

Genesis 25-33: Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25-33

Based on NLT (2004)

Transition

Isaac, Abraham's son, married and had twin sons—Esau and Jacob. Isaac loved Esau and his wife loved Jacob. The boys grew up.

Gen 25:29-34

One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived...exhausted and hungry. Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew!"... "All right," Jacob replied, "but trade me your rights as the firstborn son."... So Esau swore an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his brother, Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate the meal, then got up and left.

Transition

When Isaac was old, he asked Esau to prepare his favorite food so that Isaac could give Esau a blessing. Jacob's mother helped Jacob dress so that he seemed to be Esau and she prepared a meal for him to serve his father. Thus, Isaac gave Jacob the blessing. When Esau found out, he threatened to kill Jacob. His mother sent Jacob away to her brother. There he married two sisters and had many children. After twenty years, he decided to return home.*

Gen 32:3-21

Then Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother, Esau...He told them, "Give this message to my master Esau: 'Humble greetings from your servant Jacob...I have sent these messengers to inform my lord of my coming, hoping that you will be friendly to me.'" After delivering the message, the messengers returned to Jacob and reported, "We met your brother, Esau, and he is already on his way to meet you—with an army of 400 men!" Jacob was terrified at

the news...Jacob...selected...gifts from his possessions to present to his brother, Esau...Jacob thought, "I will try to appease him by sending gifts ahead of me. When I see him in person, perhaps he will be friendly..."

Gen 33:1-11

Then Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his 400 men...Then Jacob went on ahead. As he approached his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times before him. Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept. "And what were all the flocks and herds I met as I came?" Esau asked. Jacob replied, "They are a gift, my lord, to ensure your friendship." "My brother, I have plenty," Esau answered. "Keep what you have for yourself." But Jacob insisted, "No, if I have found favor with you...Please take this gift I have brought you, *because* God has been very gracious to me..." And because Jacob insisted, Esau finally accepted the gift.

Gen 33:12-17

"Well," Esau said, "let's be going. I will lead the way." But Jacob replied, "You can see, my lord, that some of the children are very young, and the flocks and herds have their young, too. If they are driven too hard, even for one day, all the animals could die. Please, my lord, go ahead of your servant. We will follow slowly, at a pace that is comfortable for the livestock and the children. I will meet you at *your home*." "All right," Esau said, "but at least let me assign some of my men to guide and protect you." Jacob responded, "That's not necessary. It's enough that you've received me warmly, my lord!" So Esau turned around and started back to *his home* that same day. Jacob, on the other hand, traveled on to *a different place*. There he built himself a house and made shelters for his livestock.

Why This Story?

The story of Jacob and Esau form part of a forgiveness story set to be used for discipleship. The story shows that Jacob and Esau went through the motions of friendly greeting but perhaps did not forgive. The result was a final separation of the brothers.

This story would be used to show the consequences of a lack of forgiveness for the family. Family oriented cultures react strongly to the idea of a family being split permanently.

Other stories which explain why forgiveness is necessary would come before this story.

Story Crafting

The story needs to include enough details so that the audience understands why Jacob is afraid of Esau, and why Esau is angry with Jacob. The audience needs to understand that forgiveness is necessary on both sides.

Rights of the firstborn son: The firstborn usually inherited a double portion and would be the leader of the family. Thus, Jacob would now get the double portion rather than Esau. Jacob is not taking all the inheritance, just the extra portion and the leadership position.

Note that neither brother asks for forgiveness nor says, "I forgive you." They go through the motions of sincere greeting with the emotions left below the surface.

Commentaries have differing opinions on whether or not forgiveness between Esau and Jacob happened. Many commentaries believe that because this meeting occurred peacefully and because they later buried their father together, forgiveness and reconciliation did occur between Jacob and

Esau. Many commentators see the interchange about going to Esau's home as a polite form of refusal that occurs in many eastern cultures today. They don't necessarily believe that the refusal meant lack of forgiveness or deceit on Jacob's part, but that Jacob was simply obeying God's earlier command to him to go back to the land that God had given Abraham. However, some cultures would read this story and understand that forgiveness did not occur, because the brothers were permanently split.

If it is important for your people, you may include the final verse, Genesis 35:29 which indicates that Jacob and Esau were together to bury Isaac.

Words/Phrases to Consider

Please see the master glossary for a full explanation of these words.

Blessing*

This refers to when God helps, does good to, or favors someone or something. In the *Creation* and *Abraham* stories, the specific blessing includes God giving them the ability to reproduce and multiply. Try to avoid using a word related to luck or games of chance.

In this story, Isaac is giving the blessing and it would be considered binding. Isaac was not dying so this is not a deathbed blessing. The blessing shows the power of the spoken word in that once stated it cannot be rescinded or changed. The spoken blessing is a one-time event.

Forgiveness*

Some languages don't have an adequate word for 'forgive.' If that's the case, understanding what 'forgiveness' means is imperative to translating it correctly. Forgiveness involves two people, one of whom has done something wrong to the

other and offended him. The one who was offended sets aside his rights and does not punish the other as he deserves. He does not seek revenge. If the other repents of his behavior and accepts the forgiveness, the relationship between the two is restored and the guilt is removed. With God, forgiveness is available to all and dependent on a penitent heart in that the person stops his actions and turns towards God with an attitude of faith and repentance. This results in a restored relationship between God and man. Here are some idioms used in the New Testament to describe “forgiveness.” Your language may have a similar idiom, and if so, you may use that to create a word picture for your audience.

to wipe away the sins of someone

to lift up the sins of someone

to loose, release

to throw away

to cover over

to pass by

to take away

to turn one’s back on

Worldview

Jacob sent a message of greeting and then gifts to Esau. The message of greeting would indicate that Jacob was not coming to threaten Esau. The gifts would show Jacob’s wealth and that he was not a threat to Esau. Describe enough of the gifts to indicate that Jacob was a wealthy man.

Bowing to the ground seven times: This was a way to show respect to the other person. Be sure that your audience understands that Jacob was showing respect for Esau as his older brother and not worshipping him.

They both wept: These would be tears of joy not of sadness.

My lord...your servant: The lord would be the master or the ruler. The servant would work for the master. Here Jacob is indicating that Esau is the master or in charge while he, Jacob, has the role of serving Esau. This is a polite form of talking.

Esau refused the gifts but Jacob insisted and then Esau accepted. In many cultures this is a polite formula for gift exchange. Jacob was not forcing Esau but simply being polite while Esau was being polite by initially refusing the gifts.

Esau returned home and Jacob went to a different place. You need to indicate that these were not in the same direction. In many cultures, Jacob would not be seen as lying but rather politely refusing to go to Esau’s home.

Because different cultures would respond to this story differently, you will be able to understand more about how your culture understands forgiveness. This is a good time to discuss the definition of real forgiveness and to delve deeply into whether or not real forgiveness occurs as often as we think it does.

Intra-Story Cohesion

These stories are not told as a chronological set but rather as a theme set. You need to introduce each story so that the audience knows the characters. You need to situate each story so that your audience understands when it happened and that it is a true story. In your discussion, you would compare this story with the others in the set that have already been told.

Use the same words for **God, forgiveness, blessing**, etc., in each story.

Story Set Themes

Forgiveness

Family

Relationship

Blessing

Inheritance

Giving gifts

Brothers