

The Story of Prophet Yaqub 'alayhis-salaam

Ibn Katheer rahimahullaah
Translated by Muhammad Gemeiah

The Qur'ân does not give details of Isaac's life peace be upon him, but reliable Qur'ânic commentators mentioned that when Abraham felt that his life was drawing to a close, he wished to see Isaac married. He did not want Isaac to marry one of the Canaanites, who were pagans, so he sent a trustworthy servant to Haran in Iraq to choose a bride for Isaac. The servant's choice fell upon Rebekah Bint Bethuel, Ibn Nahor, who was a brother of Abraham. Isaac married her and she gave birth to a set of twins, Esau (Al Eis) and Jacob (Yaqub).

Ill feelings developed between the two brothers when they grew into manhood. Esau disliked the fact that Jacob was favored by his father and by Allâh with prophethood. This ill feeling became so serious that Esau threatened to kill his brother. Fearing for his life, Jacob fled the country.

The People of the Book said that when Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, Bint Bethuel, during his father's life. They said she was sterile, so Isaac prayed to Allâh and then she became pregnant. She gave birth to twin boys. The first one was called Esau whom the Arabs called Al-Eis. He became the father of Rum. The second one was called Jacob, which means Israel, (belonging to the people of Israel).

The People of the Book claimed that when Isaac peace be upon him grew old and his eye sight had weakened, he had a desire for food, so he asked his son Esau to go hunting and bring him some cooked game. Esau asked him to bless the food and pray for him. Esau, a hunter, went out to get his father the meat. Rebekah, overhearing this, ordered her son Jacob to slaughter two goats of his best flock and cook them as his father liked and bring it to him before his brother returned. She dressed Jacob in his brother's clothes and put goat skin on his arms and neck, for Esau was hairy while Jacob was not. When he approached his father with the food, his father asked: 'Who are you?' Jacob answered: 'I am your son.' When his father finished eating, he prayed for his son to be the more blessed brother and to prevail over them and all people, and for Allâh to sustain him and his children.

When he left his father, his brother Esau, who had carried out his father's command, entered. Isaac asked him: "What is this my son?" He answered: "This is the food you like." Isaac asked: "Did you bring it an hour ago and ask me to pray for you?" Esau said: "No, I swear I did not," and he knew his brother had preceded him in this matter and he was sick at heart.

The People of the Book said Esau threatened to kill his brother when their father was dead. They also said that he asked his father to pray for him that Allâh make the earth good for his offspring and multiply his sustenance and fruits.

When their mother knew that Esau threatened his brother Jacob, she commanded her son Jacob to go to her brother Laban in the land of Haran and abide with him for a time

until his brother's anger had abated, and to marry one of the Laban's daughters. she told her husband Isaac to command him with that advice and pray for him, and he did.

Jacob peace be upon him left his family, when night came he found a place to rest. He took a stone and put it under his head and slept. He dreamed of a ladder from heaven to earth. Angels were ascending and descending and the Lord addressed him and said to him; "I will bless you and your offspring and make this land for you and for those who come after you."

When he awoke he felt joyful from what he had seen in his dream and vowed, for Allâh's sake that if he returned to his family safely, he would build here a temple for Allâh the Almighty. He also vowed to give one tenth of his property for the sake of Allâh. He poured oil on the stone so as to recognize it and called the place "Ayle's House" (Bethel), which means "House of Allâh". It was to be the location of Jerusalem later.

The People of the Book also said that when Jacob came to his maternal uncle in the land of Haran, his uncle had two daughters. The elder one was called Leah (Lia) and the younger one was Rachel (Rahil). The latter was the better and lovelier of the two. His uncle agreed to marry his daughter to him on the condition that Jacob pasture his sheep for seven years.

