



# 8 Bible Studies in Genesis 23 - 32

For individuals, small groups, and 1:1



## Leaders' Notes

Welcome to the fourth instalment of our Genesis teaching series at TMB.

We continue the story of God bringing his purposes to fulfilment, particularly through the family of the man he chose, Abraham.

In this series we move through the next two generations of the family, notably Isaac (who only gets very brief treatment) and Jacob. You will see time and time again, God faithfully working to achieve his ends for good, through and despite, faithless and flawed people!

These are the very early days of the plans of God that are ultimately fulfilled in Christ, and yet we can see already, hints of the salvation that he will win for his people.

## Further Reading

**Notes from the Reformation Study Bible.** Comments on particular verses explaining context, culture and more.  
<http://mytmb.me/rsgenesis>

## Notes for Study 1 - Genesis 23 - 24

Study guides for the previous instalments of this teaching series are available on the TMB website. You may like to download a copy and use a little of that material to help your group think about questions 3 and 4 in this study.

A proper burial for the dead is important in many cultures, but in addition to finding somewhere to lay his wife to rest, Abraham was determined to rightfully own a piece of the land that God had promised to his family.

The “senior servant” (24:1) has been called “one of the most attractive minor characters of the Bible” because of his

wisdom, faith and service to his employer. If he is the Eliezer of Damascus mentioned in 15:2 - 3, his service to Isaac who superseded his claim to inheritance is all the more striking! This is the longest single incident in the whole of Genesis. The author gives it significant attention!

This section is not the divine plan for finding a spouse for Christian couples! Remember these characters are foundational characters for God's plans and purposes through Abraham and his descendants.

## Notes for Study 2 - Genesis 25

This section shows that Abraham became the father of many nations, just as God had promised.

Keturah was probably Abraham's wife during Sarah's lifetime, not a wife taken after her death as the flow of the narrative might suggest to us. Keturah is called a "concubine" in 1 Chronicles 1:32.

Notice the sending away of the sons of Abraham's concubines, to the "east" which is generally considered negative in Genesis.

God's pattern of giving children to women who are unable to conceive, and then using those children in significant ways is seen once again here. For question 6 you may also like to look at Genesis 18:11 - 12, Genesis 30:22 - 24, 1 Samuel 1:6 - 17, Luke 1:5 - 7.

## Notes for Study 3 - Genesis 26:1 - 33

In Genesis 12:10 - 20 and 20:1 - 18, Abraham commits this same shocking act, passing off his wife as his sister.

"Abimelech" may be a royal title, like "king" or "Pharaoh"

There are lots of other similarities between Abraham in chapters 20 – 21 and Isaac in chapter 26. The fact that they both get rich in Abimelech’s land (20:14 – 16), both make treaties with Abimelech and his commander, Phicol (21:22 – 24).

Genesis 26 is really the most attention Isaac gets in the whole book. Much more attention is given to his father and his sons. It’s interesting that it’s this episode on which the author chooses to focus.

## Notes for Study 4 - Genesis 26:34 - 27:45

In ancient near eastern cultures, the birthright and the patriarchal blessing were both very important. Jacob has already received the birthright (chapter 25), here he deceives his way to receiving the blessing.

Even though this episode is filled with familial dysfunction and deception, God in his sovereignty uses it to achieve his purposes. It doesn’t mean though that God approves of, or blesses, the sinful behavior.

Hebrews 12:16 – 17 tells us that in selling the birthright, Esau already gave up his right to the blessing.

Isaac’s “blessing” to Esau proved true; Israel, Jacob’s descendants, would generally dominate Edom, the descendants of Esau.

## Notes for Study 5 - Genesis 27:46 - 28:22

God graciously appears to Jacob and gives him promises and assurances, even though Jacob is on the run due to his own deception!

Jacob is approaching Haran, the place where God first appeared to Abram. See Genesis 11:31 – 12:4

This is a significant appearance from “the LORD” (v 13) in the presence of his angels. This alerts us to the fact that this is a major event in salvation history.

Note the new element in the promise “I will bring you back to this land” (v 15).

## Notes for Study 6 - Genesis 29:1 - 30:43

There are some similarities between this episode and the account in chapter 24 of Isaac finding a wife. Notice, though, the almost complete lack of references to God, in contrast to the many references to God, worship, and prayer, in the earlier episode.

