

# ISAAC & JACOB

## Family Fighting and Faith

**A Bible Teaching Commentary  
for personal or group study  
by Fred Morris**



**GENESIS Part 3  
Chapters 22 to 36**



## **ISAAC and JACOB: Family Fighting and Faith GENESIS Part 3, Chapters 22 to 36**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Holding on to faith in God</b></li><li>• <b>Isaac as a picture of Christ</b></li><li>• <b>Family quarrels and fears</b></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Marrying the right person</b></li><li>• <b>Jacob's vision of Heaven</b></li><li>• <b>How God changes people</b></li></ul> |
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**THIS BOOK** teaches about the work of God in the life of two great men of faith, Isaac and Jacob. They were the son and grandson of Abraham. All three were used by God to begin the nation of Israel and to prepare the way for their coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. Isaac himself was a type of Christ but Jacob was a cheat until God changed him to a great man of faith. God prepared a way through them for us all to become spiritual children of Abraham through faith in Israel's Messiah. We also read about the tribes of Ishmael who persecuted the children of Israel and later all who believe Israel's Messiah is the one true Son of God Almighty.

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**Talk about this:** Where you see this, there are questions to prayerfully answer yourself or to discuss in a group study. They also help the reader to remember the Bible verses.



**Think about this:** Where you see this, the question requires more time for personal meditation.



**Ruled teaching boxes:** Where you see this, the information gives extra teaching about life at the time the Bible was written and for today's believers.

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# **ISAAC & JACOB, Genesis Part 3: Chapters 22-36**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Dear Reader, this is our third commentary on the first book of the Bible. It is about the work of God in the life of Isaac, the only son of Abraham and Sarah, and in the life of Jacob, their second son. Jacob was later given the name 'Israel' by the Lord God Almighty.

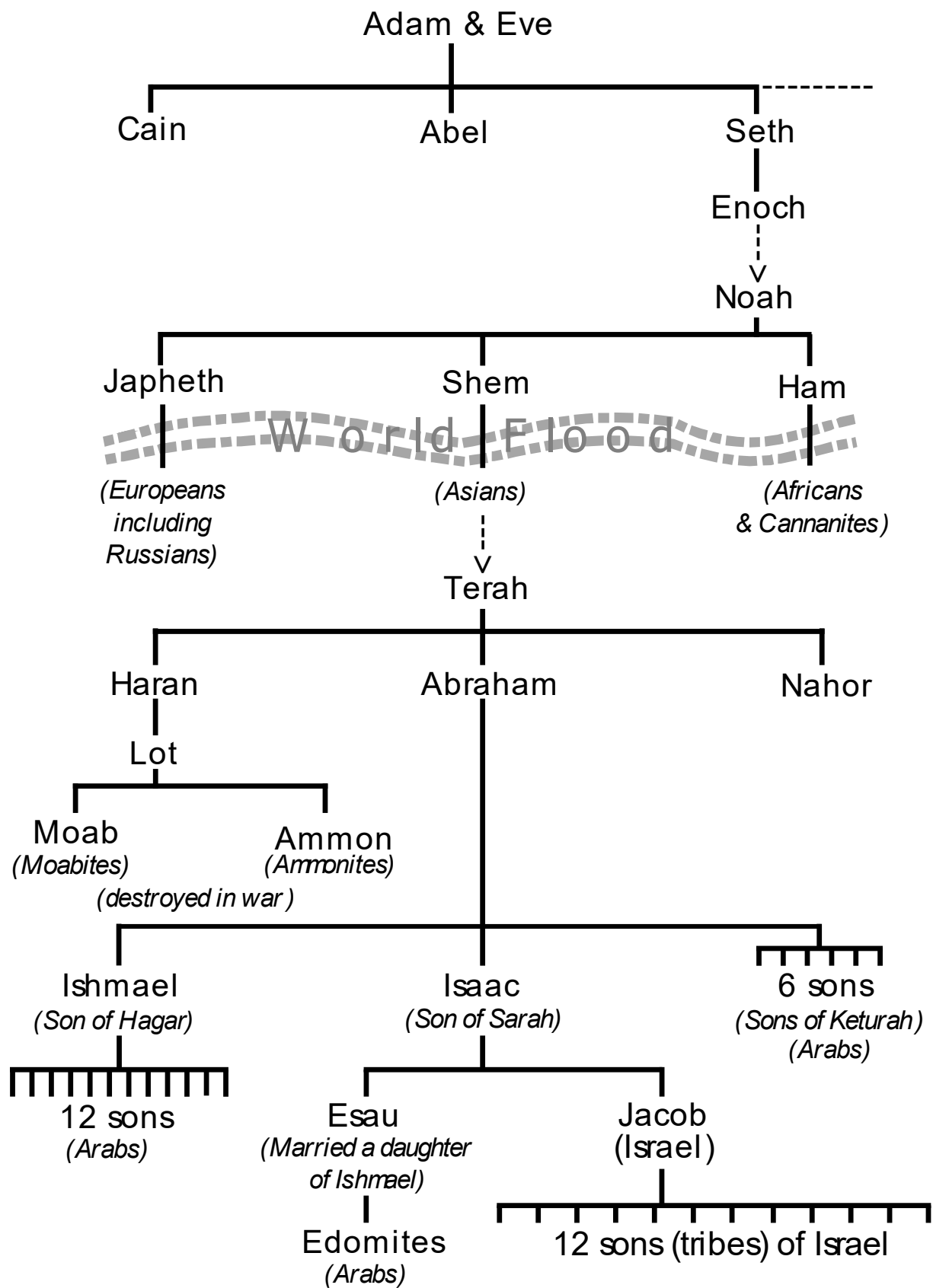
In our first commentary 'Beginnings' we talked about the beginning of the world. We said that God (Yahweh) made the world and He made it well. He also made the people and all living things and He was pleased with what He had made.

We also talked about the sins of men and women and how they turned away from God. They were selfish and did things that did not please God. He was sad and angry and He was sorry that He had made them. So God decided to destroy everyone with a great flood of water from above and from the depths of the sea. But He saved Noah and his family of three sons, because Noah worshipped, obeyed and believed God.

One son, Japheth, moved into Europe with his family. One son, Ham, went south to Africa with his family. Shem's family spread across Asia. Shem's children were the most religious of all Noah's family. The Jews came from them and then later the Muslims and many other religions. To the Jews was born God's Messiah, Jesus the Christ, through the virgin Mary. Some Jews and many non-Jews (Gentiles) believe that Jesus is the Son of God. He is God's promised Saviour for the whole world. One day soon, Jesus will return to Israel where He was born. He will come to rule the world.

In our second commentary we told you that God chose Noah's grandson Abraham to teach the truth about Himself. Noah and Shem were still alive when Abraham was a young man. He knew that God had punished the world with a great flood. Abraham believed God. And God chose him to become the spiritual father of millions of people who believe in the one true God.

Isaac was one of the sons of Abraham and God chose him because he was Abraham's only son by Sarah. Isaac was therefore special to Abraham and special to God. The promises that God made to Abraham started to come true through Isaac. The apostle Paul says in Galatians 4:22, "It is written that Abraham had two sons. The slave woman gave birth to one of them. The free woman (not the slave) gave birth to the other one. Abraham's son to the slave woman (Ishmael) was born in the usual way. But his son by Sarah the free woman (Isaac) was born because of God's promise." It was a miracle because of her great age.



The family line from Adam to Jacob (later called Israel)

Abraham was ready to offer up Isaac on an altar back to God. He believed that God would save Isaac or raise him from death. Because of this, we can see that Isaac was a type of Christ: Jesus was the chosen Son of God who sacrificed His life but God raised Him from death. God saved Isaac so that many people would trust in God and receive His salvation. God raised up Jesus the Christ as Israel's Messiah so that many more people would trust in God and receive His salvation. Paul calls this 'the mystery of Christ'.

In this third commentary, you will read a lot about Isaac's son Jacob. He became one of the most important people in the Old Testament. God called him to be part of His new agreement for the salvation of mankind. He is the grandson of Abraham and the son of Isaac. He is called the third of the great Patriarchs. The Bible often says "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". Like his father and grandfather, he had weaknesses. He often failed to do what was right. In this way, he hurt those who were close to him. But like Abraham and Isaac, he grew in faith in God Almighty. God was able to use him to fulfil part of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac.

As Jacob grew older, he was more and more aware of his failings. His guilt was mainly due to the way he treated his parents, his twin brother and his own children. But God was with Jacob and God chose him to become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. He overcame family problems and grew strong in faith.



### **Talk about this:**

1. What did the angel of the Lord promise Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:13-21)?
2. Who are Abraham's true children (Hebrews 11:8-19)?
3. Why is Isaac like a type of Christ (Hebrews 11:17-19)?



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 22**



**Learn about this:** *Abraham is tested by God to sacrifice Isaac and sets out to obey in faith (verses 1-10); an angel stops the sacrifice and offers a ram instead (v.11-14); Abraham receives another blessing from God who reconfirms the blessings for his future family (v.16-19); the family line of Abraham's brother Nahor (v.20-24).*

## **GOD ASKS ABRAHAM TO SACRIFICE HIS SON**

'God put Abraham to the test' (22:1). "Take your son, your only son... Sacrifice him on one of the mountains I will tell you about" (22:2).

It was not God's will for Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, because human sacrifice was strictly forbidden by God. Abraham's test of faith pointed to God's better plan of innocent animal sacrifice. And later on, Jesus Christ, God's faultless Son, would be sacrificed for the sins of the whole world (John 3:16).



All true faith includes surrender. This means giving back to God all His gifts to us, all the time (Matthew 6:33). Abraham 'came out of the world' in the fullest sense of the word. He became a nomad and surrendered any worldly interests. He left behind:

- his father's comfortable house in the city of Ur to become a tent dweller, always on the move;
- the attractive things and places of this world, as chosen by his nephew Lot, who journeyed with him;
- Ishmael, who was a picture of Abraham 'striving in the flesh' to raise a family (Hebrews 4:12).

God prepared Abraham to surrender even the closest and dearest, his only true son, Isaac. Isaac was his miracle child born to Sarah (Genesis 21:1-2). God wants His blessings to be offered back to the Giver for Him to use as He chooses.

## **ABRAHAM AND ISAAC OBEY GOD**

Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac as God commanded. His faith was in God's ability to 'raise him from death'. Abraham was therefore ready to kill his only son from Sarah. He also knew that the neighbouring tribes offered similar human sacrifices to their heathen gods.

Isaac went with Abraham to the mountain of sacrifice. Isaac asked his father, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (22:7). Abraham answered, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." The two of them walked on together towards Mount Moriah.

