it is the
only time in the Old Testament that paneh, “face” is a direct object of kpr (lit. “cover”).\footnote{116}
The Hebrew verb kpr mean “to atone,” “to cover,” “to appease,” or “to bribe”. The verb
occurs 102 times in the Old Testament, mostly in the priestly ritual sections of Exodus –
Numbers (ca 73 x) and in other ritual passages strewn throughout the Old Testament.\footnote{117}
Therefore, the intention of Jacob seems to be reconciliation. Rad says, “In v.21 Jacob speaks
quite clearly that the purpose of his gifts for Esau is “reconciliation”.\footnote{118} Wenham suggests that
the cultic terms Jacob used including “gift” (minha, cereal offering), “atonement” (kipper),
and “accepted” (rasa 33:10) implies that Jacob makes peace with God by reconciling with
Esau.\footnote{119}

\footnote{112} Cf. Hamilton, Genesis 18-50, 326.
\footnote{113} Cf. Mann, The Book of the Torah, 60.
\footnote{114} Cf. Brueggemann, Genesis, 265f.; Fokkelmann, Narrative Art in Genesis, 206f.
\footnote{115} Cf. Westermann, Genesis 16-36, 622; Wenham, Genesis16-50, 292; cf. Hamilton, Genesis 18-50, 326; Rad,
Genesis, 319. Moreover, the repeated mention of Jacob’s servitude to Esau “your servant Jacob” and “my lord
Esau” emphasises the genuineness of his statement. Cf. Waltker, Genesis, 444.
\footnote{116} Kpr in Gen. 32:21; Exod. 21:30 and Prov. 16:14 meaning ransom for purposes of placating or mollifying. Cf.
Hamilton, Genesis 16-50, 326.
VanGemeren (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997), 690. Jacob’s language here resembles religious sacrifice (e.g.
“I will pacify his face... perhaps he will receive me”). It is no less appropriate to pacify an offended brother than
to appease an offended God. Cf. Waltker, Genesis, 444.
\footnote{118} Rad, Genesis, 319.
\footnote{119} Cf. Wenham, Genesis 16-50, 292. Jacob’s explicit mention “I may appease him with the present” (lit., “cover
his face,” and the use of the Hebrew term kappar which is often used for expiation of sin especially in the book
Leviticus makes it clear that the intention of Jacob is Reconciliation. Cf. Maly, “Genesis,” 34, col. 1.
1.4.5. Jacob in the Camp v.22b:

The section ends once again with the mentioning of the term “present” (minhah) and the “camp” (mahaneh). The use of these two words near to each other raises once again the suspicion in the mind of the reader – what is going to follow. Klein says that the word play of minha (present) and mahane (camp) brings out a double way of preparation in expression – at one side it represents a harmless gift and on the other side it indicates also a tension of battle. The mention of the term “camp” again in this section could be an introduction or preparation to the next episode – Jacob’s struggle with the mysterious man.

1.4.6. The Sincerity of Jacob’s Intention and Act:

The sincerity of Jacob’s method to achieve good will from Esau has been debated much by scholars. Some hold that it demonstrates his lack of faith and trust in God’s providence, which Jacob had demonstrated in his prayer in vv.10-13 [9-12]. Some even consider it as the re-surfacing of the old Jacob. But many scholars look at it as a genuine act of amendment paid back to the one, who incurred the loss because of his deception. Though the narration does not mention the morality or the immorality of his act, one thing, that stands out crystal clear in the story, is his desperate earning for the forgiveness and for the reconciliation from Esau. His act of offering present to Esau clearly demonstrates that he is paying the restitution for the pain and anguish, he had caused on Esau.

Commenting on this action of Jacob, R.R. Reno writes, “The future of the covenant rests in God’s hands, but this does not excuse us from undertaking our own efforts. Reconciliation depends upon God’s providence, but the divine plan calls for us to play an active role, rather than to sit on the side-line of the divine project as passive spectators.” H. Seebas states concerning this new initiative of Jacob – through his prayer Jacob has overcome his fear of Esau and therefore, he takes as the next step to meet his brother. The act of Jacob demonstrates his inner earning for forgiveness, though the narrator does not express it in clear and distinct words – I am sorry or forgive me. But from the context one can perceive that the one, who once wanted to be the lord of his brother, now calls his brother lord and accepts voluntarily for himself the servant designation. This by itself expresses the inner status of his

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120 Cf. Wenhem, Genesis 16-50, 292.
123 Cf. Rupper, Genesis, 356.
repentance, which is being ratified by his generous action. He, who once wanted to grab and amass things, is now letting things go.

The price he pays for reconciliation is indeed a heavy price. His intention is reconciliation and the means he adopts to achieve it is offering present. Since the Heb. word *minha* (present) is often used in the Old Testament in a positive religious contest one could assume that the word has here a positive connotation. Both, the purpose and the means by themselves are good. Therefore, it is a moral act because the goal and means employed here are not bad or evil.

**Conclusion:**

After the peaceful resolution of Jacob-Laban conflict (31:44-54) Jacob finds himself again in another episode of conflict: the approaching Esau with four hundred men. As one reads through the text one is confronted with number of ambiguities – ambiguities raised by the language and vocabularies used in the text and the scenes portrayed in the text; ambiguities that a reader has of Jacob: is it the old or the twenty-years-disciplined Jacob; ambiguities about the morality of Jacob’s intentions and moves to win Esau’s favour, etc. If one assumes that God’s twenty years project on Jacob with Laban is to mould, correct and form Jacob into Israel, then one should read these passages through different spectacles. No doubt, Jacob has to undergo still more changes. If Jacob-Laban-Factor is to teach and discipline Jacob, then Jacob-Esau-Factor II is a test for Jacob.

God’s project for Jacob during the twenty years with Laban was to make Jacob Israel. During these twenty years Jacob has become increasingly God-conscious and God-dependent; therefore, he is increasingly God-fearing. If the Psalmist says: “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them” (Ps. 34:7), then the encounter of the angels of God on his way back to the Promised Land is a positive sign of God’s protection for Jacob and his camp, and a sign of God’s intervention in the reconciliation process between human beings, as Jacob had recently experienced with Laban. Therefore, it is evident in the text that there is a vertical and a horizontal dimension in the reconciliation process.

The ambiguities regarding the morality of Jacob’s intention and the methodology that he applied to realise it could be solved as follows. If Jacob wanted to avoid Esau he could have easily avoided him and entered the Promised Land. He could have reached Bethel without the notice of Esau through another way. The problem here is not Geographical but Spiritual (cf. Kinder, *Genesis*, 159). Therefore, he has to meet Esau, he has to be reconciled with Esau.
Therefore, the argument that Jacob is still sneaky and crafty holds no strong ground. This suggests that the intention and the efforts of Jacob seem to be genuine and sincere.

With regards to Jacob’s reactions to the report of his messengers – division of his family, the prayer for deliverance, and sending present to Esau, could be argued as follows. The first reaction of Esau to divide his family and herds into two camps is a simple human natural reaction taken in desperation and panic before the imminent threat of a total genocide of his whole race. The second reaction emerges from the spiritual side of Jacob. Jacob’s recourse to God in prayer is taken after a recollection of the past events, especially God’s promise at Bethel, God’s faithfulness to His promise by protecting him throughout his stay in Paddan-aram and God’s command to return – God has promised and God has commanded, and Jacob has as a humble servant trusted and obeyed God. Therefore, it is God’s responsibility to protect His servant, his family and his belongings. Jacob’s plan to send present to Esau, could have either emerged after a further reflection, suggesting a sincere repentance would demand restitution. For true repentance involves not only inward sorrow (v.11a [10a]), but it also involves outward restitution. For a sensible action follows a sincere prayer. This suggests that Jacob, in his part, has done whatever he could do.

However, one can still argue that his strategies emerge from the fear factors; and although Jacob has made a sincere prayer to God for His intervention, he still holds on to his human crafty plans. Thus, he is portrayed here as the one standing between the threshold of the old and the new Jacob, suggesting the need for further hewing in his life. But one thing is clearly evident in the narrative that Jacob is determined to settle the conflict with Esau once and for all, and therefore he is ready to take all the measures and risks possible to achieve it.
CHAPTER – II
WRESTLING AT PENIEL: JACOB IS RECONCILED WITH GOD

Introduction:

Gen. 32:23-33 is one of the most ambiguous and paradoxical texts in the Old Testament. It raises number of questions on the mystery of the event: Is the text historical or merely a folk story? Who was the opponent of Jacob? Why was he fighting Jacob and why was he unable to defeat the patriarch? Is it real wrestling or merely a moral, spiritual or psychological struggle within Jacob? Why did the opponent want to depart before the dawn? Why did he use extraordinary strike/touch to dislocate Jacob’s thigh? What is the meaning of the name “Israel”? Who was the winner at the end? etc. Due to these ambiguities the text is subjected to various interpretations. As the whole scene of wrestling happens in the dark, the readers are also left in the dark like Jacob about the “who” and “why” of the event. However, it is through the gradual recollection of the event, supported by other events both in the past and future, that the truth of the story comes to light both to Jacob and to the readers. Therefore, Fokkelman suggests – for understanding the hidden mystery in the event at Peniel, it is important to know the context of the story: the life story of Jacob and also the history of the nation Israel.

The Penel event is the central and the most climax event in the life of Jacob, in which Jacob faces the most difficult conflict of his life, because his opponent is not merely Esau or a man, but God Himself. This suggests that Jacob had to settle his case with God first before he settle with Esau in order to enter the Promised Land. Therefore, for Jacob it was the moment

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124 Some scholars have argued that the story has nothing more than a collection of aetologies about the names Israel, Peniel and the dietary law. Nath had argued that the story has nothing to do with “Jacob Esau” narrative: “Rather, it is a distinctly separate narrative which originally was concerned with cultic matters and all sort of aetiological secondary interests.” Steve McKenzie, “You Have Prevailed: The Function of Jacob’s Encounter at Peniel in the Jacob Cycle,” in Restoration Quarterly, 23 no 4 (1980), 227.

125 S. Geller holds that the ambiguity in the story is to make the story more exiting and impressive to the readers. “A plot must advance through several stages is a convention of great power. The more plague the better; the greater the obstacles, the more impressive the salvation. Pharaoh must be made an antagonist strong enough to give meaning to God’s and Israel’s victory. Another convention is the humbling of pagan pride by divine punishment. The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, though troublesome, is acceptable in biblical terms.” Stephen A. Geller, “The Struggle at the Jabbok,” in Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible (London: Routledge, 1996), 27.

126 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 209f.

127 The scene of Jacob’s encounter with God at Peniel recalls actually Jacob’s past; and points to his future role as a model for the nation Israel.
of self-acknowledgement and open confession of his true identity before the divine antagonist. His tight holding of the divine opponent and his demand for blessing are the symbolic expressions of Jacob’s repentance in humility. For it is in humility and brokenness of his self-confidence he is blessed and honoured with a new name, Israel, which is the fulfilment of God’s promise to Jacob as he fled from the Promised Land (cf. 28:20-22) and the answer to his prayer for deliverance (cf. 32:10-13). This encounter transforms and sanctifies Jacob and prepares him for divine service, bearing witness to the awesome holiness of Yahweh, who instead of punishment, blessing and instead of death, life showered on Jacob. This is not merely the story of Jacob but also his descendents, Israel. Thus within the hero’s story the story of the nation is hidden.

There have been differences of opinion about the source of the text. Scholars such as DeWette, Hupfeld, Kuenen, Studer, Wellhausen, Driver, Skinner, Kautzsch, Procksch, and Eichrodt, Blum, Coat and Westermann assigned the text to Yahwistic tradition, while scholars such as Knobel, Dillmann, Delitzsch, and Röscher assigned the passage to Elohistic tradition. Schmidt explains: “The usual criteria fail. Yahweh does not occur at all, not even on the lips of the renamed hero. Elohim is found everywhere, but in a way that would not be impossible even to a writer usually employing the name Yahweh.” Gunkel establishes from the inner narrative of the text and ascribe it to two receptions. Many modern scholars today believe that the passage is a combination of both E and J traditions. One can sub-divide the passage into three parts: The wrestling with the mysterious man, the dialogue with the opponent and Jacob’s own interpretation of the event.

2.1. Jacob Wrestles with the Mysterious Man vv.23-27 [22-26]:

Filled with fear and uncertainty of the next day encounter with Esau, Jacob acts strangely; he moves his family and possession to the other side of Jabbok at midnight but he himself remain alone, isolated from his own, at the opposite side of the river. During this isolation he finds surprisingly himself wrestling with a mysterious man, who attacks him unexpectedly. The

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theme here is wrestling, which parallels not only his name but also symbolises his whole life
till now. Though ambiguities and mysteries are all through the match, the event begins to
unfold gradually the deeper reality as the wrestling match proceeds and takes twist and turns
at different periods step by step.

2.1.1. Jacob sends his Family across Jabbok vv.23-25a [22-24a]:

In spite of his calculated and genius diplomatic approach to appease Esau, Jacob could find no
inner peace. As a result he could not rest at night, therefore, he pressed on himself. He now
begins to send his family and all the belongings to the other side of the river Jabbok at
midnight. These opening verses of this passage record the crossing of the Jabbok by Jacob
and his family. The first verse (v.23) provides a summary statement of the crossing of the
river by his entire family. Verse 23 seems to suggest that Jacob himself crosses the river.
However, the following verse suggests the contrary – Jacob sends his entourage across, but he
himself does not cross. If one takes both the verses (vv.23-24) together, it might suggest that
Jacob crisscrossed the river several times, helping his family and belongings to cross
safely.

The readers can imagine the reason for Jacob’s unrest. “Anxiety may have produced
insomnia. He is too afraid to be able to sleep.” In v.14 Jacob tried to sleep but in vain
therefore he took recourse to the minha approach. Even then he could not sleep. Fokkelman
comments, “Jacob was still a prey to inner contradiction; his aim, reconciliation (via dialogue
face to face) does not harmonize with his intentions or the means used (a minha) behind
which he who is responsible takes shelter, out of fear arising from a bad conscience.”

But there are other things, which are puzzling to the readers about this peculiar haste of Jacob.
Firstly, why did he send his family across the river at night and that too to a place where they

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132 The river Jabbok is one of the four major canyons. It is one of the two major permanent streams that empty
into the Jordan on the east. It is 50 miles long and descends from its source at 1900 feet above sea level to about
133 Cf. Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” 343. The crossing the river is twice described in v. 24. v.24a and
24b are apparently doublets. According to Skinner two traditions are clubbed together here. “While E
implies that Jacob crossed with his company, the account of J is consistent with the statement of 25a, that after
sending the others across he himself was ‘left alone.’” Skinner, Genesis, 408.
135 Ibid. 328.
136 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 211.
would be all the more exposed to Esau’s attack? It would surely have been more sensible to do it by day. Secondly, why the text does not mention his daughter, while his two wives, maidservants and eleven sons are mentioned? The text does not provide any answer to these queries. Wenham concludes, “In the absence of any explanation in the text, we are left to conjecture. It may be that his irrational actions represent his disturbed state of mind: he was too worried to sleep, so he just decided to press on.”

Whereas Fokkelman observes that the key-word ‘abar in v.17 appears again here. Earlier he made his servants ‘abar (pass on v.17), he now makes his family to cross/pass the river. This indicates that he has another plan which goes beyond the minha-plan of 14ff. Fokkelman says that this crossing is most significant. By sending his whole family and possession he is abandoning his defence plan (mahane) – “he makes the Jabbok a serious obstacle, not for Esau, but for himself, should he want to flee.” The omission of mentioning Dinha among those crossed the river could be of no relevant for the narrator, since the prime concern of the narrator was to establish the founding of the nation Israel. This could be the possible reason for avoiding his daughter’s name.

2.1.2. The Significance of Jacob’s Solitude v.25a [24a]:

V 25 starts with the statement, “Jacob was left alone.” But it does not provide any further explanation, why he did not accompany his family. Is it because he is too frightened? Does he want to use his family as a human shield from the foreseen threat? One suggestion could be that he remained behind to make sure everything was safely across. Another suggestion could be that he intended to spend the night in prayer before meeting Esau. Whatever could be the reason one thing is evident that the narrative goes to great lengths to isolate Jacob from his family and possession. Here, according to the narrator, the question of his plans is irrelevant, but the important point here in the story is that he was alone. According to Douglas MacMillian, Jacob had done all he could and still felt deep inside there is something more to do and that is why he desired to be alone for the moment. There was a darkness inside him.

137 Skinner observes. “Either the narrative is defective at this point, or it is written without a clear conception of the actual circumstances.” Skinner, Genesis, 408.
138 Wenham, Genesis, 292.
139 Abar is in the Qal stem in v.23[22]. In v.24 [23] it occurs twice in the Hiphil stem. In the Qal the meaning is “cross,” an in the Hiphil “send across/take over.” Hamilton, Genesis 18-50, 326.
140 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 212f.
141 Cf. Waltke, Genesis, 445.
142 Cf. Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” 343; According to Fokkelman there are two possibilities for Jacob being alone: either for self-reflection, or to avoid Esau. Cf. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 212.
that troubled him more than the darkness around him. Kinder states, “The great encounter with God came when Jacob knew himself to be exposed to a situation wholly beyond him. The threat of it had already driven him to prayer (9-12), and both his renewed desire to be alone and the form that the night struggle took, indicate a hunger now for God Himself; a hunger awakened by the crisis but not determined by it.”

This moment of solitude is, therefore, very important for Jacob. This meant let go of all, indicating his preparedness to face the crisis alone. According to Andrew Mayes solitude is an essential element in a spirituality of struggle. For the Desert Fathers of the fourth century solitude meant entering a state of spiritual nakedness before God, where masks drop off and there is no place to hide. To enter into solitude is to come to a place of vulnerability and utter openness to God.

Commenting on this verse, MacMillan states: “The introductory phrase, ‘Jacob was left alone’ (v.25), is an immediate and graphic reminder that there are places and areas in the history of personal, spiritual experiences of God’s grace where we have to be brought into solitude.” He lists two kinds of solitude or loneliness: Loneliness caused by sin and Solitude caused by God. Here, in Jacob’s case both are at work.