After a period of time, his uncle prepared a feast and gathered people for the wedding. He married Leah, his elder daughter, to him at night. She was weak-sighted and ugly. When morning came, Jacob discovered she was Leah and he complained to his uncle. "You deceived me; I was engaged to Rachel and you married me to Leah." His uncle said: "It is not our tradition to marry the younger daughter before the elder daughter. However, if you love her sister, work another seven years and I will marry you to both of them."

Jacob worked for seven years and then married Rachel. It was acceptable in their time, as described in the Torah, for a man to marry two sisters. Laban gave a female slave to each daughter. Leah's slave was called Zilpah and Rachel's slave was called Bilha.

Almighty Allâh compensated Leah's weakness by giving her sons. the first one was named Rueben (Robel), after whom there were Simon (Shamun), Levi (Lawi), and Judah (Yahudh). Rachel felt jealous of Leah's having sons, as she was barren. She gave her slave Bilha to her husband and he had relations with her until she became pregnant. she gave birth to a son and named him Naphtali. Leah was vexed that Rachel's slave had give birth to a son, so she in turn gave her slave Zilpah to Jacob peace be upon him, Zilpah gave birth to two sons, Gad and Asher. Then Leah got pregnant and gave birth to her fifth son, Issaacher, and later she gave birth to a sixth son Zebulun. After this Leah gave birth to a daughter named Dinah. Thus, Leah had seven sons from Jacob.

Then Rachel prayed to Allâh to give her a son from Jacob. Allâh heard her call and responded to her prayer. She gave birth to a son, great, honorable, and beautiful. She named him Joseph (Yusuf).

All of this happened when they were in the land of Haran and Jacob peace be upon him was pasturing his uncle's sheep, which he did for a period of twenty years.

Jacob then asked his uncle Laban to let him go and visit his family. His uncle said to him: "I have been blessed because of you; ask for whatever money you need." Jacob said: "Give me each spotted and speckled goat born this year and each black lamb."

But at Laban's command his sons removed their father's goat that were striped, spotted or speckled, and the black lambs, lest others should be born with those traits. They walked for three days with their father's goats and sheep while Jacob tended the remaining flock.

The People of the Book said that Jacob peace be upon him took fresh rods of poplar, almond, and plane. He peeled streaks in them and cast them into the water through for the goats to look at. The young inside their abdomens were terrified and moved and they were born striped, spotted or speckled. When the sheep were breeding, he set their faces towards the black sheep in Laban's flock and put the rods among them. Their lambs were born black. This was considered an example of supernatural powers, a miracle. Jacob had many goats, sheep, beast and slaves. His uncle and his sons faces changed as if they the sheep and goats) had been stolen from them.

Allâh the Almighty inspired Jacob to return to the country of his father and people, and He promised to stand by him. Jacob told his family that, and they responded and obeyed him. Jacob did not tell Laban of his plans, however, and left without bidding farewell.

Upon leaving, Rachel stole her father's idols. After Jacob and his people had fled for his country, Laban and his people followed them. When Laban met with Jacob, he blamed him for leaving him without his knowledge. He would have liked to know so that he could have made them leave with celebration and joy, with drums and songs, and so that he could have bidden his daughters and sons farewell. And why have they taken his idols with them?

Jacob had no knowledge of his idols, so he denied that had taken them from him. Then Laban entered the tents of his daughters and slaves to search, but he found nothing, for Rachel had put the idols in the camel saddle under her. She did not get up, apologizing that she had her menses. Thus, he could not perceive what they had done.

Then they sat on a hill called Galeed and made a covenant there. Jacob would not ill treat Laban's daughters nor marry others. Neither Laban nor Jacob would pass the hill into the other's country. They cooked food and their people ate with them. Each bade the other farewell as they departed, each returning to his own country.

