

# Stories of the Hebrew Bible

## Lesson 5: Jacob and Esau, Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors

3.7.2021

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**Objectives:** Explore archetypal stories of sibling rivalry, favoritism, and family conflict.

**Materials:** Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

**Time allotment:** Suggested for 60 minute online class.

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### 1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.
- No Zoom icebreaker today.

### 2. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

**Teacher reads:** (from Pamela Dugdale, author)

*“Siblings are the people we practice on, the people who teach us about fairness and cooperation and kindness and caring... quite often the hard way.”*

### 3. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

#### 4. Pre-Story Activity: (20 minutes)

This exercise hopefully helps youth better relate to how characters in our stories may have felt, and why they may have made the choices they did.

- Ask youth to list themselves oldest to youngest (can use chat or paper).
- **Teacher explains:** “I’m going to ask a series of questions. If you answer correctly, you get a point. Whoever has the most points wins! The oldest gets to answer first, then the second oldest and so on.”

- Ask the **oldest** question A: *What happens first, thunder or lightning?*

*[Answer: They happen at the same time—we see lightning first because light travels faster than sound.]*

If they guess incorrectly, give them another try. If they don’t know, give them a hint. Keep helping them until they get the right answer. Give encouragement, put up an emoji reaction, and award the oldest a point.

- Ask the **next oldest** question B: *What year did the Eiffel Tower open?*

*[Answer: 1889.]*

Give them one chance to answer and no hints. Don’t give encouragement if they get it wrong, or congratulate them if they get it right. Just say “okay” and only award a point if it’s right.

- **Teacher says:** “Now, everyone else has a chance to answer question three. The first person to answer correctly, gets a point.” Anticipate comments of unfairness, confusion, annoyance.

- Ask everyone else question C: *What did ancient Romans use to dye their hair?*

*[Answer: bird poop and pee]*

Give youth a little time to try and answer. Do not award any points.

- **ABRUPTLY**, teacher says (acting as if reading over directions again): “Sorry, sorry, I was confused. The **youngest** was supposed to answer the first question. Sorry about that! Let me make it up by letting the youngest get two points if they answer the next question correctly.”

- Ask the **youngest** question D: *What is the color of a giraffe's tongue?*

*[Answer: black, blue or purple are all correct.]*

If they guess incorrectly, give them another try. If they don’t know, give them a hint. Keep helping them until they get the right answer. Give lots of encouragement, put up an emoji reaction, and award the youngest two points, so they end up the winner.

For reference, all questions with answers:

- A. What happens first, thunder or lightning? [*Answer: They happen at the same time and/or we see lightning first because light travels faster than sound.*]
- B. What year did the Eiffel Tower open? [*Answer: 1889*]
- C. What did ancient Romans use to dye their hair? [*Answer: bird poop and pee*]
- D. What is the color of a giraffe's tongue? [*Answer: black, blue or purple are all correct.*]

**Questions for Discussion:**

- As you noticed the increasing layers of unfairness, what feelings and thoughts did you have?
- If you didn't get a chance to answer a question, what feelings and thoughts did you have towards the youth who got special treatment?
- Did anyone wish they were the one getting special treatment?
- Do you or have you envied someone else? Have you been the one envied because you were given special treatment? Is anyone willing to share a brief story about this?

**5. Story: Jacob and Esau (15 minutes)**

**Teacher introduces story:** So many of the stories in the Hebrew Bible are about families. For with families come questions about our primary relationships – between spouses and partners, parents and children, and brothers and sisters – and conflicts that are unavoidably at the heart of these relationships. The Hebrew Bible could be considered a story about families and the conflicts that they must work through: from jealousy, anger, and rivalry to violence that threatens to tear apart the human family.

**Teacher summarizes** background information:

- Esau and Jacob were the twin sons of Isaac, the son of Abraham. The boys were described as fighting “even in the womb.”
- Rebekah, their mother, received a prophecy that the brothers would fight all their lives, that they would father two nations that would compete with one another, and that the older would serve the younger. Rebekah never told her husband, Isaac, about this prophecy.
- Primogeniture or “birthright” is the right, by law or custom, for the firstborn son to inherit his parent’s estate, titles, and offices. The story of Jacob and Esau is one of the earliest accounts of primogeniture widely known, indicating that primogeniture was common in the Middle East.

**Screen share** lesson attachment 5a (Isaac’s Twin Sons). Invite volunteers to read portions aloud.

### Questions for Discussion:

- Why was it so important to Jacob, as the second son, to receive his father's blessing? (*Think birthright of firstborn, parent's favor*)
- How does a family story that begins with biological birth order (and a minor one at that, given they are twins!) end with threats of killing and Jacob leaving the family? (*Hint: How does birthright and parent's favoritism → envy → rivalry → deception → hatred → threat of violence → broken relationship?*)

## 6. Second Story: Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors (20 minutes)

Teacher summarizes background information:

- We move onto the next generation: Jacob had 12 sons and 1 daughter from several mothers (not uncommon at the time), but he favored Joseph born from his favorite wife. Favoritism again!
- Dreams and their meanings were important in Joseph's time. Dreams were regarded as divine messages sent from angels of God, and were taken seriously.

**Screen share** lesson attachment 5a again. Scroll down to the third story, "Joseph Is Sold as a Slave." Invite volunteers to read portions aloud.

### Questions for Discussion:

- How is this story similar to the first story of Jacob and Esau?
- How is it that troubles and dysfunctions of one generation get repeated in the following generation(s)?  
(*Think about relationship patterns that are set in motion and snowball, culminating in ancient hatreds that are hopelessly difficult to change; e.g. Middle East conflict.*)
- What would it take to disrupt and change these patterns of destructive conflict and violence?  
(*Consider: In the full story, Joseph eventually forgives his brothers for all they have done and offers a chance to start anew.*)
- What are we to learn from these ancient stories about human relationships and conflict?

## 7. Extinguish the chalice, saying together: "May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."

## 8. Leave zoom breakout classroom: wait until all youth have left, click "Leave" then "Leave Meeting."