

The Encounter with Esau

GENESIS 33

Opening Thoughts

- * What are the two main themes of chapter 33?
 - ◆ RECONCILIATION
 - ◆ RETURN
- * We will see a wonderful picture of genuine reconciliation in action, and ...
- * God's final act of fulfillment of the promises he made to Jacob in Gen 28:10ff (Jacob's ladder)

Structure of the Chapter

- * The brothers reconcile - vv. 1-17
 - ◆ The moment of TRUTH arrives - vv. 1-3
 - ◆ From revenge to reconciliation - vv. 4-11
 - ◆ From reconciliation to fellowship - vv. 12-17
- * Jacob's return to the land - vv. 18-20

The Moment of Truth

- * No sooner than he completed his "match" with God ... the encounter with Esau looms
- * Jacob lifts his eyes and his worst fears are confirmed ... Esau was coming — AND his 400 men!
- * How does Jacob respond?
 - ◆ He arrays "his troops" for battle
- * How does Jacob array his troops?
 - ◆ He lines up his family in his "order of preference" ... making no distinction among the "maids"

The Moment of Truth

- * What does this order foretell about the upcoming “Joseph” narrative?
 - ◆ Perhaps where the hatred for Joseph was catalyzed ... Jacob’s favoritism
- * What is the only redeemable part of Jacob’s plan?
 - ◆ At least he took the point position ...
- * How should we understand Jacob’s excessive bowing?
 - ◆ CONTRITION

Revenge to Reconciliation

- * What is interesting about Esau’s approach?
 - ◆ It is wholly unexpected ...
 - ◆ His heart has been moved on from revenge and was now bent on reconciliation
- * The whole scene is somewhat analogous to the account of the “prodigal” son in the NT
- * What is the significant point of comparison?
 - ◆ The one offended makes the first move to reconcile!

Revenge to Reconciliation

- * Esau demonstrates the essential & irreducible element of forgiveness & reconciliation - **What is it?**
 - ◆ The one sinned against pursues the “sinner” — which is what God does with us!!!!
- * **What is interesting about Jacob's approach?**
 - ◆ A heart that should have been wholly changed was not!
- * **How is this manifested?**
 - ◆ Jacob comes in the power of the flesh vs. the power of the Spirit!

Revenge to Reconciliation

- * **What is noticeably lacking in the reconciliation?**
 - ◆ No re-hashing of the past sin(s)
 - ◆ There are times when this is necessary ... but not here because both parties seem to tacitly “own” their own behavior
- * So the meeting that Jacob feared is instead a tender reunion ... **Proving what?**
 - ◆ That God can change hardened hearts!
 - ◆ Which is essentially what happens every time someone is saved ... God regenerates stone cold hearts

Revenge to Reconciliation

- * Note the two “manners” of address used by Jacob and Esau ...
 - ◆ Jacob addresses Esau as “my lord” — thus approaching the encounter formally
 - ◆ Esau addresses Jacob as “my brother” (v. 9) — thus approaching the encounter familially
- * Esau next inquires as to Jacob’s prosperity ... in both children and flocks

Revenge to Reconciliation

- * To which Jacob replies by acknowledging the source — God, and ...
- * Then introduces the family in their “arrayed” order
- * Esau goes on to inquire about the meaning of the tribute sent ahead of the family
- * **What is interesting about Jacob’s response?**
 - ◆ He tells the “unvarnished” truth ... for once!

Revenge to Reconciliation

- * Esau resists the tribute (v. 9) and Jacob presses the tribute (v. 10-11) — **Why?**
 - ◆ Two reasons — 1st because Esau is “truly” over his anger with Jacob, and “has much”
 - ◆ 2nd because of ANE custom, namely ...
 - ◆ To accept a gift from an enemy was to release the feud
 - ◆ We see in Jacob’s response a lack of faith ... **despite God’s promises, he persists in human strength**
 - ◆ He wants the debt to be officially cancelled!