When Jacob approached the land of Seir, the angels greeted him. He sent a messenger ahead with greetings to his brother Esau, asking forgiveness and humbling himself before him. The messenger returned greetings and told Jacob that Esau was riding towards him with four hundred men. This made Jacob afraid and he entreated and prayed to Allâh Almighty. He prostrated in humiliation and asked Him to fulfill His promise which He had made before. He asked Him to stop the evil of his brother Esau. then Jacob peace be upon him prepared a great present for his brother: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, and thirty milch camels, forty cows and two bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

He commanded his slaves to take the animals, each drove by itself, and pass on ahead of him with a space between the droves. He instructed them: "When you meet my brother Esau he will ask you, 'to whom do you belong? where are you going?' you shall say, 'they belong to your servant Jacob; they are a present to my master Esau. Moreover, he is behind us.'"

Jacob stayed behind with his two wives, his slaves and his children for two nights, then continued walking by night and resting by day.

When the dawn of the second day came one of the angels appeared in the shape of a man. Jacob began to wrestle with him. They were neck and neck until the angel injured his thigh and Jacob became lame. When the day was breaking, the angel said to him: "What is your name?" He answered: 'Jacob.' The angel said: "After today you shall not be called anything but Israel." Jacob asked: "Who are you? What is your name?" He vanished. Then Jacob knew that he was one of the angels. Jacob was lame, and for this reason the children of Israel do not eat the thigh muscle on the hip socket.

Jacob raised his eyes and saw his brother Esau coming. Jacob prostrated seven times before him for it was their salutation in that time. It was lawful for them just as the angels had prostration in salutation to Adam.

When Esau saw him, he ran towards him, embraced and kissed him and wept. When Esau raised his eyes and saw the women and children he asked: "Who are these with you?" Jacob answered: "Those whom Allâh has give me, your servant." Leah, Rachel, their slaves, and all the children approached and prostrated before him. Jacob asked Esau to accept his gift and insisted until he did so.

Esau returned and went in advance before him. Jacob and his family followed with the flocks and herds and slaves to the mountains (Seir).

When he came to Succoth (Sahur), he built a house for himself and shades for his beasts. Then he passed by Jerusalem, the village of Shechem, and camped before the village. He bought a farm from Shcehm Ibn Hamor with one hundred goats and built an altar, which he called Ayl, as Allâh commanded him. He built the altar where Jerusalem stands today and later Solomon son of David peace be upon him rebuilt it. It is in the place of the stone which he had earlier anointed with oil as was mentioned before.

The people of the book tell a story of Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah. Shechem Ibn Hamor seized her and lay with her by force. Then he asked her father and brothers to let him marry her. Her brothers said : "Circumcise all of you, and we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves; but we do not marry with uncircumcised people." They (the men of the city) agreed to that, and all of them were circumcised. When the third day came, the pain from the circumcision had increased, Jacob's sons approached and killed them till the last one. They killed Shchem and his father for the evil they had committed against them and for their worship of idols. That is why Jacob's sons killed them and seized their money as spoils.

Then Rachel got pregnant and gave birth to a son, Benjamin, but she had a hard labor and died after delivery. Jacob buried her in Ephrath (afrath). The tomb of Rachel is there till the present day. Jacob's sons were twelve men. From Leah there were Rueben

(Robil), Simon (Shamun), Levi (Lawi), Judah (Yahudh), Issachar (Isakher), and Zebulun (Zablun). From Rachel there were Joseph (Yusuf) peace be upon him and Benjamin. From Rachel's slave there were Dan and Naphtali (Neftali), and from Leah's slave there were Gad and Asher.

Jacob came to his father Isaac and settled with him in the village of Hebron which lies in the land of Canaan where Abraham had lived. Then Isaac fell ill and died when he was one hundred eighty years old. his sons Esau and Jacob buried him with his father Abraham Al Khalil in a cave which he had bought. It was said that Abraham died at the age of one hundred seventy five.

Allâh the Almighty declared in the Glorious Qur'ân: And who turns away from the religion of Abraham (Islamic Monotheism) except him who befools himself? Truly, We chose him in this world and verily, in the Hereafter he will be among the righteous.

