

LESSON FOUR

History of Isaac and Jacob (Gn 25 to 50)

It is necessary to have already read these chapters before continuing this lesson; otherwise you will not profit much from it. Five important points are to be raised:

I. The two sons of Isaac: Esau and Jacob (Gn 25,19...)

Rebekah (Rivca), like Sarah her mother-in-law, was Syrian. Gn 25,20 insists on the revelation of this “**Aramaean**” origin of Isaac’s wife: “Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the **Aramaen** of Paddan-Aram, and sister of Laban the **Aramaen**” (Gn 25,20).

Rebekah, like Sarah, was sterile: “Isaac prayed to Yahweh for his wife, on behalf of his wife for she was sterile. Yahweh heard his prayer and his wife Rebekah conceived” (25, 21). She carried twins: Esau and Jacob. The first to be born was regarded as the elder one, and the habit wanted that this one is privileged and inherits paternal dignity. According to the **human** tradition, it thus returned to Esau, the elder one, to inherit the spiritual mission of Abraham and Isaac, the Messiah having to come from his line, not from that of his twin brother, Jacob.

But God is not submitted to human habits and considerations whether familial or tribal, as it is the case here. They are too often racist and are dictated by unjust prejudices. He thus established his Covenant with Jacob, not with Esau, however the elder one. This “Covenant” meant that the Messiah was to come from the line of Jacob.

Indeed, when Rebekah went “to consult God”, He answered her: “There are two nations in your womb... and the elder will serve the younger” (Gn 25,23). This is a total upheaval of the mentality of the time and ancient traditions. The reason -strictly human- of the passage of the right of primogeniture to Jacob is that Rebekah “preferred Jacob” because he was “a quiet man and remained under the tents”, near his mother (Gn 25,27-28). She thus plotted to conceal the right of seniority to give it to her preferred son. By trick she obtained that her husband blesses Jacob instead of Esau, yet “Isaac preferred Esau, for he had a taste for wild game (*cooked by Esau*), but Rebekah preferred Jacob” (Gn 25,28). It was believed, at that time, that the blessing given was effective and irrevocable, not being able to pass to another, whether it is deserved or not (Gn 27,1-45). It should be noted that “this consultation of God” was practised by men or women who claimed to hold this capacity of “clairvoyance”. Today still, much claim to hold such a capacity. The Bible reveals that the Jews usually practised this habit and many of them still do so: Ex 33,7 / 1S 14, 41 etc...

The attitude of Rebecca and Jacob in this case is not an example of high morality. The prophets, later on, condemned the trick of Jacob: Jeremy presents it like example of deception: “Let each be on guard against his friend; do not trust a brother, for every brother aims to supplant (*like Jacob*)...” (Jr 9,3-4). “Yahweh has a case against Judah, he will punish Jacob as his conduct merits... In the very womb he overreached his brother...”, also said Hosea (Hos 12,3-4).

But the scribes, wanting to justify Jacob and his mother, presented the story of the dish of lentils at the detriment of Esau. He returned famished and “exhausted” from work to the countryside; he told his brother who had prepared a good soup of lentils: “Give me a mouthful

(*he was so hungry*) of that **red stuff** there (*colour of the lenses*); I am exhausted.” But Jacob, famished of the right of seniority, seized the occasion immediately and misused it to take possession of this right from his brother: “First give me your oath; he gave him his oath and sold his birthright to Jacob”. Esau, not taking seriously this covetousness of his brother, agreed. “That was all Esau cared about his birthright”, cynically comment the scribes (Gn 25,29-34).

This story has, however, the merit to shake us: it invites us, if we are attentive, to revolt in front of injustice. Notice that Isaac, indeed, tells his son Esau: “... you will serve your brother. But when you **free yourself, you will shake his yoke off your neck**” (Gn 27,40). It is necessary to be released from the yoke of the unfruitful religious traditions.

Another moral lesson from this story: one must prefer the spiritual life rather than the material one; we should not “sell our right of seniority”, which is **our** right to the life Eternelle, for a good of a temporal nature. It is this teaching which Jesus gives us by refusing, at the devil’s request, to transform the stones into bread, in spite of the fact that Jesus was hungry, because, as he had answered the devil: “Men do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4,4. See also Dt 8,3). Men should be hungry and thirsty for the divine directives. If there is to choose between a material interest and spiritual one, it is the latter to choose and the first to sacrifice, without hesitating and turning back like the wife of Lot did...