Isaac obeyed his father's will and went with him to be offered up on the altar. He trusted his father, Abraham. This is another reason why Isaac is a type of Christ. Jesus went to the cross and did his Father's will. He became the Lamb of God in His sacrifice for us. The words of Abraham, "God will provide the lamb," were prophetic (22:8).

Isaac learned about the care and will and provision of his earthly father. He also learned about his heavenly Father. He inherited all of God's promises made to Abraham, as well as his inheritance from Abraham.

But the angel of the Lord called out to Abraham. "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son" (22:12).

Then Abraham saw a ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son (22:13).

## **GOD'S MESSAGE FOR ABRAHAM**

The angel of the Lord God Almighty then gave Abraham a message from God. "I make a promise on oath in My own name. I will bless you because of what you have done. You have not held back your son, your only son. So I will

certainly bless you. I will make your children after you as many as the stars in the sky... Your children will take over the cities of their enemies. All nations on Earth will be blessed because of your children. All this will happen because you obeyed Me" (22:15-18).



### **The need for human and animal sacrifice to forgive sins**

Old Testament sacrifices of innocent animals were common and are prophetic. They point forward in time to the sacrifice of the innocent Lamb of God (Luke 23:33). We see how God encouraged animal sacrifice and prepared the way for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His own special Lamb. Jesus died on a cross at Calvary in the will and purpose of His Father God (Romans 8:28-39). God prepared the way for this sacrifice when sin first came into the world. His sacrifice brings forgiveness and salvation today for all who repent and believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

Calvary is a part of the mountain of Moriah, the place where God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (22:2). It is the place where God provided a lamb or ram to sacrifice in place of Isaac. It is also the place where God provided His own Son to sacrifice in our place for sins He did not commit.

The chapter ends with the details of the family of Abraham's brother Nahor. It includes the name Bethuel, who was the father of Rebekah. They are mentioned in Chapter 24. They remained at Haran in the land of Mesopotamia while Abraham and Lot obeyed God's call to move 750km to Canaan (12:4-5).



### **Talk about this:**

1. True faith surrenders everything to God. What was Abraham ready to give up?
2. What was Abraham's son Isaac ready to give up?
3. What did God provide for a sacrifice on Mount Moriah?
4. Who did God prepare for sacrifice on Mount Moriah many years later?
5. What is the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ?



**Think about this:** God's purpose in the lives of Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac and their relatives who remained in Haran.



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 23**



**Learn about this:** *The age and death of Sarah (verses 1-2); Abraham buys land with a cave for his future family burials (v.3-18); the burial of Sarah (v.19).*

## THE DEATH OF SARAH

Abraham wandered back northwards to Hebron. It is in the mountains 30km south of Jerusalem. He was a Bedouin, a nomad living in a tent. He was “an outsider and a stranger” in his own words (23:4).

Abraham and Sarah had shared a long life together. She died at the age of 127. Now Abraham needed to find a resting place for her body.

A local Canaanite tribe called the Hittites owned land with a cave in it. Abraham bought the land and buried Sarah’s body in the cave. It became the family burying place for (49:29-31):

- Sarah
- Abraham
- Isaac
- Rebekah
- Leah
- Jacob



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 24**



**Learn about this:** *Abraham arranges for his servant to travel to his brother’s home to find a wife for Isaac (verses 1-11); the servant’s prayer for a sign from God to do what is right (v. 12-14); the servant meets Rebekah who invites him home where he is welcomed (v.15-33); the servant explains his reason for his journey and Rebekah’s parents agree to the marriage with Isaac (34-61); Isaac meets Rebekah and gets married (61-67).*

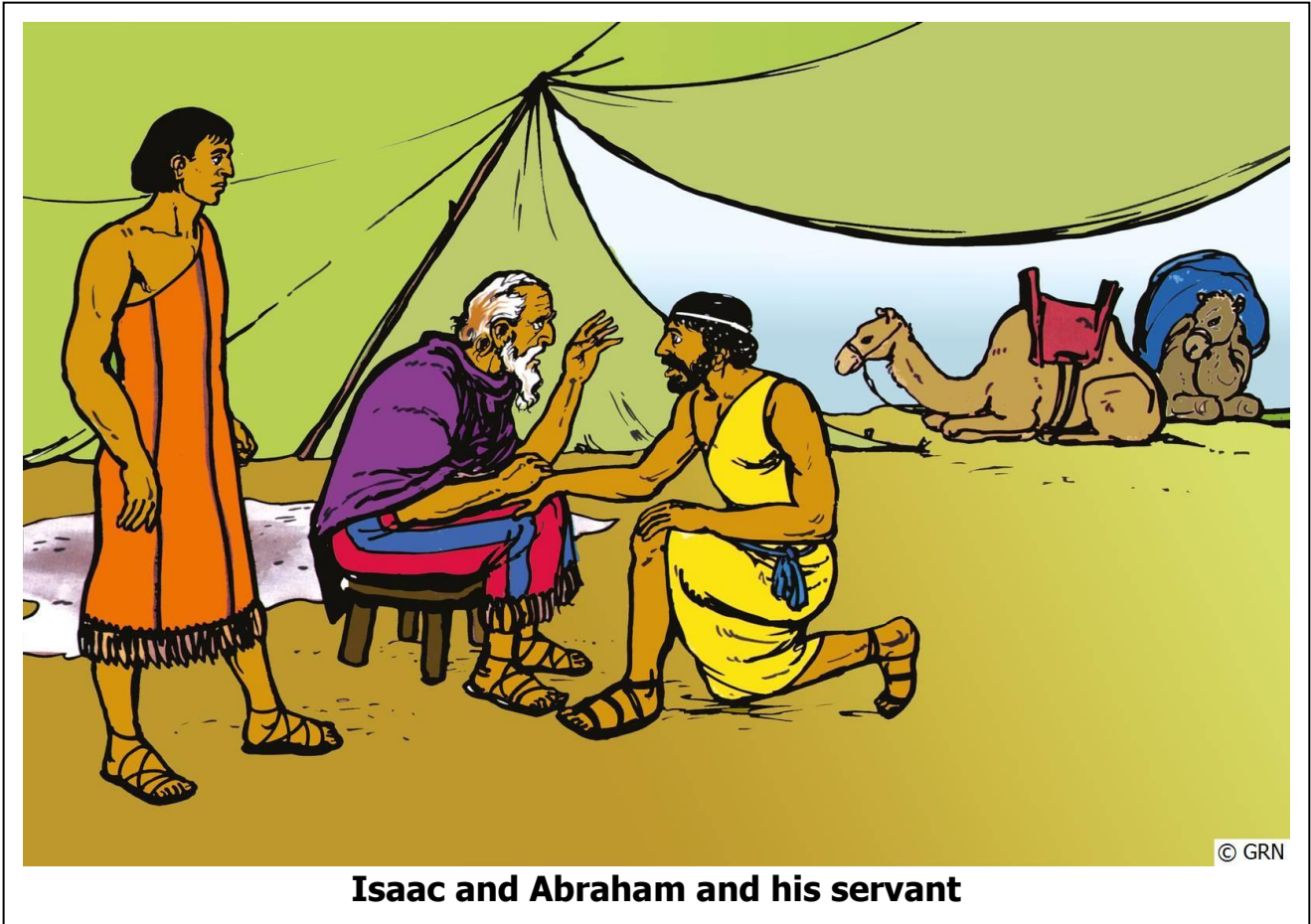
## FINDING A WIFE FOR ISAAC

Abraham and his family lived in Canaan. All the people living around them worshipped idols. The Canaanites did not know the one true God, Yahweh, and they were very wicked. Because Abraham loved God, he wanted his son, Isaac, to marry a girl who also loved God.

The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. Now God would bless Abraham with the right wife for Isaac. Parents need to be concerned about life partners for their sons and daughters and Isaac was special! He could not marry a heathen Canaanite girl. Nor did Abraham want Isaac to leave him to travel to his uncle’s home in Haran.

Abraham had eight sons but he knew that God’s promises would be fulfilled through Sarah’s only son, Isaac, the miracle boy. Ishmael married an Egyptian girl and the other sons married local girls. Abraham knew that Isaac must marry within his father’s relatives.

Abraham trusted his servant to go on the long journey. He would visit Abraham’s brother’s family to bring home a wife for Isaac who believed in the Lord God Almighty. The servant probably knew the area and Nahor’s family.



**Isaac and Abraham and his servant**

Before the servant left, he asked Abraham, "What if the woman will not come back with me?" (24:5). This reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who prompts us to do the Father's will. Abraham believed that God's Spirit would guide his servant (24:7). So Abraham reminded his servant that God brought him out of the city of Ur, spoke to him and promised to be with him. He assured his servant that the same God would "send His angel before you" (24:7).

In the same way, Father God uses His Spirit to prompt us to obey Him. We can then choose to do what is right or we can disobey and choose to go the wrong way. However, when God calls us to do His will, we must learn not to get ahead of God's guidance. It may take years of faithful waiting on God to see His plans fulfilled. Meanwhile, we have to grow in faith as did Abraham and his servant.

The servant obeyed Abraham and loaded the camels for the journey. So the servant set out for Haran to find a wife for Isaac. He went to Abraham's own brother Nahor. The servant took with him all kinds of good things from his master. Abraham was very rich and he gave his servant gold, clothes and fine food to take with him. These were presents to give to Abraham's brother and to the members of Nahor's family.

## **ABRAHAM'S SERVANT MEETS REBEKAH**

After travelling many days, the servant came to Haran. God led him straight to the right place. It was evening, "the time when women go out to draw water" (24:11). Abraham's servant made his camels kneel down near a well.

He prayed, "O Lord, the God of my master... help me... I am standing beside this spring and the girls of the village are coming out to draw water... When I ask one of them for a drink and she says "Yes," let her also say "And I will give your camels water, too. Let her be the one" (24:13-14).

He also asked God to give him signs that the woman would be:

- kind hearted and ready to help a traveller;
- kind to animals and good at her work.

Then the servant looked up and saw a young girl. She was carrying her water jar on her shoulder. He watched her as she filled her jar with water. She was strong and willing. She spoke the words he had asked to hear. This was the sign that he had asked God for. And God gave him the sign. He knew that this was the right girl. And then she told him that she was a granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother. The girl's name was Rebekah. She was Laban's sister.

Abraham's servant was filled with joy. Then he bowed his head and thanked God. He gave her two gold bracelets and sent her running to her mother. God had guided him to this place and had given him a wife for Isaac.

At Nahor's house, the servant talked with the girl's father and mother. He told them how God had blessed his master, Abraham. He told about the young man, Isaac. Isaac's faith was like his father's and Isaac wanted a godly woman to be his wife. Notice how the servant speaks only about Abraham and Isaac. In the same way the Holy Spirit directs us towards God the Father and God the Son.