2.1.2.1. Alienation caused by sin:

The loneliness of Jacob in one sense can largely be traced to his sins. Sin brings separation into three specific areas of man’s life, and each in the sphere of fellowship: separation from God, separation from man and separation from self. First, the Genesis story of the first fall of man explains the break of relationship between God and man – no sooner had man sinned than sin separated him from the fellowship of God. Sin is the opposite power that alienates the human spirit from God. Jacob seems to be conscious of this fact in the course of his spiritual journey. Second, “Sin had been separating Jacob from everything that endues life with its best qualities, and it had been happening throughout his life.” In Genesis 3-4 one learns that sin breaks relationship between men. Though Adam knows that God had given Eve to him,

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144 Kinder, Genesis, 168.
146 Cf. Ibid., 7f.
147 Cf. MacMillan, Wrestling with God, 47.
148 Cf. Ibid., 47ff.
149 Cf. Ibid., 47f.
150 Ibid., 48.
yet he immediately lays all the blame on her: “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Gen 3:12). Every word Adam said, alienated him from her, thus widening the gap that sin had already covered into their relationship. Jacob’s personal history at every single turn demonstrates this separation - He has been alienated from his twin brother, his parents, his homeland, his relatives Laban and his sons, and even from his family. Surprisingly, this division is also spreading among those related to him. Third, there was a deep division in self in terms of personal peace. Jacob was not at peace with himself in spite of all his genius and cleaver efforts to win the favour of Esau. Professor John Murray says that ‘the entail of sin’, indwelling sin, causes tensions, and inward, spiritual strife even in the Christian believer. The story of Jacob wrestling at Peniel reflects those spiritual realities.

2.1.2.2. Solitude through saving Grace:

In Jacob one also finds loneliness other than the one caused by sin. In a sense, the isolation of grace had been evident in Jacob ever since he was born. This theological perspective of Jacob’s story should not be set aside. “We have the distinguishing, sovereign, electing, covenant love of God, finding perfect illustration in the life of this man. It brings strains and tensions into his experience, but in the midst of them all, this great truth stands out. God’s covenant grace has been setting him apart from blessing even from the womb.”

Henri Nouwen puts it: “Solitude is thus the place of purification and transformation, the place of the great struggle and the great encounter. Solitude… is the place of salvation.” Mayes surmises, “Solitude is above all, the place where we can learn to receive from God. All his life, Jacob was used to making it on his own, and striving by his own schemes to get his way with God. In his experience of solitude at the Jabbok, Jacob would discover that blessing comes from God, not by his own efforts, but by clinging to God in the silence.”

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151 Cf. Ibid., 49.
152 Cf. Ibid., 48f.
153 The division is noticed between Isaac and Rebecca, each favouring different sons; between Lea and Rachel; between Laban’s sons and Jacob’s sons; between the sons of Jacob himself (Lea’s sons and Rechel’s sons), etc.
154 Cf. Ibid., 50.
155 Ibid., 55.
156 Mayes, Spirituality of Struggle, 8.
157 Ibid.
2.1.3. A “Man” Wrestles with Jacob vv.32:25b-26 [24b-25]:

As Jacob was alone, separated from his family and possession, a man unexpectedly wrestled with Jacob. Jacob was alone, and yet he found that he was not alone. The truth about the solitude through saving grace (cf. 2.1.2.2.) could be considered here as being tangibly presented in the narrative. The ambiguities one confronts here are: Is the wrestling merely a moral or psychological or physical? Who is this mysterious man? Why did he take recourse to a magical touch? And why did he want to leave before the sun rise? Though the wrestling match is filled with these ambiguous questions, these ambiguities also reveal the mysteries behind the wrestling in the course of the proceedings of the narrative.

In verse 25b there is a sticking phonetic similarity of the words to describe the wrestling match: Jacob (yaqob), Jabbok (yabboq), and wrestle (yeabeq). The verb used to describe the wrestling is wayeabeq, "and he wrestled” is a rare word.\(^{158}\) The noun form of the verb “to wrestle” is abaq, which means “dust,” It suggests the idea of "get dusty" in wrestling.\(^{159}\) This indicates that the wrestling was physical and not merely a psychological or a moral struggle within Jacob alone as some commentators would suggest. Dillmann says the limping of Jacob at the sunrise testifies that the wrestling was a physical occurrence in a material world.\(^{160}\)

The text identifies the antagonist simply as a man (is). Who is this mysterious man? There are different opinions among the scholars regarding the identity of the man. Gunkel, Von Rad, and Westermann are among those, who hold that Jacob wrestled with a Canaanite river god, because the man desired to depart before dawn, a regular feature of folk tale. However, many others such as Eissfeldt, Sarna, etc. identify the opponent as God in the form of man.\(^{161}\) Sarna argues, “because he blesses Jacob, the antagonist cannot be demon.”\(^{162}\) Furthermore, at the end of the episode, Jacob himself identifies his opponent as divine. “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved” (v.31 [30]). Kinder adds, “When God appears as a man in 

\(^{159}\) Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 329; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 295; Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” 344. The scene, as described in the text – the rushing water of the Jabbok, the darkness, the length of the struggle, and almost symbiotic conflation of the contestants, etc. remind also of the first struggle in the womb. Cf. Steven Molen, “The Identity of Jacob’s Opponent: Wrestling with Ambiguity in Genesis 32:22-32,” in *Dialogue, 26* no 2 (1993), 190.
\(^{160}\) Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” 344.
the Old Testament He is usually called the angel of the Lord, a title interchangeable with ‘God’ or ‘the Lord.’”

The time of the match is doubly significant. The wrestling takes place at night, in the pitched darkness. According to Fokkelman it is on the one hand a symbolic of Jacob’s position surrounded with fear and uncertainty as in Bethel, on the other hand it concealed the adversary's identity. The concealment of Jacob’s antagonist is needed because if Jacob had perceived whom he was going to fight, he would never have fought. MacMillan says, “Darkness should conceal the identity of the Angel, helping the process of teaching and moulding Jacob by encouraging him to struggle on his own strength until the movement was ripe for the Angel to reveal exactly who he was. Jacob was to be brought to the very end of his own resources.”

As the text indicates the wrestling was long and violent, characterising Jacob’s enormous commitment. Indeed, the point is that the opponent could not be victorious until he resorted to something extraordinary – “When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched (wayyigga) the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob’s thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.” v.26. The “touch” was actually a blow — he dislocated his hip, the place of a wrestler’s strength. But the text uses a mild term for it, demonstrating a supernatural activity (cf. Isa. 6:7, where the coal touched Isaiah’s lips, indicting just a touch of the finger rather than a fist). The mild touch that dislocates indicates an opponent with supernatural power. This gives a hint to Jacob to perceive that he is not wrestling with an ordinary man. Therefore, Ross says, “The blow was revealing to Jacob.”

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163 Kinder, Genesis, 170; Hos. 12:5 [4] identifies him as malak (an angel). The narrator’s use of the term is here illustrates the inability of the mortals to recognise the divinity until the divine performs a wonder. As in Gen. 18-19, the three men standing before Abraham; Judg. 6 where Yahweh’s angel sat under an oak tree and engaged in conversation with Gideon; and Judg. 13, where Manoah and his wife take Yahweh’s angel to be a man of God. Thus, it is not unusual in the Old Testament for supernatural beings to assume human form. Cf. Hamilton, Genesis 18-50, 330.

164 Cf. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 213; Ross, Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” 344.

165 MacMillan, Wrestling with God, 81.

166 The strength of Jacob is demonstrated earlier in 29:1-14 when he rolled away the stone from the well, which was possible only for a group of men. Cf. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 214.

167 It is impossible to determine if the word naga be should be translated here as “struck” or “touched”. It could be understood either as a violent stroke (cf. Job 1:11; 2:5; 1:19; Josh 9:19 and 1 Sam.6:9) or a gentle touch (Gen. 3:3; Is. 6:7; Jer. 1.9). cf. Hamilton, Genesis 18-50, 330.

168 The Hebrew word for thigh (yarek) occurs only two other passages in Genesis: 24:2 and 47:29. In both these occasions the act is related to oath. Cf. Molen, “The Identity of Jacob’s Opponent,” 191; Hamilton, Genesis 18-50, 331.

169 Cf. Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” 344. “A clearly symbolic phrase like ‘place the hand under the thigh’ would have been too explicit to allow an associative dimension of meaning.” Cf. Geller, “The Struggle at the Jabbok,” 21.

170 Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” 345.
comments, “At that point, something died in Jacob – the pride of self. His self-confidence and self-reliance took a bad tumble.” Therefore, Jacob held on the man asking for his blessing even though he was wounded seriously at the pivotal part of a wrestler’s strength.

Skinner surmises the passage in these words: “In its fundamental conception the struggle at Peniel is not a dream or vision like that which came to Jacob at Bethel; nor is it an allegory of the spiritual life, symbolising the inward travail of a soul helpless before some overhanging crisis of its destiny. It is a real physical encounter which is described, in which Jacob measures his strength and skill against a divine antagonist, and ‘prevails,’ though at the cost of a bodily injury.”

2.2. The Dialogue between Jacob and the “Man” vv. 27-30 [26-29]:

With the dislocation of his hip the wrestling match takes a new and a different phase. It moves from silent contact into verbal exchange, from physical to spiritual/moral. The dialogue is the central part in 32:23-33 because it is here that Jacob’s old identity is replaced with his new identity, Israel, suggesting the transformation that had taken place in him – the old Adam becoming a new man with new role in the history of his descendents.

2.2.1. Jacob’s demand for Blessing from his Opponent:

The dialogue is initiated by the opponent with his request, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." Here the opponent exhibits the traits of both divine and human. He could with mere touch dislocate the hip of Jacob and at the same time he requests Jacob to let him go. But Jacob replies, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (v.26). Commenting on this verse Molen remarks that this verse also echoes the deception of Jacob in taking the birthright from Esau (25:30). “The speech of the man in 32:27 (“Let me go, for the day is breaking”) neatly matches that of Esau in syntax and signifies a similar entreaty to Jacob. In each case he exacts a price: from Esau his birthright (bekhorah), and from the man a blessing (berakhah).” Furthermore, the request of the opponent provides another hint for Jacob to speculate the superhuman character of the man, therefore, Jacob holds him fast for his

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Why does Jacob after all want a blessing when he has already one from his father? Waltke answers, since Jacob received the patriarchal blessing by cheat, he has been unfit to experience the status till now. Therefore, he needs now the renewal of his being in order to face the ordeal of the next day. Earlier he had prayed for deliverance (32:11), therefore it is reasonable to assume that his demand for blessing is to deliver him and his family. Concerning Jacob's demand for the blessing, Fischer comments, „Es geht ihm nicht um irgendwelche äußeren Dinge, sondern allein um eine Zusage von Lebensfülle, wie sie von Gott her ihren Ursprung hat und in einer Atmosphäre menschlichen Wohlwollens gegeben wird.“ Kinder says, “Jacob’s desperate embrace vividly expressed his ambivalent attitude to God, of love and enmity, defiance and dependence. It was against Him, not Esau or Laban, that he had been pitting his strength, as he now discovered; yet the initiative had been God’s, as it was this night to chasten his pride and challenge his tenacity.” Thus, one can assume that the demand for blessing is not a demand rather a prayer for forgiveness from God.

2.2.2. Jacob’s Repentance and Confession before the Man v.28 [27]:

The dialogue between Jacob and the opponent is full of twist and turn. The man instead of blessing Jacob surprisingly asks him, “What is your name?” At this question the physical wrestling begins to turn into a moral/spiritual wrestling - here “Jacob’s identity is now the issue.” This question concerning his name was not by chance. It is intended to remind Jacob of the question that Isaac, his father, asked him before, “Who are you, my son?” (27:19). Then Jacob said a lie to Isaac and got his blessing by deception. But now he can no longer seek a blessing on the basis of a lie, but only clinging on to truth. Jacob speaks the truth this time – I am “Jacob,” a cheat, supplanted, twister, crafty, cheeky, etc. By giving his true name Jacob discloses his character and it is here a sincere and a true confession of his guilt takes place, for in bible a name signifies more than the named; it reveals the nature of

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175 Fokkelman characterizes Jacob by stating, (even) "from the most miserable situation he wants to emerge an enriched man.”

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175 Cf. Skinner, Genesis, 409.
176 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 215.
177 Waltke, Genesis, 446.
178 Paul Vrolijk, Jacob’s Wealth, 235.
179 Fischer, Der Jakobsweg der Bibel, 71.
180 Kinder, Genesis, 169.
the person named. Jacob admits before God who he really is; and in admitting his true identity, it is maintained, he is really repenting – making a decision to turn away from his deceptive ways. At this moment of self-disclosure he becomes open to the blessing from the opponent. Therefore, Hamilton says, “the acknowledgement of the old name, and its unfortunate suitability, paves the way for a new name.” Karl Elliger says deliverance is the free sovereign act of God only, and man realizes God’s deliverance when man approaches God with openness and the nakedness of the self: „Nicht der gläubige oder der bußfertige, sondern der nackte Mensch im letzten Stadium wird hier gerettet. Allerdings eins darf nicht übersehen werden: dieser Mensch kennt Gott von Jugend auf und hat die Verbindung nie bewusst zerschnitten. Es ist also der nackte Mensch Gottes, dem alle Masken vom Gesicht gerissen sind und an dem dennoch das Wunder geschieht.“

### 2.2.3. **Israel, the New Identity for Jacob v.29 [28]:**

To the readers’ astonishment, Jacob’s adversary instead of blessing Jacob glorifies him with the new title rather name *Israel,* thus, indicating the change of his character and his destiny. Molen says, “Now the patriarch ‘strives’ rather than ‘supplants.’ In his so-called ‘striving with God,’ Jacob does not darken the stain of his old name but rather cleanses himself of that ugly title. The new name changes him, displacing his former fears with a new self-assurance.”

Again the ambiguity that runs through this chapter is evident with respect to the meaning of the name Israel. “Often when a name is bestowed in the Bible, the etymology is explained in verse.” The explanation given for the etymology in v.29 [28] is - “for you have striven with God and men, and have prevailed,” suggesting that “he struggled with God” and “he prevailed with God”. Concerning this explanation of the etymology S. Geller comments,

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186 Jacob’s change of name is also recorded in two other passages in the Old Testament. In Gen 35: 9-15, at Jacob’s return to Bethel, where God blessed him and renewed his covenant promise to him; the second reference is in 1Kgs. 18:30-38, during the Israelites’ dramatic and pivotal change of heart. According to verse 31, Elijah stated that the Lord himself had previously spoken to Jacob, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” showing that the changing of Jacob’s name to Israel was ultimately, if not directly accomplished by God. Cf. Mark D. Wescott, “Towards a Literary understanding of Face to Face in Genesis 32:23-32,” 174.
188 Molen, “The Identity of Jacob’s Opponent,” 193.
“Jacob’s defeating God is blasphemous; his defeating a man is meaningless. One naturally tries to posit some intermediary, but still supernatural being: an angel. … *elohim*, “divinity,” can refer by itself to angels; cf. 32: 2-4.”

M. Noth observes that *el* is the subject of verb root *srh*. Thus, the word *Israel* could be interpreted as “may God struggle/fight, or “may God prevail” or “may God content or prevail.”

Fokkelman says, “The name “God fights” may then mean: God fights with you, because he is forced to by your stubbornness and pride. And also: henceforth God will fight for you, for he appreciates your absolutely sincere and undivided commitment.”

With regards to the etymology *Israel* much has been written, and there are several meanings associated to it. A. Haldar suggests that the root of the etymology is *isr/sr*, means “happy,” so it could be associated to the Canaanite god Asherah, Thus, the name change suggests the merging of the two religions. E. Jacob says that the name *Israel* comes from the root *yasar*, means “just, right;” suggesting the meaning “God is the righteous or just one.” Albright argues that the original name was *Yasir-el*, from the verbal stem *yasar* (an Arabic root *wasara*), means “to cut, saw” with the developed meaning of “heal.” Thus, suggesting the meaning “God heals.” Noth, considers that the root of the term is *sara*, which means “to rule, be lord over.” Israel then means “God will rule” or “May God rule.” Dillmann says when Jacob contented successfully with God; he won the battle with man. Thus the name “God fights” and the popular explanation “you prevailed” obtain significance for future struggles.

According to Coote from the verbal stem *s´ry* or *ys´r* meaning “to govern by rendering judgment or decree,” so *Israel* could mean “El judges.”

The deferent interpretations of the etymology *Israel* itself indicate how ambiguous not only the wrestling story but also the very term *Israel* itself. Curtis considers James Boice is correct in seeing v.29 as irony; and he (Boice) said, “With men Jacob had contended successfully … and lost. He cheated Esau of the blessing but lost Esau’s good will. He outwitted his blind

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190 Geller, “The Struggle at the Jabbok,” 23. The LXX and the Vulgate, varies from the traditional translation of this particular verse. According to LXX it is: *hoti enischysas meta theou kai meta anthroopon dynatos* (“Since you have been strong against God, so you will triumph over men”). Similarly the Vulg. translates: *quoniam si contra Deum fortis fuisti, quanto magis contra homines praevalebis* (“Because you have been strong against God, in the same manner you will prevail against men with great strength.”). Both do not state that Jacob prevailed against God; rather Jacob’s exhibition of strength against God as his success against men. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis* 18-50, 335.


192 Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 217.


and ailing father but lost his good name. None of these victories had brought satisfaction, and now on the banks of the Jabbok he is bottled up between enemies. He even has God for his antagonist. However, in his battle with God Jacob suffers a reversal of his fortunes which is actually his victory. He loses his wrestling match with God; God touches his hip and he is permanently wounded. But in the divine logic, which is beyond our full comprehension, this loss is Jacob’s victory. He wins by losing and is now able to go on in new strength as God’s man.”

Elliger contributes another angle to the interpretation to the explanation to the name Israel. According to him it is not Jacob who is the subject of the wrestling but God. It is not Jacob rather God struggles with Jacob: “Es handelt sich nicht um Jakobs Kampf, in dem er auf irgendeine Weise siegt, sondern um Gottes Kampf mit Jakob, in dem Gott über sich selbst, in dem seine nur im großen Zusammenhang einigermaßen begreifliche, letztlich irrationale Gnade siegt, weil Gott festhält an seinem Geschichtsziele und damit an seiner Verheißung. Daran liegt alles, an Jakob nichts. Jakob hat den Tod verdient nach allem Betrug und trotz allem Gebet, und Gott ist darauf und daran, ihm nach Gebühr heimzuzahlen; es ist restlos ein Wunder, wenn Jakob mit dem Leben davonkommt.”