God promised Adam and Eve a descent which will crush the head of the devil. This Saviour is the Messiah, Jesus. The Messianic plan of God began with Abraham, passed to Isaac and continued with Jacob.

After having started with Abraham and being transmitted to Isaac, the descent promised by God to Adam and Eve to crush head of their tempter, the devil, passed to Jacob, the third Patriarch. The story of the soup of lenses comes to explain why this descent did not pass by Esau, Jacob’s elder son. But this human explanation does not reveal God’s true intention.

II. Two wives of Jacob (Gn 28 & 29)

Esau married two hittite, and not aramaen, women. This greatly disappointed his parents (26,34-35) and put them against him. Rebecca, who feared similar marriages for Jacob, intervened with her husband and gave an ordre to Jacob: “You are not to marry any of the Canaanite women! Go off to Paddan-Aram (*in AramSyria*), the home of Bethuel your mother’s father, and there choose a wife for yourself from the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother” (Gn 28,1-2). Notice that Isaac calls invokes upon Jacob and his descent “the blessing of Abraham”. In the divine intention, this blessing means that the **Messiah comes from this descent**, not from that of Esau. The scribes give this blessing a geographical interpretation, namely that Palestine belongs to the descent of Jacob (*the Jews*), not to that of Esau (*the Arabs*). This arises from the following verse: “... so that one day you may **own the country** where you are now living as a stranger, which God gave to Abraham” (Gn 28,3-4).

On his way to Syria, Jacob had a dream: God appeared to him at the top of a scale from the ground to the Sky to announce to him that his Covenant with Abraham would continue with him (Gn 28,12-16). Jesus evoked this dream of the ladder, adapting it to his person and revealing by there that, from now on, he was the holder of the divine Covenant, the successor and the heir to the true promises made by God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Jn 1,51). He is

this ladder which stands from earth to Heaven and allows all those who believe in him to ascend to Heaven.

Notice that the belief in one single God did not develop without difficulty. Personal experiences and options were needed. Jacob was not convinced enough just by the words of his father. He hesitated to believe in God and his faith was conditional: “**If** God remains with me... **if** he gives me food to eat and clothes to wear, and **if** I come back home safe to my father’s home, **then** Yahweh (*only then*) shall be my God...” (Gn 28,20-22).

The story of Jacob’s marriages begins in chapter 29,15. The frenetic race between Lea and Rachel to have children appears strange to us. It is necessary to read these facts considering the mentality of the time: the regard of the husband for his wife was according to the number of children because the offspring was regarded as a sign of the divine blessing.

This unrestrained race for procreation between the two wives -to which the maidservants Zilpah (*of Leah*) and Bilhah (*of Rachel*) were put at contribution- gave Jacob 12 boys and a girl. These 12 sons of Jacob are the ancestors founders of the 12 tribes of Israel, the first monotheistic community called to reveal to the world, with kindness, the single Creator. The prophets denounced the disloyalty and the bad management of this first group of believers.

Being enriched, Jacob wanted to be independent of Labban, his father-in-law. He thus flees towards his native land, Canaan. Notice that, in the precipitation of the voyage, Rachel insisted to carry with her the idols of the gods whom she still worshipped in spite of her marriage with Jacob (Gn 31,34). Thus note again that the belief in the one and only single God grew gradually and with time in the hearts of the ancestors. We should not be astonished because, even today, 4.000 years after Abraham, we find a great number of Jews, Christians and Moslems who do not believe in God... or who believe in Him badly, with an unrenewed, fanatic, fundamentalist or fetishistic mentality.

III. The “wrestling” of Jacob against God (Gn 32,24-33)

Jacob, on his return to Canaan, had another divine manifestation: “Someone wrestled with him until daybreak”. This “someone” was God himself in human form, like the three “men” who had previously appeared to Abraham (Gn 18).

The “wrestling” between God and Jacob is symbolic: God wants to mold Jacob, to shape him according to his divine Holy Spirit, but this man (*as so many others*) resisted and fought against God, his Creator. Because Jacob resisted against Him, God gave him the name of “Israel”, which means “to fight **against** God”, which he had done in fact! (Gn 32,29).

By analysing this fact, one concludes that Jacob wanted unconsciously to be equal to God, to look at Him, face to face, like an equal rival. This is why his behaviour was condemned by the prophets. Indeed, Hosea said: “Yahweh has a case against Judah, He will punish Jacob as his conduct merits...in the very womb he overreached his brother, in maturity he wrestled against God,...and beat Him”, concludes Hosea ironically (Hos 12,3-4). It is by violence and personal interest, not by love and justice, that Jacob wanted to steal God’s blessing, exactly as he had done to subtilise from his father the blessing he intended for Esau.

