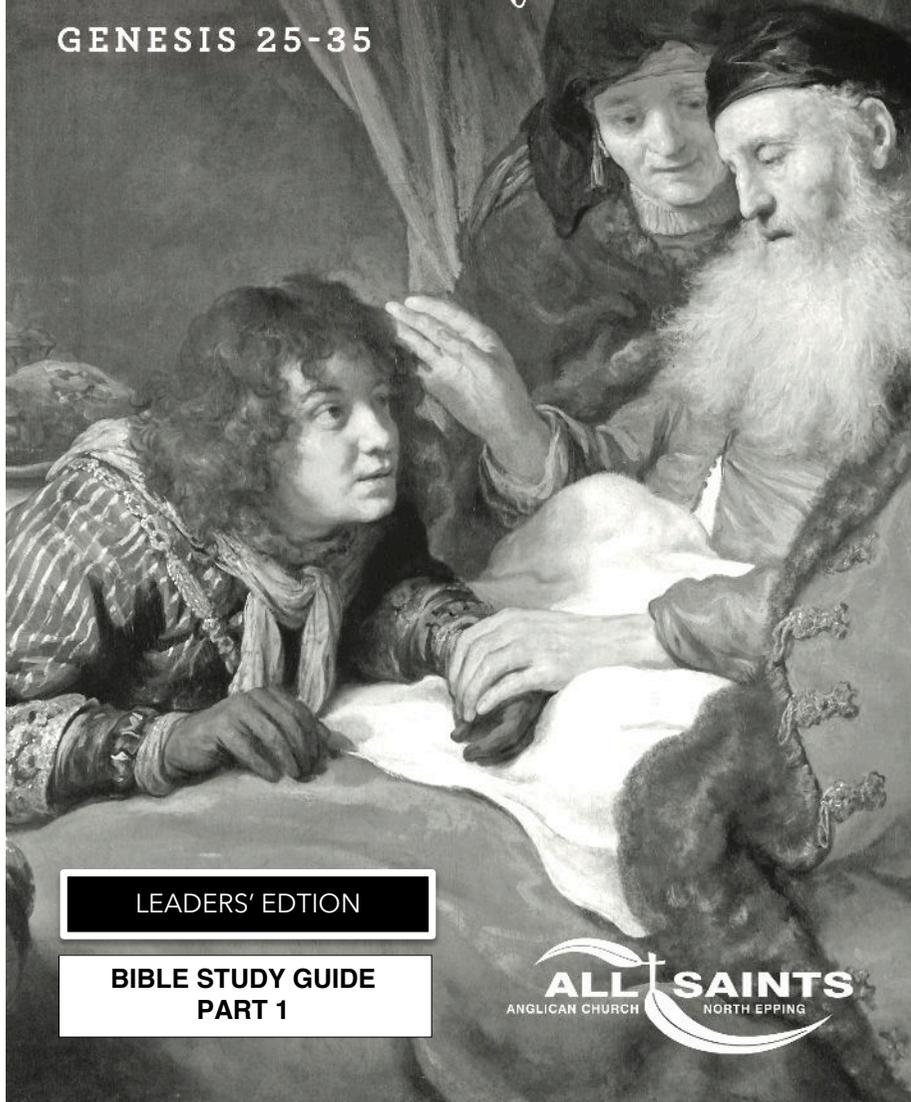


The family of Isaac and the Promise of God

GENESIS 25-35



LEADERS' EDITION

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
PART 1

ALL SAINTS
ANGELICAN CHURCH NORTH EPPING

Study 1: Genesis 25:19-34

At several points in the book of Genesis, a new section begins with the phrase "This is the account of the family line of X" (5:1, 6:9, 8:1, 10:1, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, 37:1). In Genesis 25:19-35:29 we have the account of the family line of Isaac, son of Abraham. Although this section is named after Isaac, and concludes with Isaac's death, most of the action concerns his sons, especially Jacob. The centre of the narrative is chapter 30, and the birth of Jacob's twelve sons (Isaac's grandsons), who father the 12 tribes of Israel.