The new name to Jacob, according to Elliger is God’s justice for Jacob; it is just as a kind of salvation. “Der neue Name ist Gericht, aber er ist in einzigartiger Weise Heil zu gleich. Gott richtet Jakob, aber er richtet ihn nicht zugrunde, sondern richtet ihn auf, rettet ihn aus dem Gericht. Auf welcher Basis das geschieht, zeigt die Erteilung des neuen Namens durch Gott selbst. An die Stelle der alten Wirklichkeit tritt damit die neue (Name ist ja nicht Schall und Rauch!): aus Jakob, dem Sünder, wird Israel, zwar auch Sünder, aber durch Gottes Erklärung gerechtsfertigter Sünder, der leben darf! Diese Wirkung ist der Namengebung absolut immanent. Die Rettung ist ein einseitiger Akt Gottes.”

2.2.4. God still remains a Mystery v.30. [29]:

On the one hand the opponent honours Jacob with a new name, but on the other hand he refuses to answer Jacob’s request - “Tell me your name, please.” Instead of revealing his

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195 Curtis, “Structure, Style and Context as a Key to Interpreting Jacob’s Encounter at Peniel,” 134f. One could look at this victory of Jacob with the victory of Christ on the cross. Though in human sense, the death of Christ on the cross is an utter defeat and disappointment, but in the divine logic it was the greatest victory in the history of salvation.
197 Ibid., 27f.
name the opponent puts a counter question to Jacob – “Why is it that you ask my name?” thus, choosing to evade Jacob’s question. Parallel can be found in the book of Judges, in which the request of Manoah, the father of Samson, was turned down by the angel with a counter question: “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful (Judg. 13:17-18)?” The refusal to answer could be interpreted in a variety of ways. Traditionally it was believed that the knowledge of the name of the deity gives power to the knower over the deity. Therefore, the man refused to give his name, lest it be abused. Hamilton considers Jacob’s request has nothing to do with manipulation of the power of the deity; rather it is just an inquiry about the identity of the opponent. Elliger holds the similar view that Jacob wants to make sure that it was God, with whom he had engaged throughout the night – “dass es Jakob nun doch klar sein müsste, dass er es mit Gott zu tun hat.”

According to Fokkelman, “his refusal points to his secret and draws attention to it!” Fischer says, “Jakob muss annehmen, Schlüsselerfahrungen seines Lebens nur begrenzt und bruchstückhaft begreifen zu können.” Bernard Och is of the view that by refusing to reveal the name “God remains God; His transcendence remains intact.” According to Fokkelman it is unthinkable for Jacob that the man is qualified to renew Jacob’s identity and more than that he could get to the bottom of Jacob’s identity. The context itself suggests that Jacob is by this time almost certain who the “man” is. Therefore, Fokkelman concludes, “The question itself has been put somewhat compassionately and jestingly: but Jacob, do you not ask for the sake of asking? (Think and you will know the answer!)”

The dialogue comes to an end with the narrative: “And there he blessed him.” Elliger interprets this blessing as the legitimizing of the patriarchal blessing and the confirmation of the fulfilment of the promise made at Bethel. But Westerman interprets that the “man”

201 Fokkelmen, Narrative Art in Genesis, 217. But in 35:10-11, which also relates to the renaming of Jacob, the identity of the name giver is evident: “no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name’... And God said to him, ‘I am God Almighty.’” But why did wait until the second naming to identify himself? Molen answers, “Perhaps it is to clarify that the new name Israel is divinely ordained.” Molen, “The Identity of Jacob’s Opponent,” 197.
202 Fisch, Der Jakobsweg der Bibel, 72.
204 Cf. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 218.
205 Ibid., 217.
206 Speiser, Sarna and Hamilton hold that the word “blessed” indicates the farewell greeting as in 28:1: “Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him.” Cf. Waltke, Genesis, 447.
207 „Das bedeutet im großen Zusammenhang, dass er den erschlichenen Segen Isaaks legitimiert und die Verheißung von Bethel bestätigt, damit auch der Gebetsbitte Erhörung zusagt. Und das alles nicht, weil Jakob es
imparted some of his superhuman power to Jacob – “Er überträgt etwas von seiner übermenschlichen Kraft auf den, den er nicht bezwingen konnte.” From this it is once more evident that the adversary is none other than the divine. MacMillen surmises beautifully: “Jacob would not have been capable of understanding all that the name implied of the divine person in whose hand he was held, but what Jacob could not absorb with his mind he could experience in his heart.”

2.3. Jacob’s Interpretation of the Event: *panim el panim* v.31 [30]:

Even though Jacob received no definite answer from the opponent of his identity, he realizes that the “man” was none other than God. One can notice another shift of emphasis from here on- the identity of the opponent is from here on no longer man but God. The statement here is basically the interpretation of the event by Jacob as he looks back at it soon after the sudden departure (as his appearance) of the “man”. To commemorate this wonderful event he names the place Peniel. Commenting on naming of the place, Fokkelman says, “For the third time Jacob immortalizes one of God’s revelations to him by means of a name-giving: Peniel. Just as at Bethel angels preceded God’s appearance, and God blessed him after that, so in this situation angels have appeared first (at Mahanaim) as heralds of God; now God himself goes to meet “Jacob” on the Jabbok in a unique manner and blesses him. God has come as close to Jacob as possible; he has laid his hands upon him!” By naming the place Peniel Jacob not only bears testimony to the revelation, but also establishes how important the encounter was for him personally.

Here the key-word is *panim*. According to Choon-Leong Seow *panim* denotes personal presence, in Jacob’s case it is divine presence; however, it is not literally God in person. Etymologically the Hebrew word *peniel* means “Face of God.” It is an abbreviated form of “I have seen God face to face” (*elohim panim el-paniem*). Hamilton comments “Jacob does not give to this place any name that recalls his struggling with God. … The expression *face-to-face* need not be confined to literal visual perception. In an idiomatic fashion it refers ‘to

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nun endlich verdient hat – was er verdient (auch nach dem Gebet!), lehrt ihn die Tatsache des Überfalls mit erschreckender Deutlichkeit -, sondern weil Gott seinen Plan ausführen will und deshalb Gnade vor Recht ergehen lässt.” Elliger, „Der Jakobskampf am Jabbok,“ 26.


the direct, non-mediated (i.e., immediate) character of a manifestation of presence. It describes a ‘person-to-person’ encounter, without the help or hindrance of an intermediary.”

It is also clearly evident in chapters 32-33 that there is a significant use of the word ‘face’ right through the narrative. Earlier Jacob says, “I may appease him (akperah panayw ‘cover over his face’) with the present” (v.21). In its relation to God the statement refers to atonement- a ‘cover over’ sin so to hide it from God’s face. The conclusion is, since Jacob survived coming face to face with God, he can now confidently face Esau, his brother. Perhaps, this could be the moment in Jacob’s life, when he realises that his life was not merely in conflict with men but God, against whom he has been trying to deceive throughout his life. Yet God has dealt kindly with him and lifted up his face upon him. MacMillan says, “While not stated explicitly, the idea of pardon, forgiveness, gracious reception is in the forefront of his thought as he expresses his sense of wonder at having seen God and lived to tell the tale. What thoughts must have passed through his mind! ‘I have been wrestling with God and yet, I am still alive – I have not been destroyed.’

2.3.1. Face-to-Face Encounter in the Old Testament:

The Hebrew phrase panim el panim occurs five times in the Hebrew Bible; and all the five times it is used within the context of the divine-human encounter and self-revelation with one or more humans – namely Jacob, Moses, Gideon, and the people of Israel (cf. Gen. 32:31; Exod. 33:11; Deut. 34:10; Judg. 6:22; Ezek. 20:35). According to Mark D. Wessner a face-to-face encounter with God is determined by four inherent elements: divine initiation, profound intimacy, intentional solitude, and supernatural verification. All these four features are clearly evident in Gen 32:23-33. For example, firstly, the wrestling was divinely initiated by the sudden and unexpected attack of the heavenly sent “man;” secondly, Jacob was in a deep solitude, preparing for the encounter with Esau for the next day; thirdly, the encounter was not only physically intimate but it also involved the very essence of his identity – identification and the change of his name; and fourthly, the limping of Jacob serves

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214 Cf. MacMillan, Wrestling with God, 121.
215 Ibid., 122.
as a God-sent physical “sign” to verify and legitimize the primary Therefore, according to Wessner the encounter was not merely spiritual or illusory but it was a physical encounter with the divine.

2.3.2. The Effects of Face-to-Face Encounter with God:

In the Hebrew Bible the divine face plays two contrasting roles: as a source of blessing and punishment, in other words life and death. In Num 6:24-26 the divine face is portrayed as a source of blessing and life. In Jacob’s case, the divine face is associated with hen (favour) and shalom (peace), because in 33:10 Jacob, recalling the night event, says to Esau: “for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me” Here Jacob is comparing the joyous reunion that had occurred the previous night (cf. Gen. 32:25-31). For Jacob, then, seeing the divine face supplies blessing, new life and reconciliation, which was not expected by Jacob (cf. Gen. 32:31).

The divine face also instilled fear in human, as the statements of Jacob (Gen. 32:31), Gideon (Judg. 6:22), and Manoah (Judg. 13:22) exemplify. These proclamations imply that the Israelites saw the divine face as a source of death, not only as a source of blessing, and indeed Yahweh himself declared that a human being cannot look upon the divine face and survive (cf. Ex. 33:20). According to Jeffrey Niehaus, “It is possible that the Israelite fear of the divine face – and divine presence in general – stemmed from the biblical account of humanity’s fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). Prior to the fall there is no evidence that the man and woman fear Yahweh’s presence in any way, but after the fall Yahweh’s approach prompts great fear in them (cf. Gen. 3:8).” The Hebrew Bible thus presents the divine face; in some cases as a source of blessing, but in other cases as detrimental.

2.3.3. The Significance of Face-to-Face Encounter in Jacob’s Case:

Regarding Jacob’s face-to-face encounter with God, Wilson says that in Jacob’s Peniel story “we find an amalgamation of these two characteristics of the divine face. These encounters give insight into a fascinating aspect of ancient Israelite theology, and they exhibit the effect

219 Ibid.
220 Cf. Wilson, “Face to Face with God,” 108.
221 Cf. Ibid., 109.
222 Ibid. “Exposed in all his sinfulness, he cowers before a holy God. Such fear or dread of the holy is henceforth a characteristic of human response in the Old Testament to all theophanies that actually involve the glory of God.” Jeffrey Jay Niehaus, God in Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1995), 159.
that God’s literal presence has upon his servants.”

Jacob emerges both as the blessed and as the wounded. MacMillan says, “That name (Peniel) reveals to us how deeply he had penetrated the realities of what he had experienced and how precisely he had recognized whose blessing he has enjoyed.” Wilson concludes “a panim el panim encounter instils blessing and vitality in the human participant(s) by means of the divine face. Ultimately, this divine encounter transforms, even sanctifies, the person(s) involved and prepares the person(s) for divine service, bearing witness to the awesome holiness of Yahweh.”

2.3.4. The Peniel Encounter as God’s Response to Jacob’s Prayer:

Earlier in v. 10-13 Jacob had prayed for deliverance (hassileni) from the vengeance of Esau, but now he says “my life is preserved” (wattinnasel napsi). Here the narrator uses the same verb nsl as in 32:10-13. “By now using nsl again the narrator tells us: my prayer for deliverance has been answered by God.” Hamilton says, “Jacob’s earlier prayer for deliverance is now answered by God in this encounter. Jacob shall be ‘preserved’ from Esau, for God has ‘preserved’ him.” Molen comments, “Perhaps the real meaning of Peniel is one of confusion: in its explanation Jacob not only recognizes God’s presence, but also his protection from Esau’s hand.” The aftermath of this encounter with God is a new and correct approach to encounter with his brother Esau, an approach quite contrary to his minha approach.

Fokkelman says, “Now the Penuel scene transports him to another state of mind, another mentality which enables him to approach Esau in the only correct way … This is what Jacob now realizes and he thanks God for it with a name-giving which is a consecration.” Ross interprets: “Meeting God ‘face to face’ meant that he could now look Esau directly in the eye.”

Fokkelman summarises Jacob’s own interpretation of the event as: “It was a direct revelation that took place at Penuel, although God did not deliver himself up, did not reveal his Name, and we can now surmise that the darkness of the night had a protective function, to shield Jacob from the blinding (cf. Ex. 24.15f.) radiation of God’s glory. In the night God dimmed

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223 Ibid.
224 MacMillan, Wrestling with God, 122.
225 Ibid., 114.
226 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 220.
227 Hamilton, Genesis 18-50, 337.
228 Molen, “The Identity of Jacob’s Opponent,” 199.
229 Cf. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 221.
230 Ibid.
231 Ross, “Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel,” 149.
his lustre to lend it to the sun for this day, v.32. But in dimming his radiance he manifested himself, even in physical contact.”

Thus, Jacob is delivered not only from the imminent danger of Esau his brother, but also from the wrath of God by God’s sovereign act of deliverance and he and through him his descendent have been awarded with the title of Israel for his persistent perseverance of pleading for God’s forgiveness/mercy/blessing. “God has purified him from the high-handed Jacob’s policy which eventually had jeopardized his life, and he has not withheld the blessing from him.”

MacMillan says, “Jacob’s final reflection as we have it here, ‘and my life preserved’, is not merely a negative, but rather a positive statement. God did more than save Jacob from harm, he restored him into a place of favour and strength. Salvation is never merely ‘from’, it is always ‘to’ as well; it is never merely negative, it is positive. Restored as he was, forgiven by God as he now knew himself to be, Jacob is ready to go and meet with Esau. Because he had seen God face to face he could go to meet his brother knowing that he could look him directly in the eye. Leaving Peniel he is no longer merely ‘Jacob; he is ‘Israel’ as well.”

2.3.5. The Dawn of a new Phase in Jacob’s Life:

As the consequence of face to face encounter with God a new chapter begins in Jacob’s life. The narrator paints this new life of Jacob with the beautiful expression: “the sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel.” Interestingly, the narrator had earlier described the flight by portraying the scene as darkness by stating, “He came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set” (28:11). The setting sun, which symbolised the darkness of his life from the time of his flight, now rises upon him again to mark the brighter days ahead, indicating the transformation that had taken in Jacob.

Fokkelman comments, “The natural happenings have been taken into the service of the ‘inner’ happenings. … The sun symbolizes salvation, deliverance, as in Gen 19:31. The nights of Bethel and Haran have been replaced by glorious day of the ‘Face of God’, Penuel.” According to Wenhem the rising of the sun marks the dawn of a new era in Jacob’s life. Fokkelman describes “The old Adam has been shaken off, “Jacob” stays behind on one bank of the river. A new man, steeled and marked,
Israel, has developed and he continues the journey on the other bank. The completely renewed, purified relationship with God makes a renewed, authentic relationship with his ‘brother’ possible.\textsuperscript{239}

However, that is not the entire picture. There is a contrast drawn on the natural and physical level. The rising of the sun is contrasted with the limping of the wounded Jacob. MacMillan comments, “The deeply but beautifully drawn contrast on this level of the visible and the temporal points us on the great paradox on the level of the invisible and the eternal. Together they testify the fact that Jacob has been blessed.”\textsuperscript{240}

MacMillan paraphrases the whole scene in the following words: “The place, named now; the light, risen now; the man, limping now – those realities, caught in three little phrases, tell us who was the real winner of this wrestling encounter. The Angel who initiated it, who dictated its course, who ensured its outcome, has achieved a marvellous spiritual advance in the heart of Jacob. Jacob has been conquered, but has demonstrated persistence which owed itself to the help of God, and which culminated in the sort of submission that only grace can bring about.”\textsuperscript{241}

“As Jacob departs Penuel, he leaves with two things he did not bring with him to the Jabbok river. He has a new name and a new limp. The new name will forever remind Jacob of his new destiny. The new limp will forever remind him that in Elohim Jacob met for the first time one who can overpower him.”\textsuperscript{242} To remind this significant event to every Israelites observe the dietary restriction.\textsuperscript{243} According to Wenhem “this custom was a reminder of the nation’s election.”\textsuperscript{244} In Jacob his descendants are elected for a special mission to reconcile the nations with God and with one another.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{239} Fokkelman, \textit{Narrative Art in Genesis}, 222.
\item \textsuperscript{240} MacMillan, \textit{Wrestling with God}, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{241} \textit{Ibid.}, 225.
\item \textsuperscript{242} Hamilton, \textit{Genesis} 18-50, 337.
\item \textsuperscript{243} This dietary ban does not appear in the Sinatic Code, but is found in Rabbinic Judaism (e.g. \textit{Pesahim} 22a, 83b), together with the two names Israel and Peniel it made a third lasting reminder of the significance of the event in Israel’s history. Cf. Kinder, \textit{Genesis}, 170.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Wenhem, \textit{Genesis} 16-50, 297.
\end{itemize}
Conclusion:

The wrestling encounter in vv.23-33 is filled with mysteries, ambiguities, suspense and paradoxes. The more the suspense the greater is the impressiveness and the impact of the story on the readers. The mysterious man, who is identified in the course of time as God provides two paradoxical images of God: God as the protector and deliverer and God as the opponent. The Bethel encounter presents a God of conciliation and bonding, whereas the Penuel encounter presents God as an enemy. Examining both these theophanies, McKay adds another theological dimension to the encounter story saying “Perhaps this story shows that only Yahweh can bless Israel, and that only Yahweh is ‘allowed’ to attack Israel and bring it near to death.”

Jacob’s desire for solitude away from his family and possession is also a plan of God. It is God who had led the story to such a tensed situation in order to lead Jacob to solitude. It is God who had initiated the struggle not only for Jacob’s inner purification and moral rehabilitation, but also to bless Jacob with the new name Israel. In the process Jacob is made to realise that it is God, against whom he had been trying to deceive all through; and therefore, it is with God Jacob needs to make his reconciliation first in order to receive God’s blessing and protection. This story is a classic example of God’s blessing for Israel – it is only by clinging to God closely in deep commitment and humility that the nation will be blessed. Jacob limping, as the sun rose upon him, is a symbolic portrayal of God glorifying his humble servant. Therefore, Israel must learn to walk humbly before God and cling to Him to enter into the Promised Land.

The encounter also emphasises the futility of man’s quest for earthly security and his absolute dependence upon a God. Jacob had been throughout his life trying to achieve God’s promise by his manoeuvring schemes, by using other people to serve his own end. God has promised and God will bring it to fulfilment. In the darkness and terror of Peniel, he learns the truth that God cannot be used and manipulated by man. He remains beyond human control; His presence cannot be made into possession. No sooner Jacob recognises that the opponent is God, than has God already disappeared. “Perhaps the very ambiguity of Jacob’s opponent, in whom God is concealed and from whom He emerges, is the narrative’s way of expressing

man’s uncertainty about the Divine presence, which always remains beyond man’s grasp and control.”

