



**Adult Sunday School Lesson for October 28, 2007**  
**Released on October 24, 2007**

**“Esau and Jacob Reconciled”**

**Printed Text: Genesis 33:1-11**

**Background Scripture: Genesis 33**

**Devotional Reading: Psalm 133**

**Genesis 33:1-11**

**33:1** And Ja’cob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, E’sau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Le’ah, and unto Ra’chel, and unto the two handmaids.

**2 And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Le’ah and her children after, and Ra’chel and Jo’seph hindermost.**

3 And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

**4 And E’sau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.**

5 And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who *are* those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.

**6 Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves.**

7 And Le’ah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Jo’seph near and Ra’chel, and they bowed themselves.

**8 And he said, What *meanest* thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, *These are* to find grace in the sight of my lord.**

**9 And E’sau** said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

**10 And Ja’cob** said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.

11 Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took *it*.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A man and his wife have not spoken in days. One too many times she embarrassed him in public, and one too many times he responded harshly. Even though they share the same bed, a cold gap remains between them.

Two coworkers communicate only indirectly through other employees. One too many times an idea was stolen, and one too many times others were recruited to take sides. Though they occupy adjacent offices, genuine collaboration is out of the question.

Tales of wounded pride are all too common. Each of us is familiar with a close relationship that was threatened by an unfortunate conflict caused by one party's lapse of judgment and another party's defensive retaliation. Scripture does not teach us that following Jesus means that Christians will live lives free of conflict. It does show us, however, a way to overcome.

Matthew 18 and other New Testament passages provide principles and procedures for seeking genuine reconciliation. The Old Testament furnishes stories of success and failure that bring these principles to life. Today we consider one such story.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

The feud between Jacob and Esau began at an early age. Even in the womb, these boys jockeyed for position. The struggle was so intense that their mother, Rebekah, thought it was necessary to ask God for an explanation.

God informed her that two "nations" were in her womb and that the older would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23). This jockeying for position continued at their birth. Although Esau emerged as the firstborn, Jacob was clutching at his heel even as he left the womb. This prenatal rivalry was later compounded by parental favoritism (Genesis 25:27, 28).

As the boys grew older, the tension mounted. On one occasion, Jacob manipulated Esau into trading his birthright for stew (Genesis 25:29-34). On another, Jacob and Rebekah tricked Isaac into conferring his fatherly blessing on Jacob instead of Esau (27:1-40). This was the breaking point in the brothers' relationship. After having been tricked twice, Esau planned to kill Jacob after their father passed away (27:41).

This prompted Jacob to flee northward. His relocation gave Esau the time and space he needed to cool off (Genesis 27:42-45). But the plan took much more time than Jacob had anticipated. Laban, his father-in-law, tricked him into staying twice as long as he had planned. Then Jacob stuck around for several more years to gain enough wealth to head back home. So after 20 years of self-exile (31:38), Jacob finally began his perilous journey home.

## **TODAY'S AIM**

**Facts:** to examine the details of how the two long-estranged brothers, Esau and Jacob, were reconciled to each other.

**Principle:** to show that it takes an act of forgiveness to begin the process of healing and reconciliation.

**Application:** to explain that when we make the decision to forgive others, God will heal our broken relationships.

### **1. What were some of the events leading up to Jacob's return to the land of Canaan? (Genesis 33:1)**

As last week's lesson concluded, Jacob had married and had become the father of many sons. During this time, his flocks and herds had also increased, as had Laban's - all because of Jacob's presence and God's blessing upon him.

After the birth of Joseph, Jacob decided to return to his homeland (Gen. 30:25). Laban, however, wanted Jacob to stay, for he realized that Jacob had brought God's blessing to him (vs. 27). Agreeing to stay, Jacob devised a plan to gain further wealth (vss. 31-42). So Jacob "increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses" (vs. 43).

As Jacob's wealth increased, Laban's diminished, and his attitude toward Jacob changed. "And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (31:3). Fearing how Laban might react to his anticipated departure, Jacob decided to leave for Canaan without telling his father-in-law. Laban pursued him and finally caught up with him, most likely intending to do him harm. God, however, warned Laban not to punish Jacob (vs. 24). After their meeting, Jacob and Laban agreed not to harm each other but to go their separate ways (vs. 44-55).

