

Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson

Genesis

Jacob Meets Esau

January 13, 2019

Situational Context: Jacob has been told by the Lord to go back home, Genesis 31:3 (NIV2011) ³ Then the LORD said to Jacob, “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”

God has met Jacob on his way back and assured him of the Lord’s presence. Jacob is fearful concerning the expected meeting with Esau, so he sent messengers ahead to notify Esau that he was coming home, **Genesis 32:6 (NIV2011) ⁶ When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”**

Lesson Theme: Jacob offers Esau a large part of all that he accumulated as a peace offering. Jacob sees the merciful response of his brother, Esau, as evidence of God’s mercy to him. Jacob’s treatment of his brother could be an occasion for getting even. Esau’s response in many ways is a picture of God’s acceptance of a sinner.

Genesis 33:⁸ Esau asked, “What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds 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.

- 1. A Surprised Response, Genesis 33:1-4 (NIV2011) ¹ 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. ² He put the female servants 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.

Interpretation: Jacob greeted Esau as a vassal greets his patron in the ceremony of a royal court, with the deference appropriate to a superior—note the sevenfold obeisance (common practice in ancient Near Eastern court protocol, v. 3), the submissive address of a "servant" (v. 5) to his "lord" (vv. 8, 13), and the presentation of gifts of homage (vv. 10, 11). In contrast, Esau greeted Jacob as one brother greets another after a long separation (vv. 4, 9).

Supporting Texts:

Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV2011) ²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 (NIV2011) ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Discussion Starters:

Why did Jacob send messengers ahead to notify Esau?

Why did Jacob divide his company?

Why did Jacob bow down to Esau?

How did Esau's heart change?

2. A Big Surprise, Genesis 33:5-11 (NIV2011) 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 female servants 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’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds 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.

Interpretation: As Jacob remembered his troubled history, he confessed God’s unmerited kindness in giving him children and prosperity. As at Peniel, when Jacob saw God’s face by theophany and his life was graciously spared (Ge 32:30), so also now he saw the dreaded face of Esau and was graciously received. Jacob’s statement recalls his earlier theft of the paternal blessing in ch. 27. Jacob here offered recompense out of the many blessings God had given him. The reconciliation was sealed by accepting the gift.

Supporting Texts:

None

Discussion Starters:

Why does Esau never mention the Lord?

Why was Jacob showy in presenting all his family and possessions?

Why did Jacob insist that Esau accept his gift?

How was seeing Esau's response like seeing the face of God?

3. A Peaceful Parting, Genesis 33:12-15 (NIV2011) 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 flocks and herds before me and the pace 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."

Interpretation: Given his intention to travel to Succoth (v. 17), Jacob may have been speaking deceptively, but more probably Esau knew that this was Jacob's polite way of not contradicting him. Though reconciled, the brothers would live apart.

Supporting Texts:

Genesis 13:11 (NIV2011) ¹¹ So, Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company:

Genesis 36:1 (NIV2011) ¹ This is the account of the family line of Esau (that is, Edom).

Genesis 36:8 (NIV2011) ⁸ So, Esau (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir.

Numbers 20:18-20 (NIV2011) ¹⁸ But Edom answered: “You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword.” ¹⁹ The Israelites replied: “We will go along the main road, and if we or our livestock drink any of your water, we will pay for it. We only want to pass through on foot—nothing else.” ²⁰ Again, they answered: “You may not pass through.” Then Edom came out against them with a large and powerful army.

Isaiah 34:5 (NIV2011) ⁵ My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed.

Discussion Starters:

What was the level of trust between them?

Why did Jacob refuse Esau’s offer?

How had Jacob changed?