After this incident, God gave Jacob another name: “No longer are you to be called Jacob, but Israel (“*Isra*” means to fight against, and “*El*” means God) since you have shown your strength against God and men and have prevailed (*he had “fought” against his brother Esau,*

a man, and stole his right of seniority)”, God told him ironically. This same resistance applies to the scribes and the pharisees who always resisted against God and his prophets who, before Jesus and the Apostles, did not fail to denounce the refractory attitude of the religious chiefs towards God (see Is 1,2-3/ Mi 1,5/ Jr 2,20/ MT 2,3/ 1Th 2,14-16). We must discern, in the “triumph” of Jacob in his fight against God, the same divine irony addressed to Adam after his fall (Gn 3,22).

Nevertheless, the biblical scribes claim that God “blessed him (*Jacob*) there” (Gn 32,30). There is an obvious contradiction in this “blessing” with the words of the prophets referred to above: it is an overload added by the “lying pen” of the scribes (Jr 8,8). The scribes thus justify their own resistance to God by presenting it like acceptable, even “blessed” by God. This is why God, by the prophet Isaiah, tells the Israeli community: “Your first ancestor (*Jacob-Israel*) sinned, your interpreters (*religious scribes and other chiefs which interpreted the biblical texts*) revolted against me. That is why I deposit the chief men of my sanctuary, why I put Jacob under the curse of destruction and subjected Israel to insult” (Is 43,27-28). Thus, from where does this alleged blessing of Jacob come from? It comes from the interpreters and scribes, also revolted against God, like Jacob who, because of his resistance against God, was named Israel. This name passed to his descendents, heirs to the same resistance.

Today still, this fight against God is symbolised by the State of Israel. The Zionists continue, by politicising Judaism, the fight of Jacob against God and men:

- a- Against God by the refusal to admit that the mission of Judaism is essentially and only spiritual and universal, not political and reserved to the Jews alone. This refusal of God’s plan is evident by their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.
- b- Against men by the unjust and violent occupation of a ground -Palestine- which does not belong to them, while still pretending to be the “elected people”.

Many so-called believers from all religions deserve to be called “Israel” because, while asking God: “Your will be done...”, they stubbornly impose their own will against God and men, despising God and men.

IV. The 12 sons of Jacob : 12 tribes of Israel (Gn 35,22-26)

Jacob had 12 sons and one daughter from his two wives and their two maidservants.

Lea had 6 sons and one daughter:

Ruben (the elder one): He slept with Bilhah (maidservant of Rachel: Gn 35,22) and, because of that, did not obtain a blessing of his father (Gn 49,3-4).

Simeon and Levi: they committed a racist and treacherous crime (Gn 34,25-31) which attracted on them the **curse of their father** (Gn 49,5-7). Moses and Aaron his brother are from this cursed tribe of Levi, chosen by Moses to be the single sacerdotal tribe, i.e. the tribe which gives the priests to sacrifice the animals (Nb 3,45).

Judah: from his tribe comes the Messiah (*not of the tribe of the elder son, Ruben*). This is why Jacob rents Judah (Gn 49,8-12).

Issachar and Zebulun.

Dinah, finally is Jacob’s only daughter.

Rachel had 2 sons:

Joseph: His half-brothers were jealous of him and sold him. He became very powerful in Egypt where he accommodated all his family.

Benjamin: the last-born child of Jacob, the “benjamin”.

Bilhah (maidservant of Rachel) had 2 sons:

Dan

Naphtali.

Zilpah (maidservant of Leah) had 2 sons:

Gad

Asher

Chapter 49 of the Genesis brings back the prophecies of Jacob concerning each one of his children. The most important is that of Judah because from it comes the Messiah, called “the Lion of Judah” because this prophecy qualifies Judah “young lion” (Gn 49,9). The Book of Revelation (*Apocalypse*) allots this messianic title to Jesus (Rev 5,5).

The tribe of Judah held the messianic role in the Jewish history. It gave the kings who ruled in Judea, David and his dynasty, from which came the Messiah. Gn 38 indicates the descent of the Messiah from Judah and Tamar from a non-matrimonial union. Mt 1,3 indicates this genealogy. It is Judah who had revolted against his brothers following the sale of Joseph. He had left his family and married a non-Jewish Canaanite woman. He had intervened with his brothers to save Joseph’s life (Gn 37,26). Because of this noble attitude he deserved the praises of his father (Gn 49,9) and deserves it to be the ancestor of the Messiah.

