

## Exegetical Notes – Genesis 33:1-11

### *“Esau Meets Israel”*

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(Now all three of the basic theological questions Genesis asks have been presented and answered in the text. The first question is, “Whose world is it anyway?” The text answers the question by affirming that it is God’s world by right of creation. It is God’s world because God made it. The second question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is by trusting God and obeying Him. The third question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way with other people, particularly with the members of our own family?” The answer is we get over the offense and forgive and forget. The rest of the book of Genesis shows us how this process works out.)

### Genesis 33:1-11

#### Verses 1-3

***<sup>1</sup> Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. <sup>2</sup> He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. <sup>3</sup> He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.***

- At dawn the next day (see Genesis 32 and the exegetical notes on the passage), Jacob/Israel (see Genesis 32:27-28 and the exegetical notes on those verses) saw his brother approaching in the distance with his 400-armed men. Jacob divided his family into companies. Jacob went first. Immediately behind him were his two concubines and the children they had borne him. Then came Leah, his first wife, with her children. Last in line was Rachel, his favored wife and her son, Joseph.
- As Jacob/Israel approached his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times. The ritual greeting was designed to pay homage to Esau and to show that Jacob came in peace. It was also a sign of penitence. Jacob wanted Esau to know that he came in peace.

#### Verses 4-7

**<sup>4</sup> But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. <sup>5</sup> Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked.**

**Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.”**

**<sup>6</sup> Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. <sup>7</sup> Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.**

- Esau’s approach to Jacob/Israel was entirely different in affect than that of his brother. There was no formality in it. Esau ran to Jacob, threw his arms around his brother and kissed him. Though he had been badly wronged by Jacob, Esau showed no signs of resentment. He lovingly greeted his brother.
- The two hugged, kissed, and wept together. They put the past and all its hurt behind them. They forgave each other as brothers should.
- Then, Jacob introduced Esau to his family.

#### Verses 8-11

**<sup>8</sup> Esau asked, “What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?”  
“To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said.**

**<sup>9</sup> But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.”**

**<sup>10</sup> “No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. <sup>11</sup> Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.**

- Esau asked Jacob about the gifts Jacob had sent to him. Jacob told Esau that these gifts were peace offerings sent to gain favor for himself in Esau’s eyes. Jacob/Israel hereby acknowledged that he wronged his brother and sought reconciliation with him.
- Esau declared that the gifts were unnecessary. But Jacob/Israel insisted that Esau receive the gifts. He wanted Esau to know that he was sincere in seeking Esau’s favor. Jacob/Israel earnestly wanted to be restored to his brother’s favor despite their past.
- As an act of reconciliation, Esau accepted the gifts given to him by Jacob. The act of accepting the gifts showed that Esau had forgiven Jacob and wanted to be reconciled to his brother.

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