The Peniel event is not merely God’s election of Jacob but also of the nation Israel. The narrative reminds the readers that the election of Israel is by God’s sovereign choice and not by ethical or moral merit of Israel. It is a free gift of God. Like Jacob, Israel neither deserves nor merits God’s love. “Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land (Deut. 9:5).”

The issue in the text is not the historicity of the event but the theology of the relationship between Israel (Jacob) and God, which is one of ambivalent, for both Jacob and Israel as a nation are formed out of struggle and conflict. Ronald Hendel, in commenting on Jacob’s mysterious night encounter, writes: “It seems that the dangerous encounter with the deity, yet the bond is fraught with danger. The God-hero relationship is extreme both in promise and threat. It seems that the final test, the test of death, is determinant for the hero; if he survives this rite of passage, his stature is certain.”

The Peniel story ends with a positive note of hope. Jacob tries to achieve reconciliation with Esau. Though the efforts (intention and method) of Jacob to settle the conflict with Esau are highly questionable, yet God honours the persistent efforts of Jacob at reconciliation by leading Jacob to the right approach to the problem. What is required from man is that in spite of man’s ingenious and wonderful plans and strategies, he must cling to God like Jacob in order to make reconciliation happen in life. For reconciliation is the sovereign work of God.

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CHAPTER – III
JACOB IS RECONCILED WITH ESAU

Introduction:

The solution for Jacob-Esau conflict takes place soon after God had reconciled himself with Jacob in the nightlong wrestling at Jabbok; for the reconciliation with God facilitates the reconciliation between men. And rightly the narrator tries to co-relate both the encounters in chapter 33: “for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me (v.10).” Here the readers can clearly observe the deference between the pre-Peniel Jacob, and post-Peniel Jacob, for Jacob demonstrates here a new character of courage and genuine humility – marching before and leading his family from front and bowing down humbly seven times before Esau (v.3). Furthermore, the motive of his presents for Esau is also rightly placed here. Earlier Jacob tried to allure or bribe Esau in order to win his favour, but here he presents them as restitution for the loss incurred by Esau.

Transformation in Esau is also evident - the grudge-carrying Esau becomes a conciliatory brother. There is a big change in his attitude towards Jacob. Though the narrative is silent about the transformation in Esau, one could assume that the reconciliation between God and Jacob on the night had made it possible. “Jacob’s meeting with God has influenced the meeting with Esau (v.10).” Though the term forgiveness, reconciliation or restitution is mentioned not even once in the narrative, the gestures from both the characters speak loud and clear of the happy ending of Jacob-Esau conflict.

Scholars since Welhausen generally attribute the text to Yahwist composition with possible traces of Elohist, vv.18-20 are attributed to Elohist source. Mathew Kenneth holds that chapter 33 could be interpreted as a unity. “That the narrative describing Jacob’s meeting with Esau in Chap. 33 depends on the events of chaps. 27-32 contents for interpreting the

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249 Maly, “Genesis,” 34, col 2.
250 Yoreh, The First Book of God, 107; Gunkel, for example, attributed vv. 1-17 for Yahwist composition with some details derived from the Elohist ( vv.5b, 10b, 11), but vv. 18-20 he attributed to Elohist with exception of v. 18a to the Priestly tradition. Cf. Gunkel, Genesis, 324; Westermann also attributed vv. 1-17 to Yahwist, but he attributed v. 18-20 to some independent sources. Cf. Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 638.
authorship of the whole complex of Jacob accounts as the same person. … At least we can say that the author of chap. 33 had the preceding Jacob composition in its entirety in mind."

The structure of the narrative could be categorised in threefold: the meeting of the two, in which reconciliation between the both takes place, the dialogue between the two, during which Jacob persuades Esau to accept his restitution, and the peaceful departure to their respective settlements, Esau to Seir and Jacob to Shechem. Each of the unit shows that the both reach at a peaceful acceptance of their destinies. Vv.18-20 serves as a conclusion to the reconciliation story and also as an introduction to Diana’s story in chapter 34.

3.1. The Encounter between the Brothers and their Reconciliation (vv.1-7):

Meeting Esau is a spiritual necessity for Jacob in order to enter the Promised Land. After reconciling with God in a nightlong struggle at Jabbok, Jacob proceeds to meet Esau, at whose threat he had fled from his homeland twenty years ago. But to Jacob’s surprise and astonishment the encounter was not only conciliatory but deeply affectionate. The gestures and emotions exhibited by both in this encounter demonstrate true reconciliation between the twins. On Jacob’s part, there is an acknowledgement of his guilt and begging for pardon, and on Esau’s part, there is a generous and magnanimous act of forgiving and acceptance – one bows down to the ground in humility in front of the other and the other embraces and kisses the counterpart affectionately, and the both weep. How this reconciliation between them happened is a mystery not only to Jacob but also to readers. From the context and the narrative perspective of the story one can hardly deny the divine intervention in the reconciliation between both the brothers – “for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God.”

3.1.1. Jacob’s new Approach towards Esau and his Companions (vv.1-3):

The encounter between Jacob and Esau takes place immediately after his encounter with God at Jabbok; both the encounters take place on the same day, one following the other. But what is apparent and sticking for the reader is the change of character and attitude in Jacob –

Mathew, Genesis 11:27-50:26, 563. Alfred Agyenta comments: “the Jacob-Esau Story is governed by what is known as a unified plot. In such a plot, all the episodes are relevant to the narrative and have a bearing on the sense and meaning of the story. From the nature of the story, this unified plot is clearly one of resolution, whereby the conflict between the brothers reported at the beginning of the story (cf. esp. Gen 27, 1-45, the stolen blessing) is eventually resolved by the time we come to its end (cf. Gen 33, 1-11, the reunion of the brothers). Alfred Agyenta, “When Reconciliation Means More than the ‘Re-Membering’ of Former Enemies: The Problem of the Conclusion to the Jacob Esau Story from a Narrative Perspective (Gen 33, 1-17),” in Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses, 83/1 (2007), 123f.
courage replaces his cowardice as Jacob himself marches ahead of his family to meet Esau; and humility takes the place of arrogance as he bows down seven times before his brother.  

And no sooner Jacob sees Esau he prepares his family for a formal meeting with Esau. He divides his family first into three groups of wives and children in the inverse order of his affection for them: first his concubines and their children, second Leah and her children and Rachel with Joseph at their rare, and he himself goes ahead of them and leads them. Earlier in 32:8 Jacob divided his family out of fear but now he organizes his family in order to introduce them formally to Esau. In 32:24 he had sent his family across the river but he himself remained at the back and now he himself crosses over them ahead and leads the whole family from front.  

Thus, he exhibits here a new character of courage and confidence.

The way, how he approaches Esau by bowing seven times, is not only the sign of the moral change in Jacob but also is a symbolic expression of confession of his guilt. By this “Jacob admits his guilt and asks for pardon from his brother by means of the powerful symbolic gesture of falling on his face seven times (cf. v.3).” Fischer comments: “Mit dem siebenmaligen Niederfallen zur Erde, einer in den Amarna-Briefen bezeugten Weise der Huldigung eines Untergebenen vor seinem Herrn, drückt Jakob in einer Geste seine völliche Unterwerfung aus.”

Here the reversal of the patriarchal blessing to Jacob in 27:29 is evident. Ljubljana remarks: “Jacob fought all his life for not being obliged to knee before his brother, and now he does not stop to do that. He never wanted to serve him and now, he is voluntarily and with inner persuasiveness approaching as a humble and faithful servant.”

Mathew Kenneth contradicts this view by stating that this gesture of Jacob should not be taken as the reversal of the blessing but rather as a sign of humility. For Jacob fully admits

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252 Cf. Wenhem, Genesis 16-50, 304.
253 Cf. Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 639.
254 Agyenta, “When Reconciliation Means More than the ‘Re-Membering’ of former Enemies.” 128. One of the ways by which a person showed respect for a superior in the ancient world was by bowing to the ground; and to magnify the honour this gesture could be repeated seven times. Some Egyptian texts from El Amarna (14th century BC) portray vassals bowing seven times to Pharaoh. Cf. John H. Walton and Victor H. Mathew, The Ivp Bible Background commentary: Genesis – Deuteronomy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 66; cf. Nahum M. Sarna, Torah Commentary: Genesis (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 229; Skinner, Genesis, 413.
255 Fischer, Der Jakobsweg der Bibel, 74.
256 Cf. Ibid.; McKeown says, “This meeting of the two brothers reverses the roles anticipated in Isaac’s blessing of Jacob. That blessing promised Jacob dominance over his brothers, but he now relinquishes these ambitions and accepts that he must bow before Esau.” McKeown, Genesis, 157.
that his success derived from God’s grace alone, not by his superiority to Esau or any other (v.10).  

Erwin W. Lutzer suggests in his book “When you’ve been wronged: Moving from Bitterness to Forgiveness” one of the three steps towards reconciliation is humility - humbling oneself before the one from whom restoration is sought. That is exactly what Jacob does before Esau. Jacob has learned this lesson in his night struggle at Jabbok by clinging on to his antagonist and confessing his true identity and pleading in humility for the divine blessing, thereby winning the blessing of reconciliation with God. He repeats the same act of humility before Jacob and he obtains the same fruit of reconciliation with Esau. In the night struggle his words confess his guilt and here before Esau his symbolic actions speak of the confession of his guilt.

### 3.1.2. Esau’s Response to Jacob’s Humility and Confession (v.4):

Esau’s response to Jacob is amazing and magnanimous. Instead of taking revenge on Jacob, he embraces him. The text describes the meeting: “But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept (v.4).” Coats describes this moment as “the break in the tension of the narrative.” The sequences of verbs symbolises clearly the reconciliation between the both, and there is no disagreement among scholars on this. For example, Saran says, “the story of their final reconciliation is correspondingly described through a unique concentration of five amplified verbs.”

But it is also true that the terms used here – running, embracing, falling on the neck and weeping, are also the normal way of greeting relatives in the bible. However, Fischer points out that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible the terms embrace, fall on neck and kiss are used together except in Gen 45:14 and 46:26. It is a deep expression of emotion and belongingness.

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262 Sarna, * Genesis*, 229
Thus, symbolising the peaceful reunion of both the parties, this is evidently reconciliation between them. Hamilton comments, “Esau’s actions toward Jacob on his homecoming are also similar to those of the father toward his homecoming son in the parable of Jesus (Lk. 15:11-32). Both Esau and the father fell on the neck and kissed their brother/son. On both the occasions the kiss is possibly not just a display of joyous feelings but an indication of forgiveness (cf. 2 Sam. 14:33).” Von Rad remarks, “Not a word is said about the past, the embrace expressed forgiveness clearly enough.”

Hendel says, “Jacob is taken aback by Esau’s affection.” So too the readers are. This raises the question in the reader’s minds, what has changed Esau’s mind? Is that Jacob’s gift, Jacob’s language, Jacob’s humble behaviour? No doubt, they could have contributed for softening the heart of Esau. But v. 9 seems to suggest that Esau was not actually placated by Jacob’s gift, for Esau says, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” Therefore, someone else played a primary role to make this happen. “What precipitated the change in Esau is even more oblique than the forces that transformed Jacob. What must surmise that there was some correlation between the nocturnal struggle of Jacob’s assailant and the change Esau underwent the same night.”

Allen P. Ross says, „Jakobs lang erwartetes Treffen mit Esau war ein wunderbares Ereignis. Gott wandelte das Herz Esaus so um, dass er darauf aus war, sich mit seinem Bruder zu versöhnen.“ Cohen assumes that it was the struggle with Divine-human figure on the previous night has made it happen.

George W. Coat concludes, “it (the text) focuses on a central role for divine intervention. God promises. And fulfilment of the promise would resolve the familial strife.”

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266 Hamilton, Genesis 12-50, 344.
267 Von Rad, Genesis, 327.
Kinder summarises this scene in the following words: “Guilt and forgiveness are so eloquent in every movement of the mutual approach (3,4), that our Lord could find no better model for the prodigal’s father at this point than Esau (cf. 4 with Lk. 15:20).”

3.1.3. Reconciliation happens between the Families (vv.5-7):

The reconciliation between heads of the families/nations involves also families/nations. Jacob’s children and wives also genuflect before Esau as Jacob did, thereby reversing the blessing of 27:29. In replying to Esau’s inquiry Jacob mentions only about his children as God’s favour in order to gain sympathy from Esau by mentioning of the children; and he chooses to avoid mentioning about his wives. “Perhaps he feels that mentioning them would only resurrect in Esau’s mind Jacob’s departure some twenty years ago from Canaan to get a wife from Paddan-aram, and Esau’s involvement in that event.” Westermann observes that Jacob describes his children as God’s favour (henav) instead of God’s blessing (baraka), because the word “favour” includes forgiveness, but the term Baraka would remind Esau of Jacob’s stealing of the patriarchal blessing. “Der Satz erhält sein Gewicht durch das Verb bnw. Mit diesen Kindern, so sagt Jakob, hat Gott mich begnadigt. Es ist eine inhaltsschwere Aussage. Hier nämlich hätte das Verb brk näher gelegen; aber Jakob will damit sagen, dass es das Wirken der Gnade Gottes war, das ihm in einer langen und harten Geschichte diese Kinder geschenkt hat. Das Verb bnw kann die vergebende Gnade einschließen (vgl. etwa Ps. 103), das Verb brk könnte das nicht.” So by mentioning especially the children as the favour from God, Jacob not only involves his family in his reconciliation process but also tries to win the favour from Esau. Furthermore, it is not merely reconciliation between two individuals but also between all those belonged or associated to them.

3.2. Restitution made and accepted, and Reconciliation confirmed (vv. 8-11):

Reconciliation is not complete without adequate restitution. It is true that the brothers have exchanged confession of the guilt by the offender and granting of forgiveness by the offended through profound gestures of bowing, embracing, kissing and weeping. But a true reconciliation also demands justice i.e. restoring the loss. For true justice demands restitution from the one, who caused lose to the other and makes proper amendments. True, Jacob has

273 Kinder, Genesis, 171.
274 Cf. Wenhem, Genesis 16-50, 298.
276 Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 640.
already, prior to both the life changing encounters, sent doves of presents to Esau. But his earlier intention was not to make amendments or restitution for the loss caused to Esau, rather to bribe and placate him. But now, the post-Peniel Jacob is a changed person and therefore his motive and intention is also influenced by his change, which makes his present as a true restitution for Esau for the lose he had incurred.

3.2.1. Jacob persuades and persists Esau to accept his Offering:

When asked about the purpose of the camps that passed ahead, Jacob replies, “to find favour in the sight of my lord.” From Jacob’s point of view, throughout the narrative in chapters 32 - 33 the sole purpose of Jacob’s gift is to find favour with Esau. But the difference between pre and post Peniel experience is, while the motive of sending present earlier emerged out of fear and led him to appease Esau through his present, but now the motive is completely different – to reconcile with Esau and to make restitution for the loss and anxiety caused to Esau. But Esau turns down Jacob’s gift. Hamilton comments “Esau, in turning down Jacob’s gift, may well have paraphrased his grandfather with I will not take anything that is yours, lest you say ‘I have made Esau rich’ (see 14:23)”.

Some others hold that refusing a gift at the first request is a part of Near Eastern courtesy. Therefore, the refusal of Esau should not be taken at the face value (cf. 23: 11-14). Westermann interprets that by refusing to accept, Esau seems to say that even without the firstborn blessing he has become rich. “Esau hat offenbar der Verlust des Erstgeburtssegens nichts ausgemacht. Er ist auch ohne ihn groß und mächtig geworden, so sehr, das sehr das beträchtliche, ein Vermögen darstellende Geschenk Jakobs nicht haben will.”

However, Jacob does not stop at this but presses on Esau to accept his gift because it is important for Jacob, for without the restoration of the lost things the reconciliation between the brothers would be only a half-hearted one. Wenhem says, “Jacob insists, for doubtless he felt he could not be sure of Esau’s forgiveness if he refused his attempt to make amends.” Therefore, Jacob insists Esau as he did with the mysterious man for his blessing – “I will not let you go, unless you bless me” becomes I will not let you go, unless you accept

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277 Vrolijk, Jacob’s Wealth, 249
279 Hamilton, Genesis 12-50, 345.
280 But the narrator very clearly indicates the sincerity of Esau’s refusal by editorializing, “Thus he urged him, and he took it.” Cf. Waltke, Genesis, 455.
281 Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 640.
283 Wenhem, Genesis 16-50, 299.
my gift—“Accept, I pray you, my gift (berkati) that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have enough” (v.11). In this verse Jacob uses the word berkati (my blessing) as against the earlier word minhati (my gift). Most of the scholars are of the view that here Jacob returns Esau the blessing, which he had by deceit acquired (ch. 27). Cohen says, “His gift is meant not only to propitiate his brother, but more importantly to atone for his sinful actions.”

Finally, because of Jacob’s persistence Esau accepts his offer. Agyenta, however, gives different reason for Esau’s acceptance of the gift: “Whereas for Jacob, the gift is meant to mollify his brother and to influence him (cf. vv.8-11), Esau sees things quite differently. For him, it is an unnecessary offer (cf. v.9) and, at worse, an attempt to compromise his good will. It is only after Jacob has revised his intention behind the gift, namely by vengeance of perspectives is resolved (cf. esp. v.11).” In other words, it is only when Jacob has changed the word ‘gift’ into ‘blessing’ Esau concedes to Jacob’s persuasion.

Waltke concludes, “By not offering a gift in exchange, Esau indicates that he accepts the gift as a payment for the wrong done to him. Whereas conflict with Laban is resolved through a treaty of nonaggression, conflict with Esau is resolved through genuine expressions of repentance, extravagant gifts, and exaggerated humility. The reconciliation is sealed by accepting the reparation gift. His acceptance is witnessed by Esau’s four hundred men and by Jacob’s entire household. Similarly, Abraham’s claim to Ephron’s cave and field was sealed when Ephron accepted the payment before witnesses.”

