

The Prodigal
Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.
July 6, 2020

Gen 33:4

(BHS)	(KJV)
וַיָּרַץ עֲשׂוֹ לִקְרַאתוֹ	And Esau ran to meet him ,
וַיַּחְבְּקֵהוּ	and embraced him ,
וַיִּפֹּל עַל-צַוְנָאָרָו	and fell on his neck,
וַיִּשָּׂקְחוּ	and kissed him :
וַיִּבְכּוּ:	and they wept .

You may readily discern “Esau.” Notice all of the pronominal suffixes. I made them red to help. In line 3, “fell on his neck,” is an interesting idiom, don’t you think? Many translations gloss something like, “hugged him” (NCV), “threw his arms around his neck” (NLT), and so on. “To fall” is a weak verb, the *nun* has assimilated. It is *naphal*, as in “Nephilim.” “To weep” is weak too, from *bakah*, as in the toponym Bockim. See Judg 2:5 for that connection.

Take a look at the weirdness of line 4! Every letter has a dot over it. This phenomena occurs with just fifteen words in all of Scripture. No one really knows why, but a good guess is that the scribes were not sure if the word should be there or not.

And now for a discussion of the Prodigal. Please stop what you are doing and read Luke 15:11 – 32.

* * * * *

Read it? Okay then ...

Jesus spoke of a man with two sons. The younger of them disrespected his father, impatient to acquire an inheritance. His father gave him what he wanted. He then journeyed to a distant land, where he hired himself out and directed his efforts to the pursuit of women.

But after a time his situation became untenable, and he realized that it was better to live as a servant in the house of his father than to continue as he was. So he set out to return home. Along the way he practiced what he would say when he got back. He would not assume that his earlier position as a full-fledged family member would be honored. He would adopt the role of an underling and expect nothing. He decided to appease, to humble himself, to throw himself at the mercy of his offended family. With great anxiety he came closer to the estranged relatives.

He had offended his father years before, much to the distress of his older brother. It was this older brother who had resented him the most, in fact. That brother had been quite upset and had badmouthed him to his father. (In Luke 15, the Greek for the “older” brother is *presbuteros*. The only one with nothing positive to say and critical of a joyful celebration was the sole Presbyterian!)

As the younger brother got nearer, from a distance he was recognized. Much to his anxiety, a seemingly-hostile company approached. His older brother—who had been very offended years before—ran to him. So Jacob began to recite his practiced speech, calling Esau “My lord” and calling himself, “your servant.”

But Jacob did not understand the heart of his brother, who embraced him, fell on his neck, kissed him, and wept. Far from anger and resentment, there was only celebration and magnanimity. The older brother had long since become established in the land of his father. But he expressed joy and gladness that his long lost brother had finally returned.

Jesus’ parable puts it this way, “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him ... ‘For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found’” (Luke 15:20, 24).

It doesn't matter why you left. It doesn't matter how many years have gone by. Jesus says, "Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

I know a woman who sinned against her church community, through maliciously spreading false rumors and gossip. When she realized the evil she had done, she left that church. Ten years had gone by when I met her, and she was in a spiritual rut, unable to get beyond certain debilitating habits. I counseled her to return to her old church and make amends. After a long season of resisting, she finally did it. And she was wonderfully welcomed there. It was a genuine healing moment, experiencing the love of Christ among his people. There was rejoicing in that church over one sinner who returned. And there was rejoicing before the angels of God as well.

Get over yourself. Come to your senses. Go back and make amends. Jesus loves you. Your Father wants you to move forward. What is the worst that could happen?