

## LESSON 10: ABRAHAM (COVENANT WITH ONE TRIBE II)

### Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Std 1	:	Cover points 1 to 8
For Intermediate Level / Std 4	:	Cover points 1 to 10
For Advanced Level / Form 1	:	Cover points 1 to 12

### Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned about how God gave Abraham and Sarah a son even though they were very old. We also learned about the different ways in which God tested Abraham's faith, which required that Abraham send his first son, Ishmael, away and sacrifice his second son, Isaac, out of obedience. It has been explained that although God required Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, it was actually just a test and a foreshadowing of something to take place in the future. In this lesson, we will learn about how God fulfils His promise to Abraham through Isaac (his son) and Jacob (his grandson).

### Current lesson:

1. Before Isaac was 40 years old, he got married to Rebekah. But after many years of marriage, Rebekah still had not given birth to a child and was believed to be barren. Apparently, God was testing Isaac's faith in the same way He had tested Abraham's faith. Isaac prayed for Rebekah, and she conceived, giving birth to twin boys, Esau (elder) and Jacob (younger). Isaac was 60 years old when they were born. Isaac favoured Esau and Rebekah favoured Jacob.
2. As the elder son, Esau had the rights of inheritance from his father. One day, Esau came home from hunting and was famished. When he saw that his younger brother, Jacob, happened to be making some soup, Esau negotiated to have the soup and agreed to swear his birthright over to Jacob for a bowl of soup. This was just the kind of person Esau was, always concerned with immediate gratification and not interested in more important issues about faith and life. (Whoever held the birthright would receive all his father's wealth upon the father's death.)

Let us first consider our "birthright" as Christians. Because of our baptism and our faith in Jesus Christ, we have become children of the Father, with all the benefits and the inheritance that comes with it now and later in heaven. And yet, if we are not so concerned about our faith, we can find ourselves in situations like Esau, willing to forfeit our inheritance, our birthright, for what amounts to a bowl of soup.

Human beings have strong appetites for all sorts of things. We find ourselves "famished" at times, longing to be filled, and suddenly stumble upon something that tempts us by promising to temporarily satisfy that appetite or emptiness. The catch is that these attractive things are incompatible with our status as sons and daughters of God. Choosing these things turns us away from God in separation. In effect, we exchange our birthright. Esau later regretted what he had done but had no chance to undo his foolish act. Esau's character

shows us why Jacob was the one bound to inherit the blessings that God had promised Abraham (passed down through Isaac) instead of Esau himself. (Genesis 25:29-34)

3. When Isaac had grown old and was almost blind, he wanted to bestow his blessing on Esau, his eldest son, before he died. (This was the traditional way of recognising the eldest son as the one who would inherit his father's position when he died.) So Isaac summoned Esau and instructed him to hunt for game and prepare it for him to eat, after which he would give Esau the traditional blessing. Evidently, Esau had forgotten that he had sold his birthright to Jacob much earlier on (obviously, an agreement or promise meant nothing to him).

While Esau was out hunting, Isaac's wife, Rebekah, who had overheard the conversation, told Jacob to prepare two goats from their flock for Isaac's meal so that they could cheat Esau out of his inheritance. She also suggested that Jacob wear Esau's clothes and put a goatskin on his neck and arms so that Isaac would be fooled into thinking it was Esau, who was much hairier than Jacob. Jacob served up the roasted goat to his father, and although Isaac was suspicious, he ate the delicious meal and gave Jacob the family blessing. No sooner had Jacob left his father than Esau arrived, prepared the game he had hunted and presented it to his father. As soon as Isaac heard Esau speak, he knew he had been tricked. He shook violently at this realisation, but despite Esau's pleas, he could not undo his blessing, simply confirming that Esau was now subservient to his younger twin. Esau was furious towards Jacob for robbing him of his birthright. He vowed to kill Jacob as soon as Isaac died. But Rebekah quickly sent Jacob away to her brother, Laban, in Haran. (Genesis 27:1-45)

4. Jacob left home and eventually married two wives (who were daughters of Laban), Leah and Rachel. He had twelve sons, all of whom were birthed by these two wives and two of their maids. Their names were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. These sons would eventually become ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. But among all the sons, the one whom Jacob loved most was Joseph, the eleventh son, because he was the firstborn of the wife whom Jacob truly loved, i.e. Rachel. He married Leah first only because he was cheated by Laban into marrying her.

Because Joseph was his father's favourite son, his half-brothers were jealous of him and they ridiculed him often. He was also a spoilt brat who told his father about all of his half-brothers' misdeeds. When Joseph was 17 years old, Jacob made a long luxurious coat of many colours for him. Seeing this, the half-brothers began to hate Joseph. Then Joseph began to have dreams that implied that his family would bow down to him. When he told his brothers about such dreams, it drove them to conspire against him. When Jacob heard of these dreams, he rebuked his son for proposing the idea that his family would even bow down to Joseph. (Genesis 37:1-11)

5. Because of their hatred for Joseph, he was eventually sold by his brothers as a slave and put onto a caravan headed for Egypt. In Egypt, he was sold to Potiphar, one of the Pharaoh's ministers ("Pharaoh" was the title for the king of Egypt). The brothers confiscated Joseph's colourful coat and brought it to their father with the coat drenched in animal blood. Jacob recognised the coat as his son's and concluded that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. He mourned for days over the loss of this son and nobody could comfort him. (Genesis 37:31-36)

6. Joseph landed up in Egypt as a slave. For a while, things started to look up for young Joseph. God's help enabled him to find favour in his master's eyes, and he was appointed head of Potiphar's household and was fully trusted by Potiphar. However, this would not last for long. Attracted by his handsome looks, Potiphar's wife desired to be intimate with him. To her anger, Joseph continuously refused. One day, when no one was home other than the two of them, the mistress grasped Joseph's garment, demanding that he consent. Thinking quickly, Joseph slid out of his cloak and ran outside. But Potiphar's wife turned the tables on Joseph, telling her husband that it was Joseph who had tried to entice her. The angry master reacted by placing his trustworthy assistant in prison. (Genesis 39:1-20)
7. Joseph's charisma followed him to prison as well, and the warden soon appointed him as his right-hand man (Genesis 39:21-23). In time, his unique qualities expressed themselves in an additional area: when the king's royal cupbearer and baker were imprisoned, Joseph successfully interpreted their dreams, correctly predicting that the cupbearer would be released and the baker would be hanged.