3.2.2. Vertical and horizontal Dimensions in Reconciliation (v.10b):

According to biblical understanding, in reconciliation there is divine and human dimensions involved, which is evident in Jacob-Esau Story too, as it is portrayed by both the encounters – the encounter with the divine at river Jabbok and the encounter with Esau. This reality of

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285 Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 641; Hamilton, *Genesis 12-50*, 346; Waltke, *Genesis*, 455; Fischer, *Der Jakobs Weg der Bibel*, 76; Ross, „1. Mose.“ 90; Hendel, however, says, “Jacob is offering to Esau ‘my blessing’ as a gesture of reconciliation; it is not the genuine blessing of the patriarch, to be sure, but a sense of reconciliation is conveyed by the careful choice of words.” Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch*, 130.
286 Cohen, *Self, Struggle & Change*, 120.
287 Agyenta, “When Reconciliation Means More than the ‘Re-Membering’ of Former Enemies” 128. Fishbane remarks that it is by a slip of tongue Jacob used the word Berakhah, because throughout the narrative it is the word minhah, which was in his mind all along. Esau, indeed, takes the berakhah, thus affecting the resolution of conflict that began in Gen. 27. Cf. Fishbane, “Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle,” 28.
288 Waltke, *Genesis*, 455.
reconciliation is summarised by the narrator in v.10b “for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me.”

The word ‘face’ is clearly the key term linking 33:10 and 32:31 [30]. Hamilton says, “‘Peniel’ (face of God) has been followed by ‘Peni-esau’ (face of Esau). Reconciliation with God is now capped off with reconciliation with a brother.” In 32:31 God’s mercy has been expressed by the verb nasal. In 33:10 Esau’s mercy is expressed by verb rasa. The verb rasa is a sacrificial term for acceptance in the cult. So the acceptance of Esau is associated with the acceptance of God. Fischer says, “Es ist eine theologische Spitzenaussage, die keine Parallele hat. Das Schlüsselwort „Angesicht“ ist von Gen. 32 her vertraut und dessen Verbindung mit Gott ebenfalls. Jene besondere Gotteserfahrung vergleicht Jakob hier mit der eben geschehenen Begegnung mit seinem Bruder und dessen Wohlwollen; im Original klingt bei Letzterem auch Gefallen mit wie z.B. Gott ein Opfer wohlgeläufig annimmt. Jakob bringt damit zwei Weisen des Verschonens in enge Beziehung, die durch Gott in der Nacht und jene jetzt durch Esau. Ein Bruder, der über Schuld hinwegsieht, ist Abbild des versöhnlichen Gottes, der in gleicher Weise Menschen trotz ihrer Vergehen leben lässt.”

At Paniel Jacob is spared from death even though he came face to face encounter with God, for no one can live after seeing God; here he is graciously received by Esau, whom he feared for death, for Jacob expected the meeting with Esau to be hostile and detrimental. But to his surprise he was taken aback with the kindness and affectionate acceptance of Esau. Thus, Jacob perceives a similarity between both the encounters. Brueggemann comments, “In the holy God, there is something of the estranged brother. And in the forgiving brother, there is something of the blessing God. Jacob has seen the face of God. … Perhaps in both it is the experience of relief that one does not die. The forgiving face of Esau and the blessing face of God have an affinity.”

Brueggermann adds further, “Not for a minute does the narrator confuse God and brother, heaven and earth. But it is seen that the most secular and the most holy overlap. Permission to be Israel (and not Jacob) depends on wrestling and prevailing. But it also requires meeting the brother. Perhaps it takes meeting the brother to regard the limp as a blessing. The religious

289 Hamilton, Genesis 12-50, 346.
290 Cf. Ibid.
291 Fischer, Der Jakobs Weg der Bibel, 75.
292 Brueggemann, Genesis, 272f.
encounter and the renewal of the relation are not the same. But they come together and must not be separated.”  

Clare Amos summarises, “Indeed the message of reconciliation scene between Jacob and Esau is that reconciliation between God and reconciliation between human begins are intermingled. There is an extraordinarily powerful interplay between Jacob’s encounter with a divine antagonist at the Fords of Penuel in Gen 32:22-32, and his meeting the next morning with Esau, the brother, whom he expects to meet as an antagonist, but whose graciousness surprises him. The word plays make the connection crystal clear. ‘Truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God – since you have received me with such favour’ (33:10). It is only if we are prepared to continue our struggle with God that we can see our ‘brothers’ in their true light, as God sees them. Conversely it is when we wrestle for a more authentic relationship with our brothers and sisters we discover that we are given God’s blessing.”  

3.3. Peaceful Disengage of the Brothers from each other vv.12-17:  

The narrative about the peaceful reunion between both the brothers however, does not end with the climatic events of the sevenfold prostration of Jacob (v.3), the emotional embrace from Esau (v.4) and Esau’s acceptance of Jacob’s restitution (v.11); rather it ends with a low note that both the brothers departing from each other in different directions. Verses 1-11 establish the climax scene of reconciliation, while 12-17 seems to water down the happy and climax ending of the reconciliation scene. The readers are suddenly taken aback with this anti-climax end of the reconciliation story. It raises the question either about the quality of the reconciliation or if at all the reconciliation between the two brothers is genuine.  

The doubt about the genuineness of the reconciliation between Esau and Jacob could be justified from the narrative point of view in vv. 12-17. First, For Esau proposes to travel together, while Jacob politely turns down the offer, giving excuse of his young kids and his milking animals among his flocks. Jacob, in fact, tells to join Esau later but v.17 contradicts this; both journeying to different directions, Esau taking the road back to Seir while Jacob makes his way to Sukkot.  

Second, throughout the narrative Easu addresses Jacob achi (my  

293 Brueggemann, Genesis, 273..  
295 Cf. Agyenta, “When Reconciliation Means More than the ‘Re-Membering’ of former Enemies,” 124. According to Rad Jacob’s refusal to accompany Esau is “the mistrust of the one, who himself has often deceived.” Von Rad, Genesis, 328.
brother), but Jacob tries to keep the distance, preferring to address Esau as *adoni* (my lord cf. vv.13, 14, 15) and himself *yabed* (servant v.14). "Even the narrative style in Gen 33, 12-17 clearly underlines this contrast in the brothers’ conduct by means of the reference to their different destinations (Seir and Sukkoth).” Therefore, Coats assumes that no reconciliation has taken place here, for according to Coats “reconciliation cannot occur if the reconciled parties continue to live apart.”

However, this view of Coats has been contradicted by many scholars “for tying reconciliation too closely to physical communion.” Westermann is of the view that reconciliation need not require that both the parties must live side by side. Though Esau and Jacob live separately they remain as brothers. „Eine Versöhnung zwischen Brüdern braucht nicht in jedem Fall ein Zusammenleben zu bedingen; sie kann sich auch darin auswirken, dass sich beide in Frieden trennen und jeder in seiner Welt und auf seine Weise lebt.“

According to Blum, “while it is true vv.12-17 are ambiguous; the reconciliation (Versöhnung) between the brothers is no longer in question. From the perspective of national dimension of the Jacob-Esau Story, he argues that the separation of the brothers in Gen 33, 12-17 has to be understood in the light of the need to preserve the identity of Israel, which is only possible by means of territorial separation from others.”

Crüsemann supports this opinion that the separation of both the brothers does not demonstrate the lack of reconciliation; rather it reflects the point that both the nations (Edom and Israel) living in peace and freedom with each other. Schmid is of the opinion that the separation of the brothers is important because it is only in separate dwelling

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297 *Ibid.*, 125; From the geographical point of view the two localities are worlds apart. Seir lay far south, immediately after the Dead Sea, while Sukkot is to be found in the Jordan valley, north of the Dead Sea.
300 Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 642. This view is substantiated by two other events later, where both the brothers come together: at the burial of their father (35:29) and their prosperity as the reason of their separation (36:6-8) cf. Turner, *Announcement of Plot in Genesis*, 131. Agyenta points out that Coats seems to ignore a number of narrative details such as the transformation of the two rivals, the absence of the any further threat of violence foreseen or caused. Cf. Agyenta, “When Reconciliation Means More than the ‘Re-Membering’ of Former Enemies,” 126.
302 “The account of the reconciliation in chap. 33 is not filled with explicitly political expressions, yet it contains features that do not fit into the lives of the individuals mentioned. This applies in particular to Gen 33:12ff. The story does not end with the brothers' embracing, but rather with a renewed separation.” Frank Crüsemann, “Dominon, Guilt and Reconciliation: The Contribution of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis to Political Ethics,” in *Semeia* 66 (1994), 72.
that people can co-exist peacefully. In other words the story has to be understood here in the light of the history of Israel – its survival, identity among the nations.

From a narrative perspective Agyenta tries to establish the sincerity of their reconciliation, and gives reasons for the need for their separation. He considers, “the story does not only end on a note of genuine reconciliation between the brothers but also, more significantly , that it proposes a radical understanding of reconciliation that goes beyond the practical arrangement of territorial separation between former enemies whether individuals or as nations.”

He gives the following arguments for the need for their separation:

a) The divergent viewpoints and interests of the protagonists in the final scenes of the story: Jacob’s excuses not to accompany Esau have nothing to do with their past conflict; rather more to do with the way and manner that their new relationship should be managed. While Esau proposes physical union, Jacob prefers to keep a healthy distance.

b) Jacob and Esau as round characters in the story: The character traits of both are two extreme. No doubt transformation has taken place in both, but how far it is, is not clear. The exuberance with which Esau receives his brother back in the final scenes of the story may seem to reflect the same naïve and uncritical behaviour, apparently, typical of him. In the same way Jacob, though has undergone drastic behavioural change, still remains couscous, diplomatic and persuasive. It would be practically not easy for people, with such extreme opposed character trait, to live together for long.

c) It would be also unrealistic to think that the one who feared for twenty years all of a sudden to come out of it and live hail and happy along with his perceived antagonist.

d) Other relevant narrative details in the story: 1. the absence of any further threat of violence between both the brothers in the later narrative, 2. a spirit of collaboration between the brothers are witnessed in 35:29 at the burial of their father, Reconciliation is more than living together; “reconciliation is a matter of attitudinal change (metanoia), especially, a change from the desire to eliminate or dispossess

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304 Ibid.  
305 Agyenta, “When Reconciliation Means More than the ‘Re-Membering’ of Former Enemies,” 127  
306 Cf. Ibid., 128ff.  
307 Cf. Ibid., 129ff.  
308 Cf. Ibid. 131ff.  
309 We are not told anywhere that Esau has made any moves to carry out his threat. Cf. Ibid., 131.  
310 Children burying their father appears to be common literary motif in the patriarchal narratives. Cf. Ibid.
each other to mutual respect and collaboration between former rivals.”

If the stolen blessing is the root cause for strained relationship (represent both political and economic supremacy) then it is important that both renounce their greed. “In short, when people no longer pose and threat to each other by what they are what they have, reconciliation can become a real possibility even if they do not share a common physical space.”

e) Another reason from the narrative perspective is from the point of faith. In his dialogue with Esau, Jacob refers to God number of times (vv.5, 10, 11), but Esau mentions not even once. Thus, suggesting that Jacob’s way and destiny is different from Esau. Therefore, the separation between both the brothers is a need.

Kamiskey summerises, “Reconciliation neither signals a return to the status quo ante, nor does it magically erase the character flaws that people have exhibited all along. Rather, when reconciliation occurs in the bible, usually the characters have matured, but they remain partially flawed.” Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that Jacob-Esau Story ends with genuine reconciliation.

3.4. Jacob enters Canaan and confesses publicly El as his God:

Throughout the story Jacob, unlike Esau, remains mysterious and non-transparent to the readers. One cannot exactly figure out what is going on in Jacob and why he behaves the way he does. It is true that transformation has taken place in Jacob after twenty years of discipline at Laban’s place, and by the blessing received from the mysterious human-divine being after the night struggle and in the peaceful resolution of the conflict with Esau. But in spite of all these Jacob is not fully changed as one would expect him to be. This is evident from the following events, which clearly demonstrate his frivolous attitude to God’s commandment. Though God has answered his prayer from delivering him from the hand of Esau, yet Jacob remains as a man of his own will and plan, because he instead of going to Bethel to fulfil his vow goes to Sukkoth first and after few months goes to Shechem and stays there.

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311 Ibid. 132.
312 It is quite revealing for Esau to decline the enormous gift of animals from his brother; so too for Jacob to acknowledge that he has everything (v. 11).
313 Ibid. 133.
3.4.1. The Departure of the Brothers and the temporary Stay of Jacob at Sukkoth:

After a peaceful reconciliation, both depart from each other, Esau travels southwards towards Seir, while Jacob towards north and halts at Succoth, where he made booths for his livestock and for his family. According to Jewish tradition he stopped at Succoth about eighteen months to utilize the natural resources of this fertile valley in order to recoup what he gave away to Esau.\(^{315}\) However, Kinder comments that halting at Sukkoth “was a backward step, spiritually as well as geographically”\(^{316}\) because Sukkoth is situated outside the Promised Land; and therefore, Jacob is disobeying the command of God by not entering in the Promised Land as God had promised and commanded.

3.4.2. Jacob’s Entrance into Canaan:

After a temporary stay at Sukkoth, Jacob comes safely to Shechem, where he purchases a plot of land from the sons of Hamor, Scechem’s father. According to Sarna the purchase of land is “an expression of faith in God’s promises that his descendants would inherit the land.”\(^{317}\) Whereas Brett considers this as an act of ungratefulness; for the readers would accept him to go to Bethel to thank God and to fulfil his vow after a miraculous reconciliation with Esau. Instead he purchased a piece of land to be permanently settled there.\(^{318}\) Kinder comments, “Shechem offered Jacob the attractions of a compromise. His summons was to Beth-el; but Shechem, about a day’s journey short of it, stood attractively at the crossroads of trade. He was called to be a stranger and pilgrim; but while buying his own plot of land there (33:19) he could argue that it was within his promised borders. It was disobedience none the less, and his pious act of rearing an altar and claiming his new name of Israel (v.20) could not disguise the fact.”\(^{319}\) Therefore, Jacob had to pay the price for his disobedience later by fleeing from Shechem to Bethel, being ashamed and humiliated before the Canaanites (cf. Ch. 34).

3.4.3. Jacob’s Declaration of El as Israel’s God:

At his arrival at Canaan Jacob erects, on the land that he had purchased, an altar and he calls it El-Elohe-Israel, God, the God of Israel, recalling Jacob’s vow of 28:21. Sarna calls it as the celebration of safe arrival to the homeland after a prolonged absence and the commemoration

\(^{315}\) Cf. Sarna, Genesis, 231.
\(^{316}\) Kinder, Genesis, 171f.
\(^{317}\) Sarna, Genesis, 232.
\(^{319}\) Kinder, Genesis, 172.
of the change of name from Jacob to Israel.\textsuperscript{320} Wenham says, “In calling the altar ‘El, the God of Israel,’ Jacob acknowledges that the creator God who had changed his name at the Yabbok to Israel was now his God, and by implication his descendants’ God too.”\textsuperscript{321} However, this should have taken place at Bethel as he had vowed. This indicates the fact that the journey of Jacob is not yet complete, and thus, suggesting the requirement of a further pilgrimage both for Jacob and his descendants.

**Conclusion:**

The conflict between Jacob and Esau, which began with the stealing of the patriarchal blessing (chapter 27), comes to a happy conclusion with the reconciliation between the twins in chapter 33. The reconciliation story comes to its climax in vv.1-11 with the climax scene of both the brothers embracing, kissing and weeping, and finally with the acceptance of Jacob’s restitution by Esau. However, the story does not end with that climax, rather with a renewed separation of the both. Though Jacob-Esau Story is about the conflict and reconciliation between two brothers at its peripheral, internally and historically it is a story of the conflict and resolution between two nations – Israel and Edom. Jacob and Esau here stand for two nations,\textsuperscript{322} which is hinted in chapters 25:23 and chapters 36-37.

Through Jacob-Esau reconciliation story the narrator wants to convey the message that Israel’s approach towards its neighbour should be of humility as Jacob towards Esau. The Israelites should be kind and magnanimous towards their neighbours, especially the Edomites because Esau, the forefather of Edom, was kind to Jacob and received him with forgiveness and generous heart. Furthermore, Israel should never boast over the Edomites firstly because they are brothers and secondly, Jacob, their forefather had by deceit inherited the patriarchal blessing, which was in fact due to Esau (cf, Deut. 2:1ff).

However, Israel should at the same time separate herself from the Edomites in order to live in peace with the Edomites and other neighbours and to preserve the purity of her race. Because Jacob has preserved the purity of Abraham’s family by marrying only from the clan of

\textsuperscript{320} Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 232.
\textsuperscript{321} Wenhem, *Genesis 16-50*, 301.
\textsuperscript{322} Crüsemann remarks if the narrative about Joseph in Genesis is about inner political in Israel, then the central themes of the Jacob narrative are the foreign conflicts with the closely related Edomite and Aramean peoples. Cf. Crüsemann, “Dominion, Guilt and Reconciliation,” 68.
Abraham; secondly Jacob and his descendant are the believers in Yahweh, whereas Esau and his seeds are mixed groups of people and they have not accepted Yahweh as their God.

The chapter co-relates also the relation between the reconciliation between divine and human and the reconciliation between or among human beings. Reconciliation with God facilitates, enables and also demands reconciliation between men. In the act of reconciliation among men God is always present, orchestrating the process of reconciliation towards a peaceful end from behind the scene. Thus, there is a vertical and horizontal dimension in any true reconciliation.

As the conclusion of the story indicates that the pilgrimage of reconciliation with God and with one another are not a finished product but an on-going process. God continues to strive with men to reconcile them with him; man must imitate God in his relation with fellow men to realise reconciliation with one another and renew it time and again. For there is always a danger of stepping backward spiritually as the text suggests of Jacob’s half-hearted obedience as he decides to stay at Shechem, postponing his voyage to Bethel to fulfil his vow. This is also the story of the nation Israel, who throughout her history struggled with God, which is evident throughout the Old Testament. But Jesus Christ through his perfect obedience to God’s will reconciles the whole world to God. In him everyone find reconciliation with God and one another.
CHAPTER IV
GOD RECONCILES HUMAN BEING WITH HIMSELF IN CHRIST

Introduction:

Jacob is one of the most significant personalities in the history of Israel because from Jacob emerge the twelve tribes of Israel, which later take a shape into a nation. The story of Jacob is not merely a story of an individual but it also mirrors the story of the nation Israel, as his account is narrated in the book of Genesis. Incidentally, “Genesis” means “origin”. The book of Genesis could be summarised as an account of the origin of creation and the origin of salvation. Gen. 1-11 is basically about the origin of the universe and its fall due to man’s disobedience; and chapters 11 onwards it is about the origin of the salvation history, i.e. God trying to reconcile the fallen humanity and the universe and restore its original status. In order to reconcile the world with Him, God calls first Abraham and through him his descendants. The history of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham is one of deception and cunningness. The election of such a cunning, crafty and deceptive person like Jacob and his descendants for this holy mission is, in fact, to demonstrate that salvation is not the work of man but the work of God.

