

### Lesson 3

## THE CHOICE OF ISRAEL



Isaac was the son born to Abraham according to the promise of God. God said to Isaac: “I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands, and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring” (Gen. 26:3-4). We see how God's promises to Abraham are fulfilled through the descendants of Isaac.

### Esau and Jacob

Rebekah was the wife of Isaac, She gave birth to twin boys Esau and Jacob. Esau was the elder and Jacob the younger. Before they were born the Lord Said to Rebekah: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you

Shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23).

The boys grew up. Esau was a skillful hunter and a man of the field. While Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he was fond of game meat but Rebekah loved Jacob.

### Birthright

The birthright that by tradition goes to the eldest son of the family was of great importance to the people. The First-born was heir to the promises of God. Once when Esau came from the field, tired and hungry, Jacob was cooking stew. Esau asked Jacob to give him from it. **Jacob demanded Esau's birthright in exchange for food. Feeling that, in his famished condition, food was more important than birthright, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for bread and stew.**

### Isaac blesses Jacob

Isaac grew old and his eyes became dim. He called his elder son Esau and said: **“My son, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die”** (Gen. 27:1-4).

Rebekah was listening to the conversation. When Esau went hunting she told Jacob about it. **She wanted Jacob, her favorite, to obtain the blessing of his father, because the words of the Lord during her pregnancy were still in her mind.** Rebekah cooked the meat of two lambs and dressed Jacob in such a way that he should feel like Esau to Isaac. Then she sent Jacob to Isaac with the specially prepared meat and bread. **After offering the food to Isaac Jacob asked for his blessing. Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob, mistaking him for Esau.**

When Esau arrived after the hunt Jacob had left the room receiving the blessing from Isaac. After cooking the food and offering it to his father, Esau asked Isaac for his blessing. Then Isaac realized his mistake. **He told Esau that since he had already given his blessing to his brother, he should remain blessed.** This made Esau very sad. He also became furious that his brother cheated him again. Esau decided to murder Jacob because first he had tricked him out of his birthright and now he had snatched the father's blessing that was meant for him.

### **Jacob's dream**

Realizing that the life of Jacob is in danger from the part of Esau, Rebekah called him and said: “Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away” (Gen 27:43-44).

Jacob set out for Haran. When evening came he stayed at a certain place to rest and sleep. In his sleep he had a vision. God stood near him and said. **“I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring;... All the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go”** (Gen 28:13-15). When Jacob woke from his sleep he gave that place a new name **Bethel**, meaning **'the house of God'**.

Continuing his journey he reached Haraan. He lived with his uncle Laaban for fourteen years. He married Leah and Rachel, daughters of Laaban. Meanwhile he aquired much wealth. Following the direction of God Jacob went to his brother Esau taking his family with him. He wanted to live on friendly terms with his elder brother.

## The name Israel

During his journey from Haran to join Esau Jacob had an unusual experience. This happened on the bank of the stream Yabok, where he spent the night.

A stranger was wrestling with Jacob the whole night. When that person realized that he couldn't defeat Jacob, he said: "Soon it will be daybreak. So let me go". Jacob replied: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" Then he asked: "What is your name?" "Jacob" he replied. Then he said: "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but *Israel* for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed" (Gen: 32:24-28). The word *Israel* means 'one who wrestles with God'. Thereafter Jacob was known by the name Israel. Generations of Jacob's descendants are called the people of Israel.

## God of Jacob

Jacob occupies a unique place in God's plan of salvation. All the promises God made to Abraham and Isaac were repeated also to Jacob. We see that God leads and protects Jacob in a special way. This is why we use the phrase, 'God of Jacob'. In the Holy Qurbana and other prayers too, we use the phrase '*God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*'.

Jacob's life is full of unusual experiences. We learn from this that the ways of the Lord are so incomprehensible. In all situations of life we should submit ourselves to God's plan. Then we, who are the *new Israel*, would receive the blessing of God just as the *old Israel* did. Thus the God-experience of Jacob becomes ours also.

The life of Jacob teaches us that in the God's plan what may look evil to our human eye can turn out for our good.

## **Let us Pray**

Almighty God, help us to live with hope in the midst of our failures and difficulties.

## **Read Recount**

Narrate how Esau lost his birthright (Gen 25:27-34)



## **Word of God for our Guidance**

“Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go” (Gen 28-15).

## **My decision**

I will not forfeit my divine sonship for the sake of temporal gains.

## Let us do

Match the following drawing lines

Israel

Stream

Bethel

One who wrestles with God

Yabok

House of God

Isaac

Birthright

Esau

Father of Jacob

## Let us find out the answer

1. How did Esau lose his birthright?
2. What did Isaac say when he blessed Jacob?
3. What is the meaning of the word Bethel?
4. What is the name Jacob received after wrestling with God?
5. What does the life of Jacob teach us?