



# *Imperial Academy Bible Lessons*



**Origins of a Brotherhood**

# Origins of a Brotherhood

**A**braham knew it was important for Isaac to become close to God. He was the son of promise. Through him, God would pass down the blessings that He had promised to Abraham's descendants. Abraham had been willing to sacrifice Isaac, as covered in the last lesson, so these incredible physical and spiritual promises were now unconditional.

Isaac had a heavy responsibility to be faithful and obedient toward God like his father. Such responsibility meant that he needed to marry the right woman.

During this time period, parents chose their children's spouses, and Abraham prepared carefully for the right bride to be chosen. He did not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman. God created the races, and He preserves them by commanding people to marry within their own race. Whomever Isaac was to marry needed to be of the proper race, not from among the Gentiles. Abraham knew that such a wife would come from his home region in Mesopotamia, a place where his brother Nahor and family still resided.

Abraham commissioned his chief servant to take men, camels and provisions to

Mesopotamia and bring back a wife from among his own people (Genesis 24:2-4).

## **WORTHY THROUGH SERVICE**

After traveling for several days, Abraham's caravan stopped at the water wells outside of Nahor's city (Genesis 24:10). The servant relied on God to make this important decision. He prayed that God would send the right woman to the well: a woman who would volunteer to draw water not only for him, but also for his caravan. Very few women would volunteer to draw hundreds of gallons of water for 10 camels. This was a test of the young lady's character.

Before the servant finished praying, a beautiful young woman came to the well. The servant approached her and asked for a drink of water. Not only did she cheerfully agree, she also offered to draw water for his camels—as much as they could drink! This was a direct answer to the servant's prayer.

The servant was delighted when she told him she was Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel and granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother. The servant again

prayed to God, thanking Him for leading him to a suitable wife for Isaac. He gave Rebekah a gold ring and expensive bracelets (verse 22).

The servant and his caravan were invited to Rebekah's home by her brother Laban and served a nice dinner. But the servant declined to eat, until he first told everyone the reason for his visit: to find a wife for Isaac (verse 33).

Rebekah's family agreed that it was God's will for her to marry Isaac. The servant gave many expensive items to Rebekah and her family, an acknowledgement of her great value to them and Isaac (verse 53). Then they enjoyed a celebratory dinner.

The next morning, Rebekah and her servants joined Abraham's caravan for the long journey to Canaan.

Several days later, the traveling party arrived at Abraham's property. Isaac was immediately impressed by not only Rebekah's beauty, but also her character. God had answered the prayers of Abraham and his servant and had brought Isaac the perfect wife. Their marriage was the next step of God's plan to create a special nation that would affect the whole world.

Abraham died 35 years later at the age of 175. His life had been one of the most important in history, and still is to this day. Although Abraham never witnessed the fulfillment of some of God's promises, the promises God made because of Abraham's faith and obedience were kept, and they have changed human history.

### **ONE FAMILY, TWO NATIONS**

Isaac and Rebekah were married for 20 years and had no children (Genesis 25:20). This was a difficult trial, similar to the one that Abraham and Sarah had endured. Isaac knew that it was God's will to give him and his wife the desire of their hearts, so he prayed to God.

God heard his prayer, and when Isaac was 60 years old, Rebekah became pregnant. They were very grateful to God for performing this miracle. However, shortly into her pregnancy, Rebekah experienced strange pains. She immediately went to God, in faith, to understand what was happening. God delivered an exciting answer.

He told her that she was going to give birth to not just one child but two, and that



Rebekah meets Isaac in the field.



Jacob and Esau

these twins would become the ancestors of two nations. God prophesied to Rebekah that the nation that descended from one of these sons would be stronger than the other, and that the descendants of the firstborn would actually serve the descendants of the younger brother (Genesis 25:23).

As the boys grew, their parents began recognizing differences between the two. The firstborn, Esau, loved to roam the outdoors and hunt. The second-born, Jacob, preferred raising flocks, tending crops, and staying closer to home.

Esau brought his father meat from his hunting trips, and over time Isaac came to favor Esau over Jacob; Rebekah came to favor Jacob over Esau (verse 28). This favoritism, which is wrong for parents to do, contributed to a spirit of division and competition that increased as the boys grew older.

## **ESAU SELLS HIS BIRTHRIGHT**

Years later, after a long hunting trip, Esau returned home. There, Jacob was preparing a savory lentil soup. Esau, who was extremely hungry, smelled its aroma. He asked Jacob for a bowl.