It would seem that Jacob could now return to his homeland in peace—except for one problem: Esau. The "few days" (Gen. 27:44) Rebekah had suggested Jacob spend in exile had now turned into twenty years (31:38). At last word, Esau had vowed that he would kill his brother.

### **2. What did the four hundred men accompanying Esau portend to Jacob? (v. 1)**

In Chapter 32, Jacob is preparing to go back home and makes preparations along the way for his brother Esau to receive him and find favor in him by first sending messengers to him (Esau). When the messengers returned to Jacob, they told him his brother was coming to meet him with four hundred men. Jacob knowing the state of mind his brother was in when he left, didn't take the news of his brother meeting him with four hundred men too lightly. He became afraid and was very distressed which led him to divide the people that were with him along with the flocks, herds and camels, into two companies. He told them that if "Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape".

So, Jacob was presuming that all was not well with his brother as he had hoped. When Jacob saw the four hundred men with Esau, he thought of two possible things that could happen: He thought the men were there to launch an attack or to be protection for Esau. Jacob had no clue what Esau would do next.

### **3. Why did Jacob divide his family into groups at this time? (vs. 1,2)**

As stated earlier, Jacob did not know what to expect from his brother Esau so he divided his family into groups in case Esau launched an attack, some would be able

to escape while the others are being attacked. Jacob divided his camp as follows: He placed his children with their mothers by order of preference: He put the handmaids first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph at the end. Although we are not told, perhaps Jacob reasoned that if Esau decided to vent his rage against him, the first to die would be the maidservants and their children.

As we read early on in the previous chapters, Jacob had worked very hard over many years to acquire Rachel as his wife. By putting Rachel (his favorite wife) and Joseph (his favorite son) behind the other family members, perhaps Esau's wrath would then be appeased by the time he reached Rachel and Joseph.

#### **4. Why did Jacob bow before Esau? (v. 3)**

Here we see that Jacob is no coward. He could remain with Rachel and Joseph at the end of the procession, but instead he places himself on the front line. As he ran ahead to approach his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times before he reached him.

This action is very significant. On the one hand, it stands out as a model for those seeking to initiate reconciliation. Jacob had deeply wounded Esau in the past. Realizing this, Jacob comes humbly to his brother, begging forgiveness. His bowing is not a perfunctory, superficial act, but is an act of complete contrition and submission. By doing this, Jacob affirmed Esau's power over him and his desire for mercy at his hand.

#### **5. When Esau saw Jacob, how did he respond? (vs. 4,5)**

When Esau saw Jacob, instead of being full of enmity, he "ran to meet him," thus indicating his desire to be quickly reunited with his long-lost brother. That fact that he came with four hundred men has led some to assume that when Esau headed out to meet Jacob, his desire was not reconciliation but retaliation. "Esau's greeting was totally unexpected. Jacob had expected either revenge from Esau, or heavy bargaining and appeasement. But instead, there is a warm greeting between the brothers. Emotions pour from the both of them. We see tears of joy and reconciliation.

Esau is also the first to speak. He is likely aware that these people are Jacob's family, thus his question is rhetorical (v. 5). The question gives Jacob an opportunity to introduce his family properly. Note that Jacob refers to himself as Esau's *servant*. This reinforces his own humility.

#### **6. Why did Esau respond in this manner as opposed to meting out vengeance on Jacob?**

If we go back to Ch. 32, v. 11, we will find that Jacob prayed a prayer of deliverance from the hand of his brother Esau. Seemingly in response to Jacob's prayer, Esau had a change of heart". (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan). When he had experienced the change of heart is unknown, but it was a welcome surprise for Jacob.

Even today, we must recognize that when we pray, God is at work in ways that are unseen by us. Of course, we may need a change of heart ourselves with regard to some event or conflict from the past. As our hearts are changed, though, God may

be simultaneously working in the hearts of others to make reconciliation possible - as He did with Esau.

As we see in verses 6 and 7, Esau did not concern himself with the circumstances that had happened so long ago. Instead, he wanted to catch up on all that he had missed over the years. There had apparently been no contact between the larger extended family, either, as Esau seemed surprised that Jacob now had such a large family. Jacob had the different groups within his family step forward to be introduced to Esau. We note that they all bowed before him. This was customary in their culture when approaching a king or ruler.

