

January 13, 2019

Genesis 33:1-15 – Reconciled

Introduction

Genesis 33 begins with a description of the moment that has been anticipated since the beginning of Genesis 32: Jacob's meeting with his brother, Esau. What would this reunion be like?

Put Aside Your Pride (Gen. 33:1-4). In preparation for his meeting with Esau, previously, Jacob had sent a delegation to him to try to ease what looked like a contentious reunion (Gen. 32:3-5). Further increasing his anxiety, Jacob discovered that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men (Gen. 32:6)! Hearing this news, Jacob became distressed and afraid. Because of this, he decided to take two actions: first, divided his people into two groups (Gen. 32:7-8); second, he prepared gifts to give Esau when they met (Gen. 32:13-21). Now that Esau is close, Jacob organized his family in groups. Then, the Bible states that Jacob went "before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother" (Gen. 33:3). What we find next is striking to say the least. Instead of anger and vengeance, we see Esau embracing his brother (Gen. 33:4). What a beautiful picture of reconciliation.

Be Genuine (Gen. 33:5-11). From verse four onwards, the tone of the story changes dramatically. Instead of harsh words, hatred, and strained conversation, we find a joyful reunion unfold. Esau desired to meet Jacob's family (Gen. 33:5-7). So, both Leah and Rachel along with their children come and meet Esau and bow before him. Besides meeting his family, Esau questioned Jacob about all of the gifts that had been presented to him. Jacob explained that God had blessed him abundantly and he wanted to share some of that with him (Gen. 33:11). Initially, Esau refused to accept the gifts. He explained to Jacob that he had plenty himself. In the end, though, Jacob prevailed upon him and Esau accepted his gifts.

Agree on Limits (Gen. 33:12-15). After their gracious reunion, the time comes for both men and their respective groups to continue on their journeys. In kindness, Esau offered to accompany Jacob as they traveled. In fact, this passage states that Esau suggested to Jacob that he and his men lead the caravan and go before Jacob and his family. Due to a couple of key factors, though, Jacob declined Esau's offer. Jacob voiced concern for the children and the flocks. They would not be able to travel at the same pace as Esau and his four hundred men. Recognizing this, Esau offered to leave some of his men with Jacob (Gen. 33:15). Again, Jacob declined this generous offer. At this point, Esau and his men leave to return to Seir, their home. Likewise, Jacob and his family resume their journey.

Conclusion

Jacob's encounter with Esau went much better than he could have expected. In place of hatred, he found an embrace and a kiss. Esau was a changed man. Certainly Jacob was, too. The change both men experienced paved the way for their reconciliation. This episode in their lives depicts this reality beautifully.