The servant's prayer was simple (24:12-14):

- He prayed in faith for success for Abraham's son.
- He knew what was needed to please Isaac's father.
- He asked God to do it in a way that he could easily understand.
- He fully believed that God would choose a wife for Isaac.

## **ABRAHAM'S RELATIVES AGREE TO THE MARRIAGE**

The family tried to stop Rebekah leaving immediately. But the sign of a true person of God is the immediate response to God's call (Matthew 4:22). When they asked Rebekah if she would leave immediately she said "Yes" and so they blessed her. "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring overcome the gates of your enemies" (24:60).

When Rebekah met Isaac, "She got down from her camel... She took her veil and covered her face" (24:64-65). Isaac took Rebekah into the tent that

had belonged to her mother Sarah. Isaac married Rebekah. She became his wife and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother died (24:27).



### **Talk about this:**

1. Why did Abraham send his servant to Nahor's place 750km away in Mesopotamia?
2. What did Abraham say to encourage his servant (24:7)?
3. What did Abraham's servant promise to do (24:9)?



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 25**



**Learn about this:** *The sons of Abraham by his second wife and the division of his goods (verse 1-6); the age, death and burial of Abraham and the blessing of God passes to Isaac (v.7-11); Ishmael's age, death and family (v.12-18); Isaac's origins and marriage details (v. 19-20); Isaac prays for Rebekah to conceive who then bears twins who fight in the womb, a sign of future family rivals (v.24); the problems of the twin sons Esau and Jacob (v. 27-34).*

## **THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM**

After Sarah died, Abraham married again. He had several children by his second wife Keturah. When Keturah's sons grew up, Abraham gave them a share of his inheritance and he sent them away to the east (25:6).

Abraham died at the age of 175 years. Abraham had lived 100 years in Canaan (12:4; 25:7). There was a meeting between Isaac and Ishmael when they came together to bury their father.

Ishmael had his own large family who gave a lot of trouble to Isaac's grandchildren later. Ishmael's family were unfriendly people. They lived near the border with Egypt (25:18). Many remained in Canaan, God's Promised Land of Israel. God told Abraham that the children of Ishmael would become a great nation (17:20). They would fight many tribes including Abraham's future family, the children of Israel (15:18). God used the tribes of Ishmael to test the faith and obedience of His special people Israel. Also to test the faith of those who believe in Israel's Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles. This remains true to this day.

Isaac received God's blessing (25:11) and God's covenant promises. This was in addition to his inheritance from Abraham (25:5). God's covenant promises passed to Isaac and then to Jacob (28:13-15; 35:12). The covenant promise with Abraham did not pass to Ishmael, nor to his half-brothers by Keturah, nor to Jacob's twin brother Esau. God chose Isaac and Jacob.



## Groups of people in God's Promised Land before the Exodus

Canaan became God's future Promised Land which was promised to Abraham for his family through Jacob. The Genesis record gives the following groups were living in the land of Canaan:

1. The original inhabitants, the Canaanites (descendants of Ham, Noah's son).
2. Ishmael's family line (Genesis 12-18)
3. Abraham's descendants by Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4).
4. Esau's family line (Genesis 36)
5. The families of Jacob, later called the Children of Israel or the Israelites (Genesis 27-50).

## JACOB AND ESAU

Here we see the things that prepared the future of Jacob in the family of Abraham and Isaac.

The promise made to Rebekah, Isaac's wife (25:23) was more than a promise. It is prophesy, spoken by God in direct answer to her prayer. God told Rebekah about the twins that she would bear, what they would be like and what would happen to them. "Two nations are in your body. The two tribes that are now inside you will be separated... The elder son will serve the younger one."

As they grew up, their outward looks and behaviour seemed to match their natures and characters. We list what we know about them at this stage of the story:

<b>Esau</b>	<b>Jacob</b>
First born	Second born
Rough skin with red hair	Smooth skin
Physically strong	Emotionally strong
A farmer, (like Cain)	A shepherd, (like Abel)
Isaac's favourite twin son	Rebekah's favourite twin son

Esau was a 'man of the soil', like his father, and a hunter. Jacob was a quiet man. He was a shepherd. But he was also a schemer, like his mother.

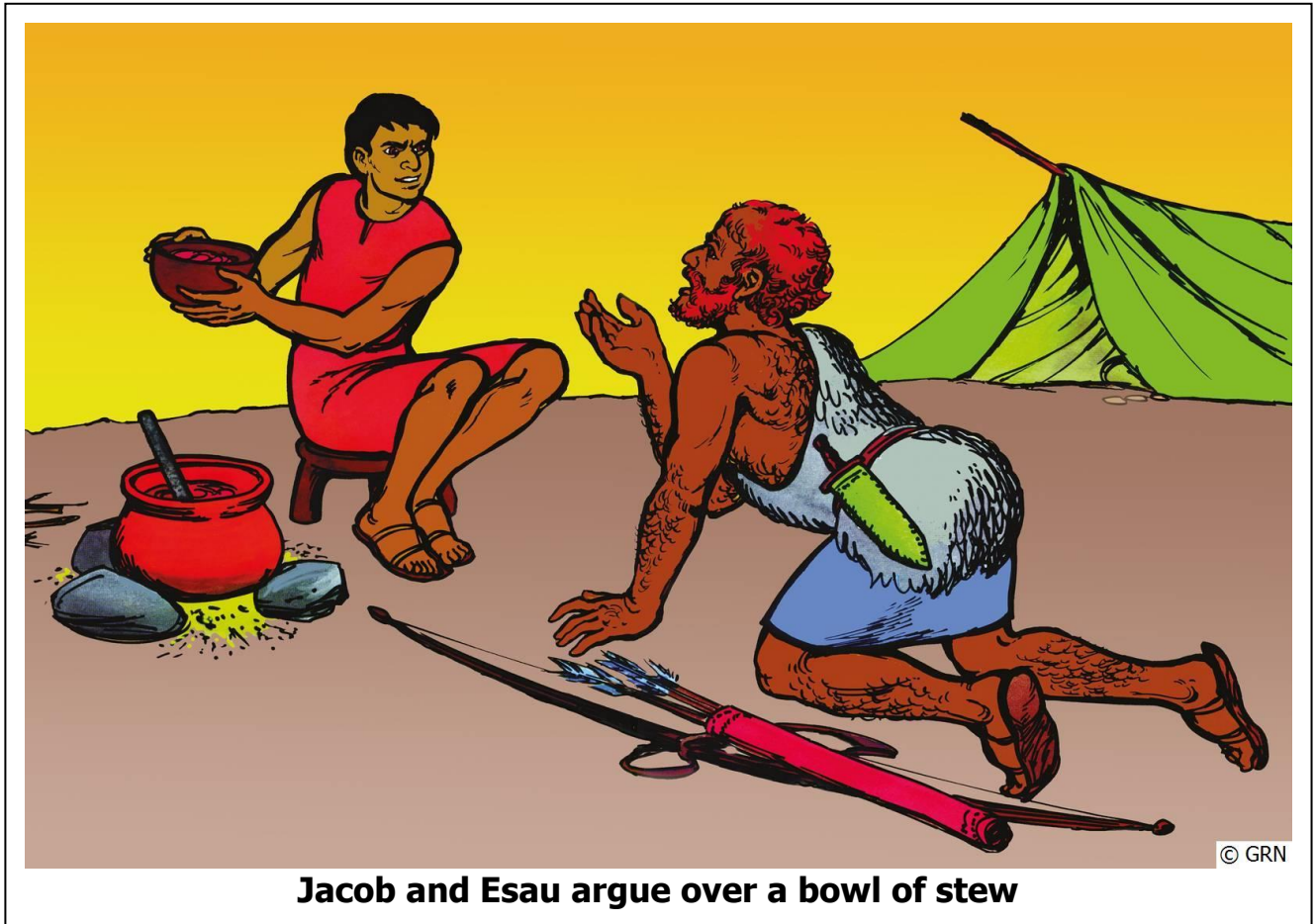
Isaac was now 60 years old. He enjoyed eating good food. He liked the meat and the food that Esau provided.

Rebekah wanted Jacob to have the eldest son's birthright and she believed that it would be his. Jacob wanted to have it also. (In those days, the largest inheritance from the father, called the birthright, went to the eldest son.)

## ESAU AGREES TO SELL HIS BIRTHRIGHT

One day, Jacob was at home making stew when Esau came in from hunting. Esau was very hungry and he said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that stew!" (25:30-31). Then Esau foolishly promised to sell his birthright to Jacob in exchange for some food.

How foolish it is for a person to reject his inheritance in exchange for any goods that this world can give him! (Hebrews 12:16b). How foolish it is for a person to reject his inheritance in Christ in exchange for the pleasures of this world!



Jacob and Esau argue over a bowl of stew



**Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 26**



**Learn about this:** Isaac and Rebekah move to a foreign land because of famine and are blessed by the Philistines and by God (verses 1-33); Esau marries Canaanite women which saddens Isaac and Rebekah (v.34-35).

## GOD PROVIDES FOR ISAAC

"There was very little food in the land" (26:1). This famine was a test for Isaac. Was the Land of God's Promise not so promising after all? Trials and testing are part of this world, but we remember that Jesus said, "I have won the battle over the world" (John 16:33).



God told Isaac that he did not need to move down to Egypt to escape the famine (26:2). God would provide for him and his family in the land that He had promised to Abraham (26:3).

Many chapters tell of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, but there is little about Isaac. Chapter 26 tells us what we know of Isaac's life. Many details match those of Abraham's life. We learn from this that God's promises are offered to each generation (26:4).

We also learn a little of Isaac's character. He was not a man of war or a man who demanded his rights. Isaac met trials in the Promised Land, but God was faithful. We therefore learn from this example that God will always give us peace in our hearts as we trust in His goodness and mercy, even in times of difficulty.

However, as we shall see, Isaac did not always learn from the mistakes that his father Abraham made. It is a sad fact that mankind does not learn lessons from the mistakes of history. This is because we are all born with a sinful nature. This is why God later prepared a Saviour for the world through the family line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This family line continued through Judah and King David to Jesus, Israel's Messiah.

## **REBEKAH AND ABIMELECH**

Isaac and family continued to move further from home in search of food. Rebekah was not in danger of being taken into Abimelech's harem, but she was in danger of being taken by the men who lived there. When they asked Isaac about Rebekah, he told them, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to tell them that she was his wife. They might kill him, a stranger, and take Rebekah.

The king found out what Isaac said. "The results of your lie could have been very bad for your wife," the King told him (26:10). In this way, Abimelech protected Isaac and his family. In fact, God used him to protect the family line of Isaac so that they would not mix with other tribes. God also blessed Isaac with good crops, cattle and servants. Then the local people became fearful and jealous. These feelings finally came to the surface and the Philistines drove Isaac away (26:13-16).

