

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: January 13, 2019
Lesson Title: "Reconciled"
Lesson Passage: Gen. 33:1-15

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson is based on an account of the rendezvous of two brothers, Jacob and Esau, when they met again after having been apart for more than 20 years. Jacob remained cautious throughout this encounter with his brother, who was leading a band of 400 armed warriors, and he took elaborate precautions against the possibility that Esau would still seek revenge. But Esau seems to have lost all desire to punish Jacob for his past wrongs, and the two were reconciled.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Recall why "Esau hated Jacob" when Jacob fled from him many years earlier. (2) Describe the attitudes of the two brothers toward one another when they met after their long separation.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To begin the lesson, read Proverbs 18:19: "An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel" (NIV). Observe that this describes Esau's attitude toward his brother when, years earlier, Jacob fled to Haran to escape the wrath of his brother (see Genesis 27:41). Review the circumstances that led to this earlier separation: Jacob and Esau were fraternal twins, but Esau was the firstborn, since he had been delivered a few minutes before his brother Jacob. So, as the eldest son, Esau was entitled to the "birthright" (the right to inherit his father's position as head of the household and to receive a double portion of the family estate). But Jacob had connived to steal these benefits from his brother (Gen. 27:36), then he ran away to escape Esau's wrath. (On a map, point out the locations of Beer-sheba, where Jacob and Esau grew up, and Haran, to which Jacob fled.) Note that Esau had been so angry at Jacob then that he vowed to kill him (Gen. 27:41b), but that today's lesson passage provides evidence that there is some truth in the old folk-saying, "Time heals all wounds."

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Describe Jacob's earlier escape from the wrath of Esau: (1) When Jacob's mother, Rebekah, heard about Esau's murderous intentions, she determined to send Jacob far away to her brother Laban, who lived in Paddan-aram, a country in upper Mesopotamia (modern Syria) (Genesis 27:42-43). (2) Rather than telling her husband, Isaac, her real reason for wanting Jacob to flee to Haran, she expressed her fear that Jacob would marry one of the Hittite

women who populated the area where they lived (Gen. 27:46). (3) So, Isaac sent Jacob to Laban in Haran (Gen. 28:1, 5).

2. Comment on Gen. 33:1-4 as class members turn to that text in their Bibles: (1) Jacob and Esau apparently had not had any contact with each other for two decades. In those years of separation Jacob had become a wealthy man with a large family; and Esau, also wealthy, was a chieftain who could muster a large troop of warriors, while Jacob could not. But Jacob now showed a dependency on God (Genesis 32:30). (2) For unexplained reasons, Esau came in force with 400 men when he set out to meet Jacob (33:1). (Perhaps Esau was anticipating the possibility of a hostile encounter; but, perhaps he had brought along the 400 men because of his pride, or simply because he always traveled with an armed escort.) (3) When Jacob heard that Esau was coming with this large troop, he had no way of knowing whether or not his brother's intentions were hostile. So, being very wary, he made a tactical effort to safeguard at least some of his family and his possessions by dividing them into two groups in the hope that at least one group would escape Esau's wrath (Gen. 33:1b-2; compare Gen. 32:7-8). Also, Jacob was prepared to offer Esau a large gift from his herds of livestock (Gen. 32:13-18). (4) When the inevitable confrontation finally occurred, Jacob approached Esau with a great show of humility, putting his wives and children behind him, and prostrating himself seven times as he drew nearer to Esau (Gen. 33:3). (5) To his great relief, Esau "ran to meet Jacob and embraced him." Rather than a violent confrontation, there was a hearty and tearful reunion of two brothers long separated by competition, hostility, grudges and distance (Gen. 33:4).

3. Describe what happened immediately after Jacob and Esau were united (Gen. 33:5-11): (1) As we read Esau's question in Gen. 33:5, we need to remember that Jacob had divided his flocks and herds and all his possessions into two companies (Gen. 32:7-8). (2) When Esau inquired why it was that Jacob's caravan was traveling in two divisions, Jacob did not dare give him the true explanation; but, rather, to save face, he gave half his possessions to Esau, who reluctantly accepted the gift (33:8-9,11b). COMMENT: We can't know how this encounter between the two brothers might have turned out had Jacob not tried so hard to make peace with Esau. But the whole biblical account strongly suggests that Jacob's prayerfulness, generosity, and humility did a lot to facilitate a happy reunion where there might have been disaster.

CLOSING THE LESSON

A final thought: Jacob the clever trickster might have felt pleased with himself when he succeeded in stealing his brother's birthright and paternal blessing. But Jacob the man of prayer, the humble peacemaker, was the Jacob given the name "Israel," to mark him as God's man, and his family as God's people.