

Genesis 25:19-34; 27

Aim of Lesson

To contrast the characters of Jacob and Esau. To show how deception caused hatred and unhappiness in the lives of several people, and divided a home.

Background study

Study the nature of the domestic and social life of the times.

Suggested outline of lesson

The picture of family life, which is the setting for this story, must be drawn in a manner readily recognized by the children as having a counterpart in their own experience. The strength of a family and its happiness, rest upon loyalty, honesty and truthfulness among its members. Any favouritism, jealousy or deception brings unhappiness and the ultimate break-up of the family.

Remind the children of the happy marriage of Isaac and Rebekah marred only by the sadness of having no children for twenty years. Faithful Isaac prayed to God about this and his prayer was answered. Rebekah soon knew that she was to have a baby. She experienced more than the usual sensation of kicking and, when she talked to God about her discomfort, she was told that she was to have not one but two babies - twin boys, both of whom would have large families. God told her that he had already chosen the younger boy to be Isaac's heir, contrary to tradition.

From their birth, it was obvious that the boys had distinctly different personalities. Contrast the life-styles that each boy chose for himself, and describe the different characteristics and outlooks which influenced their choice. Point out also the response of the two parents to their sons, the one favouring the vigorous Esau, and the other the quiet Jacob. Enliven the story by filling in details of the way of life of these nomadic people.

In describing the incident of the selling of the birthright, show how desperately tired Esau would have been after a hard period of hunting, which had probably taken him many days' journey from home. His tiredness was exceeded only by his ravenous hunger. These, together with his impulsive nature, led him to pay an unreasonable price to gratify his immediate needs - a price which gave a moment's satisfaction followed by a lifetime's regret. Explain the meaning of the word "birthright" and the custom of giving the entire family inheritance to the eldest son. All this Esau had foregone.

Show how from that time onward there was no longer harmony in this family. There was hatred and jealousy between the brothers, and Isaac and Rebekah were driven by their favouritism to act in opposition to each other. Rebekah loved Jacob so much more than Esau and was so ambitious for him that she was prepared to go to almost any length to secure the first-born's blessing for him. There can be no doubt that the lies and deception of these two were completely unnecessary and wrong in the eyes of God, who had already promised that the elder should serve the younger, and who would have fulfilled that promise in his own good time. But Rebekah, disturbed by Isaac's intention to bestow the blessing on Esau, thought that quick action was needed to avert this and the result was a plot which played upon the weakness of an old and blind man, who was dependant upon the senses of touch, smell and hearing to recognize the people around him. One wonders how Rebekah, who had been so close and loving to her husband, could so deceive him. In describing the tense exchange between deceiver and deceived, quote the exact words of the blessing and reflect how the poignancy of the scene was marred by the lies and cruel deception.

Convey the sense of shock and distress felt by Esau and Isaac as the fraud came to light. Nothing could reverse the situation; the blessing was as solemn and binding as a vow and could not be changed. Resentment welled up in Esau to such an extent that he resolved to revenge himself and regain his rights by killing his brother at the first opportunity. Jacob had to flee for his life, and he was destined not to return to his home for many years; Rebekah was never to see her favourite son again, and Esau was alienated from his family and from God's chosen people. All this suffering had resulted from dishonesty and self-seeking, and bears out the point that we do well to place ourselves in God's hands, pray for his will to be done and have the patience to wait for him to work it out.

Relevance to the children's lives

We can see clearly from this story the serious results of telling lies. When are we most tempted to lie? (To get ourselves out of trouble?) What happens when we begin to tell lies? (One lie usually leads to another). How can we cultivate the habit of always telling the truth?

Worksheets

The jumbled words are love, trust, lying, jealousy, spitefulness, kindness, forgiveness, anger, sulking, fun, fairness.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, please forgive us for the lies we have told. Help us to be honest with ourselves, with other people and with you, and to love you with all our hearts. Amen.

Memory verse

"Putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth" (Ephesians 4:25).