1. If you were here when we studied Genesis 12-25 in 2018, what facts can you remember about Abraham's son Isaac? (Flip through Genesis 12-25 if you need a reminder)

Read Genesis 25:19-23

2. What obstacle was there to Isaac's family line progressing? How does this echo the previous generation? How is the obstacle overcome?
3. In the age before ultrasounds, what surprising things does the Lord reveal to Rebekah?
4. Does the end of verse 23 seem to you like a prediction or a decree? Is God *describing* what will happen or *deciding* what will happen?

“Primogeniture” was a well-established norm in ancient cultures - the firstborn son would have authority in the family, and would receive the greatest share of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). This provided stability for the transfer between generations and ensured family land-holdings and flocks didn’t get divided up into useless scraps. Obviously, it destined some to advantage and others to disadvantage. But the announcement in verse 23 involves the up-ending of this norm. In this case, “the last will be first and the first will be last” (Matt 20:16). Genesis 25:23 sets the agenda for the chapters to follow.

Read Genesis 25:24-28

- Why is Jacob named Jacob? (See the NIV footnote)
- The four members in this family will be central characters in the chapters that follow. Label the following diagram with some characteristics of each person, and the relationships between them:



Isaac



Rebekah



Esau



Jacob

Read Genesis 25:29-34

- Based on this episode, what words would you use to describe Esau as a character?
- Based on this episode, what words would you use to describe Jacob as a character?
- How is verse 23 coming to fruition?

In the New Testament, Paul refers to Jacob and Esau in chapter 9 of his letter to the Christians in Rome. In this section he’s discussing the issue of Israelites (descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) who have not put their faith in Jesus for salvation.

Read Romans 9:6-16

“Jacob I have hated” (from Malachi 1:3) is a Hebrew idiom for “not loved as much” (see Luke 14:26)

- Paul sees Genesis 25:23 not as a prediction but a decree - that God actively chose Jacob in advance. Does that mean Jacob and Esau’s own choices were meaningless?
- Paul believes that God sovereignly chooses who will inherit the blessing. If this were not the case, what would be the alternative (see v12)? Would the alternative be good for us?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 2: Genesis 26:1-33

Having introduced Jacob and Esau in chapter 25, here we step back to look further at their father Isaac. This is the only chapter where Isaac is the principal character and we see him following in his father Abraham's footsteps.

Read Genesis 26:1-13

1. Fill in the first column of the table below to summarise this story

	Verses 1-13	Verses 14-31
What problem does Isaac face?		
What does God promise?		
How does Isaac respond?		
How does it turn out?		

2. Draw a picture representing the promises God makes in verses 3-4 (Use the back of this booklet or separate paper)
3. Why has this promise been passed on from Abraham to Isaac?
4. Does Isaac believe the Lord will keep these promises? Give evidence for your answer.

5. Can you identify with Isaac's experience here? What are some examples of how fear can make us act faithlessly today?

6. What does this section show about God's character?

Read Genesis 26:14-31

7. Fill in the second column of the table above to summarise this story

8. How has Isaac developed during this chapter?

9. God is in heaven (Psalm 115:3). What does it mean for him to say to Isaac "I am with you"? For some clues you can look up Genesis 21:22, 28:15, Gen 31:3, 31:38, 39:3, 39:23,

10. How does the command "Do not be afraid, for I am with you" (v24) apply to us today? In what sense is God with us, in a way that can drive us from fear to faith? How can we grow in our appreciation of this?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 3: Genesis 26:34-28:9

In this chapter we resume the story of Jacob and Esau and their relationship. In chapter 25 Esau had sold his birthright (first-born privileges) to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Although this was a solid personal agreement between the brothers, it probably likely had no broader legal force. Here the sibling rivalry resumes.

1. Refer back to the diagram you annotated in study 1 question 6. What are the dynamics within this family?

Read Genesis 26:34 - 27:13

2. Why would Rebekah be plotting this deception? Did she have any justification for doing so?

3. How does Jacob feel about the proposed deception?

Read Genesis 27:14-29

4. What impression do you get of the four characters in this story? Does your estimation of them increase or decrease?

Read Genesis 27:30-40

5. What does Esau say about Jacob's name?

6. Why would the narrator choose to include this statement from Esau?
7. Words are taken very seriously in this story. Each brother desperately wants to receive the words of blessing, which Isaac sees as irrevocable. How does this compare with the way words are seen today?