According to the prophecy of Jacob relating to Judah (Gn 49,9-12), the Messiah was to abolish the royalty in Israel, not to consolidate it as the Jews, and the Apostles themselves thought (Act 1,6). The prophecy says in fact: “The sceptre **will not pass from Judah**, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, **until** tribute be brought him (the *Messiah*), and the peoples render him obedience.” (Gn 49,10). The sceptre, symbol of the royalty, will thus remain until the arrival of the Messiah who must seize the crown to proclaim the universal **and spiritual** reign, according to God, not a politico-military Zionist one according to men.

The reason of the destruction of the Israeli kingdom -we shall see that later- is that it had been established by the Jews against God’s will. But if the Messiah comes to destroy the temporal royalty of an Israeli State, it is to inaugurate his spiritual and universal Kingdom according to prophetic words Jacob addressed to his son Judah: “The sceptre will not pass from Judah... until tribute be brought him (*the Messiah*) and the peoples render him obedience.” (Gn 49,10). The royalty will thus cease in Israel, but after the arrival of the Messiah who will proclaim **spiritual** King of all the nations. In fact, after Jesus, the political Kingdom ceased in Israel when Titus invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Consequently, the spiritual and universal Kingdom of the Messiah, Jesus, the “Lion of the tribe of Judah”, was definitively established. To him belongs the “Sceptre” forever.

The tribe of Judah (“*Yehudah*” in Hebrew) gave its name to the Jews (“*Yehudim*” in Hebrew, and “*Yahoud*” in Arabic). The English translation of the two words (“*Yehudah*” becoming “*Judah*” and “*Yehudim*” becoming “*Jewish*”) does not reveal, like in Hebrew and Arabic, this relation between the tribe of Judah and the Jews (*Yehouda* and *Yehoudim*). The words

“Jew” and “Judaism” are derived from the name of this tribe which, because of its Messianic quality, had a great importance in all the community. The Jews claimed themselves after its name, becoming the “**Yehudim**”, to present themselves as the people of the Messiah due to come from the tribe of “**Yehudah**”; just as they had adopted the name of Israel to mean that they are the descendents of Jacob, named “Israel”.

The disciples of Jesus are called “**Christians**” because they believe that He is the “**Christ**”. Thus, the Messiah, is the centre of both communities and their point of reference. In Him, they are defined and find their identity. He is the beating Heart of both the Old and the New the Covenants (*Testaments*).

Thus, Judaism and Christianity refer to the Messiah: Judaism being in waiting of his Advent and Christianity proclaiming this Advent in the person of Jesus. Is thus a “Christian” whoever recognizes Jesus as the announced Christ. Thus we should not expect another Messiah as the Jews of today still do.

The Jewish community, in the past, had the mission of spreading the knowledge of God and the **future advent** of the Messiah. The Christian community, on the other hand, testifies to the **achievement** of the Messianic prophecies by Jesus, presenting him as the one and only awaited Messiah, and that none should expect another one (Mt 11,2-3).

Thus, these 12 sons of Jacob had no political mission. Their mission was essentially spiritual and consisted in revealing the one and only God, and announcing the future advent of the Messiah from their community and in favour of the whole world. Therefore, these 12 tribes are not only the **spiritual** ancestors of the Jews, but of all those who believe that Jesus is really the one and only Christ of God.

It should be known that the word “Messiah” derives from Hebrew “Meshiah” which means “**Ointed**”, the one who receives the unction of God. The word “Christ” derives from the Greek “Christos” which also means “The Ointed”, the selected one of God. It is by unction that the kings were enthroned. Now the Messiah is the King of the two worlds and his unction comes directly from God.

V. The 12 tribes in Egypt (Gn 37 to 50)

With the story of Joseph we saw how the “sons of Israel” ended up in Egypt around 1700 B.C. They remained four centuries there, growing in number. The account of the Covenant “of the halves” between God and Abraham “had prophesied” this event (Gn 15,13-15). We should remember that this story was written about 1.000 years B.C. The stay in Egypt and the exit from this country had thus already taken place. The scribes added this “prophecy” later.

This stay in Egypt strongly marked the israeli community which, with time, had forgotten God and had been contaminated by idolatric practices of the Egyptian idolatry. This exposed the Messianic plan of God to failure.

