



Understanding the Parsha

Genesis 32:4-33:17

We will Learn how to

- 1) interpret the main theme (subject) of a Parsha (weekly reading from the Torah),
- 2) make thematic connections to that Parsha (study the Scriptures related by a common theme [subject], line upon line and precept upon precept)
- 3) learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha we are looking at through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.

Understanding Genesis 32:4-33:17

I have chosen this week's Parsha because it presents us with a few "problems." By problems, I mean facts that don't always make sense to the average reader, like me. Let's put together a general outline of the flow of events in the Parsha. We will make our outline titles short to formulate a more general theme.

Genesis 32:4-7 — Jacob informs Esau of his r_____.

return

Genesis 32:8-24 — Jacob prepares to m_____ Esau.

meet

Genesis 32:25-33 — Jacob w_____ with an angel.

wrestles

Genesis 33:1-15 — Jacob and E Esau meet.

Genesis 33:16-17 — Jacob and Esau p part ways.

Let's concentrate on the first four parts of our outline.

Read Genesis 32:4-7. Even before reading Genesis 32:7, how do we know that Jacob is extremely worried concerning Esau's feelings about his return?

He sent m messengers ahead of him to tell Esau of his return. Also, he obviously sent them way in advance of his return so that they could let him know what kind of attitude Esau's had about his return. That's

Why they had enough time to go to Esau and return b before Jacob arrived.

Why was Jacob worried about Esau's reaction to his return?

Remember, he had fled to Charan because Esau wanted to k kill him for taking the b birthright and the "b blessing."

Okay, this sets the scene. The last time Jacob saw Esau, he was having thoughts of murdering him. It's been twenty years and Jacob wants to know if Esau is still wanting to killing him.

Read Genesis 32:7-8. Think about the information given to Jacob by his messengers, as well as how Jacob responds. What should we expect to happen once Jacob and Esau meet?

It seems as if Esau is s still thinking about killing Jacob!

Read Genesis 32:7-23. What one word describes how Jacob is feeling?

F Fear, with a capital F.

As you can see, Jacob is hurrying in fear. He is extremely fearful for the lives of his family.

Read Genesis 32:25-33. Doesn't this passage seem strange? Of course it does. This passage immediately brings up a lot of questions. Who is the man? What happened to cause them to begin wrestling? Why did Jacob want the angel to bless him? Does this passage seem to have anything at all to do with Jacob and Esau's reunion?

N on, not on the surface.

I must admit, I don't know the answers to these questions; but, hopefully I can share some ideas with you that will lead you one small step closer to the importance of these events. For now, let's skip this section and return to it later.

Read Genesis 33:1-15. Does this passage seem to fit with the first passage we read in this long Parsha? Why or why not?



N_____ . It doesn't seem to fit at all. Throughout

Genesis 32:4-33, the Torah seems to tell us that Esau is coming towards Jacob with the intent of killing him! Esau's actions (Esau ran to him, embraced him, fell upon his neck, kissed him and he wept) are totally the opposite picture the Torah had painted in its previous verses.

In other words, Genesis 32:4-24 leads us to believe that Esau was approaching with murderous thoughts, the same ones he had when Jacob fled for his life. Then, all of the sudden, Genesis 33:1-15 shows us a totally different picture of Esau!

What happened? Can you tell me what happened between Genesis 32:4-24 and Genesis 33:1-15?

Yes, Genesis 32:25-33, when Jacob **W**_____ the "man."

Do you see that? Earlier, I asked you if Genesis 32:25-33 had anything at all to do with Jacob and Esau's reunion. Now we can see that it had everything to do with it. It is the key to understanding the obvious transformation of Esau. Jacob's encounter with the angel is strategically placed right between the seemingly disparate portraits of Esau! Surely, the events surrounding Jacob's wrestling match had a bearing on Esau's change of heart.

We can look at this Parsha in a number of ways. Had Jacob's messengers misunderstood Esau's intentions in approaching with 400 men? Or, had Esau intended on killing him, only to change his mind for some reason? I don't know the answer for sure; but, I will give a suggestion. I say suggestion because I don't know that it is necessarily the correct answer. I believe that Esau had intended to kill Jacob until his encounter with the angel. Here's why I think this.

To understand Esau's change of heart, let's first try to understand Jacob's wrestling match.

Read Genesis 32:8-22. What three things does Jacob do to prepare for his fateful meeting with Esau?

- 1) He **d**_____ his family into two camps
- 2) He **p**_____, asking the Holy One for help.
- 3) He sent **g**_____ to Esau in hopes that they would appease his anger.

Genesis 32:22 informs us that after making his three preparations, Jacob turned in for the night. As pointed out by Rav Chanoch Waxman from Har Etzion Yeshiva:

"His threefold preparation complete, Yaakov goes to sleep, as ready as he can be. Surprisingly, immediately after being informed of Ya'akov's lying down for the night and right before the story of the struggle, we find Yaakov up and about, crossing the Yabbok... In pointed contrast to the previous splitting of his camp, he gathers together all of his people and possessions. He is breaking camp and initiating a journey. The sense of reversal of Ya'akov's previous preparations is further emphasized by the image of 'getting up that night', the precise opposite of the 'sleeping there that night' that closes out Ya'akov's preparations. Yaakov seems to have undergone a last-minute change of plans."



This was a brilliant analysis by Rav Waxman. To support his idea that Jacob has had a last second change of mind, notice how he mentions that Jacob had already divided his family and possessions into two camps. Now he is seen bringing them all together for a trip across the Jabbok! Surely, this is a reversal of his original plan to meet Esau as two separate groups. So, what happened in Genesis 32:23-24! Why did he wake up in the night and send his family across the Jabbok River? I believe that the Rashbam hits the nail on the head with the following spectacular, stupendous, awesome thematic connection in which he sees the similarity of this passage about Jacob and a similar passage about David.

Read II Samuel 17:21-24! In this passage, David is fleeing from Absalom. Look for the following thematic connections to this week's sidra (Torah portion).

Just as Jacob **a** arose, so likewise David arose.

Just as Jacob arose in the **l** late night, pre-dawn hours, so likewise, David arose in the late night, pre-dawn hours.

Just as Jacob had all who were with him **c** cross the river, so likewise, David had all with him cross the river.

Rashbam also notices that the **t** two crossings happened near each other geographically!

David arrived in **M** Machanaim after crossing the river. Jacob's last location was pinpointed at Machanaim (Genesis 32:3)!

Both David and Jacob are fleeing from a close **f** family relative.

Because of these amazing thematic connections, Rashbam concluded that just as David was fleeing from Absalom, so likewise, Jacob was fleeing from Esau! Therefore, Adonai sent the angel to stop him from fleeing. And, this would explain why Jacob's hip was injured; to prevent him from fleeing. The beauty of this understanding is that it is based on a clear thematic connection to a similar event. And, if you've been doing these thematic studies, you know that this thematic connection is significant and shouldn't be disregarded too easily.

Find the hidden words for this weeks Parsha

E	N	C	O	U	N	T	E	R	X
S	E	A	H	T	S	P	M	A	C
A	N	G	E	L	U	O	N	E	F
U	L	P	E	E	H	G	A	F	A
D	F	E	C	L	R	A	N	S	M
I	P	E	R	Y	I	I	B	V	I
P	R	C	H	I	L	D	V	E	L
B	L	E	S	S	I	N	G	E	Y
L	E	A	H	E	L	T	S	E	R



JACOB
 ESAU
 ENCOUNTER
 ANGEL
 WRESTLE
 ANGRY
 CAMP
 SLEEP
 RIVER
 FAMILY
 FEAR
 BLESSING