Jacob who cheated his father, is cheated by his soon-to-be father-in-law.

Observe the bitter irony; Laban’s deception is based on the order of birth (v 26), the very issue in which Jacob deceived his father!

The tensions between Rachel and Leah become more significant later in the life of Jacob’s family.

We see God at work especially in 29:31, 30:2, 30:6, 30:17, 30:20, 30:22, 20:24.

## Notes for Study 7 - Genesis 31:1 – 55

The theft of Laban’s household gods (v 19, 31 – 35) is a way of demonstrating that Laban’s gods are no help to him, in

contrast to the great help that Jacob's God has been to him. Rachel may have stolen them to demonstrate her claim to an inheritance from her father.

In Genesis 20:3 – 7, God appears to Abimelech with a similar warning to that given to Laban in verse 24.

In later Israel, those guarding flocks for others did not have to pay for animals killed by wild animals. Jacob had served Laban beyond the normal expectation.

Note the irony in verse 50 where Laban forbids Jacob to take extra wives. It was Laban who was the cause of Jacob's bigamy in the first place!

## Notes for Study 8 - Genesis 32:1 - 32

Jacob's fear of Esau would seem to be well-founded. The last words from Esau in Genesis (27:41) were "I will kill my brother Jacob."

Notice that even Jacob's dividing of his company into two groups is seen positively in his prayer.

The mysterious incident in which Jacob wrestles with God reminds us that God permits, and even brings about, difficult situations, but he also brings his people through them.

Progressively it becomes clear to Jacob that he is wrestling with God. This physical manifestation of God is most likely the pre-incarnate Son. Thus God still speaks truthfully to Moses (Exodus 33:20) when he says "you cannot see my face."

**1.** What is the best story of the meeting of a future husband and wife that you've ever heard?

**2.** What's the strangest thing you've ever seen take place at a wedding or a funeral?

**3.** What events or people can you recall from the story of Genesis so far?

**4.** What are the promises that God has made to Abraham and his family previously in Genesis?  
*See Genesis 12:1 - 3 & 15:1 - 6.*

**Read Genesis 23:1 - 20**

**5.** How does Abraham demonstrate his faith in the promises of God in this episode?

## **Read Genesis 24:1 - 21**

**6.** Why does Abraham consider it acceptable to bury his wife in Canaan, but not acceptable for his son to find a wife there?

**7.** How does Abraham demonstrate his faith in the promises of God in this story of finding a wife for Isaac?

**8.** What does this episode suggest is important to Abraham?

## **Skim read Genesis 24:22 - 67**

**9.** Why do you think the author repeats so much of the story?

**10.** What is significant about the blessing that Rebekah's family give her before her departure (24:59 - 60)?

**11.** What do you notice about the prayers of Abraham's servant in this section? (See v 12 - 15, 26 - 27, 52)

**12.** Do you think the servant's particular approach of prayer and request is a model for us to follow today? Why or why not?

**13.** The church Reformer John Calvin observed in his commentary on Genesis, "the sepulchre cried aloud, that death formed no obstacle to their entering on the possession of the land."

How does the fulfilment of God's promise about the land (although partial) give us confidence in the face of death?

**14.** How do you see God's promises to Abraham standing at the close of this section?

**1.** Have you ever received an inheritance?  
How did you feel when you received it??

**2.** What food would you give almost anything to eat?

**3.** If you have siblings, how would they describe you?

**Read Genesis 25:1 - 18**

**4.** Where do God's promises stand at the time of Abraham's death?

**5.** What do we see about Israel's relationship to the other nations of the ancient Near East?

## **Read Genesis 25:19 - 34**

**6.** Are you aware of any other women in the Bible who are described as unable to have children? Does their experience create any expectations for you as you read of Rebekah's children?

**7.** How is God's word to Rebekah in verse 23 fulfilled in the incident that follows?

**8.** Which of the two brothers do you tend to have a great affinity and sympathy for?

## **Read Romans 9:10 - 16**

**9.** What does the Apostle Paul add to our understanding of this incident?

**10.** How is Paul's argument in Romans 9 an encouragement to us?

**11.** What would be fair and right for us to receive from God's hand?

**12.** How do we see God's sovereign hand at work in our lives?

**13.** If God sovereignly orders events, what is the point of planning, or seeking to make wise choices?

**14.** Why is the indictment that Esau "despised his birthright" (v 26) so significant?  
What is it that Esau has despised?