In order to pursue his plan successfully, God charged Moses to get the Jews out of Egypt four centuries after their entry. The book of the Exodus, that we will see in the fifth lesson, tells the history of this exit. With Jacob, only 70 Jews had taken refuge in Egypt (Gn 46,27); with Moses, 400 years later, 600.000 Jews left this country. This was the Exodus (Ex 12,37).

Remember the two dreams of Joseph when he was 17 years old: that of the sheaves of his brothers which bowed to his sheaf, and that of the sun, the moon and the eleven stars which did the same in front of him (Gn 37,2-11). Let us retain also the two dreams of the Pharaoh: that of the cows and that of the ears of grain (Gn 41,1-7). God often speaks to men in dreams and reveals Himself to them in that manner.

The Creator announces the same message in two different forms: first to Joseph then to the Pharaoh. God thus often speaks by dreams. But it is also necessary to be careful: there may also be satanic sources in our dreams. It is thus necessary to discern the source and **to interpret well the meaning** of the messages thus received, making sure they are from God. We should pray to understand them well, and consequently act wisely. God often used this method in the Bible, and particularly in the book of John's Revelation, where the same message is announced in repeated visions, but in various forms, like the dreams of Joseph and of the Pharaoh. The prophet Joel informs us, on behalf of God, that God appears to his elected ones in dreams and visions: "After that, I shall pour out my Spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old people will have dreams, and your young people see visions..." (Jl 3,1).

The Genesis ends up with the Jews in Egypt, Jacob having been buried in Canaan (*Palestine*) in the current city of Hebron (*in Arabic "El Khalil"*), where Abraham and Isaac are also buried (Gn 50,12-13). This place is, today, a mosque which the Jews would like to recover.

Before dying, Joseph warned his brothers that "God will surely remember you kindly and take you out of this country to the country which he promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". He recommends them to carry his bones with them (Gn 50,24-25). This is what Moses when he left Egypt with the Jews (Ex 13,19).

The expression "God will visit you" (*or "remember you"*) is to be retained. It often returns in the Bible. God "visits" by an envoy, a prophet, to communicate a message, or by happy or unhappy events to reward or punish. This expression means that God is the cause of these earthquake, mighty din, hurricane,...", prophesied Isaïe against the irreligious Jerusalem (Is 29,6; also see Jr 29,10 / Am 3,2 / Lc 7,16 and 19,44). God visits you and solicits you by the biblical study...

Questionnaire of recapitulation:

1. Did you make your “déconditionning” and your “awakening”?
2. Why do you study the Bible and not another holy book?
3. Are you sure that the biblical text that you study is authentic? Why?
4. Do you feel joy studying the Bible? What do you feel?
5. Explain the accounts of creation and the oral traditions.
6. What means “God created man in the Image of Himself”? Are you like this Image?
7. How do you imagine the state of the man in the Paradise before the fall? And afterwards?
8. How do you understand the sin of Adam and Eve?
9. Explain Gn 3,15. What relationship with Abraham?
10. God approved the offering of Abel, not that of Cain. Why?
11. Who was the successor of Abel?
12. What did you understand from the flood and the descendents of Noah?
13. What do you know about epic of Gilgamesh?
14. How do you understand Gn 6,1-4? Gn 10? Gn 15? Gn 18,1-15? Gn 32,23-33? Gn 49,8-12?
15. What was the aim of God’s plan with Abraham?
16. Which of the two concepts is right: “**chosen** people” or “**formed** community”? Why?
17. Sarah expelled Hagar and Ishmael. Comment.
18. Are circumcision and water baptism divine requirements for the salvation of the soul?
19. What did you understand about Melchizedek?
20. What did you understand of Sodom and Gomorrah?
21. Lot’s wife was transformed into salt statue. Comment.
22. The 12 tribes of Israel. Explain.
23. Comment on the dreams of Joseph and the Pharaoh.
24. Who is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”? Why this name?
25. State the Messianic line from Abraham to Judah.
26. Why do the Jews want to recover the Mosque of Hebron and that of Omar in Jerusalem? (The mosque of Hebron is built on the place where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are buried. The mosque of Omar, in Jerusalem, is built on the supposed place where Abraham was on the point of offering Isaac in sacrifice. Solomon built there the 1st Temple destroyed in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar, then again in 70 A.D by Titus. In the VIIth century A.D. the Caliph Omar Ibn-el-Khattab built a mosque -still there- on this same site).