The story of Israel in the Old Testament is, like Jacob’s, a story of wrestling with God – Israel wrestles in rebellion to disobey God; but God wrestles with Israel to bless her. The constant disobedience and rebellion of Israel against her God resulted in the failure of her mission i.e., to be the channel of God’s reconciliation for the world. However, Israel’s disobedience and rebellion frustrate the plan of God for the world. The unconditional kindness and the steadfast love of God for the fallen humanity are perfectly and finally revealed to humanity through Jesus Christ. Jesus, the incarnation of God, through his life, preaching and work, and finally his death on the cross as atonement for the sins of the world, not only manifests the unconditional and steadfast love of God for the fallen world but also reconciles her with her creator. His free and deliberate sacrifice on the cross is the utmost and climax manifestation of his obedience to his Father and the profound revelation of God’s love for the fallen humanity.

The life, works, passion and the resurrection of Jesus not only demonstrate that God had reconciled the world through his Son, but also invite human beings to accept God’s offer of
reconciliation with happiness and gratitude through repentance and belief in his Son and his
gospel (Mk. 1:15) to become ambassadors of reconciliation through their life and ministry in
the world (2 Cor. 5: 20-21) and to unite the whole world in and through Christ (Rom. 5:18-
20).

4.1. **Original Sin and the fallen State of Man:**

Solution to any problem requires the understanding of the cause or causes that led to it.
Similarly understanding reconciliation requires knowing the factor that contributed to the
conflict and division in relationship. Therefore, it is necessary to have an understanding about
original sin that brought rift in the relationship between God and man, man and creation and
among human beings.

According to the Bible man is created in the image and the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26; Wis.
2:23) enjoying the privilege of being in communion with his Creator, able to know and love
the Creator (Lg. 2 § 2). However, man can cherish this communion only if he remains
submissive to his Creator. The “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” is a symbolic
expression of his limits and that he must recognise, respect and trust in his Creator for his
state of grace and holiness. Therefore, “man is dependent on his Creator, and is subjected to
the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom” (CCC. 396). But
“man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and abusing his
freedom, disobeyed God’s command” (CCC. 397). This is the first sin of man (cf. Gen. 3: 1-
11). Thus, every subsequent sin is a breach of obedience and trust in the goodness of the
Creator.

Due to his disobedience man lost the grace of original holiness (cf. CCC. 399; Rom. 3:23),
and as a result the intimacy between human pair and God (Gen. 3:8), human pair and sub-
human form of creation (Gen. 3:14-19) and intimacy between man and woman (Gen. 3:7) got
broken. Consequently, sin manifests itself in the history of whole humankind. Catechism of
the Catholic Church states: “But we know by revelation that Adam had received original
holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the
tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affects the human nature that
they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation
to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness

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and justice. And that is why original sin is called ‘sin’ only in an analogical sense: it is a sin ‘contracted’ and not ‘committed’ – a state and not an act” (CCC. 404).

Thus, the understanding of original sin is important in order to understand the theology of atonement and reconciliation because in the Bible and according to the teaching of the church the origin of man is not primarily understood in a temporal sense but in a theological sense. Therefore, what is said of original sin in the Bible is not something accidental that would affect only the individual committing the sin in a particular period of human history; rather it refers to facts which radically condition the life of all in all ages.324

However, God in his steadfast love did not abandon human being (cf. Gen 3:15): “On the contrary, God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall. This passage in Genesis is called the Protoevangelium (‘first gospel’): the first announcement of the Messiah and redeemer of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of her” (CCC. 410). “The victory that Christ won over sin has given us greater blessings than those which sin had taken from us: ‘where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (Rom. 5:20).” The New Testament teaches not only, how God reconciled the fallen humanity, but also invites everyone to enter in this reconciliation by committing oneself radically to the kingdom values and believing in the one, who accomplished the long awaited reconciliation, which was also the call of the Torah and the Prophets.

4.2. Teachings on Atonement and Reconciliation:

The term “atonement” meant originally ‘at-one-ment’, i.e., being at one with or reconciled. As time went on, it took on the sense of expiation, because reconciliation often requires one party to make up for an offence given to the other. Thus the term is used often to translate words from Hebrew root kpr, used of sacrifices and scapegoats which ‘atone for’ or ‘expiate’ sins and thereby bringing forgiveness (cf. Lev. 16); and also, in the New Testament the term is translated as katallage means ‘reconciliation’ or hilaske' means ‘expiation’.325 In order to have a clear understanding on the doctrine of atonement and reconciliation it is important to study the meaning and the usage of some of these terms, in their original usage.

4.2.1. Reconciliation (Katallaso/Katallage):

“Reconciliation” is a special metaphor used by Paul in his writings. The Greek verbs for reconciliation are katallaso, Katallage and apokatallaso, formed from another Greek word allasso meaning ‘to change’, ‘to alter’, ‘to renew’, ‘to become another in the inner, deepest sense, to change our self or identity’.\(^{326}\) In the Hebrew Scriptures, however, there is no equivalent word for katallaso. In the political and diplomatic sphere of the Hellenistic world the term katallage was used for reconciliation between enemies and for peace treaty between two parties.\(^{327}\) Paul sometimes tries to connect the Hebrew term kipper (atonement or expiation) with katallaso.\(^{328}\)

In 2 Cor. 5:17-7:6 Paul seems to link very closely the ideas of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘new creation’. Beale considers Is. 40-66 as the specific Old Testament background for Paul’s concept of reconciliation. Therefore, Paul understands both ‘new creation’ and ‘reconciliation’ in Christ (2 Cor. 5: 14-21) as the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy on new creation in which Israel would be restored into a peaceful relationship with God.\(^{329}\) Hofius considers that the term “reconciliation,” originated from Paul’s personal experience of God’s reconciliation of him to himself on the Damascus road.\(^{330}\) Kim concludes the following from the Pauline doctrine of reconciliation: first, God is the initiator of reconciliation (cf. Rom 5:10); second, there is an intrinsic relationship between reconciliation of human beings to God and reconciliation between human beings. Reconciliation with God demands reconciliation with those he had persecuted.\(^{331}\)

4.2.2. Redemption (lutrosis/ apolutrosis):

The idea of Redemption from slavery has been one of a familiar concept in ancient Greek and Rome as well as in Israel. It is one of the most powerful concepts in the Bible conveying the ideas of freeing, reclaiming, restoring or healing. Therefore, the metaphor redemption is widely used in the New Testament, especially by Paul: Jesus has redeemed us by his death


\(^{328}\) According to Breytenbach, the Jewish religious tradition of atonement and Hellenistic secular notion of reconciliation were different in origin and belonged to two different Semitic fields. And it was Paul who brought these two notions together and interpreted both in the light of Jesus’ death ‘for us’. Cf. Constantineanu, The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul’s Theology, 27.

\(^{329}\) Cf. Ibid., 28.

\(^{330}\) Cf. Ibid., 29f.

\(^{331}\) Cf. Ibid., 30f.
(Rom. 3:24f.; Eph. 1:7), he has ‘bought’ us from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13; 1 Cor. 6:20), and etc.332 The word redemption is derived from the Latin word redemptio which means “buying back” In Greek it is translated either as lutrosis – “redemption by the payment of the price” or apolutrosis - “the liberation brought about by the payment of the price” (cf. Mk: 10:45; Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6).333 Thus, the New Testament writers use secular terms to explain theological fact of redemption.

It is true that the New Testament writers use the terms derived from the Greek world of commerce and slave market, in order to convey theological truth of redemption, probably to make the doctrine of redemption easily understandable for the readers of the time. However, for us it is necessary to understand the implied or the intended meaning of terms in order to have their correct use in the New Testament; therefore, we have to go back to the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrew root for the verb “to redeem” is go’el which means ‘to buy back or to redeem or to protect’. The term has its root in Jewish family law on the protection of a family member who had the misfortune of falling into debt or slavery.334 “In particular, this task of protecting and defending the integrity of the family fell first to the next-of-kin who was called the go’el (ransomer or redeemer) and it was his obligation to restore persons, land or property back to the family – at his own cost (Lev. 25:8-55; Jer. 32: 6:15). The noun go’el soon passed into religious usage and was transferred to God as the protector of the weak (Prov. 23:10; Jer. 50:34), and defender or advocate of the oppressed (Job. 19:25). By the time of Second Isaiah, go’el was not a ‘part-time’ concern of Yahweh (Is. 41:14; 43:14; 49:7). Vindicating the oppressed as Israel’s go’el was not a ‘part-time’ concern of Yahweh or a secondary characteristic. This was precisely what distinguished Yahweh from the other gods (Ps. 82).”335

Besides the verb go’el, there was one more Hebrew verb padda, used in the Old Testament which means to ransom or to redeem: it is used of God’s rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 7:8), and later from exile (Jer. 31.11).336 These both the verbs go’el and padda were synonymously used in the Old Testament. These words were later translated into Greek Bible as lytrousthai, often translated into the Latin Vulgate as redimere and into English as ‘to

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redeem. Thus, the meaning intended from the word redemption in the New Testament was not the Greek secular meaning but the original Hebrew understanding. Evidently, the Hebrew Scriptures do not highlight after all on the price paid for the liberation, but on the dimension of personal relationship – “now you belong to me…you are mine…you are precious in my eyes and honoured, and I love you,” (Is. 43:3-5). This indicates that it is God who liberates Israel from the slavery. (Ex. 19:5; Is. 43:21).

It is true that the New Testament writers have often used secular terminologies of buying and purchasing (agorazein and exagorazein), if these terms are linked with the noun lutron (Mk. 10:45; Matt. 20:28) or antilutron (1 Tim. 2:6) they tent to misguide us to understand them in the Greek commercial sense as Christ paying price to Devil as the early Church Fathers understood. But the fact of the matter is that the New Testament writers never indented to convey the commercial sense of the words. For instance, Paul never specifies to whom the price is paid; rather he stresses the costly burden of what Christ has accomplished. “But by using the metaphors of ransom, redemption and purchase, Paul and the other New Testament authors are not trying to define the mechanism by which salvation is effected rather they are pointing to their conviction that because of the total Christ-event we have been introduced into a new personal relationship with God.” Therefore it is Jesus’ love rather than his death which restored the relationship between God and man. He is our go’el who freely comes to liberate us from sins and dehumanising elements, restoring our relationship with God. For after all being in right relationship or being reconciled with God is the real meaning of Salvation.

4.2.3. Expiation (hilasterion/Kipper):

Another important concept need to be understood is “expiation,” for we are said to be redeemed from sin and death by Christ, at the cost of his suffering and death, which atoned for or expiated our sins. The Greek word for expiation used by Paul is hilasterion. It is the key word in Romans 3:35 and it is also a rare term and is found only in one other place in the New Testament (Heb. 9:5). The verb hilaskesthai in its Greek secular sense means ‘to appease’, ‘to propitiate’, or ‘to placate’. Hence, many scholars believe that hilasterion should be translated as ‘appeasement’ or ‘propitiation’. However, C.H. Dodd contests this view by saying that

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338 Ibid., 425.
339 Cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9-10; 14:13.
341 Ibid., 427.
such a meaning has no support in the Greek Old Testament or in the Pauline usage of the term. Therefore it is important to understand the term from the Old Testament perspective.

In the Septuagint the word hilaskesthai is often used to translate the Hebrew verb root kpr, which is linked to the feast of Yom Kippur, the “Day of Atonement” or the “Day of Expiation” (Lev. 16), it is a great day of God’s forgiveness and reconciliation with his people. The verb kpr has a wide range of meaning such as to appease, to propitiate or to expiate. The term Hilesterion in Rom. 3:25 can be correctly understood against the background of Yom Kippur. According to Paul that mercy seat is Christ, who once and for all for every one by his passion and death accomplished God’s forgiveness and reconciliation with his people, which the High Priest symbolically performed every year. Further reasons are: first, God is never used in the Old Testament as the object of the verb kpr but always as the subject. If God is the subject of the verb then it is impossible to translate as God propitiating human being. Second, in the Old Testament hilaskomai, and its cognates, hilasmos and hilasterion, are never used to speak of appeasing or pacifying Yahweh; on the contrary Yahweh himself expiate in the sense of forgiving, purifying, cleansing (Ps. 25:11; 65:3-4; Ezek. 16:63).

Tambasco says that in the New Testament too God is the sole agent of expiation. And to say Jesus’ death expiates our sin means he wipes out our sins and cancels our guilt because in Christ God forgives human sin.

4.3. Teaching on Atonement and Reconciliation in the Old Testament:

There is no one uniform and persistent teaching on atonement in the Old Testament. Understanding atonement in the Old Testament time had been changing according to people’s understanding about God and sin. Each new age brought with it new ideas concerning God


343 It is believed that the sins of Israel have contaminated the mercy seat, the throne of God. On the feast of Yom Kippur, great day of forgiveness and reconciliation, the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the slaughtered goat (Lev. 16: 2-16). Cf. Mulcahy, *The Cause of our Salvation*, 430; Brendan J. Byrne and Daniel J. Harrington, *Romans* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 127.

344 Cf. Footnote 115 (Chapter 1). If God is the subject of the verb kpr, then the common Greek meaning “to propitiate” becomes a virtually impossible translation, for God cannot be said to propitiate humankind. The natural translation will thus be “to expiate”, i.e., that God wipes out our sins. Cf. Mulcahy, *The Cause of our Salvation*, 432.

345 Byrne, *Romans*, 127.


and sin. This change in the understanding of God and sin has also influenced and changed their understanding about atonement. But the two common factors that underlie in different doctrines of atonement are: requirement of sincere repentance from the part of the sinner and reconciliation as the chief motive for atoning.

Among the different views on Atonement the earliest one was the sacrifice offered to Yahweh as a compensation for an offence against his majesty and holiness. But as the understanding on God grew more and more ethical and spiritual, the offering came to be looked upon as only the outward manifestation of an inward and spiritual grace. And the emphasis was more on the genuine penitential heart of the sinner. If the sacrifice offered as prescribed, it was believed that the sinner would be reconciled with God. The second view is that of pineal substitution; the punishment, which is due to the offender, is either laid on an animal (Deut. 21:1-9) or on someone else, who takes the place of the convicted party (Is. 52:13-53:12). Ezekiel, however, denies the possibility of vicarious righteousness (Ezek. 14:12ff.), since for Ezekiel religion is a private, personal experience. Consequently, every man stands or falls before God upon his own merits. According to Ezekiel, “Sin angers God and is thus doomed to punishment; God's anger may be assuaged only by repentance; this repentance must be experienced by the sinner himself; there is no other way of salvation” (cf. Ps. 51:17). A third view on atonement was that atonement was to be obtained through absolute obedience to the divine will, expressed in the Mosaic Law. The atoning sinner must change his attitude towards the Law and recommit himself to follow it. This changed attitude towards the law is the prerequisite to the bestowal of pardon (Is. 1:16).

Some of the features that one find in the Old Testament teachings are: an individual is forgiven when he repents and lives righteously; the sin of the nation may be forgiven in consequence of a manifestation of the divine wrath falling upon the righteous representatives

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349 Cf. Ibid.
350 Cf. John M. P. Smith, “The Biblical Doctrine of Atonement: III. Atonement in the Later Priestly Literature,” in Biblical World, Vol. 31. No.3 (Mar., 1908), 216. In the later Jewish ideas (in Josephus and in IV Maccabees) we find traces of atonement for the nation through the suffering of the righteous members of the nation. The thought seems to be that “when the nation has sinned, God must manifest displeasure with their sin that he may do this if he will, not by punishing the whole nation, but by permitting evil to fall upon a few who are representatives of the whole. Cf. Smith, “The Biblical Doctrine of Atonement: XIII Conclusion,” 26.
352 Cf. Ibid., 24f.
of the sinful nation, or an act of notable righteousness by an individual even through this involves no suffering on his part.

4.4. **Traditional Theories on Atonement and Reconciliation in the Church:**

The church doctrine on atonement had also gone through different phases of changes with the better understanding of the New Testament passages on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This gave rise to different ways of explaining the redemptive and reconciling death of Christ, leading to different theories of atonements at different stages of her history; but each having their base on the sacred Scripture. Some of the prominent traditional theories of atonement are: Ransom theory, Christus Victor theory, Satisfaction theory, Moral influence theory and Penal Substitution theory.

4.4.1. **The Ransom Theory:**

Origin was one of the prominent proponents of the ransom theory (185-254). According to ransom theory through the death of his son, God paid a ransom to Satan in order to redeem human beings from the slavery of sin and from the slavery of Satan. Though this theory bases itself on the New Testament texts, which mention Jesus is the ransom or paid ransom for our sin, there is a fundamental flaw in the theory for the reason that human beings committed sin against God, not against Satan. Therefore, ransom has to be paid to God, not to Satan.

4.4.2. **The Christus Victor Theory:**

The Christus Victor theory by Gustaf Aulen (1879-1978) teaches that Jesus battled victoriously against Satan and redeemed human beings from the slavery of sin and death. His victory in this conflict accrues to all those, who accept and believe Jesus, are saved from the enslavement and bondage of sin and Satan. But the shortcomings in this theory is that: it focuses too much on the past event of victory, neglecting our present experience, and it over-stresses the divine action to the detriment of our human role in salvation, ending up making us simple on-lookers at a cosmic battle that takes place over our head. It presents Jesus as a

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355 Cf. Mk. 10:45; Mat. 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Tim. 2:6; 2 Pet. 2:1.
357 Cf. Ibid.
warrior, thus, negating the concept of kenosis, the self-emptying love of God which is evident in God’s total identification with sinful humanity in the birth, ministry, passion and death of Jesus. It also gives an impression that power of death, sin somewhere out there. For the modern person; the power of death is often inside man. It also badly presents God as deceiving Devil.