**15.** What does the account of Jacob and Esau demonstrate about how God fulfils his plans and purposes?

**16.** Where do the promises of God stand at the end of this section?

## Genesis 26:1 - 33      #3 - Like Father, Like Son

**1.** What are you like at making, and keeping, promises?

**2.** Which of your parents are you most like?  
What is it about their character or temperament that you reflect?

**3.** Can you recall telling any really big lies as a child? Did you ever get found out?

### **Read Genesis 26:1 - 33**

**4.** How do God's promises to Isaac compare to the promises made to Abraham in 12:1 - 3?

**5.** Why do you think is the significance of the promises here?

**6.** What does the incident with Abimelech reveal about Isaac's character and his trust in God?

**7.** Why do you think the author includes this none too flattering incident in his historical account?

**8.** There are many parallels between this chapter and Abraham's experience in chapters 20 and 21. Why do you think the author goes to such lengths to portray the similarities between Abraham and Isaac?

**9.** What do you think is the meaning of the promise in verses 23 & 24?

**10.** How do we see God's promises being fulfilled through Isaac's dealings with the Philistines?

**11.** Do you think Isaac's material prosperity is a pattern to be expected for Christian people?  
Why or why not?

**12.** Where do the promises made to Abraham, and now repeated to Isaac, stand at the close of this section?

**13.** When is it hardest for you to trust God's promises?

**14.** How can you guard against the temptation to take things into your own hands instead of trusting God?

## Genesis 26:34 - 27:45     #4 - Curse & Deception

**1.** Where would you rate yourself on a gullibility scale of 1 to 10?

**2.** What are the characteristics that make it hard for you to trust someone.

### **Read Genesis 26:34 - 27:45**

**3.** Think back to the lengths Abraham went to in order to find a wife for Isaac who didn't come from the nations in Canaan. What expectation do you have in the light of Esau's choice of brides at the very beginning of this section?

**4.** How does this introduction prepare us for what follows in terms of God's promises to build a nation?

**5.** Who in the family do you feel bears most of the blame for this incident?

**6.** Make a list of all the contributing factors to this deception that you can observe.

**7.** What are the different motivations that each person demonstrates?

**8.** What is Jacob trying to gain through his deception?

**9.** What repetition of the promises to Abraham and Isaac do we see here?

**10.** What do we learn about the brothers' trust in God's promises?

**11.** How do we see God's purposes being achieved even in the midst of sin and deception?

**12.** Can you think of other instances in the Bible where God sovereignly over-rules to bring his plans to fulfilment through the sinful acts of humanity?

**13.** If God's promises and blessing did depend purely on family lineage and position, what would that mean for us today?

**14.** What do we learn about God's choice of us in this episode?

**15.** What does this episode teach us about God's plans for salvation?

## Genesis 27:46 - 28:22 #5 - Stairway to Heaven

**1.** Have you ever been scammed?  
How did you react?  
How did you want to respond?

**2.** Have you ever tried to make a deal with God, or offered some quid pro quo?

### **Read Genesis 27:46 - 28:22**

**3.** What hint of hope for Abraham's descendants is given in the opening verses of this section?

**4.** What restatement of the earlier promises do we hear?

**5.** What is new or emphasised afresh in God's assurances to Jacob?

**6.** Why do you think that God continually re-states the promises first made back in chapter 12?

**7.** Why did God choose to reveal himself to Jacob the cheater, deceiver, etc!

**8.** Do you notice anything significant about the location that should alert us to a moving forward in the purposes of God?

**9.** What do you notice about Jacob's response to the dream in verses 16 - 17?  
Does anything surprise you?

**10.** Do you feel that Jacob is making a deal with God in verses 20 - 22, or simply responding to God's revelation?

**11.** In John 1:50 – 51, Jesus alludes to this episode and declares that heaven is now open and God’s presence made accessible for all.

How is our access to God through Jesus better than the access that Jacob experienced here?

**12.** Where do the promises of God stand at the close of this episode?

**13.** A Christian friend says to you that we should expect God to speak to us in dreams like this today. How do you respond?

## Genesis 29:1 - 30:43 #6 - The Deceiver Deceived

**1.** Are you much of a practical joker?  
What is the best practical joke you have ever performed, suffered, or observed?

