GENESIS

Chapter 33

*Jacob Meets Esau*

**Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. 2 He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. 3 He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. 4 But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. 5 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.” 6 Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. 7 Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. 8 Esau asked, “What do you mean by all these droves I met?” “To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said. 9 But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.” 10 “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. 11 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. 12 Then Esau said, “Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.” 13 But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. 14 So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the droves before me and that of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.” 15 Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my men with you.” “But why do that?” Jacob asked. “Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord.” 16 So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. 17 Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth.18 After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. 19 For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. 20 There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.**

**33:2** *Rachel and Joseph in the rear.* Jacob wanted to keep his favorite wife and child farthest away from potential harm. (CSB)

**33:3** *bowed down to the ground seven times.* A sign of total submission, documented also in texts found at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt and dating to the 14th century b.c. (see chart on “Ancient Texts Relating to the OT”). (CSB)

Servant’s act of respect for his lord. (TLSB)

*bow*. Synonymous with worship toward God (Ex 4:31; 34:8; Ps 95:6; 1Sm 1:28; see note, Ex 33:10) or respect and service for a human being (Gn 33:3; 43:26–28; 1Sm 20:41; 28:14; Est 3:2). God expressly forbade bowing to false gods (Ex 20:4–5). People also bowed to (1) greet someone (Gn 18:2; 19:1), (2) signal humility and repentance (Ezr 9:5; 10:1), and (3) express thanks (Gn 24:52). Bows were done in a variety of ways (1Ch 29:20; 1Ki 18:42; Ne 8:6) and likely included tilting the head, tilting the upper body, kneeling with one’s face to the ground, or lying prostrate. The more elaborate the bow, the greater the expression of devotion or emotion (cf Gn 33:3). (TLSB p. 1276)

**33:4** *they wept*. With joy. (TLSB)

All Jacob’s fears proved unfounded. God had been at work and had so blessed Esau (v. 9) that he no longer held a grudge against Jacob. (CSB)

**33:8** *all this company*. The flocks Jacob had sent to Esau. (TLSB)

*find favor*. So that Esau would be favorable toward Jacob and his family. (TLSB)

*favor*. Hbr *chen*, “approval” or “affection,” related to the idea of grace (see “grace,” p 1902; see also “gracious,” p 842). Often used in the Hbr expression “found favor in someone’s eyes” (cf Gn 6:8; 39:21; Ex 3:21; 11:3; 12:36; 33:12). Common also in the writings of Solomon, especially Proverbs. (TLSB)

**33:9** *my brother.* Esau’s generous and loving response was in contrast to Jacob’s cautious and fearful “my lord” (v. 8). (CSB)

**33:10** *like seeing the face of God*. An experience of mercy. Probably also alludes to the fact that Jacob saw God and lived. Here, Esau could have wiped Jacob out. (TLSB)

**33:11** *present.* The Hebrew for “present” is the same as that used for “blessing” in 27:35. The author of Genesis was conscious of the irony that Jacob now acknowledged that the blessing he had struggled for was from God. In his last attempt to express reconciliation with Esau, Jacob in a sense gave back the “blessing” he had stolen from his brother, doing so from the blessings the Lord had given him. (CSB)

*my blessing*. Jacob’s gift for Esau. (TLSB)

*he took it*. By accepting the present, Esau showed that he accepted Jacob. (TLSB)

**33:12** *I will go ahead of you*. To accompany and protect Jacob’s household. (TLSB)

**33:13** *children are frail*. Jacob’s oldest son, Reuben, was c 13. (TLSB)

**33:14** *until I come to my lord in Seir.* But Jacob did not follow Esau all the way to Seir. No reason is given for why he did not do so. (CSB)

Jacob changed his mind about going to Seir at this time, though he might have visited Esau later. Together, they buried their father, Isaac (35:29). (TLSB)

**33:17** Succoth was nearby, located along the Jabbok River. (TLSB)

**33:18** *Paddan Aram.* Means “plain of Aram,” another name for Aram Naharaim (see note on 24:10). (CSB)

*arrived safely.* The answer to Jacob’s prayer of 20 years earlier (see 28:21). (CSB)

*Shechem.* An important city in central Canaan, first built and inhabited during the patriarchal period. Jacob followed in the footsteps of Father Abraham (see 12:6). Jacob dug a well there (see Jn 4:5–6) that can still be seen today. (CSB)

Shechem was across the Jordan, due west of Succoth, in Canaan. (TLSB)

**33:19** *pieces of silver.* See NIV text note. The Hebrew word translated by this phrase is always found in patriarchal contexts (see Jos 24:32; Job 42:11). (CSB)

Purchase of property suggests that Jacob planned to settle here. (TLSB)

**33:20** *set up an altar.* See note on 12:7. (CSB)

*called it El Elohe Israel.* See NIV text note. Jacob formally acknowledged the God of his fathers as his God also (see 28:21). But he lingered at Shechem and did not return to Bethel (see 35:1), and that meant trouble (see ch. 34). (CSB)

Jacob used his new name to confess his faith in the mighty God of heaven and earth. (TLSB)

**Ch 33** God turns Jacob’s fear into joy as Esau approaches and the two brothers are reconciled. Jacob humbles himself, and Esau forgives. As much as possible, without compromising Christian doctrine and morality, we should make peace with those who oppose us—especially family members. This takes mutual humility and forgiveness. God took the lead here. While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rm 5:10). • Lord God, in Christ You have dealt graciously with me, and in Him I have enough. Amen. (TLSB)