In verse 8 Esau asked Jacob what was meant by "all this drove" he met? We know that early on when Jacob sent the messengers to Esau, he also sent along flocks and herds as gifts to his brother in order to pacify him. This was done so that Jacob would find grace in his sight. Esau declines the offering because he does not need it and prefers that Jacob use it to meet his own family's needs (v. 9).

### **7. Why do we sometimes fail to seek reconciliation? What benefits are there when we do?**

Pride undoubtedly heads the list of reasons people don't seek reconciliation. The solution is to come to grips with the nature of God's grace. God took the initiative to reconcile us to Him, although He is the one who has been offended. God does not attempt to sell us His forgiving grace—it is a free gift.

But God's grace is not a gift that is forced upon us. And it is a gift we can reject. Failing to be reconciled to God is a rejection of His grace. Accepting His grace but then not extending forgiveness to others puts us in the position of being the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35.

A church in which people have failed to forgive and be reconciled to one another is a church that will be filled with internal struggles. This will make the church mostly ineffective in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20).

### **8. What did Jacob mean when he said that seeing Esau was like seeing the face of God? (v. 10)**

Jacob's statement "For therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God" is intriguing but should not be understood in a literal fashion. The meaning is that Jacob saw God's favour to him in Esau's: it was a token for good to him that God had accepted his prayers" (Henry). Jacob was pleased that Esau had accepted him as a brother to be embraced and not an enemy to be destroyed. With Esau's army of four hundred, things could have turned out quite differently for Jacob and his family. Instead of reconciliation, the incident might have ended in a massacre.

"Ironically, the four hundred men accompanying Esau turned out not to be for battle with Jacob's household and for taking his spoils, but for safeguarding the final stage of Jacob's journey".

### **9. Why was it important for Esau to receive Jacob's gift? (v. 11)**

Although Esau was reluctant to receive Jacob's gift, Jacob continued to urge him to accept these presents from his bounty. Jacob was thankful for the blessings he had received from God during the past twenty years, as well as the friendly reception he

had now received from his estranged brother. However, like the situation of Abraham's purchase of a burial plot in Genesis 23, Jacob knows he has to pay. He cannot remain indebted to Esau, so he urges Esau until he complies.

We see here that genuine reconciliation requires responsibility of both parties. Jacob has to be willing to humble himself, and Esau has to let go of a long-held grudge. This applies to Christians today. Christ has taught us to forgive others' debts as we have been forgiven (Matthew 6:12; 18:21-35).

Hanging on to resentment is unhealthy for both parties. Sometimes reconciliation is a matter of verbal confession and verbal forgiveness. At other times, restitution may need to be made so both parties may truly experience closure. In such cases the party that was wronged must, with a sincere heart, imitate Esau's willingness to accept an offer that has been made, even though he or she may prefer not to.

## **CONCLUSION**

Christians can learn valuable lessons from the account of Jacob and Esau. We may find ourselves in the shoes of one or the other at different points, sometimes the offender and sometimes the offended. Our culture encourages us to respond with extremes. At one extreme is inflicting payback. At the other extreme is a kind of quietism, meaning "just try to forget about it and move on with life."

Our Savior, however, does not give us either of those options. He calls us to seek reconciliation actively with those who have offended us (see Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15; compare 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Galatians 6:1, 2; Colossians 3:13; and James 5:16).

Those of us who share the blame for being estranged from another person must humble ourselves like Jacob. Those of us who have held grudges against someone who has wronged us need to embrace the offending party, like Esau, as we accept genuine confession, forgiving truly as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us.

## **PRAYER**

We thank You, Father, for reconciliation through Christ. It is tempting, Lord, to hoard reconciliation, to accept it for ourselves but fail to extend it to others. Prepare us to accept with joy the ministry of reconciliation that You have entrusted to us. In Jesus' name, amen.

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Reconciliation requires humility and acceptance.

## **ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "Joseph's Dream." Study Genesis 37.

### **Lesson Summarized By:**

Veronica Jasper

Jesus Is All Ministries

[www.jesusisall.com](http://www.jesusisall.com)