

Close Encounters of the Best Kind Spotkania, które zbliżają Genesis 32-33

Introduction:

Following the success of *Jaws*, film producer Steven Spielberg could make any film he wanted to. He chose to produce what became another box office hit, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" [*Bliskie spotkania trzeciego stopnia*]. Filmed in 1977 during the height of the Cold War, the film portrayed contact with an alien civilization. Spielberg later commented on why he made the film. He said, "If we can talk to extraterrestrials in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*", he said, "why not with the Reds in the Cold War?"

Close encounters enable us to understand ourselves and others better. They lead to understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation. They deepen relationships that had been superficial. They give an impetus for growth and a new direction on life. All these took place during the encounters Jacob faced on the road home to Palestine.

[Read 32:1-6] Przed spotkaniem Jakuba z Ezawem

32 Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. ² And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

³ And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, ⁴ instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. ⁵ I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.' "

⁶ And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." ⁷ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, ⁸ thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape."

⁹ And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' ¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. ¹¹ Please deliver me from

the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. ¹² But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' "

This first encounter is mysterious. Why have angels come to meet Jacob? Are they friendly or threatening? Whichever, they made such an impression on Jacob that he named that place Machanaim, which means "two camps", one for the angels' camp and one for Jacob's camp. In Jacob's earlier vision at Bethel, he saw a stairway between heaven and earth. Here God reminds Jacob that He and his angels are present and active anywhere Jacob goes.

When Jacob calls Esau "My Lord", he is speaking to Esau, not to his servants. The text should read, "My Lord Esau; Your servant Jacob says to You ...". Jacob knows he messed up when he stole Esau's blessing. He sends a humble greeting, hoping to find favor in his brother's eyes.

But the messengers return with a terrifying report: Esau is coming with 400 men. Such a force could easily defeat Jacob's group of shepherds and servants. What was Esau's purpose in bringing an army with him? Here again we see how the author gradually builds suspense, by leaving much that is unclear or ambiguous.

[Read 32:7-12]

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Jacob tried to impress Esau by saying, “Heh, Bro’, I’m back! And guess what - I’m rich!” Esau in turn speaks through his actions: “You may be rich but I have 400 soldiers to fight for me!” Men are so predictable. They’re just two guys posturing for position.

Jacob is unsure of Esau’s intent and acts to preserve at least part of his possessions. But he also prays to God. He expresses his fear and asks God for help. He reminds God that he is returning to Palestine at God’s direct command, and that God had promised to bless him. He says, “God, you got me into this. You get me out of it.” But to Jacob’s credit, he heard God and obeyed. He also expresses humility, by acknowledging that everything he has is a result of God’s provision and blessing.

When I read this prayer I wonder whether Jacob is praying to his God or the God of his fathers? We’ll answer that question later on.

[Read 32:13-21]

¹³ So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove.” ¹⁷ He instructed the first, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, ‘To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?’ ¹⁸ then you shall say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.’ ” ¹⁹ He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, “You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, ²⁰ ²⁰ and you shall say, ‘Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.’ ” For he thought, “I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me.” ²¹ So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

Jacob’s motto was, “Pray to God and buy a good insurance plan.” So he sent Esau a gift of goats and sheep and camels and cattle and donkeys. Was this a sign of fear resulting from unbelief, or a sign of faith that led to taking

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ge 32:9–20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

responsible action? It was probably a bit of both. In any case, faith does not mean we are passive, or that we don't plan ahead even though we know we are not in control of the final outcome.

Jacob was clever, he knew his words and gift would appeal to Esau's pride. He hoped that they would lead to forgiveness, to reconciliation. The actual word used here is "to propitiate" (to hide one's face, i.e. to turn away wrath). This phrasing, together with Jacob's gift or "offering", gives this act almost a ritual or "sacramental" significance.

[Read 32:22-30]. Zmagania Jakuba

²²The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. ²⁴And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." ²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." ³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. ³²Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

Jacob made camp for the night but found he could not sleep. He sent his family on ahead while he remained behind. In the darkness of night, Jacob meets and wrestles with an unknown figure. As readers we too are left in the dark; we see no more clearly than Jacob did. Only as the darkness begins to lift does Jacob suspect who he is fighting with. But as mysterious as the circumstances were, their significance is clear. Yes, this narrative provides historical basis for the place name Peniel and a dietary taboo about the sciatic muscle. But the real purpose of the encounter was to test Jacob's fitness for the new role and responsibilities that he faced.

The wrestling match ends in a draw, yet Jacob was clearly outmatched. All his opponent had to do was to touch his hip to lame him, and thus ensure victory. The question that follows about Jacob's name is rhetorical. God knows his name; he asks in order to hear Jacob's response, and set the stage for giving him a new name.

When asked what his name is, our erstwhile hero replies, "Jacob", which means "supplanter". Jacob's reply is an admission of guilt. He says, "I am the Supplanter. I have used deceit to take what is not mine, and to manipulate my father and brother and my uncle." What is more, Rebecca and Jacob used deceit in an effort to bring about God's will by the force of their own actions. Jacob was not only guilty of manipulating his relatives, but also of trying to manipulate God. Here he admits his sin, humbles himself, and acknowledges his dependence upon God.

In this encounter Jacob surprises us by demonstrating many good qualities: (1) He displays courage and perseverance while fighting his supernatural opponent and refused to concede even when injured; (2) He humbly acknowledges his dependence on God, and later bows down to Esau and calls him "Lord". (3) He is repentant; he confesses before God his life as a deceiver, and later offers to return the stolen blessing to Esau. There is one more thing to note: Isaac and Esau like their stew. Jacob likes his blessings, and he refuses to let go until he receives it.