4.4.3. The Satisfaction Theory:

Anselm (1094) is the proponent of the satisfaction theory. According to this theory sin is a debt owing to God, because sin offended and withheld the honour of God that is due to Him. Consequently, sin requires not just a return to obedience, but some additional satisfaction for the wrong committed. Anselm’s argument continues that God’s perfect righteousness and honour requires that either the honour taken away by sin should be repaid, or the sinner must be punished; however, it was impossible for man to satisfy God. Because such a satisfaction for sin cannot be made by anyone who is less than God and at the same time ought not to be made by anyone who is not man. Because man has sinned so man has to make the satisfaction. It must, therefore, be made by one who is both divine and human: a God-man. And that is the reason God became man (Cur Deus Homo). So that, as a God-man, he could make satisfaction and restore the relationship between God and man359 and this is what Christ accomplished in his suffering and death. The positive point in this theory is that unlike the last two theories in this theory there is an involvement of man. However, it does not involve human beings except for the humanity of Jesus. Furthermore, the theory is only about the past event and it does not relate to the present and the future.360 Finally, there is a logical flaw in Anselm’s argument: “if human sin can cause infinite offence to God why then cannot human sorrow or repentance cause infinite satisfaction?”361

4.4.4. The Moral Influence Theory:

This theory was advocated by Peter Abelard as he was not convinced with the idea of God punishing an innocent instead of the guilty, as mentioned in Anselm’s theory of satisfaction. The fundamental idea of this theory is that there is no principle of the divine nature which necessarily calls for satisfaction on the part of the sinner; and that the death of Christ should

358 Cf. Ibid., 340.
359 Cf. Park, Triune Atonement, 15-16.
360 Cf. Ibid., 17.
361 Mulcahy, The Cause of our Salvation, 357.
not be regarded as expiation for sin. It was merely a manifestation of the love of God, suffering in and with His sinful creatures and taking upon Himself their woes and grief. “This suffering did not serve to satisfy the divine justice, but to reveal the divine love, so as to soften human hearts and to lead them to repentance.”

This theory, of course, has a great emphasis on God’s love, both his love for man and his love as the originator for the act of the Atonement. However, there is a lack of clarity in the means of atonement. It also raises the question about the justice of God.

4.4.5. Penal Substitution Theory:

Penal Substitution theory teaches that sin is a violation of the moral law of God. Due to sin human beings became guilty before God and they stand under the penalty of death. But God, out of his love for the human being, sent his son Jesus as a substitute to die for the sinners. By dying on the cross for the sins of human beings, Jesus takes upon himself the guilt of human being on himself. Through his suffering and death he satisfies the penalty, thus allowing human being to take his righteousness upon them and to be reconciled with God by restoring the relationship with God. Though this theory is widely accepted, it is not free from criticism. It is often criticized for punishing the innocent. Some think that this paints God as an uncaring and bloodthirsty tyrant; one who demands that justice is satisfied when it was within his gift to exercise grace and mercy instead.

Although these theories are grounded on the scriptural passages, they do not adequately or fully explain the true nature of Christ’s atoning act and they are also often misleading due to their inadequacy and limitations. Some critical limitations that could be observed in them are: firstly, they limit the reconciling or the atoning activity of Christ only to the cross of Christ, thus failing to present the life and ministry of Jesus as reconciling. Secondly, they seem to emphasize reconciliation as a past event, thus failing to establish it as a present event. Thirdly, they give an impression that Christ’s suffering and death is as an ontological event, thus failing to ground it in the concrete life situation of human being. Finally, they try to explain the fact ‘freedom from’ but not ‘freedom to’. Thus, there are series of flaws. In order to have a deeper and correct understanding on atonement and reconciliation we need to look at in a

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362 Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 386.
364 Cf. Oliver D. Crisp, Retrieving Doctrine: Essays in Reformed Theology (Downers Grove: Oliver Crips, 2010), 95.
365 Cf. Mulcahy, The Cause of our Salvation, 422.
different perspective. For that we need to take into account the whole Christ event and not merely the suffering and death of Christ, though it is the climax in Christ event.

4.5. Jesus’ Life and Ministry invite to reconciliation:

One of the major flaws in the traditional atonement theories is that by only restricting to the cross-event they fail to present the life and ministry of Jesus as reconciling - “We are not saved by the death without the life; nor are we saved by the life without the death. Neither can be isolated from the other. Unfortunately, there has been tendency to over-value the moment of Jesus’ death on the cross, making it the only cause of our salvation.”366 For without reference to the life and ministry of Jesus it would be difficult to understand the meaning of the cross.

The primary content of Jesus’ preaching and healing ministry is about the coming of the Reign of God.367 They present God in a new light and demand from the hearers a new way of behaving. They demonstrate God’s love for the sinners and the outcasts. The Sermon on the Mount is summed up as God’s indiscriminatory love for enemies reveals how God deals with sinners. (Mt. 5:38-47). This loving attitude of God towards sinner is visible in the life and ministry of Jesus – he becomes friend of tax-gatherers and sinners, he eats with them and he even confronts and has sharp words against those who were against it. His parables reveal how God rejoices at the return and reunion of his lost sons and daughters as a loving Father (cf. Lk. 15), who even dismisses the sinner’s history of guilt as irrelevant from the start.368 His miracles are also signs of God’s reconciliation. He cures not only the deaf, blind and dumb but also lepers who are most isolated and abandoned and excluded from the society. The aim of Jesus’ healing is thus re-integration of the outcast again into the community and re-establishing of communion with society.369 His addressing God as Abba reveals that God has come close to him as Father and has revealed everything to him (Mt. 3:13-17; 11:25-28).

366 Ibid., 468.
367 According to Rahner the Reign of God is not an abstract reality; rather it is a new way of being human, characterised in the Sermon on the Mount and summed up Jesus’ double commandment of love – love for God and love for human being, suggesting that communion with God can become concrete only in communion with other people. Cf. Mulcahy, The Cause of our Salvation, 445.
368 “However, a person stand before God, repentant or unrepentant, God forgives him unconditionally, without presuppositions” (Merklein: 24). His forgiveness “precedes the repentance, both temporally and logically,” as H. Merklein said in summarizing Jesus’ proclamation. He “offers sinners salvation before they do penance” (Jeremias, 1971: 173). This doesn’t mean that repentance is superfluous. It is no longer a condition which must precede God’s willingness to forgive, but follows from it, as is clear from the parable of the merciless debtor (Mt 18:23-35). Raymond Schwager, “Christ’s Death and the Prophetic Critique of Sacrifice,” in Semeia, no. 33, (1985), 111f.
Therefore, Jesus is the true and legitimate interpreter of the divine will to human being (Jn. 1:18).  

Through his words and works, signs and miracles Jesus concretely offers a new way of being human, a new way of being free and a new way of relating to God. The public ministry of Jesus, marked by praxis of healing and exorcising, of forgiveness, acceptance and table fellowship, provides the paradigm of God’s offer of reconciliation. “Jesus is the sacrament of salom – the catalyst of right relationship with God, with creation, with humanity, with self.” Jesus seeks to restore harmonious relationships and open the way to a new communion within the human family and with God. The cross is, as Rahner says, is the summing up of his whole life in an unqualified “yes” of all that he has stood for – all his claims, his insights, his parables, his healings, he ever perched and taught.

Vat. II states: “It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph. 1:9). His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph. 2:18; 2Pet. 1:4). … He did this by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation – by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth. (cf. Dei Verbum § 2-4).” Thus, far from focussing only on the suffering of Jesus’ Dei Verbum states categorically that we are saved by his words, works, signs and miracles. The text insists therefore that we are reconciled to God not only by cross alone by his ministry, death and resurrection.

4.6. **How Christ can save us today?**

One of the most all time relevant and pertinent question that the traditional atonement theories do not address is: how can the past event of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection be rendered present today so that we may enter into personal relationship with him that can transform our lives in the present time? The answer perhaps lies by looking at Christ-event as a symbolic causality that makes present the reality signified by the symbol. But to understand this, it is a prerequisite to know the difference between the terms *sign* and *symbol*. And the fundamental

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370 Schillebeeckx says, “Clearly the uniqueness of Jesus’ message and practice has its source in the Abba-experience.” Schwager, “Christ’s Death and the Prophetic Critique of Sacrifice,” 112.


difference between sign and symbol is that sign do not participate in any way in the reality and power of that to which they point. Symbol, although they are not the same as that which they symbolize, participate in its meaning and power. Downey says that signs belong to the world of information and function whilst symbols belong to the world of meaning and value. In *Dynamics of Faith* Tillich writes that symbols convey meaning and value; they lure into participation; they carry power, they are transformative; they release energy; they trigger consciousness and awareness; they open up new layers of reality; they give birth to new insight; they shift horizons. In this sense Christ events, especially his death is not merely past event, but they continue to bring out the effects they symbolise, when they are relived on life. With this preliminary understanding we can unfold the views of some of the Catholic theologians.

### 4.6.1. Karl Rahner:

According to Karl Rahner the principle cause of our salvation is not the death of Jesus on the cross as traditionally understood but the love of God communicated in that event. He insists that salvation is the *cause* of the cross and not that the cross is the cause of salvation. Because the salvific will of God cannot be an *effect* of the cross; rather it is the cross that is the *result of God’s* saving will.

Rahner, however, maintains that the cross is objectively the presence of grace for human being and subjectively it evokes in human being the response of receiving this grace. “The crucified Jesus is thus the ‘effective exemplar’ (*produkitives Vorbild*) of the divinising and forgiving self-communication of God, because he *enables* and *empowers* our free reception of salvation.” From the cross Jesus reveals that God is eternally ‘the reconciled One.’ If God is eternally forgiving and reconciled One then the cross is the symbol in and through which we experience the love and forgiveness of God, inviting us to respond in faith to enter into his relationship.

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Thus, the cross is not the principle cause of our redemption but God and his love. The cross reveals and makes present this reality symbolically. “The cross is the most transparent witness we have in the world of God’s forgiving love towards us all. It is already this awareness, however, - that we acquire looking at the cross – that allows us to open ourselves upon to such a love, gives to us the possibility of living this unconditional love recognised in the cross of Christ. We are not saved by the cross in se – but there is no salvation without the cross.”

4.6.2. Jon Sobrino:

Sobrino develops this approach of Rahner further. He says that the New Testament does not present Jesus’ life and cross were necessary to change God’s attitude towards human beings - from being a justly angry God to duly appeasing God; on the contrary it asserts that it is God who takes the initiative to convince human being of his love and forgiveness through the life and suffering of his Son in order to reconcile human being with himself. “Jesus did not make God change; Jesus is the historical sacrament in which God expresses his irrevocable saving change toward us.” Therefore, the cross “is not efficient causality, but symbolic causality” that symbolically expresses God’s love for human being (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9), which moves the hearts of men and women. Sobrino believes that we find in Jesus the most singular experience of unconditional love of God and of humanity. And by contemplating the life of Jesus and by imitating Jesus, human beings can become aware of who they really are and what they can and should become, and by imitating the love of Jesus human being can facilitate the humanising of a sadly dehumanised humanity.

4.6.3. Bernard Sesboüé:

Another Catholic theologian, who goes down the same line with Rahner and Sobrino is Bernard Sesboüé, a French Jesuit theologian. He says that the Scripture presents God as the God of love, mercy and tenderness. Jesus’ sacrifice has nothing to do with cultic rituals; his sacrifice is that of his life – long pr-existence and service of others. According to Sesboüé the new category which would help us understand the mystery of redemption and

380 Ibid., 402.
381 Jon Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, (Kent: Burns & Oates, 1994), 230
382 Ibid. “Jesus’ suffering and death is a sacrament which proclaims ‘nothing, absolutely nothing [is] an obstacle to God’s indicating his definitive, saving, welcoming, irrevocable ‘yes’ to this world. We can thus claim that Jesus’ cross saves ‘because in it the love of God for human beings has appeared with maximum clarity’” Mulcahy, The Cause of our Salvation, 404; cf. Jon Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 231.
383 Cf. Ibid., 405f.
reconciliation is that of relation and communication, because it is through the dimension of relation and communication the mysteries about God, self and others are being unfolded. “Since we are beings with intelligence and freedom, communication between God and us passes by knowledge and love, and they inter-penetrates with each other. Because knowledge leads to love, whilst love always wants to know more. This exactly is about God’s revelation – that invites response that desires communion. The whole Christ event is the revelation of God’s love in its fullness. And we are to discover this and adhere to it. For to be saved, is first of all to accept to be loved. Jesus is the sacrament of salvation, but not just in the moment of dying on the cross. The total reality of Jesus can be called the sacrament of salvation – the totality of the incarnation on, his earthly existence, ministry, death, resurrection and his sending of the Spirit. Thus, salvation would imply to be open to the love of God that is being revealed in the life, ministry, passion and resurrection of Christ and by the Holy Spirit.

4.7. Why Jesus’ death be understood as reconciling or salvific?

There is no doubt that Jesus went around doing good things (Acts. 10:38), he was innocent, loving, obedient, etc. But there are also so many innocent, self-sacrificing and good people who are persecuted and killed like Jesus, some died even more violent death than the one Jesus underwent. Then why is it only the death of Jesus is singled out as reconciling, redeeming or salvific? What makes Jesus’ death special and extraordinary? According to Karl Rahner Jesus’ death is not salvific simply because he died loving, self-sacrificing and obedient, but the one and the most sublime thing that differentiates Jesus’ death from other is his resurrection. Jesus transformed the death into life. Something which no one has ever done or can or will ever do. The traditional atonement theories had missed this important point. In the words of Karl Rahner: “What truly distinguished his death, is that death, as the manifestation of sin, became in him as expression of grace; the emptiness of man the advent of God’s plenitude (which death certainly cannot of itself be). Death became life; visible condemnation became the visible advent of the Kingdom of God.”

When we speak of death its not only physical death, not merely the death of the innocent, but, paradoxically, moral death, the death of the guilty sinner. In his descent into “hell”, Jesus

385 Cf. Ibid. 406.
386 Cf. Ibid., 407f.
387 Cf. Ibid., 459.
388 Von Balthasar says that this is the moment of supreme identification of God with humanity. In cross the Incarnation is complete. No one now can accuse God of being an outsider to the pain and suffering of the human
identifies himself with the sinner’s radical separation, alienation and estrangement from God. According to Ur von Balthasar what is terrible about Jesus’ death is that though personally sinless he suffered the death of sinners and of all sinners. “For von Balthasar, Jesus is a substitute for sinners and he wants the word “substitution” (Stellvertretung) retained in all its vigour and force. Jesus must bear the totality of the world’s sin (Jn. 1:29) “for us”, pro nobis, he must be “made into sin” (2 Cor. 5:21), becoming “a curse” (Gal. 3:13).

Experiencing what is to be abandoned by his Abba, Jesus touches the point furthermost a human being could fall away from God and enters the abyss of death in solidarity with the guilty, identifying with the sin of sinners, as Paul scandalously claims in 2 Cor. 5: 21: “God made him into sin”. 389

4.8. Why was it necessary that the Christ should Suffer (Lk. 24:26)?

One of the puzzling questions regarding the death of Jesus is: why did Jesus have to suffer and die to reconcile us with God? Was not any other method that God could have adopted? Perhaps there are some dimensions to the answer of this question. First, Jesus has to undergo such a cruel and unjust suffering and death not because it was the will of the Father; 391 but on the contrary it is due to the reality of the human condition caused by sin, that anyone with genuine integrity will escape suffering of some kind. “To be human is to be crucified is not something that the Father has directly planned but what we have arranged.” 392 Jesus suffered and died as a consequence of the free choice of evil men. 393

Second, Jesus had to suffer to show us what human beings are doing against one another – crucifying the innocent. 394 In other words to show that sin 395 is destroying the order of creation which Jesus came to restore, and to teach human beings how to restore the order of creation.

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389 Cf. Ibid., 462.
390 Ibid.
391 “The mission of Jesus from the Father is not the mission to be crucified; what the Father wished is that Jesus should be human. … Jesus accepted the cross in love and obedience, and his obedience was to the command to be human.” Herbert McCabe, God Matters (London: MPG Books, 2005), 93.
392 Ibid.
395 Sin is not so much the transgression of God’s laws and the moral code; rather it is dehumanising the human nature. It is hamartia, “missing the mark”, failing to become who we were meant to be in God’s eye. Cf. Mulcahy, The Cause of our Salvation, 463f.; David B. Burrell, Elna Malits, Original Peace: Restoring God’s Creation (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997), 15ff.
Third, perhaps this was the best way to convince human being of God’s love. In cross God access to human zones where we never expected God could be. For in cross God’s love is seen with maximal clarity. And now human being can see God’s love and believe.\textsuperscript{396} Therefore, in Jesus’ suffering God suffers. “God ‘experiences’ a death – as never before. In cross God is in solidarity with the victims of the world. And now no one can accuse God of being an outsider to the pain of the human condition.”\textsuperscript{397} Though God seems in the whole episode of cross silent, God, in his own way, in his own time, gives it his own meaning and restores this innocent victim to life, and that is called Resurrection.\textsuperscript{398} This understanding of the cruelty of sin, its consequence to human being himself and the realization of God’s love and solidarity for the fallen human being call out the sinner to repent and believe in the loving God who wants to set him free, and accept the new way shown by God in Jesus of Nazareth to redeem the whole humanity from the clutches of sin, that dehumanizes the humanity.

4.9. Reconciliation effects in Repentance and Faith in Christ:

In Christ event, God has very powerfully revealed human being of his forgiveness and of his acceptance of sinners that he is not hostile or discriminatory against sinners; rather he loves both the just and the unjust alike (Mt. 5:43–48); and through Christ God has redeemed humanity from all the elements that dehumanizes and enslaves him. Therefore, it is now the turn of every individual to enter into God’s reconciliation through repentance (turning away from sin) and faith (turning towards Christ) in the one who accomplished the reconciliation. Furthermore, once a person is reconciled with God, he or she shares the ministry of reconciliation by being the ambassadors for Christ to call everyone to reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:20).