These Philistines had filled up many of the wells that his father Abraham had dug (26:15). Water is a source of life. Spiritually, wells are a symbol of the Word of God. The enemy of God tries to weaken the Word of God for the people of God. Today, many churches weaken the Word of God by allowing false teaching, false prophecy, attractions which become distractions, false signs and wonders or simply not believing in Almighty God who answers prayers.

Isaac moved to a fertile area near the Philistine city of Gerar. He became a farmer (26:12), as well as the owner of sheep, goats and cattle. Isaac opened up the wells again (26:18). Because God made him prosper, the Philistines did

not like him. The Philistines lived in Canaan and they occupied the coastlands along the Mediterranean Sea until the days of King David.

Isaac's servants again had trouble from local farmers when digging wells for fresh water (26:19-21). Isaac moved on to Beersheba. That night the Lord appeared to him. He said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid. I am with you. I will bless you. I will increase the number of your children because of My servant Abraham" (26:24).

Isaac built an altar there and worshiped the Lord. There he set up his tent. And there his servants dug [another] well (26:25).

Some of the Philistine leaders followed Isaac. He asked them, "Why have you come to me [since] you were angry with me?" (26:27).

They answered, "We saw clearly that the Lord was with you. So we said, 'We should make an agreement by taking an oath.' The agreement should be between us and you. We want to make a peace treaty with you. Promise that you will not harm us. We did not harm you. We always treated you well. We sent you away in peace. Now the Lord has blessed you" (26:28-29).

In this way, God gave Isaac the same promises that he gave Abraham. And God told him not to be afraid. So when the Philistines visited Isaac again, he had a new boldness, through faith in God.

We too are blessed because we share the same faith in the living God that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had before us. And we can share the same boldness that God has given us in Christ. It will take away the fear of our enemies. Then God will open the eyes of our enemies to see how God blesses His people (26:28).

Then Isaac had a big feast prepared for them. They ate and drank. Early the next morning the men made an agreement with an oath. Then Isaac sent the men on their way and they left in peace (26:30-1).

That same day, Isaac's servants came to him and said, "We've found water!" The blessings of the Holy Spirit's supply could not have been greater.

## **ESAU SADDENS ISAAC AND REBEKAH**

Meanwhile, Esau married two Hittite women from Canaan. Isaac and Rebekah became very upset because Esau had married Canaanites (26:34-35). Later on, Esau tried to put things right by marrying someone within Abraham's family born to Ishmael (28:6-9).

It is a big worry for parents when children from Christian families marry non-Christians. These children are often lost to us. We wonder why Isaac and Rebekah did not find a God-fearing wife for Esau. Perhaps because there was no harmony between Isaac and Rebekah. They each favoured different sons.



### **Talk about this:**

1. There was a famine in Abraham's day and he went down into Egypt without asking God (12:10). What was the result?
2. There was a famine in Isaac's day and God told him, "Do not go down to Egypt" (26:2). What was the result?
3. Why did Isaac build an altar and worship the Lord (26:24-25)?
4. Esau grieved his parents by marrying heathen women (26:34-35). What example did Isaac give to Esau later on (28:6-9)?



**Think about this:** In what ways was Isaac blessed by God from birth? How did he show God's wisdom, thanks and love? In what ways did he fail? How did Esau and Jacob demonstrate the purposes of God and the foolishness of mankind?



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 27**



**Learn about this:** *Isaac sends Esau to get meat while Rebekah sends Jacob to obtain Isaac's family blessing by deceit (verses 1-29); Esau returns and gets angry and demands a blessing from Isaac (v.30-40); Esau threatens the life of Jacob whom Rebekah sends away (v.41-46).*

## **REBEKAH'S PLAN FOR JACOB**

Rebekah preferred Jacob, the younger of the twin sons. And she knew that Esau "did not care at all about the rights that belonged to him as the eldest son" (25:34).

Isaac knew God said He would bless Jacob (25:23). But Isaac liked Esau because he was a 'man of the soil' and he liked the food that his son produced. Esau was also a hunter. He would often kill an animal and make his father some stew from it.

Isaac thought that it was time to bless his elder son before he died. It was the custom then, and it still is, in many countries. (Actually Isaac lived for another forty years.) Isaac called Esau to give him his 'final blessing'. He would do this while he feasted on Esau's special stew.

## **REBEKAH'S DECEIT**

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, heard what Isaac said to Esau. Rebekah listened at the tent door and she thought of a way to gain Isaac's blessing for Jacob, her favourite son. She knew that Jacob had earlier stolen the birthright. He had tricked Esau into giving the birthright to him. Now she would also get him the final blessing of Isaac. Her plans, and the lies she told to bring it about, were wrong.

But God had already said that Jacob and not Esau would be blessed. So nothing could change God's plan! And nothing needed to be added to it. God

had said, "The elder shall serve the younger" (25:23). Rebekah knew this and she thought that she was helping to make it happen.

What she did was not right, but the result was still in God's hands. Yet she was even willing to risk God's curse to get her own way! When we know God's will we must obey and do things His way to avoid stress and failure.



### **God sees the good in Jacob**

God was fair when He chose Jacob and not Esau. God's promise rested on the younger twin, Jacob (Romans 9:7-18). He knew how much they fought in the womb of Rebekah. He knew the future of these two people. He could see the end from the beginning. He chose Jacob for the faith he would have. Jacob proved to be patient and he was able to suffer difficulties. One day he would be father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Yet he, too, would suffer much from the difficulties his sons would cause him.

Jacob stole the birthright and blessing from his twin brother Esau. It shows how the sins and mistakes we and others make in life often lead to resentment, anger and guilt. However, the twin's father Isaac prophesied that one day Esau would overcome his troubled feelings (27:40). This took 20 years to happen (33:4).

Parents and children grow in faith in different ways and at different times to each other. Love must be shown at all times in order to see God's purpose at work. Jesus said 1800 years later, "I have come into this world so that the blind will see" (John 9:39). Pray to see God's good provision of wisdom for families of believers. "The Lord's love for those who have respect for him lasts for ever and ever. Their children's children will know that he always does what is right" (Psalm 103:17).

## **GOD'S PROMISE TO JACOB**

The calling and promise that God gave to Jacob was not because of anything that Rebekah or Jacob did or did not do. It was because of God's grace. God knew that Jacob would have faith to obey Him. Esau looked down on his birthright. He gave up the birthright. He did not value the covenant promises that God made to his forefathers, Abraham and Isaac.

Rebekah's plans, and what Jacob did, obtained God's blessing. But what happened separated him from his father and mother for over fourteen years. It also caused the twins to quarrel.

This is a warning to us to trust God more and to trust our own methods less.



### **Talk about this:**

1. Isaac preferred Esau. How did this affect what God had planned for him?

2. Rebekah preferred Jacob. How did this affect what God had planned for him?
3. Jacob tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing. How did this affect what God had planned for them?
4. When Jacob acted wrongly, how did this affect the family of God?
5. When Esau gave his birthright away and also married heathen women, how did this affect the family of Abraham?



**Think about this:** Satan can never destroy God's plans. Satan causes trouble within the family of God if we listen to his voice instead of God's voice. Isaac and Jacob is the story of family fighting and of family faith in God.

## **ISAAC BLESSES JACOB AND ESAU WEEPS**

Isaac did not see at first that God's covenant for Abraham's family was with Jacob and not with his twin brother Esau. However, Isaac spoke his blessing on Jacob in the words of God's covenant. The old man explained what he should have told his son years before! He spoke of "taking possession of the land where you now live". It had been promised to his father Abraham many years before (13:14-17). We are often slow in seeking the purposes of God and preparing the way for their fulfillment.

The blessing that Isaac gave to Jacob was wide-ranging and included property, power, blessings on his friends and curses on his enemies (27:28-29).

Esau was blessed too, but it was not enough to comfort him and he cried a loud and bitter cry (27:34). The New Testament writer said that Esau wanted to repent, but it was too late (Hebrews 12:17).

All who do not ASK and SEEK now, will cry later. Jesus said, "Not all those who cry 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who do what My father in Heaven wants will enter" (Matthew 7:21). So Esau was cut off from much of the inheritance and the blessing.

Believers who do not fully repent of this world's sin will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" But Jesus will answer, "I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:22-23).

Esau cried again for a blessing (27:38). Today, there are many who will not have the blessing of Christ our Lord. Even if they seek the blessing of a church fellowship, they may fail to seek a personal relationship with God. This comes through repentance before Christ, the head of the church.

Esau wept loudly. Isaac replied: "You will live far away from Earth's richness. You will live by the sword, and you will serve your brother" (27:39-40). Later, Esau's sons, called the tribe of Edom, went into the mountains. They found that the crops would not grow, so they stopped farming and started fighting.

For many years, Israel ruled Edom in the generations that followed (2 Samuel 8:14). Finally, Edom rebelled (2 Kings 8:20, 22) and freed themselves from Israel (Genesis 27:40).

Esau did not see all that happened to him as his fault! Few of us look into the mirror of life and say to God, "I am sorry! It was my own fault."

## **JACOB PAYS A HIGH PRICE FOR HIS BLESSING**

Esau was so angry with Jacob that he said that he would kill him! When Rebekah heard this, she told Jacob to prepare to go to his uncle's house in Mesopotamia and stay there until Esau's anger passed.

Jacob's sins against his brother caused many problems:

- He never saw his mother again.
- He deceived and hurt his father.
- He was treated badly by his uncle Laban.
- Quarrels and wickedness divided his family.
- He became afraid of his brother and his brother's family.
- Later, his brother's tribe became the enemies of Israel.

People often cause their own family problems as did Jacob. 'We reap what we sow' (Galatians 6:7). If a man spends too much money, he gets himself into debt. If a man looks for too many good things, what will happen to him? (Proverbs 30:7-9).

Rebekah stayed at home with Esau, the son she did not love, the daughters-in-law she hated and the husband she helped to deceive. Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am sick of living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land... my life will not be worth living" (27:46).

So Jacob prepared to run off to his uncle's family in Paddan Aram in Mesopotamia to start a new life.



### **Talk about this:**

1. What was important in Isaac's blessing for Jacob, then and now (27:28-29)?
2. What was the result of Esau's actions?
3. What was the result of Jacob's actions?
4. What was the result of Rebekah's actions?
5. What was the result of Isaac showing favour to Esau?
6. What was the result of God showing favour to Jacob?



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 28**



**Learn about this:** *Jacob receives instructions and a blessing from Isaac to visit his relatives to find a wife (verses 1-5); meanwhile, Esau marries a daughter of Ishmael (v.6-9); Jacob has a vision of a ladder reaching to Heaven*

*and receives a promise from God (v.10-15); Jacob awakes and sets up a memorial stone and makes a promise to God (v.16-22).*

## **JACOB RUNS AWAY TO PADDAN ARAM**

Isaac took control and listened to his wife's complaints. He told Jacob what to do. Isaac instructed Jacob not to marry Canaanite women who were descendants of Noah's third son Ham. Instead, he sent Jacob to Laban's home to marry a descendant of Noah's first son, Shem. "Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father, Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of [your uncle] Laban" (28:2).