When his Lord said to him: "Submit (be a Muslim)!" He said: "I have submitted myself (as a Muslim) to the Lord of the Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)."

And this (submission to Allâh, Islam) was enjoined by Abraham upon his sons and by Jacob, (saying): "O my sons! Allâh has chosen for you the true religion, then die not except in the Faith of Islam (as Muslims -- Islamic Monotheism)."

Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob? When he said unto his sons: "What will you worship after me?" They said: "We shall worship you (Ilah (God - Allâh) the Ilah (God) of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, One Ilah (God), and to Him we submit (in Islam)."

That was a nation who had passed away. They shall receive the reward of what they earned and you of what you earn. And you will not be asked of what they used to do.

They say: "Be Jews or Christians, and then you will be guided." Say (to them O Muhammad): "Nay (we follow) only the religion of Abraham, Hanifan (Islamic monotheism, i.e. to worship none but Allâh Alone, and he was not of the Al Mushrikeen (those who worshipped others along with Allâh))."

Say (O Muslims): "We believe in Allâh and that which has been sent down to us and that which had been sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and to Al Asbat (the twelve sons of Jacob), and that which has been given to Moses and Jesus and that which has been given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam)."

So if they believe in the like of that which you believe, then they are rightly guided, but if they turn away, then they are only in opposition. So, Allâh, will suffice you against them. He is the All Hearer, the All Knower.

(Our Sibghah, religion is) the Sibghah (religion) of Allâh (Islam) and which Sibghah (religion) can be better than Allâh's. We are His worshippers.

Say (O Muhammad, to the Jews and Christians): "Dispute you with us about Allâh while He is our Lord and your Lord? And we are to be rewarded for our deeds and you for your

deeds. We are sincere to Him in worship and obedience (i.e., we worship Him Alone and none else, and we obey His Orders)." Or say you that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Al Asbat (the twelve sons of Jacob) were Jews or Christians? Say: "Do you know better or does Allâh know better....that they all were Muslims? And who is more unjust than he who conceals the testimony (to believe in the Prophet Muhammad, when he comes written in their books) he has from Allâh? Allâh is not unaware of what you do." (Ch 2:130-140 Qur'ân)

In another Surah Almighty Allâh declared: O People of the Scripture (Jews and Christians)! Why do you dispute about Abraham, while the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have you then no sense? Verily, you are those who have disputed about that of which you have no knowledge. Why do then dispute concerning that which you have no knowledge? It is Allâh Who knows, and you know not.

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a true Muslim Hanifan (Islamic Monotheism), to worship none but Allâh Alone and he was not of the polytheists (he joined none in worship with Allâh).

Verily, among mankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, and this Prophet (Muhammad) and those who have believed (Muslims). And Allâh is the Wali (Protector and Helper) of the believers. (Ch 3:65-68 Qur'ân)

Allâh the Exalted also affirmed: Then verily! Your Lord for those who do evil (commit sins and are disobedient to Allâh) in ignorance and afterward repent and do righteous deeds, verily, your Lord thereafter to such is Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Verily, Abraham was an Ummah (a leader having all the good righteous qualities or a nation), obedient to Allâh, Hanifan (to worship none but Allâh), and he was not one of those who were Al Mushrikeen (polytheists, idolaters, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allâh and those who joined partners with Allâh). He was thankful for His (Allâh's) Graces. He (Allâh) chose him (as an intimate friend) and guided him to a Straight Path (Islamic Monotheism, neither Judaism or Christianity). We gave him good in this world and in the Hereafter he shall be of the righteous. Then, We have inspired you (O Muhammad saying): "Follow the religion of Abraham Hanifan (Islamic Monotheism to worship none but Allâh) and he was not of the Mushrikeen (polytheists, pagans, idolaters, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allâh and His Messenger Muhammad, those who worship others along with Allâh or set up rivals with or partners to Allâh)." (Ch 16:119-123 Qur'ân)