This is the reason that Paul Tillich says that in atonement/reconciliation there is an objective and subjective elements.\textsuperscript{399} The objective element is that God has objectively forgiven sinners in Christ once and for all. But now man must subjectively accept God’s forgiveness by

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{396} “In Jesus’ life and cross God’s love has been displayed. And God chose this way of showing himself, because he could not find any clearer way of telling us human beings that he really wills our salvation. . . . (it conveys) God has irrevocably drawn near to this world, that he is a God ‘with us’ and a God ‘for us’.” Sobrino, Jesus the Liberator, 231.
  \item \textsuperscript{397} Mulcahy, The Cause of our Salvation, 466.
  \item \textsuperscript{398} Cf. Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{399} “Atonement is always both a divine act and a human reaction. The divine act overcomes the estrangement between God and man in so far as it is a matter of human guilt. In atonement, human guilt is removed as a factor which separates man from God. But this divine act is effective only if man reacts and accepts the removal of guilt between God and man, namely, the divine offer of reconciliation in spite of guilt. Atonement therefore necessarily has an objective and a subjective element.” Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1975), 170.
\end{itemize}
repenting from his sin and in believing in the one in and through whom God’s forgiveness is accomplished. “The provision for reconciliation made in the death of Christ is not finally effective except when met by faith. God has reconciled all men to Himself; thus men are reconciled to God when they receive the gospel in faith. The first is provision, the second application.” 400

The central theme of Jesus’ teaching in the synoptic gospels is the Kingdom of God. And it was always preached in the context of discipleship, calling men and women to be reconciled with God and one another through repentance of sin and believing in the gospel: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk. 1:15). “It is a call to discipleship. It is a call to Metanoia, i.e., a conversion to God. A call to completely new way of life. A call to a radical change of mind and attitude. A call to reconciliation. A call to a life of Faith.” 401

Jesus’ parables, Sermon on Mount, healing ministry, passion, death, resurrection and sending of the Spirit and all meant to invite human being to accept the offer of God’s Reconciliation in believing in Jesus and the gospel he preached. Incidentally, reconciliation is a personal relationship and it cannot be a unilateral action on the part of God alone. Reconciliation takes place between two parties. God has provided forgiveness for all people through his Son, and sinner has to accept the forgiveness in act of repentance and faith to effect the reconciliation in his or her life. God’s part is finished; our part is a matter of individual decision. 402

4.10. Ministry to Reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:14-6:10):

God’s reconciling the world to himself in Christ, which is effected in the individual by the personal act of repentance and faith in Christ, urges and demands the believer to be an ambassador of reconciliation to the world. Paul’s profound experience of God’s grace and reconciliation on his way to Damascus, which significantly shaped his theology, life and ministry, made Paul understand how God reconciles the world to himself. Paul was thus forced to re-examine his entire worldview in the light of this new and undeniable reality. 403

403 Here he develops his theological reflection on his personal experience on the road to Damascus. He admits that he was once the enemy of Jesus Christ and persecuted the Church because of his misjudgement of Jesus Christ like other Jews. But on the road to Damascus, God revealed to him the crucified Jesus as Christ and Lord.
Wolff states “this experience of reconciliation shaped Paul’s apostolic existence.” From then on Paul considers himself as an ambassador for Christ to take this message to the world and to appeal men and women to be reconciled to God. In 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:10 Paul summarises his experience of reconciliation with God in Christ as purely God’s gift of grace offered to an estranged and rebellious humanity, therefore, he feels urged to do the very thing for the humanity that God had done with him.

First, Paul understood from his own experience of encounter with Christ the reconciliation is purely God’s gift of grace offered to an estranged and rebellious humanity. “Indeed, we have a window into the radical nature of God’s grace, of a God who reached out to his enemies. The victim takes initiative. This is what Schwöbel refers to as “the asymmetry of reconciliation.”

Second, the reconciliation of the world by God is presented to Paul as an objective reality, which means it not be limited simply to those who have such an experience. On the contrary, it must be reached to human being till the end of the world. “It is an extending of that cosmic reconciliation. It is not an extending of our terms of reconciliation but extending God’s reconciliation.” What Paul is trying to convey to the Corinthians here is that his apostolic ministry cannot be separated from God’s act of reconciliation. For “to reject the ambassador is to reject the one who sends him, and to renounce Paul because of his suffering is to renounce Christ, on whose behalf Paul is speaking and with whom he is working.”

Third, it is through Christ’s death and resurrection that the objective reconciliation is accomplished, so it is Christ, who is the reconciler. Therefore, it is around Christ that any

And now, he feels urged to take this message of reconciliation to his Jewish brethren and others as an ambassador. Cf. Seyoon Kim, “2 Cor. 5:11-21 and the Origin of Paul’s Concept of ‘Reconciliation’,” in Novum Testamentum, 39 (1997), 379.


Cornelius Constantineanu, The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul’s Theology (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 71f.

“The asymmetrical character of divine reconciliation and of divine love defines the reconciling act in Christ as of identification and exchange. Since reconciliation with those who cannot initiate reconciliation by themselves, because they are captive in separation from God, can only be achieved through the identification of God in Christ with his enemies, so divine love is directed to those who cannot love God (Schwöbel, 2003, 25). Constantineanu, “Church, Ministry and Relational Theology,” 153.

Ibid.

Lim, The sufferings of Christ Are Abundant in Us: A Narrative Dynamics Investigation of Paul’s Sufferings in 2 Corinthians (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 127; “The main emphasis on reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5 is that Paul’s ministry of reconciliation (v. 18). Those who have been reconciled to God in Christ become themselves ministers of God’s reconciling love. Paul described this as being “ambassadors” for Christ (v.20). An ambassador has a high rank, but their rank is totally derivative. The ambassador’s message is that the one who sent her or him.” John B. Polhill, Paul and His Letter (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 269.
thought of reconciliation should be based. “One cannot separate the concept of reconciliation – especially in its political and social aspects – from Christ, in whom the reality of reconciliation is found and realized.”

Fourth, by sharing his experience of reconciliation, Paul wants to encourage the Corinthians to relate differently to each other and even to their enemies as God does in Christ. In 2 Cor. 6:1-10 Paul insists that the Corinthians should not make the grace of God go in vain. “Indeed, the whole point of 6:1-10 is to illustrate that ‘the gospel message, to be the gospel message, must be embodied, not just spoken’ (Kraftchick, 2002, 151). There is thus an intrinsic relationship between the message of reconciliation and the messenger’s own reconciliation and life.”

Lastly, it is significant that for Paul there is no reconciliation without a cost. In 2 Cor. 6: 3-10 Paul provides a list of hardship involved in the ministry of reconciliation: first, the external trials – beatings, imprisonments, and the like (vv. 4b-5); second, positive traits needed in order to conduct the ministry – patience, purity, love, etc. (vv. 6-7); third and finally he lists nine pairs of antithetical ways of viewing the ministry (vv. 8-10). What Paul is trying to convey to the believers here is that the ministry of reconciliation involves the entire lifestyle and immense hardship. Schwöbel comments: “…in view of the message that has been entrusted to them Christians know that the reality of reconciliation can spread – but at a price. Reconciliation understood from this theological perspective is not based on mutual agreement that has to be established first, but on a one-sided step to break up the pattern of the mutuality of enmity. Reconciliation is based on a one-sided offer of peace where there was conflict. As such, it is costly: it requires withdrawing from all attempts at retribution. The one who offers reconciliation is the one who must pay the price for the renewal of the relationship in the sense that there can be no retribution for the past misdeeds (Schwöbel, 2003, 2003, 35-6)”

Thus, we see that Paul’s vision of reconciliation was radically shaped by, and grounded in, the story of Christ, which he personally experienced on the road to Damascus. “This vision inspired him throughout his life and ministry and gave him the impetus to be constantly engaged in reconciling practice – between Jews and Gentiles, between various individuals and

409 Constantineanu, “Church, Ministry and Relational Theology,” 253f.
410 Ibid., 154.
411 Ibid.
412 Cf. Ibid.
413 Constantineanu, “Church, Ministry and Relational Theology,” 254.
groups within the churches, between Christians and outsiders. It was the same vision worked out in Paul’s life that offered an incentive for his congregation to think and act likewise and, indeed, it also inspires us to continue to build on that vision.”

Therefore, the Church and her every member, who is reconciled to God, share the urgent mission of Christ to make known to the world the truth of God’s love and how he reconciled the World to himself in Christ in words and deed, and to beseech human being on behalf of Christ to be reconciled with God.

**Conclusion:**

Based on the study the following conclusion could be arrived: 1) Reconciliation is the work of God. It is God who initiates reconciliation and he is the subject of reconciliation: it is not God but human beings that are reconciled to God and are urged to reconcile themselves to him (2 Cor. 5:20). 2) God reconcile the word to himself through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We neither understand the cross without reference to his life and resurrection, nor does the cross have any meaning without the life and resurrection. 3) Reconciliation denotes a real change and transformation in the relationship between God and human beings, a restoration of fellowship with God and with one another (2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 5:10; 12:14-21), a life transformed according to the teaching of Christ. 4) Reconciliation to be effected subjectively it has to be appropriated in repentance and faith in Jesus and in his gospel (Mk. 1:15). 5) There is a ministry of reconciliation to be carried out into the world by those who have been reconciled (2 Cor. 5:18-21). We are urged to be witnesses and to be ambassadors of Christ of God’s reconciliation (Lk. 24:47), “For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny” (GS.22).

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414 **Ibid.** 158.

415 “The Christian is certainly bound both by need and by duty to struggle with evil through many afflictions and to suffer death; but, as one who has been made a partner in the paschal mystery, and as one who has been configured to the death of Christ, he will go forward, strengthened by hope, to the resurrection.” Cf. **LG.** 22.
CONCLUSION

One of the recurring themes in the New Testament, especially in the Pauline writings, is sin and reconciliation. Paul is in fact preoccupied with this theme as it was his personal experience with Jesus on his way to Damascus. In the Synoptic Gospels this theme is elaborated by Jesus through his parables, (cf. Lk. 15), his teachings (Mt. 5), Jesus’ own attitude towards the sinners and above all his death and resurrection. Among the Old Testament books it is one of the major themes in the book of Genesis, which narrates the story about the fall our first parents and God’s initiative to restore human beings to the state of holiness and justice. God’s design to reconcile human beings begins immediately after their fall (Gen. 3:15). In fact the major theme in Jacob’s and Joseph’s cycles is reconciliation.

One of the themes that recur frequently in the Genesis narratives is the contrast between the work of man and the work of God. The story about the tower of Babel is a classic example. The entire story of Jacob also reflects this theme – throughout his life Jacob is determined to seize the promise of God by his own efforts and strategies. Genesis 32-33 highlights the reconciliation between two rival brothers and Jacob’s entrance into the Promised Land, which is an integral part of God’s promise to Jacob. The contrast between the work of God and the work of man is also evident in Gen. 32-33 at various points in the narratives. Jacob undertakes different methods to appease Esau – as a diplomatic measure first he sends messengers. And as the messengers report that Esau is coming with 400 men to meet him he is at great distress and fear. So he divides his family intending to save at least half of it, he prays to God that nothing worst fall on him and his family and finally he strategizes to appease him with a large sum of presents. However, at the wrestling at Jabbok he learns that reconciliation with Esau and the fulfilment of God’s promise must be the work of God rather than the work of man.

The narrative in Genesis 32-33 illustrates not only the reconciliation episode of two brothers but also the nature of Jacob’s God who is a God of initiative. We are reconciled to God not merely because of our repentance for our sins but because of the unchanging love and mercy of God. In the context of Jacob’s story it is God who takes the initiative and sees that his plan is fulfilled at the proper time: He elects Jacob even before his birth, it is God who promises to bring him back to the Promised Land, it is God who sees that Jacob becomes prosperous in spite of the deception and manipulation of his uncle Laban, it is God who commands Jacob to leave for his homeland, it is God who prevents Laban from harming Jacob and his household and it is God who initiates the wrestling match with Jacob with the intention of blessing him.
Throughout Jacob’s cycle the narrative indicates time and again God’s roll; God working out his plan from behind the scene: disciplining him, correcting him, guiding him and protecting him. It is God who pushes Jacob to the point where he finds himself alone so that God could finally deal with him privately to break his self-reliance and make him more God-dependent. God struggles with Jacob, and in the process Jacob prevails – not in the sense that he overcomes God but rather in the sense that by recognizing his dependence on God he is now able to receive the promise and the blessing of God to Abraham.

It sounds in fact ridiculous for many that God wrestled with a man. But the bottom line is not that God wrestle with a man but how God transforms a person without abusing or humiliating a person. God dislocates the sinew of Jacob’s thigh not with a violent hit but with a gentle touch. God’s motive of wrestling with Jacob is not to crush him but to bless him. By the way, blessing in the biblical sense does not mean filling a person with material possessions or comfort, not even with happiness, though often they follow with God’s blessing, but the real content and the purpose of God’s blessing is transforming a person in the image of God (cf. Mt. 5:43-48). And the method of God’s blessing is breaking. In order to bless God has to break the self-reliance and the pride of Jacob – he breaks the strongest part of a wrestler’s strength. Often in life the things that we consider as strongest source for our success could be greatest hindrance for our spiritual growth. God has to disable us in the very thing that we are proud of; though it is a very painful experience. Dale Martin Stone’s saying is true with Jacob: “He (God) ruthlessly perfects whom He royally elects.”

Jacob’s determination to cling on to his adversary and his persistent plea for blessing from his adversary is remarkable! Even more impressive is the beauty and the gentleness of the mysterious man’s response. Now the man touches gently the most sensitive area of Jacob’s life with a gentle question: what is your name, a question that does not offend or despise Jacob, yet cuts through his whole life history, forcing Jacob to recall all that he had done and all that he had been. Now Jacob has to face the Truth with truth. This suggests though God deals gently with sinners, yet he is firm in his approach, not compromising with the sins of the sinners; but all the same time he does this without hurting or humiliating the worth and the dignity of the person. Jacob knows now God more than ever. He has learnt the nature of his God and how he deals with sin and sinners. Therefore, he expresses with the greatest relief: “For I have seen God face-to-face, and yet my life is preserved.” The contrasting images of

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the shining sun and the limping Jacob symbolically portray the dawn of a new era in Jacob’s life. This new life, in fact, does not emanate from his strength but from his weakness and his experience and understanding of his God: If God could deal with so kindness and gentleness with a rogue like Jacob; he would surely protect him from his angry and revengeful brother.

With this new strength and confidence he leads his family to meet Esau not with an attitude of self-reliance but humility and total trust in God. The change in his approach and attitude also contributes to the change in the atmosphere: Jacob experiences something beyond his expectation. The man, of whom Jacob had nightmare and terror all through, runs, throws his arms around Jacob, falls on his neck and kisses him. They both embrace and weep. What a miracle! What a climax reunion! Not a word spoken, yet reconciliation between the brothers is accomplished. Surely, Jacob has understood that his God has made it happen. Therefore, Jacob relates this encounter with his encounter with God: “for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me.” Here the divine and the human or the vertical and the horizontal dimension in reconciliation are made clear. For, there can be no true reconciliation which is not grounded in God, and reconciliation with God is meaningless if it is not lived with human beings.

According to Genesis due to sin relationship broke at three levels: the intimacy between God and human beings, the intimacy between man and woman and the intimacy between human beings and creation. With the first fall these relationship were broken one after the other in a descending order. So also when reconciliation between God and human beings happens the other two follows or should follow.

The reconciliation story of Jacob sends out a message of hope that man, despite his weakness and deceits can live together with God. A reconciliation of opposites can be achieved; imperfect man and God can travel a common road through history. The reconciliation story in Genesis 32-33 is a prototype of God’s reconciliation with human beings in Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the manifestation of God’s love and that God has already reconciled the world to himself. Jesus’ preaching, miracles and his attitudes towards the sinners and the outcaste loudly proclaim that God has forgiven the world of its sins. The passion and the death of Christ is the climax and ultimate manifestation of God’s reconciliation with human beings and his deepest solidarity with the suffering humanity. The cross not only conveys God’s love and mercy but also the justice of God that does not compromise with sin.
The cross of Christ, though foolishness and contempt in the eyes of the world, is the most powerful symbol from God that not only displays the truth that God has already reconciled the world to himself, but it also draws the minds and hearts of human beings towards God’s love in repentance and faith in Christ, who is the manifestation of God’s love and forgiveness for the sinners, and is at the same time the representative for human beings, for he identifies himself with all the sinners, taking upon himself sins of human beings offers his life in perfect obedience to his Father’s will. He imputed our sin on himself and imputed his righteousness on us. Thus, he made sinners righteous before God. Therefore, it is in and through Christ we find and obtain our reconciliation with God. As Jacob received blessing and reconciliation with God by clinging to him, beseeching persistently for his blessing, so too we must cling on to Christ in faith and beseech for God’s forgiveness in repentance.

The encounter of Jacob with God at Jabbok is fundamental for Israel; for it is from this encounter she is born with a new identity and mission – a mission to reconcile nations to God. God’s intention of electing Jacob and Israel is that they be light to nations. Throughout Israel’s history God had been teaching and reminding her of her mission for the world. But she failed to fulfil the mission. But even then God did not abandon human beings. He sent his only Son who through his life, death and resurrection reconciled the world once and for all with God. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the indelible mark of God’s love and reconciliation for the World, calling men and women to receive God’s reconciliation in the name of Christ. All who accepted this through repentance and faith enter into communion with God and form a new community in Christ, sharing the mission as ambassador for Christ in the world proclaiming God’s reconciliation through their words and life-style that despite our sins we can be reconciled with God in Christ.
BIBLIOGRAPHIA

Primary Sources


Secondary Literatures


Erklärung

Ich erkläre, dass ich die vorliegende Diplomarbeit selbständig und ohne fremde Hilfe verfasst, andere als die angebenden Quellen und Hilfsmittel nicht benutzt und die den benutzen Quellen wörtlich und inhaltlich entnommen Stellen als solche erkenntlich gemacht habe.
Abstract:

Reconciliation is one of the major themes in the bible, and it is primarily the work of God, and it is He who initiates the process of reconciliation and brings it to its fulfilment. He enables man often through different incidents and at times even through painful and life-changing experiences. Though his invitation is addressed directly or indirectly to man, man is free to accept or reject it at his own risk.

Jacob’s account in Genesis is full of deception and enmity, but it is also one of the marvellous stories of “sin and reconciliation” in the Old Testament. This scientific paper is an attempt to establish, how God is active in shaping Jacob into Israel through a series of life-changing events and enabling him to be reconciled with his adversaries – first with God himself, and then with his brother Esau, who once plotted to kill him.

The story of Jacob portrays also the story of the nation Israel, which is one of constant struggle with YHWH and with her neighbouring nations. Through the story of Jacob the narrator tries to teach Israel that she must cling on to YHWH for His blessings, in order to enter the Promised Land and to experience peace with her neighbours.

Jacob’s story is also a foreshadow to the New Testament account of the atoning and reconciling act of Jesus, through which the whole of humanity is reconciled with God and with one another; and it is by clinging on to Christ in faith one is enabled to enter into this reconciliation with God and men.
Abstrakt:


Jakobs Geschichte im Buch Genesis ist voll von Betrug und Feindschaft, aber es ist auch eine erstaunliche Geschichte von "Sünde und Versöhnung".


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