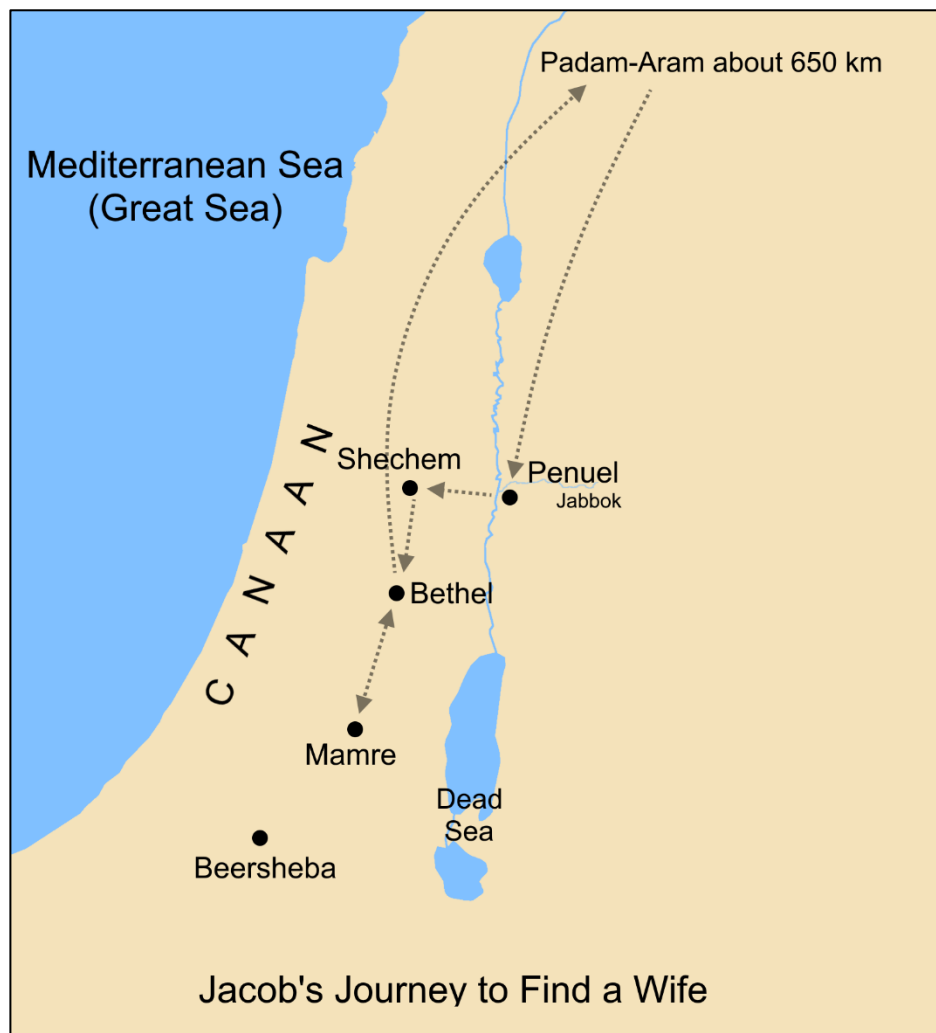
Then Isaac added a blessing for Jacob which was more important than any material blessing or inheritance that He had promised before. This blessing was similar to (and agreed with) God's own covenant promise to Abraham and Isaac. Isaac prayed over Jacob, "May God Almighty... give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham" (28:4). Isaac asked God:

- to begin a great nation through Jacob having many children;
- to give Jacob the blessing that God promised to Abraham;
- to enable Jacob to take over the land that God promised to Abraham.

In this way, Isaac acted fully in God's will by sending Jacob to find a wife among Abraham's relatives. He had the words of God's promise fully in his mind.

It was a journey of about 750km to Paddan Aram, now in Syria. The landscape was dry and barren and Jacob was tired.

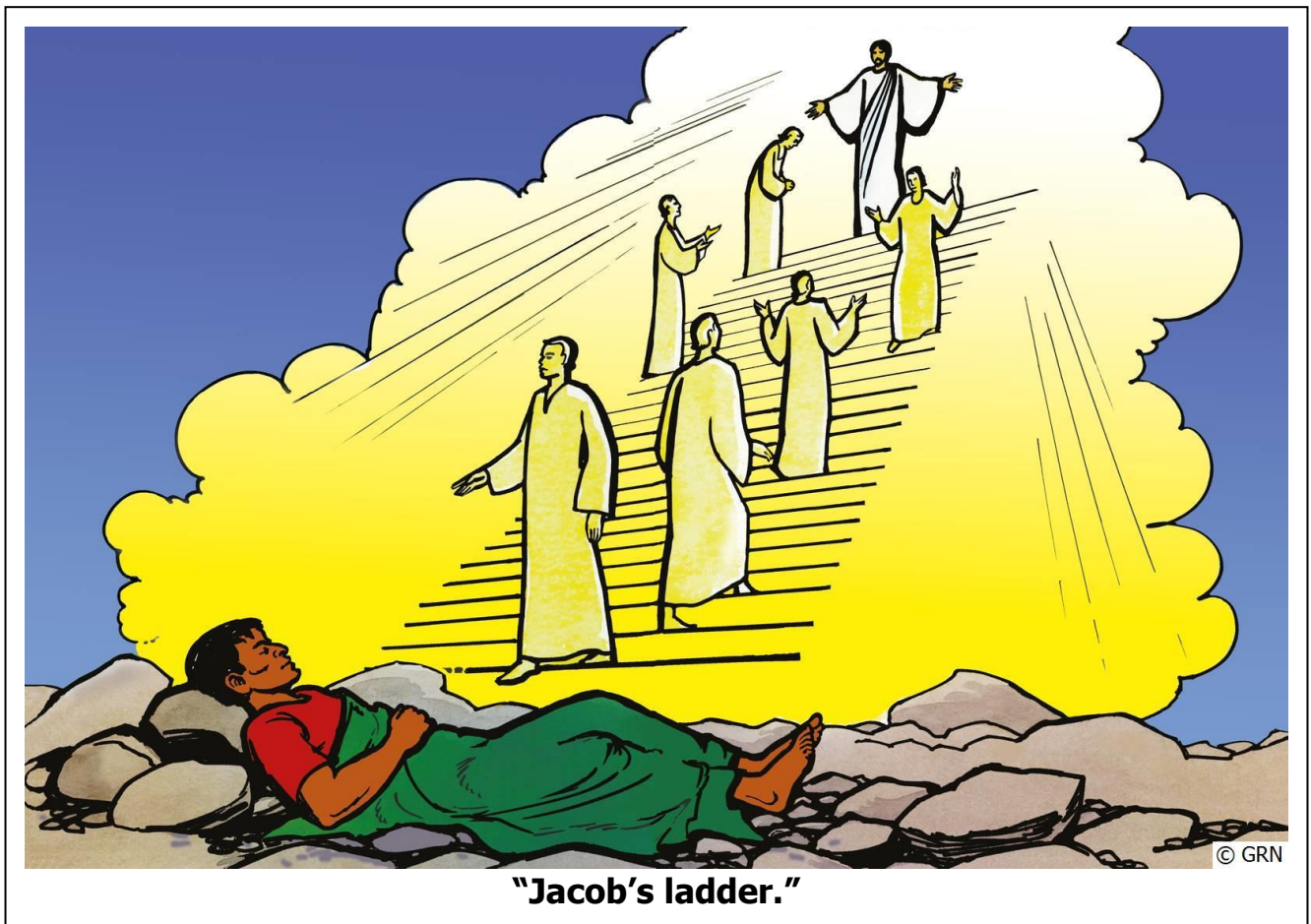
Jacob obeyed. Meanwhile, Esau chose another wife from the family of Ishmael to try to please his parents but again without seeking God's blessing first.



## JACOB'S DREAM

Jacob came to Bethel as night was falling. He found some rocks for a pillow and lay down to sleep. While Jacob slept, he had a dream. In his dream, Jacob saw a stairway or ladder resting on Earth, with its top in Heaven. Angels of God moved up and down upon it (28:12).

Above it stood the LORD God Almighty, who said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on Earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."



**"Jacob's ladder."**

Notice that:

- God's blessings come from above and were spread around by His divine messengers.
- The Lord stood above the vision as the source of all blessing (28:13).
- God's goodness produces His perfect will for the whole of mankind.
- His wisdom from above directs everything and everybody on Earth below.



For Christians, the ladder represents Christ who is the One who brings us close to God (1 Timothy 2:5). He is our 'stairway to Heaven'. His human nature was planted firmly on Earth, with His divine nature in Heaven. Men and women have no way of getting to Heaven except through Christ (John 14:6).

In Jacob's dream, God spoke to him and He repeated everything that Isaac had promised him, and more! God promised that:

- Jacob's family would possess the land and spread out in all directions;
- All nations would be blessed because of his family;
- God would take care of him and bring him back to that place.

When Jacob woke up, he thought, "The LORD is certainly in this place, and I did not know it" (28:16). God was with Jacob. No evil would come to him. God would protect him from Esau's threats and from the long journey to Paddan Aram.

Jacob called that place Bethel. Then he made a promise to God (28:20). If God watched over him, so that he returned home safely, he would give God a tithe, that is a tenth of everything, and he would worship God (28:20-22).

Bethel means 'House of God'. Jacob learned things there. He learned that God is everywhere. He learned that it was not enough to trust his father's faith in God. He needed to know and trust God for himself, personally.

We cannot run away from God, no matter where we go or how bad our future looks. In God's presence, the loneliest place becomes special.



### **Talk about this:**

1. What did Isaac do about Rebekah's complaint? (28:1).
2. What did Isaac say and do before Jacob left home (28:2-4)?
3. What did Jacob ask God to do for him (28:20-21)? Was it in line with God's will?
4. What promise did Jacob make to God (28:22)?



**Think about this:** What happened when Isaac took control of his family? How do we pray to know God's will for our family and relatives? How did Esau disobey his father and his heavenly Father? Have you ever made a promise to God? Was it in line with God's will?



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 29**



**Learn about this:** *Jacob meets Rachel and arranges to marry her (verses 1-20); he is deceived by Rachel's father and is forced to marry the older sister for seven years who bears him four sons (v.21-35).*

## JACOB REACHES PADDAN ARAM AND MEETS RACHEL

Jacob continued his journey until he came to the land of the eastern peoples (where Abraham used to live). He saw a well in a field and so he sat down (29:2). Shepherds with their sheep were resting nearby under the trees.