At this point, Jacob saw an opportunity. Firstborn sons received more property and stature than younger sons. This is the birthright. In Isaac's case, the birthright also included the amazing, world-changing promises God had made to Abraham! Jacob schemed to take advantage of Esau's hunger and his attitude toward his birthright.

"You can eat, but only if you give me your birthright in return," Jacob said.

Esau, focusing on his hunger and the immediate appeal of a tasty dinner after a long trek, treated his birthright lightly.

"I'm so hungry right now I could die," Esau said.

"Swear you will renounce your birthright and give it to me," Jacob insisted.

"Fine!" Esau said sharply. "I swear. Now give me some food!"

This seemed like a minor thing to Esau, but that is just the point. Esau treated his birthright casually—and he lost it. He paid an enormous price for a mere bowl of soup that was gone in a couple of minutes.

## **JACOB STEALS ESAU'S BLESSING**

Many years later, Isaac was very old and blind. He called for Esau to come to him. Isaac was nearing death and wanted to give Esau his blessing. Isaac instructed his



Jacob, wearing goat skins, prepares to deceive his father.

son to hunt for venison, and then return with the cooked meat (Genesis 27:1-4). Esau could have used this opportunity to be honest, and tell his father that he had sold his birthright to Isaac. But he didn't.

Rebekah overheard Isaac and Esau's conversation. She knew God had prophesied that the descendants of Jacob would be stronger than the descendants of Esau. But Isaac was insisting on conferring the

blessing and birthright to Esau. Rebekah quickly devised a deceitful plan to disguise Jacob as Esau—and therefore, ensure her favorite son received the blessing.

After Esau left, she instructed Jacob to get two goats from the field. She would cook them to taste like venison.

Jacob was willing to go along with the deception, but he was afraid that his father would recognize him, even though Isaac was blind. Rebekah insisted, and Jacob complied. Rebekah cooked the meat, wrapped goat skins around Jacob's neck and hands, and told him to wear some of Esau's clothing.

Jacob entered Isaac's tent. Trying to sound like Esau, he said, "I have returned, father."

"Who is it?" asked Isaac.

"Esau, your firstborn son," Jacob lied. "I have brought the venison you asked for. Sit up and eat. Then you can give me the blessing you promised."

"My son," Isaac asked, "how were you able to return so fast?"

Jacob lied again: "God showed me where to find the deer" (verses 18-20).

Isaac was still suspicious. "Come near to me, so I can place my hands on you," he said. He placed his hands on the goat skins Jacob was wearing.

"You sound like Jacob, but your hands are hairy like Esau's," Isaac said. "Are you truly my firstborn, Esau?"

"Yes father, I am Esau."

Isaac and Jacob ate the meal, Isaac kissed his son, and then asked a special

blessing from God on him and his descendants.

Turn to Genesis 27:28-29 and write out the blessing below:

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After his father finished praying, Jacob quickly left the tent. Moments later, Esau arrived.

"Sit up, father," Esau said. "I have returned from hunting."

"Who are you?" Isaac asked in shock. "And who did I just give God's blessing to?"

Esau was stunned to hear that Jacob had already received the blessing. Isaac knew that even though Jacob had obtained them deceitfully, it was God's plan to confer those birthright blessings on Jacob.

"Jacob has now cheated me twice!" Esau exclaimed. "First, he stole my birthright. Now, he has taken my blessing. Is there nothing that you can ask God for me?"

Isaac told Esau that God would indeed bless Jacob and his descendants, and that Esau's descendants would become their servants (verses 39-40).

Esau became so bitter that he wanted to murder Jacob (verse 41). Rebekah

heard about Esau's plan and urgently persuaded Isaac to send Jacob to Haran, where her family was from, so that he would not marry a Canaanite like Esau had. Isaac agreed and again asked that God would bless him (Genesis 28:1-4).

Jacob left his home and traveled to the city of his grandfather. Instead of taking the most direct route, he trekked the more difficult, longer trails and mountain passes to try to escape Esau if he pursued. Jacob was now a fugitive in a dangerous and strange land.

### **WHERE GOD DWELLS**

After walking for about 50 miles, Jacob finally came to a stop and found a place to camp for the night that he hoped would be relatively safe from the dangers around him. He gathered several stones together and laid something soft on top to make a crude pillow. As he slept, he had an incredible dream.

Jacob dreamed of a high stairway stretching from the ground up through the sky. On the stairs, angels were walking up and down. From the top of the stairway, the God Being who later became Jesus Christ spoke to Jacob.

"I am the God of your grandfather, Abraham, and your father, Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land where you are sleeping," God said (Genesis 28:13). He promised that these descendants would become numerous like "the dust of the earth," spreading in all directions. God also promised Jacob

that if he followed Him, He would always help him (verses 14-15).