Two years later, Pharaoh himself envisioned two dreams, which none of his advisors were able to explain. Remembering the Hebrew youth from his prison days, the cupbearer suggested that Joseph be summoned. Joseph, 30 years old at that time, interpreted Pharaoh's dreams as being a Divine prediction for seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, and advised Pharaoh to prepare by storing grain during the first seven years. Impressed by Joseph's wisdom, Pharaoh appointed him as his governor, second only to the king himself, and tasked him with readying the nation for the years of famine. During the years of famine, Egypt did not suffer. In fact, all the other nations were trying to buy grain from Joseph. (Genesis 41:1-56)

8. Meanwhile, the nearby land of Canaan was not spared from the effects of the famine. Jacob's sons had families of their own by now, but they all lived nearby to one another. Hearing that there was grain in Egypt, Joseph's brothers journeyed there to buy precious food from the viceroy, not realising that he was their very own brother (as they probably thought he was dead). Benjamin stayed at home to take care of their aged father.

Joseph decided to utilise this opportunity to observe whether his brothers truly regretted having sold him, and also whether they were treating Benjamin (Joseph's only maternal brother) the way they treated him. Using a succession of dramatic manoeuvres, Joseph tested his brothers' determination to save their youngest brother Benjamin from the plot he set up for him. Once he saw their devotion toward Benjamin, Joseph finally revealed his identity to his astonished siblings. Following this heartfelt reunion, Jacob and his family settled in Egypt. When they were in Egypt, Joseph provided them with a very comfortable life as directed by Pharaoh. (Genesis 42:1 to 47:11)

9. From the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we can see that doing God's will in our lives is not an easy thing. It requires us to be determined to do the right thing, and doing the right thing can sometimes get us into trouble with people who do not have the same values and purposes. Very often, when we intend to do God's will, we do not see what the future outcome of our obedience will be; only God sees everything. Obedience to God's will must be born out of faith and trust that God will use our obedience for His glory and for the good

of other people. If we judge the value of our obedience based on its immediate benefit for ourselves or demand an instant outcome, we may feel that being obedient to God is not worth the trouble. In order to obey, we must desire to please God. Without a desire to please God, we cannot be obedient.

10. It is also very important that we do our best to steer our families towards doing God's will. We see how Abraham did his best to obey God, and the blessings that came from his obedience were experienced by Isaac. In the same way, Isaac's blessings were communicated to Jacob, and subsequently to Jacob's other sons through Joseph. At the same time, obedience to God does not guarantee that we will do things perfectly. In the process of trying to do God's will as a family, we often make mistakes because of our own imperfections. For example, see how Abraham had a son, Ishmael, with Hagar (their maid) even though Ishmael was not the promised son. See how Jacob cheated Esau of his birthright by bluffing their blind father that he was the elder brother. But if our intentions are right, and we are doing our best, these imperfections do not hinder God's will from taking place in our lives. Doing God's will is not about doing things perfectly; it is about having holy intentions and doing our best to work out these holy intentions in accordance with God's direction. Again, doing God's will must come from a desire to please God.
11. We also learn from the life of Joseph the value of forgiveness. In order to do God's will, we will have to forgive people who have harmed us before. This does not excuse the wrongs that they have committed to us, but the pain of forgiveness does allow our hearts to be purified so that God can work His will in our lives. Had Joseph not forgiven his brothers, they would all have probably died of the famine together with their families. As a result, there would not be the twelve tribes of Israel. Imagine, this entire grand plan of God depended on one man's ability to forgive his brothers for their juvenile delinquency! Without being able to forgive, we will not truly be able to do God's will.

Upon discovering Joseph's identity, his brothers were sure that Joseph would use his imperial powers to exact revenge against them for their past sins. However, the sentiments expressed by Joseph were quite the opposite: "But now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that God sent me before you... You did not send me here, but God." Joseph recognised that all the suffering he had undergone was used by God to ensure the survival of Egypt and the surrounding countries, and also to help his family. Keeping this in mind enabled him to forgive his brothers and repay animosity with kindness. Rather than keeping vengeance in our hearts, it is important that we must be able to see God's plan at work in the trials and tribulations that we face throughout our lives even if these difficulties are inflicted upon us by other people. There is always a purpose in our suffering even if we do not understand it yet.

12. Notice that many of the wrongs suffered by people in the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were done by their own family members. The people whom we are closest to will often be the ones who hurt us the most. Who are those who have hurt you the most? Your siblings? Your parents? To be sure, they will not be perfect brothers and sisters, and neither will your father and mother be perfect parents. Nobody is perfect, including ourselves. They too are doing the best that they can, in the best way that they know how, to be siblings and parents to us. But like us, they are not perfect in every way. In the same way that our actions

are bound to hurt them sometimes, you will find them also doing things that may hurt you at times. To ensure that we do God's will as a family, forgiveness is the key.



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