Jacob asked the shepherds if they knew his uncle Laban. They said they knew him. They then pointed to Laban's daughter Rachel who was bringing her father's sheep to the well for water (29:5-6).

It was the middle of the day. The shepherds did not offer to move the stone that covered the well for Rachel to draw water. They said they were waiting for other flocks to join them (29:8).

Jacob waited for Rachel to come up. When he saw his cousin he was full of joy. He went over to the well, rolled the stone away... and gave water to his uncle's sheep. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep loudly (29:10-11).



**Rachel at Laban's Well**

### **"YOU ARE ONE OF US!"**

Jacob told Rachel that he was Rebekah's son. She ran to the house and told Laban. Laban hurried to meet him and hugged Jacob and kissed him. Jacob told him everything. Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood" (29:13-14). It was many years since there had been any contact between the two families. Laban took Jacob into his family. Sadly, this family no longer worshipped the God of Abraham.

Laban was as cunning as Jacob had been with Esau. He saw how Jacob could help him with his sheep. After one month, he asked Jacob to work for him. By this time, Jacob was in love with Rachel. "I will work for you for seven years," he told Laban, "in return for your younger daughter, Rachel" (29:18).

Laban had two daughters. Leah was the elder and Rachel the younger. Leah was not so pretty as Rachel. Laban could not think of any reason to refuse Jacob's request, so he replied, "It is better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me" (29:19).

## LABAN TRICKS JACOB FOR AN EXTRA SEVEN YEARS WORK

Jacob was faithful in everything that he did for Laban. After seven years, Jacob asked Laban for Rachel to be his wife. The time passed quickly for him. It seemed like only a few days because of his love for Rachel (29:20).

Laban called all the family together and they planned a week-long wedding feast. That night, when the feasting ended, Laban played a trick on Jacob. He gave Leah to Jacob as his wife, instead of Rachel.

“What is this that you have done to me?” Jacob cried when he woke up the next morning and found Leah in bed with him.

Laban said, “It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter before the older one” (29:26).

It was the same sort of trick that Jacob had played on his father, Isaac! Jacob did not fight back. He trusted God, because he fully believed God’s promise.

After a week with Leah, Laban gave Rachel to Jacob as his wife. But he had another trick to play on Jacob. “You will have to work for another seven years,” he told Jacob (29:27).

Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (29:30). This was understandable. He had loved Rachel when they first met. And he only had Leah as a wife because of Laban’s tricks.

Having children was very important in those days. All the women wanted to give birth to sons, to carry on the family line. Leah felt that Jacob did not love her and so she tried hard to make her husband love her. Soon Leah gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben. This first son gave her new hope. God gave her four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah.



### **Talk about this:**

1. Was Laban being honest with Jacob (29:26)?
2. How did Jacob respond to his uncle’s behaviour?
3. Can a man love two wives equally? What is God’s plan for marriage (Genesis 2:24)?



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 30**



**Learn about this:** *Jacob has more sons from his first wife (verses 1-21); then God enables Rachel to conceive and bears Joseph (v.22-24); Jacob tries to return to Canaan but stays and becomes extremely rich with many flocks of sheep at his uncle Laban’s expense (v.25-43).*

## JACOB'S FAMILY AND FLOCKS INCREASE

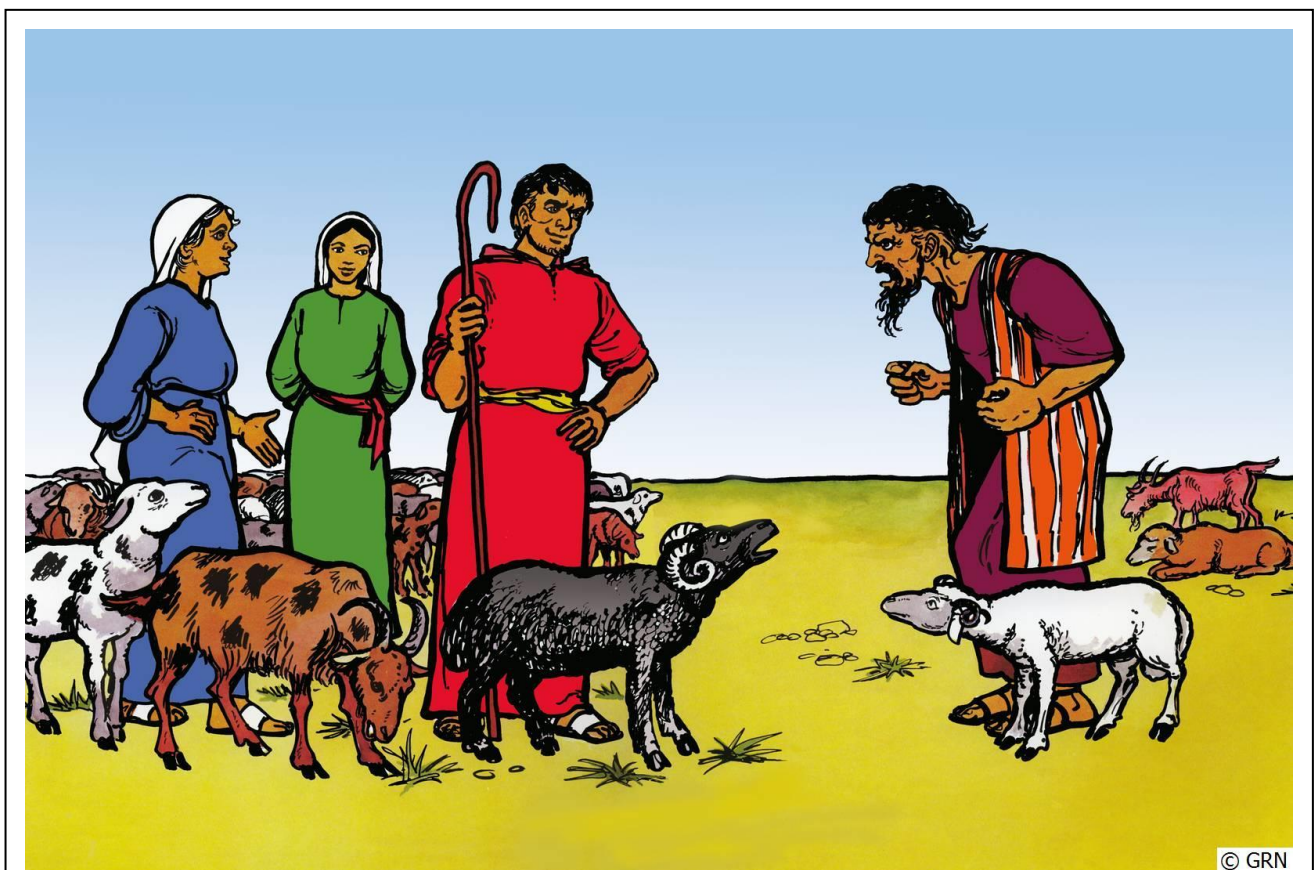
Rachel, like Abraham's wife Sarah, was barren. Rachel had no children and she was jealous of her sister. Many of us are jealous of someone, sometime. Jealousy rises everywhere. It comes on us when we least want it. So Rachel was angry with Jacob.

"Give me children or I will die!" she shouted at Jacob. This made Jacob upset. "Am I God?" he shouted back at her (30:2).

Every child is a gift from the Lord and in the Middle East a son was a very special gift. God heard Rachel's prayer and He gave her a son. But this was after Jacob had six sons by Leah, two sons by Leah's maid and two sons by Rachel's maid.

Then God listened to Rachel. He showed concern for her. He made it possible for her to have children. She became pregnant. She had a son. She said, "God has taken my shame away." She named him Joseph and continued, "May the Lord give me another son."

Rachel later gave birth to Benjamin but sacrificed her own life in giving birth (35:16-19) in the town of Bethlehem. This was where Jesus was born nearly 2000 years later to the virgin Mary whose future husband was a descendant of Jacob (Matthew 1:2).



**Jacob argues with Laban over their sheep**

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God's plan to prepare the large family He promised to Abraham began through Jacob, who was later called Israel. Abraham's first wife and Jacob's second wife were unable to have children at first. However, God worked miracles to fulfil His promise. Jacob had 12 sons in all.

Jacob worked hard looking after Laban's sheep and God blessed him. But he chose the best sheep to increase his own flock. The Bible says that in this way Jacob came to own large flocks as well as maid-servants, men-servants, camels and donkeys (30:43). He became very rich at Laban's expense. He was still behaving like a cheat.

It took 14 years before Jacob was able to fulfil the wish of his parents to visit his uncle. They did not know Laban's family no longer worshipped Yahweh, the God of Abraham.



**Think about this:** Noah's prayer (Genesis 9:26) prepared the way for the family of his first son Shem to become established and prosper in Canaan. Think about how God blessed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the people of Israel.



**Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 31**



**Learn about this:** *Laban turns against Jacob and God tells Jacob to return home to Canaan (verse 1-16); Jacob and his family and flocks depart and Rachel takes her family idols with her (v.17-21); Laban chases after Jacob and Rachel's idol's (v.22-35); Jacob and Laban agree to separate (v.36-55).*

## **JACOB PREPARES TO LEAVE LABAN**

Jacob finished his fourteen years working for Laban. He believed that this was now the right time to go back home to Canaan. He overheard Laban's sons say, "Jacob has taken everything that our father owned." Laban, his uncle, was not as friendly to Jacob as before.

Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and your own people, and I will be with you" (31:3). Jacob called his wives to the field where he was working. He told them how many times Laban had tricked him and changed his wages ten times! (31:7). But "the God of my father has been with me," he told them. This was Jacob's testimony. He was far from home, but not far from God.

His wives did not yet worship God as Jacob did. Jacob told his wives how the one true God Yahweh had blessed him and Abraham and Isaac. He told them things that they did not know. He explained to the women that God had given him special help with the flocks. Then he told them of an angel visitor who said to him, "I am the God of Bethel [where Jacob made a vow to God]... Now leave this land and go back to your own land" (31:13).

“Do whatever God has told you,” they said to Jacob (31:16). They were ready to trust Jacob’s God and not their own gods. This was an important step forward in God’s purpose for the special people of Israel.

## **JACOB LEAVES PADDAN ARAM**

Jacob was afraid that Laban would not let him go (31:31). Jacob packed up his things and left Paddan Aram secretly. Jacob’s wives, servants and children rode on camels (31:17). His men drove the flocks of sheep and goats. Jacob followed behind them as they moved forward. All that he took with him really belonged to Laban.

Before they left, Rachel “stole her father’s household gods” (31:19). She felt that she might need them. She grew up with idols around her and thought of them as ‘lucky charms’.

The long line of Jacob’s family and animals crossed the River Euphrates and “headed for the hill country of Gilead” (31:21).