God makes the same promise to you today. Children of members in God's Church are set apart for a special, holy purpose (1 Corinthians 7:14). If you follow God, He promises that He will always be with you.

Jacob awakened. What a dream he had just experienced! He sat up, thinking about what it all meant. Then he looked at his makeshift pillow. The stones had merged into one large stone! The true God had spoken to him while he was sleeping, and caused this miraculous sign! (Genesis 28:16-17).

Jacob trembled. He knew something incredible had just happened. To memorialize it, he anointed the stone that he had used as a pillow and set it up as a special landmark.

Then and there, Jacob covenanted with God. He had been given great promises of blessings, but at that time he had little more than the clothes on his back. He was a lone traveler in fear for his life. Jacob promised God that if He would indeed protect him, provide for him, and bring him to his destination and then back to his father's house again, then he would give God a 10th of all that he had (verses 18-22).

Jacob understood God's tithing law, which Abraham and Isaac had kept. Everything is God's, from the air you breathe to the food you eat. To honor and obey God, you should pay back to God the first 10th of everything you earn.

Jacob shouldered his bag and took one last look at this stone and this site where he had heard God speak directly to him. He turned and continued his journey, but now he began to rely less on his own cleverness and more on God.

Years later, when Jacob would travel back through this region, his life would be much different.

### **JACOB FINDS A WIFE**

After hiking over rough mountain passes, trekking across the hot desert, and crossing the great Euphrates River, Jacob arrived in the land of Mesopotamia. He approached a group of shepherds at a well and asked them where they were from.

“Haran,” one of them replied, pointing over a hillside (Genesis 29:1-4). Jacob’s long journey was nearly over.

“Do you know a man named Laban?” Jacob asked. “His grandfather was Nahor.”

“Yes, we know him,” the shepherds replied. They pointed out a woman walking with a flock of sheep toward the well. “There is one of his daughters, Rachel” (verses 5-6).

As she approached, Jacob saw that Rachel was beautiful in appearance. He helped water her flocks, and told her who he was. She quickly ran home and excitedly told her father. Laban hurried to greet Jacob and invite him into his home.

Laban gave Jacob a place to live and food to eat, and Jacob worked for Laban. After a month, Laban offered to begin paying Jacob. During this time, Jacob

grew to love Rachel. He told Laban that he would work for him for seven years in exchange for marriage to Rachel.

Laban accepted Jacob’s offer. He would rather his daughter marry Jacob than one of the local men. He would greatly benefit from seven years of labor from someone as hardworking as Jacob.

As the years passed, Jacob’s love for Rachel only increased. Both he and Rachel were eager for the day when they could finally be married. Until that time, Jacob held true to his commitment and worked hard for Laban.

After seven years, Laban held a feast for the marriage of his daughter to Jacob. Many people from the city attended the celebration, which lasted a whole week. But during all the dancing, feasting and music, Jacob experienced the shock of his life. The woman he had married was not Rachel. Instead, it was her older sister, Leah!

Laban’s explanation for his deception was that in Mesopotamia the older sisters traditionally married before the younger sisters. He then made Jacob an offer: “I will also allow you to marry Rachel if you finish this weeklong wedding celebration, and if you work for me for another seven years” (verses 21-27).

Jacob was finding out that his uncle was as crafty and deceitful as he and his mother had been toward Isaac and Esau. Laban was using circumstances and deception to his own advantage, at Jacob’s expense.



Jacob, thinking he is marrying Rachel, marries Leah instead.

But Jacob deeply desired to marry Rachel. *Rachel is worth more than 14 years of work*, Jacob thought. “I agree,” he told Laban (verse 27).

After the seven days of marriage feasting were over, Jacob also married

Rachel. He now had two wives. God never intended for a man to have more than one wife, although men during that time traditionally had more than one wife. There is a reason God’s Church does not allow the practice of such a custom today

(Titus 1:6), as evidenced by the great trouble in Jacob, Leah and Rachel's lives that we will learn about.

## **JACOB'S FAMILY**

Jacob worked for Laban for seven more years, and Laban made sure to get all possible advantages for himself. In these years, Jacob had 11 sons, but only one, Joseph, with Rachel. Jacob's 14 years of labor had made Laban a wealthy man, but Jacob and his family had gained little wealth from the arrangement.

Jacob told his father-in-law that he intended to leave and take his family to Canaan, where Isaac was. Laban, however, wanted to keep Jacob working for him. "Continue working for me, and you can name whatever pay you desire," he said.