Revenge to Reconciliation

- * **What does Jacob mean when he says “he sees Esau’s face as one sees the face of God?”**
 - ◆ Certainly not that he sees Esau “as God”
 - ◆ Rather, that in the friendliness beaming from Esau’s face he sees a reflection of divine favor
- * Final point in v. 11 ...
 - ◆ The word translated “plenty” is actually “all” (כל)

Revenge to Reconciliation

- ◆ It is as if Jacob is reminding Esau that he has been given everything — and this is the least I can do to “compensate you” for my trickery!
- * The sad reality is that Esau seems to have approached the reunion with genuine desire for reconciliation
- * Whereas Jacob approached the reunion with a “transactional” mindset ... “let me settle the debt and move on”

Revenge to Reconciliation

- * What lesson should we learn from Jacob's encounter with Esau?
 - ◆ Deliverance comes by faith in God, not by tribute to your enemy — Prov 29:25 says it best [READ]
- * What does Esau demonstrate in the reunion?
 - ◆ GRACE
- * What does Jacob demonstrate?
 - ◆ Humility and generosity — but still a little “trickery”

Reconciliation to Fellowship

- * It appears that Esau wants to “graduate” from reconciliation to renewed fellowship ...
- * By making two genuine attempts at re-establishing a relationship with Jacob
- * What is the first one in vv. 12-14?
 - ◆ Let’s travel home together
- * How does Jacob parry that offer?
 - ◆ “No, I will be a burden to you” ... let me travel at the pace of my children and nursing flocks

Reconciliation to Fellowship

- * What is the second one in vv. 15-17?
 - ◆ Let me leave you with an armed guard
- * How does Jacob parry that offer?
 - ◆ “What’s the need” - suggesting he is safe in God’s favor
- * In the fashion of all “deceivers,” Jacob uses “half-truths” to get his way ... Reminding us of who?
 - ◆ The serpent (Satan) in the garden, and ...
 - ◆ Rebekah — cf. Gen 27:46

Reconciliation to Fellowship

* How do we know that Jacob's responses are half-truths?

- ◆ By his actions in v. 17
- ◆ As soon as Esau is "out of sight" he heads a different direction, and ...
- ◆ Establishes a semi-permanent camp!!!

* Now — it IS possible that Jacob was not being deceptive

- ◆ He may have gone to Seir at a later date or fellowshiped with Esau elsewhere ... but Scripture is silent on this

Reconciliation to Fellowship

- ◆ Or ... it could be that Jacob was bent on fulfilling God's command in Gen 31:3 — "Return to the land"

* The commentators are mixed on this ...

* But I think it is too generous to what we know of Jacob ... he has not totally shed his old nature

* It may have been wise to avoid Esau's offers, but it did not necessitate deception

Jacob's Return

- * We don't know how long Jacob stayed at Succoth, but the building projects and the events of Gen 34 suggest it was more than a "seasonal lay-over"
- * From Succoth, Jacob finally enters the "land" and settles in the "suburbs" of Shechem

Jacob's Return

- * **Why the emphasis on Jacob's "safe" return?**
 - ◆ To record the fulfillment of God's promises
 - ◆ This was the last of the things God vowed to do for Jacob when He appeared in Gen 28:10-15
- * **What is significant about Shechem?**
 - ◆ It is where Abraham first "landed" in the "land" and God appeared to him — cf Gen 12:6

Jacob's Return

- * To commemorate his return, Jacob acquires land ...
- * Yet while it was wise to avoid entanglement with Esau, Jacob was "unwise" to become entangled with Shechem
- * Why does this decision "fall-short?"
 - ◆ God's promise of safe return was tied to Bethel ... Jacob "stopped-short" of the objective
- * How does Jacob compound his error?
 - ◆ With an altar, piously named ... *God is the God of Israel* (noting Jacob's new name) and ...
 - ◆ Trumpeting his return!

Jacob's Return

- * A number of good commentators paint a positive light on Jacob's actions in vv. 18-20 citing parallels with Abraham — and calling it an epilogue to Jacob's 20 year sojourn ...
 - ◆ So I'll stop a "yard-shy" of being dogmatic on the foregoing, BUT ...
- * I think the next chapter will corroborate my view and show Jacob's folly along with the cost of his decision
- 📖 Reminding us that ... when we claim victory short of God's standard, we settle for 2nd best and pay a steep price

Closing Thought

- * That said, Jacob — like us — struggled with his two identities, that is ...
 - ◆ The old man — [Jacob](#)
 - ◆ And the new man — [Israel](#)
- * We cannot, like Christ, be two things at one time (i.e. fully man and fully God) in perfect harmony, reminding us that ...
 - ◆ We will be driven by one appetite — or the other

Closing Thought

- ◆ Either our new nature — drawing us from the lesser (worldly) to the greater (Godly) in our allegiances
- ◆ Or our old nature — drawing us to the lesser ... perhaps even revealing something less than GENUINE SAVING FAITH
- ◆ Ultimately reminding us of Paul's exhortation in Ephesians to put off the old and put on the new