When Laban’s men told him what Jacob had done, Laban was surprised and very angry. He gathered his men and pursued Jacob. Seven days later he came to Jacob’s party who were camped in the hills of Gilead. Laban said, “Why did you run away in secret and trick me? Why didn't you tell me? Then I could have sent you away happily... You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters good-bye. You have done a foolish thing. I have the power to harm you. But last night the God of your father spoke to me. He said, 'Be careful. Do not say anything to Jacob, whether it is good or bad.' Now you have run away. You longed to go back to your father's home. But why did you have to steal my gods? ” (31:27-30).

Laban no longer worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but he was still under God’s control. Jacob then saw that God had protected his family. God even protected Jacob and Rachel in the problem of the missing family idols (31:32-35). Laban searched their things but did not find his family gods.

The two men made a covenant and they had a covenant meal there. Jacob made a heap of stones as a witness (31:45-53). He called it ‘Mizpah’ which means “The LORD keep watch between you and me.”



### **Talk about this:**

1. Why did God bless Jacob by giving him 12 sons?
2. Why did God bless Jacob by giving him many flocks and servants (31:9)?
3. Why did God make it difficult for Jacob to stay with Laban, his uncle, after 14 years (31:2)?
4. Why did God make Jacob’s wives agree to leave home (31:16)?
5. Did Jacob give God the glory for everything that happened (31:5-13)?



## **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 32**



**Learn about this:** *Jacob has a vision of God's angels on his journey home and prays for protection from his brother Esau (verses 1-12); he sends him presents and waits to see his brother on his own (v.13-23); Jacob wrestles with God who renamed him Israel (v.24-32).*

### **JACOB PREPARES TO MEET HIS BROTHER**

At last Jacob felt free to move on toward Canaan. He was going back to his own country and taking his large family and all his animals with him. They were passing through strange country. There were many robbers and violent people who might attack them, but Jacob had God's promise. "I will be with you" (31:3). Also, "I am the God of Bethel" (31:13). Bethel was the place where God met Jacob on his journey to Paddan Aram (28:10-22).

Jacob did not have any soldiers or armed men to protect his family, but as he went on his way an army of angels met him (32:1). What a great thing it is to have God's angels with us! These invisible spirits serve God and "serve those who will receive His salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).

Jacob knew that God was with him, but he still trusted in himself. He was still very afraid because he had cheated his brother Esau.

Jacob called the place where he met the angels Mahanaim. The word means 'two camps'. Here at Mahanaim, east of Jordan, God showed Jacob His protection. Normally invisible angel armies were all around us and our families! Jacob now knew that his camp was not the only camp. There was his camp and God's camp. God's 'army of angels' would go with him and they would take him and his family safely back to Canaan (2 Kings 6:16). The angels could easily do this without showing themselves.

Yet Jacob was still so full of his own problems that he was nervous. He failed to believe fully in God's wonderful protection and purpose for him. He sent a messenger ahead to meet his brother who was on his way to meet him (Genesis 32:4).

### **JACOB WANTS PEACE**

Jacob wanted very much to be friends with his brother. This should always be the desire of a true believer. Jacob sent a humble message to Esau. He called himself "your servant Jacob" and prepared a gift for Esau. He did this to please Esau (32:5). He was putting himself at Esau's service. Jacob was not running away now. God had blessed him and he could support his large family and flocks. But he was still afraid of Esau!

The messengers came back and gave Jacob a frightening report: "We went to your brother Esau and now he is coming to meet you with four hundred men!" (32:6).



### **Jacob's prayer (32:9)**

Jacob prayed: "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father, Isaac". In this way he joined himself with the Lord God of his fathers, Yahweh. For Jacob was also under the Covenant blessing that God had given to Abraham (Genesis 13:16; 22:17-18). Then Jacob reminded God of His Promise. "Lord, You are the One who said to me, "Go back to your country... and I will give you success." It is a good thing to remind ourselves and God of His promises to us. When God makes a promise, He keeps it. God is well able to perform all that He has promised (Romans 4:21). He wants to do so! That is the Covenant kindness of God. Jacob was now truly humble and he agreed with God: "I am unworthy" (Genesis 32:10).

## **JACOB SHOWS HIS FEAR**

In great fear and distress, Jacob divided his wives and children and animals into two groups (32:7). He was afraid that his brother Esau would attack and hurt the mothers and children (32:11).

Jacob did not trust completely in God. He then sent a gift and a blessing to Esau. He trusted more at times in himself than in God. We, too, must do all we can to be united with other believers and family members. But we must also trust God to prepare a way for us through family fights in faith.

Jacob's gift was a group of animals in the charge of a herdsman. Jacob's message to Esau was, "From your servant Jacob".

God wanted all of Jacob's trust but Jacob was trusting in his own wisdom and strength to get his brother's blessing. God wanted to see the faith of Abraham and Isaac working in Jacob. His fears were stopping a true life of faith in God. Jacob prayed (32:9) but he still lacked faith.

## **JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD**

In the evening, Jacob sent his whole family and his flocks across the River Jabbok without him. While Jacob sat alone, a man came and began to wrestle with him. Jacob did not know at first that this was God's angel. One of the angels had left the camp and he had come to wrestle with Jacob.

Jacob 'wrestled with him till daybreak' (32:24). The angel did not overpower Jacob and Jacob did not surrender. Jacob had faced hard things before. He had been in difficult situations and he had always succeeded.

So Jacob struggled on. He begged for a blessing with tears. He now knew that this was God's man and he knew that only God could bless him.

Near morning the angel asked, "What is your name?" (32:27).





**Jacob struggles with God.**

Then the angel gave Jacob a new name, 'Israel' which means 'ruling as a prince with God' (32:28). "You have struggled with God and with men, and have overcome." Jacob had struggled with God Himself, gained his blessing, but ended up limping. His limp was a constant reminder of who was really in control!

Jacob now saw that his 'old nature' had to surrender to God's full control.

We can struggle like Jacob or follow God's way of openness and honesty. We can trust in ourselves or in God's care for us. We each have the same choice, but it takes a strong faith to follow our Lord all the way.

Jesus said to His followers, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the Gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).



**Talk about this:**

1. Why did God show Jacob his army of angels (32:11)?
2. What was Jacob most afraid of?
3. What did his fear make him do?
4. What happened to Jacob's independence when he was alone with God's angel?



**Think about this:** In times of trouble, what should we do to have total faith in God? Is the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac your God, too? What promises of God are important to you to remember? Why did God wrestle with Jacob all night?



## **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 33**



**Learn about this:** *Jacob and Esau meet and show kindness to each other (verses 1-16); Jacob returns to Canaan and builds a house and buys land (17-20).*

### **JACOB MEETS HIS BROTHER ESAU**

'Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men.' As Jacob came near to his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times (33:3).

Esau was not expecting this! He ran to meet Jacob, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they cried together (33:4).

"Who are these people with you?" Esau asked Jacob when he saw all the women, children and servants in the distance. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has kindly given to me" (33:5).



#### **Walk and talk God's way**

It is easy for us to choose God's ways now but choose Jacob's old ways the next time that a test comes! This will not make you happy. If you choose God's way in every test and not your own way, you will grow in your faith.

Paul wrote, "I delight in God's Law (Torah). But I see another law working in my body. It fights against the law of my mind. It makes me a prisoner of the law of sin" (Romans 7:23-24). "Who will save me?" Paul cried. He knew the answer. "I give thanks to God. He will do it through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:25).

Jacob would succeed, not in his own strength but in the strength and peace that God gave him.

The Christian's 'walk and talk' must agree. "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2 Timothy 2:19). He must also walk away from trusting in himself. Jacob gave testimony, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Genesis 32:30).

This can be our testimony, too. Because of the punishment Jesus took on the cross for our sins, we are allowed into God's presence. Because we are made clean from sin, God can say to us, "Come boldly before My throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16).

Then all the families came forward in order and bowed before Esau: the maidservants and their children came first, Leah and her children next and Rachel and Joseph last.

Jacob admitted that he was afraid and he had prepared gifts to please Esau. Esau told Jacob, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself!" (33:9).

God had changed Esau. God was also working in Jacob's heart, changing him into a new man. God was building character into Jacob's life. God showed him how to walk and talk His way, without deceit or fear.



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 34**



**Learn about this:** *Dinah, Jacob's daughter, is seduced by a Canaanite who wants her to marry him (verses 1-12); the sons of Jacob insist the Canaanite family is first circumcised but end up killing them (v.13-31).*

## **DINAH AND THE MEN OF SHECHEM**

When Jacob and his family arrived in Canaan, he settled near the city of Shechem and put up his tents there. Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite was king of the area where Jacob camped.

When Jacob's daughter Dinah became a teenager, she went out to visit the local girls. They were heathen women who did not know the God of Jacob. She should not have gone out alone in that foreign land. What happened shows that Jacob was foolish to stay in Shechem. He should have obeyed God and gone on to Bethel, where he first met God.

The king's son saw Dinah, took her and raped her. This made Jacob's sons angry. Levi and Simeon punished the men of the city. They planned a deceitful and wicked thing. They agreed to Dinah's marriage provided the men of Sechem were circumcised (34:15, 22). While they were still in pain, Jacob's sons and Dinah's brothers attacked the men and killed them and captured Dinah (34:25-26).

Later their father condemned them for it (49:5). God says, "It is Mine to avenge; I will repay" (Romans 12:19).

Jacob knew that it was wrong to let his sons and daughters marry into the Canaanite families. Jacob's own brother, Esau, had fallen into sin in this way (26:34).



**Think about this:** Jacob's family lived close to the people of Shechem, and so Jacob's family were tempted to live like them. What was the cost of Jacob being an unwise father?



## **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 35**



**Learn about this:** *God commands Jacob to remove family idols from his house (verses 1-6); he builds an altar at Bethel (v.7-8); God blesses Jacob again, confirms his new name is Israel and promises his family will inherit the land of Canaan (v.9-15); Rachel dies in giving birth to Jacob's twelfth son, Benjamin (v.16-26); Jacob meets Isaac who later dies and is buried by Jacob and Esau (v.27-29).*

### **JACOB SEEKS HOLINESS FOR HIS FAMILY**

This chapter is a mixture of pieces of history, not necessarily in the order in which they happened.

Jacob knew that many things in his life needed to be put right:

- His sons did evil.
- His wives had introduced heathen idols and charms into his large family
- He needed to be holy and wise in his own life.
- God's promise and His blessing must pass to one of his sons, but to which one?
- He needed God to show him what to do because his name was a "bad word" in Shechem.

God spoke to Jacob and He told him, "Go up to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to honour Me. That is where I appeared to you when you ran away from your brother" (35:1; 28:10-22).