Jacob replied, "Let my wage be whatever cattle, sheep or goats I raise that are born with rings or spots on their hides."

But once again, Laban dealt deceitfully and unfairly. Before Jacob could set aside the livestock, Laban told his other employees to take them and give them to his sons (Genesis 30:31-35). Now Jacob had to wait for months until more of those animals would be born.

But God had promised to take care of Jacob, and God always keeps His promises. Over the next six years, God performed a great miracle for Jacob: He greatly increased the number of animals born with spots or rings (Genesis 31:11-12).

God made Jacob a prosperous man. Because of this, Laban grew increasingly less friendly toward him.

## **JOURNEY TO CANAAN**

God spoke to Jacob in a dream, telling him to leave Laban and return to Canaan (Genesis 31:13). Jacob, worried that Laban may not let him leave, waited until his father-in-law was away shearing his flocks. Jacob and his workmen then gathered all of his family's belongings and loaded them onto camels and donkeys and left.

Three days after Jacob had left, Laban found out what had happened (verse 22). Not only was he angry that Jacob left without saying anything, but he also discovered that some of his small, expensive idols were missing. He believed Jacob had taken them.

Laban furiously gathered his men to pursue Jacob. After seven days of travel, Laban finally came within range of Jacob's caravan. Yet even in this situation, God honored His promise to always protect Jacob. While Laban was sleeping, God spoke to him in a dream, warning him not to harm Jacob. Laban rose the next morning, stirred by the dream.

Early in the morning, Laban overtook Jacob's caravan. "Why did you leave me without saying anything?" he asked Jacob. "If I had known you were leaving, I would have thrown a feast, with dancing and music. But instead, I wasn't even able to say goodbye to my daughters or my grandchildren" (verses 25-29).

“I was worried you would force your daughters to stay with you, rather than to come with me,” Jacob answered.

“I should take my daughters from you now,” Laban responded sharply. “But I won’t, because the God of your father spoke to me in a dream last night and told me not to harm you. I respect your God, but why have you disrespected my gods by taking some of my idols?”

Jacob had not taken any idols. “Search our tents and belongings,” Jacob said angrily. “You won’t find any. If you do, whoever took them shall die!” Jacob was unaware that Rachel had stolen the idols.

Rachel heard what Jacob had told Laban; she knew the discovery of her father’s idols meant she would die. As Laban and his men searched every tent, she quickly hid the idols under a camel saddle. When her father came to her tent, she was sitting on the saddle. He asked for her to get up, so he could continue his search. But she lied and said she was feeling unwell and needed to remain seated (Genesis 31:34).

When Laban admitted to Jacob that he had not found the idols, Jacob was angry. For 20 years he had been away from his father’s house, working hard for Laban, being tricked into marrying Leah and having his earnings changed and taken away. He had remained loyal to Laban, but Laban had never treated him fairly. Jacob recognized that the reason he had prospered was not because of his own cleverness and certainly not due to

Laban’s generosity. It was only because of God (verses 36-42).

Laban agreed that Jacob deserved to be treated better. He wanted to leave Jacob and his family peaceably. He and Jacob made a covenant with one another, committing to have peace between their two families. They gathered stones as a monument of their reconciliation and ate a meal together.

The next morning, Laban said goodbye to his family and returned to Haran (verse 55). Jacob took his family and continued toward Canaan.

Jacob’s family was starting a new chapter in their lives. His 20 years working for Laban had not been easy. God used this hardship to instill character traits in Jacob that would be necessary for his future. Jacob would face trials in the years ahead, but he would also receive many blessings. As we continue Jacob’s life in the next lesson, we will see that his life shows you an example of how God wants to be involved in your life as well.

# BIBLE MEMORY Work hard

Ecclesiastes 9:10

Psalms 128:2

Proverbs 16:3

1 Timothy 5:8

Proverbs 14:23

Colossians 3:23

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## Word Hunt

G X B E L Z P E H A R A N C S  
X N S R S L C J G W E O N A T  
M A I J O I R R A B S C H A O  
U U C S V T A I E M I N H S N  
E J N R S T H G P D U L O I E  
A I E A T E G E K R G A K L C  
K S P S B U L D R A S J Z Q W  
R E B E K A H B N C I T Z F P  
N A A N A C L K J H D A H E D  
A W Z B G J B M I E M G O H C  
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T H G I R H T R I B L A D K V  
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BIRTHRIGHT  
BLESSING  
BROTHER  
CAMELS

CANAAN  
DISGUISE  
DREAM  
ESAU

HARAN  
ISAAC  
JACOB  
LABAN

RACHEL  
REBEKAH  
SERVICE  
STONE