**2.** Is your family a large family or a small one?  
What do you think is the best part of your family size?

### **Read Genesis 29:1 - 30:43**

**3.** Flick back to Genesis 24. What similarities do you notice between the two accounts?  
What are the differences?

**4.** What tensions do you see in Jacob's family?

**5.** How do we see God's providence and sovereignty even in the midst of human sin and foolishness?

- 6.** In what other ways do we see God at work in this episode?
- 7.** Knowing that Jacob's sons become the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel, what are you on the lookout for in the following years?
- 8.** It is through Judah that God brings his plans and purposes to their fulfilment (see Matthew 1:2, for example). Judah is born to Leah who "was not loved" (29:31). What are your reflections on this?
- 9.** Jacob's goat-breeding techniques are probably reflective of ancient magical practices. Why do you think God chooses to work through such practices?
- 10.** What do you think of the following statement? "We take credit for blessings that are undeserved, and shift the blame for bad outcomes that are deserved."

**11.** What part would you say human effort has played in moving God's plans forward in this section?

**12.** How do we find the balance between working towards God's stated purposes ourselves, and allowing him to be at work?

**13.** Which parts of this balance did Jacob and his family get right?  
Which did they get wrong?

**14.** What encouragement is there for us when we take matters into our own hands instead of trusting God to be at work?

**15.** How would you assess the promises of God made to Abraham in chapter 12 by the end of chapter 30?

- 1.** Did you ever run away from home when you were a child? Do you remember what caused you to run?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2.** When preparing for a holiday or trip, are you all packed days in advance, or is everything left until the last minute?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3.** Do you find it easier to relax and trust God's promises, or take the bull by the horns and drive events yourself?

**Read Genesis 31:1 - 55**

- 4.** How does Jacob prepare to return to his family?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5.** How does the author communicate to us that returning to Canaan is the God-honouring choice here?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 6.** What evidence do we see of God's promises to Jacob being fulfilled?

**7.** Compare Jacob's flight from Laban with his journey to Laban 20 years earlier. What do you notice is different?

**8.** Where do we see evidence of God at work in this chapter?

**9.** What indications do you see that Laban was capable of inflicting harm on Jacob?

**10.** What stands out in Laban's demands of Jacob in verses 48 – 53?

**11.** In this episode, what do we learn about:

- God

- Laban

- Jacob

**12.** How might the subsequent chapters of Genesis have been different if God had not brought about this reconciliation between Jacob and Laban?

**13.** What hope does this give you for strained relationships Jacob has with others?

**14.** Does the reconciliation brought about by God here offer hope for strained and broken relationships today?

**15.** If God is so committed to reconciliation here, what does that lead you to expect from the ministry of Jesus centuries later?

**16.** How do you feel the promises of God are holding up by the end of this episode?

- 1.** Have you ever thought about meeting God face to face? What have you imagined that might be like?!
  
- 2.** When something goes unexpectedly well for you, do you tend to imagine that more good things are coming your way, or that something bad is about to happen?
  
- 3.** What makes it hard to forgive someone?

**Read Genesis 32:1 - 21**

- 4.** What do you think is signified by the “angels of God” meeting Jacob as he returns home?
  
- 5.** Do you see evidence of Jacob’s trust in God in this section?
  
- 6.** Is there evidence that Jacob has changed at all during his 20 years with Laban?

**7.** What do you observe in the preparations that Jacob makes prior to meeting Esau?

**8.** How do we see Jacob demonstrating his dependence on God?

**Read Genesis 32:22 - 32**

**9.** What do you think God is trying to teach Jacob by wrestling with him, but not defeating him?

**10.** Why is it significant that God blessed Jacob (v 29)?

**11.** How does this incident prepare Jacob for the imminent reunion with his brother, Esau?

**12.** When we have wronged someone, how can we demonstrate contrition and a desire for forgiveness?

**13.** What lessons for prayer can we take away from Jacob's prayer in verses 9 - 12?

**14.** Think back to the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12. What do you think about their fulfilment at this point?

**15.** What is the overall message you have taken away from your study of Genesis in these eight sessions?

**16.** What do you expect to see in the remaining chapters of the book?

**17.** What problems among God's people are going to require a more lasting solution?





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