Jacob obeyed God. He told his family to make themselves holy (35:2). As head of his family, Jacob must lead them in the things of God. God's blessing brings responsibility with it. God says to us, "Be holy in all that you do... Be holy for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16).



#### **A clean heart and life**

All believers need to be holy in the way they live! We want the blessing of God, but we carry sins from our past lives. Some things look harmless enough: self-pity, impure thoughts, gambling games, lucky charms, worldly books and films. They belong to our flesh life. Be a friend of this world and you become an enemy of God! (James 4:4).

"Get rid of the foreign gods that you have with you. Purify yourselves and change your clothes," Jacob told his sons and also his servants. "Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to honour the Lord God Almighty" (35:2-3).

Jacob's family still had idols in their tents. So they gave Jacob all their foreign gods and their earrings and Jacob buried these things.

Perhaps their earrings were used to protect against evil spirits, a superstition that was common in the region. Almost everyone wore magic charms. People often paid a lot of money for them. Mothers also put charms on their babies as soon as they were born to protect them from evil spirits.

Then Jacob gathered his family together and they set out for Bethel. Many people in Shechem wanted to pursue them to hurt them. We read that "the terror of Yahweh God fell on the towns around them so that no-one attacked them" (35:5). This was part of God's protection. His army of angels was still with them.

"You are my hiding place," King David wrote years later. "You will protect me from trouble" (Psalm 32:7). God's protection was not something that would come and go. Jacob would have it as long as he lived under the covenant blessing of the Lord God.

## **JACOB ARRIVES BACK IN BETHEL**

When Jacob arrived there, he built an altar to El Bethel, the God of Bethel. It was there that God had appeared to him several years before. God now said, "You will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel" (35:10) which means 'God prevails'. Jacob's first altar was an altar of fear because of family fighting and rivalry. This was now an altar of faith.

Jacob's blessing did not come because he was in Bethel. It was a blessing from the God of Bethel, El-Shaddai, 'God All Sufficient', who kept him safe.

God reminds Jacob of his new name and his new nature. He is now called 'Israel', blessed of God, not Jacob, the deceiver. Jacob had always known that the elder brother would serve the younger brother (25:23) and that God would bless him. However, he had made the mistake of trying to do God's will in his own way. Jacob was slowly finding a new life pleasing to God. We must remember that it is a work of the Holy Spirit to give us our new life in Christ.

Almighty God then confirmed His promise to Abraham. He said to Jacob, "I am the Mighty God. Have children and increase your numbers. A nation and a community of nations will come from you. Kings will come from your body. I am giving you the land I gave to Abraham and Isaac. I will also give it to your children after you" (35:11-12).

When God stopped talking to Jacob, he gathered stones and built a pillar. He poured a drink offering on it and an offering of oil to God. There, he offered himself as a servant of El-Shaddai, the God who helps us when we need Him.



### **Talk about this:**

1. Why did Jacob leave Shechem (35:1)?
2. What did God ask Jacob to tell his sons and their mothers and their wives (35:2)? Why did he also tell this to the servants?



**Think about this:** When God speaks to us in a special way, we should offer ourselves afresh to Him (Romans 12:1-2).



### **The Names of God**

The God of the Christian faith is One God in three forms or persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Christians call this the Trinity.

The Patriarchs knew God the Father by the letters of His Name, YHWH. The Jews call God 'Adonai' when they read these letters. This name for God is usually written today as 'Yahweh'. Yahweh is the God of the Hebrews (Israelites) and the God of the Gentile Christians. He is the first person of the Trinity

Yahweh sent His Son to Earth as a human being to die upon the cross as a substitute for our sins. God's Hebrew name for our Saviour is Yeshua, which means Salvation. He is known today by Gentile believers as Jesus. He is the second person of the Trinity. The third person of the Trinity is God the Holy Spirit who is known in Hebrew as 'Ruach HaKodesh'.

The Old Testament part of the Bible gives other names for God the Father:

- Yahweh Elohim: God of power, the Creator God.
- Yahweh Jireh: God who provides.
- Yahweh Rophe: God who heals.
- Yahweh Shalom: God of peace.
- Yahweh Nissi: God my banner (protector).
- Yahweh Sabbaoth: God of hosts.
- Yahweh Roi: God, my shepherd.
- Yahweh Tsedkenu: God our righteousness.
- El Shaddai: The All Sufficient God.
- El Elohe Israel: God, The God of Israel.
- Ehyeh asher Ehyeh: I AM that I AM or I WILL BE what I WILL BE.

## **JACOB CONTINUES HIS JOURNEY AND RACHEL DIES**

Jacob's large family lived in many different places and moved around to find food for their flocks. They were near Bethlehem when Rachel gave birth to her final son. It was a difficult birth. The midwife tried to help and comfort the mother. Rachel was alive until her son was born. She whispered Ben-Oni (son of my sorrow) for the baby's name, then she died. But his father Jacob called the boy Benjamin (son of my right hand). Jacob buried Rachel, his true love, in a tomb beside the road to Ephrath or Bethlehem (35:16-19).

Benjamin grew up to be a fine man. He was very close to his older brother Joseph from the same mother Rachel.



## **Faith and love under God's covenant blessings**

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and later Joseph, each had Noah's faith in the living God. They all shared in His same covenant blessings. Each showed a different kind of faith and a different amount of faith. If we take the four men in the order in which they were born, they reveal a personal growth in faith:

1. Abraham's faith was a seeking and finding faith. He looked for God, a land, and an heir (12:1; 15:3).
2. Isaac's faith was an enduring faith. He endured the test at Mount Moriah and his two sons who argued.
3. Jacob's faith was a serving and fruit-bearing faith. Jacob at first wanted to do much in his own strength but God needed to teach him a lesson. After many years of service, God blessed Jacob with a large family and many possessions.
4. Joseph's future faith would be a suffering but triumphant faith. He never lost his trust in God's promises for his future calling. His life would display miracles of safe keeping, leadership qualities and wisdom. This included a spiritual gift of interpretation of dreams.

All four men, taken together, fought family battles with different problems. But they each displayed the principle of 'growing in faith'.

We, too, can experience growth in faith today through a personal decision to trust in God and His Son for our salvation, provision and eternal life. Between the beginning and the end of our faith journey lies a life of serving and enduring, often with suffering. But to succeed in life with God, we need to succeed in life with our family and relatives. Love for them and God is the answer!

The records of these four men of faith are a very important part of Israel's early history. The records also reveal God's purposes for all nations through Israel's Messiah born many years later in Bethlehem. After Joseph, first Moses then Joshua established God's covenant with His people through the Old Testament laws (Torah) that Jesus came to fulfil many years later.

## **JACOB RETURNS TO ISAAC**

Jacob continued his journey again, going south. While he lived in the Negev, Reuben, his oldest son, 'slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah, and all Israel heard of it (35:22). Reuben's sin cost him God's blessing (1 Chronicles 5:1).

Then Jacob came at last to his father's home in Mamre, near Hebron. Many years had passed since Jacob left Laban, his uncle, in Haran and much had happened to his family. There is a list here to tell us that all Jacob's sons arrived safely in Hebron and they met Isaac. Jacob always thought of Joseph as his firstborn son, because he was born to Rachel, the girl that he first loved

when he was young. Many years later, Joseph's sons inherited a double part, which was normally given to the firstborn son.

When Jacob's father Isaac died, he was 180 years old. Esau came from Seir to help Jacob to bury their father. Together, they cut out a new tomb in the rocky cave of Machpelah and laid Isaac's body there (49:29-31). Esau did not stay with Jacob.

The main record of Jacob's life ends here. He lived quietly for many more years. His sons took care of him in his old age and he blessed them before he died (49:1-28).

## JACOB'S FAMILY LINE

The Bible gives special mention to Judah, Jacob's fourth son by Leah as well as Joseph. Judah was a young lion. The promised Messiah of God, the Lion of Judah, would come through his family line (49:9-10). We will study this in our next commentary.

The families of the other 11 children of Israel all had a part to play in the history of the Jews and the nation of Israel and salvation through their Messiah.



### **Talk about this:**

1. Where did Jacob bury Rachel (35:19)?
2. What happened when she died (35:18)?
3. Who were the Edomites?
4. Where were Jacob and most of the other Patriarchs buried (49:29-30)?



### **Bible reading: Genesis Chapter 36**



**Learn about this:** *The family line of Esau and the nation of Edom (verses 1-43).*

## ESAU'S FAMILY LINE

Esau helped Jacob bury their father. Then Esau and his family went back to where they had settled, in the hill country of Seir, later called Edom.

A short history of Esau is added to the record. This history probably came from Esau's family records. The account in the first eight verses continues in later verses.

First, we have the names of Jacob's sons, then the names of Esau's sons and his wives, then the names of their families (36:15). There is a difference in names because some records are Jacob's and some Esau's.

The families of Esau were called Edomites and they appointed kings over their cities. They moved away and lived in the mountain caves now part of Jordan. They hated Israel. The families of Jacob were called Hebrews or Israelites. Israel's tribes had no king until the days of the prophet Samuel.



## **ABRAHAM'S FAMILY LINE**

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were Israel's first leaders before the Exodus. We call them the Patriarchs. God had a special purpose for these men. He showed the people how to live by faith in Him, through what he taught these men.

Through His covenant promises to the Patriarchs and through their faith in Him, God explained the relationship between God and man. He also established His purpose of eternal salvation for future generations. In this way the blessings of God's covenant passed from generation to generation through men and women who kept faith in Yahweh, the one true God, looking forward to Israel's Messiah.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite family favourites and rivalry, God's plan for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob prevailed. It is far better to have faith in God's way rather than getting our own way with family members. God chose Noah, Shem and Abraham. He then created the miracle birth of Isaac and chose Jacob, the younger of his twins. God chose them before they chose God. God's plan also prevailed to the next generation which included Joseph and Judah.

Joseph gained the title of saviour in God's plan for His special people Israel when they were in Egypt. This was 500 years before He gave His chosen people the Ten Commandments as a guide for Israel to live holy lives. It was another 1500 years before He sent Israel's Messiah, Jesus the Christ, as His miracle baby born in the womb of Mary. She was a descendant of Judah. When God is building something great, He takes time to lay a strong foundation. He does not call special people with knowledge of His truth. He gives His knowledge to people He chooses to make them special. He does this in love for them and for those who will be blessed in the future by those who live by faith.

We also learn that the other children of Abraham would become great nations but would also be the enemies of Israel and all who trust in Israel's Messiah.

In later Bible commentaries, we will read of more great men of faith, such as Moses and Joshua. They, too, spoke of a time in the future when God's Son would be born to the family line of Judah and King David. This would then bring God's salvation to the whole world through faith in Israel's Messiah. It includes Gentiles, so that all who believe in Jesus can be saved and live holy lives "as a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6).

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