Read Genesis 27:41 - 28:5

8. What strategy does Rebekah use to arrange Jacob's escape?
9. Isaac again blesses Jacob before he leaves, and he refers to the promise God made to his father Abraham (Gen 12:1-3,7). Why would he specifically mention the promise about inheriting the land?
10. As we saw earlier, Rebekah's actions may have been motivated by hearing God declare "the elder shall serve the younger" before her sons were born. What has been the result of her seeking to achieve this outcome by her own means?
11. Are there times when you are tempted to pursue God's agenda via unethical means? What warnings and assurances does this story have for us?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 4: Genesis 28:10-22

1. Briefly summarise how the last chapter ended up. What thoughts and feelings do you think Jacob was experiencing as he left Beersheba?

Read Genesis 28:10-15

The stone "under his head" may actually have been "at his head" - that is, he was lying next to a large stone for shelter. Robert Alter writes "There is scant evidence elsewhere of a general (and uncomfortable) ancient Near Eastern practice of using stones as pillows"!

2. Draw a picture of what Jacob saw in his dream.
3. The Lord appears and makes a promise to Jacob. Compare this promise to Genesis 12:1-3 and 13:14-17. What is re-iterated, and what is new?
4. Why would God make extra promises to Jacob at this point?
5. Considering Jacob's context and the promises God makes here, why do you think God gave Jacob the vision of the heavenly staircase, rather than a burning bush or a heavenly throne room for example?

Notes & Prayer Points

6. If it was Jacob's destiny all along to inherit the promise (hinted in 25:23) why would God choose this moment to announce the promise to him?
7. What does this show us about how God treats the heirs of his promise when they are displaced, threatened, vulnerable? How does that make you feel?

Read Genesis 28:16-22

8. The Lord presented Jacob with a vision (verse 12) and words of promise (verses 13-15). What forms does Jacob's response take?

Read John 1:47-51

9. Jacob had named the place of his vision "Beth-el", "house of God" because it was "the gate of heaven" (v17). According to Jesus, where is the meeting point of heaven and earth now?
10. The New Testament describes Christian believers as the inheritors of the promise to Abraham. How does Jesus fulfil for us the promises God made to Jacob at Bethel?

Study 5: Genesis 29:1 – 30:24

The promise has been handed on from Isaac to Jacob. But Jacob won't live forever – a marriage and children is needed! Whilst Jacob is away in Paddan Aram these things come about – but not without complications.

Read Genesis 29:1-14a

The size of the stone covering the well is emphasised, and it seems that the shepherds of the three flocks all had to work together to move it. But when Rachel approaches, Jacob rolls it away single-handedly and draws water for her flock.

1. What do you think motivates Jacob's feat of strength?

Read Genesis 29:14b-30

It's hard to know exactly what Leah's "weak eyes" mean. It might mean she had odd-looking eyes or a vision impairment, or it might be that her sweet eyes were her only good point, compared to her beautiful sister.

2. Look closely at verses 25-26. Can you spot the irony here, given Jacob's story so far?
3. What do we learn here about the experience of the heirs of God's promise as they go through life? Should it affect our expectations?

Read Genesis 29:31 – 30:24

4. **As you read**, draw a family tree showing Jacob's sons and their mothers (use the back of this booklet or separate paper)

These names are important through the rest of the Old Testament, because they become the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (along with Benjamin, born later in Gen 35). Joseph, because of his favoured status, had two half-tribes named after his sons Manassah and Ephraim (see Genesis 48).

5. Mandrakes, a root vegetable, were used for medicinal purposes and thought to be an aphrodisiac and to promote fertility. (The Hebrew name of the plant sounds similar to the word for "lovemaking"). In this case, do the mandrakes work as intended?
6. How does Jacob's character come across in this section?
7. The narrator of Genesis rarely expresses a judgement about the rightness or wrongness of the events recorded, and this includes Jacob's second marriage. But based on the events that unfold, what message do we get here about polygamy?
8. The narrator could have skipped over this messy ordeal and simply listed the offspring who were born (like in 35:23-26). Why include this embarrassing account in Israel's scriptures? What effect would it have on the Israelites reading it? How would you feel if the six states and two territories of Australia had an origin story like this?

Notes & Prayer Points