As with Abraham and Sarah, Jacob's new name indicates a change in his status. Israel means "May God (El) persevere". Jacob the deceiver has become Israel, "the one who fought with God and prevailed". The manipulative thief will now become the strong, resolute leader his people need.

Peniel means "the face of God" (oblicze Boga), and Jacob declares, "I have seen God face to face, and my life has been delivered." I believe this encounter with God gave Jacob hope that he would survive his encounter with Esau. The Israelites remembered this story, for it gave them hope that God would save them in times of trouble. Can it do any less for us today?

[Read 33:1-4]. Genesis 33:

Jacob Meets Esau 33:1-7

33 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. ² And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³ He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." ⁶ Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. ⁷ Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.

Jacob loved to be blessed. Now at last he begins to be a blessing to others. When Isaac blessed Jacob he said that Jacob's brothers would bow down to him (27:29). Here Jacob is the one who bows down to Esau! But something more striking happened next. Instead of hiding behind his servants and flocks and his wives and children, Jacob goes ahead, alone, to meet his brother face to face.

Jacob feared his brother's anger and wrath. But Esau has moved on. For all his flaws and foibles, Esau's forgiveness of his brother is remarkable. He too was a changed man. Perhaps he realized that Jacob was the only family he had left. Regardless, as we will see in the following exchange, his forgiveness of Jacob is a model of divine forgiveness.

[Read 33:8-11] ⁸ Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." ⁹ But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." ¹⁰ Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me. ¹¹ Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." Thus he urged him, and he took it.

¹² Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you." ¹³ But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks

will die. ¹⁴ Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

Isaac blessed Jacob, God blessed Jacob, now Jacob blesses Esau. Having humbled himself before God and admitted his guilt, he found it easier to honor Esau and to admit that he had wronged his brother. But he goes further, and offers to make up for the wrong he has done by “returning” the blessing he stole from Esau. The language here indicates that Jacob’s present was an offering or sacrifice to make up for or “atone” for his sin.

Jacob’s new identity is on display. He is humble and gracious, he seeks to give and not get, and he demonstrates courage by going out to face Esau alone. Jacob’s encounter with God was truly a life-changing experience!

This encounter focuses on forgiveness and reconciliation, and highlights its divine origin and nature. By his words, Jacob declares, “making peace with each other is like making peace with God”.

But Jacob still has doubts about Esau’s sincerity, or suspects that something might strain their relationship again. With a vague promise to visit Esau in Seir, he instead heads for Palestine. It was God who told Jacob to go there. So is he acting here out of fear of Esau, or out of obedience to God? My guess is, probably both.

[Read 33:18-20]

¹⁵ So Esau said, “Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” But he said, “What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.” ¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷ But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

¹⁸ And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. ¹⁹ And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem’s father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of

land on which he had pitched his tent. ²⁰There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel. ²

Jacob also turns down the offer of a guarded escort. First he goes to Succoth, which takes its name from the “booths” or “huts” he made for his livestock. He then goes to ‘Salem, the city of Shechem’, about 3 km away.

Jacob has reached the end of this journey). He has returned to the land God gave to Abraham and his descendants, which he promised to Jacob as well. So Jacob names the altar he built “God is the God of Israel!’ Note carefully: Not just the God of Abraham and Isaac, but the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob!

Conclusion:

There are many kinds of encounters. In these two chapters we find encounters that are ordinary and extraordinary, actual and anticipated, natural and supernatural. We find encounters with God, with angels, with men, and if you’re Esau - with sheep and goats. Just as in Jacob’s life, the encounters we face are closely intertwined. A pause for reflection reveals that there is no boundary between physical and spiritual reality. As we have seen today, Old Testament history often gives us a vision of life on two planes. People live out their lives, seeking to control their own affairs. Yet behind the scenes we glimpse a master plan; God is at work to carry out his purpose and will.

In Jacob’s prayer he called on God to keep his promises. Is it okay to remind God of his promises, or does that reflect a lack of faith? We don’t need to repeat prayers in hope that God will hear us and respond. But it’s okay to call on God’s promises, for they speak of his covenant faithfulness, of his love and good will towards us. What better basis could there be to call on God to help us?

Though some encounters can be foreseen, often we don’t know in advance who we will meet today or tomorrow. Yet our encounters with others are not mere chance. We must treat each one seriously, for they may change our life and the lives of those we meet. We should be on the alert for those whom

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ge 32:1 - 33:20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

God puts in our path, knowing that any such meeting may be a divine appointment, and may even become a meeting with God! Each and every meeting may be a blessing to us and to others.

Our encounters with others demand many things of us. they require courage, humility, a willingness to admit our mistakes, to make amends, to forgive wrongs done against us. They call us to change, to grow, to reach beyond what we are to what we can become. We can take heart, rediscover hope, and gain courage from the way God has met us in the past, as we do from the story of how he met Jacob. We can trust that even though we do not see the way ahead and cannot control the outcome, God is at work behind the scenes. We can think clearly, we can engage in responsible action, knowing that God gave us minds and hands and feet so we could use them. We are more than passive recipients of God's plans and actions; he invites us to be active participants in realizing our daily prayer, may "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven".

So we pray and we act responsibly.

We expect to be blessed by others and that we will be a blessing to them.

And as we pray and act, we humbly and confidently declare, "The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, He is my God! He is our God!"