

# Learn to Read Genesis Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 10



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## **SESSION 10**

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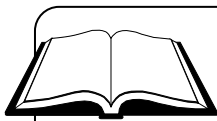




Read Genesis 24 v 6 to 8

Abraham had obviously thought about the problem and had decided that the best place to find a suitable wife for Isaac was from among his relatives who were still living in Haran. He could have gone to Haran himself, but he didn't, he decided to let God make the choice.

### **24 v 10 to 27 – The servant's prayer**



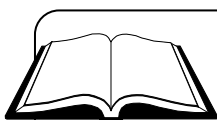
Read Genesis 24 v 10 to 14

The servant made preparations for the journey, taking ten camels together with men to look after them (verses 32 and 59). He also took suitable presents for the bride-to-be and her family.

He was no ordinary servant. Long years of serving Abraham had taught him that the God his master served was a God Who could be relied on to help when difficult choices had to be made. So the first thing he did when he arrived at Haran (after causing his camels to lie down near the well outside the city) was to ask God's blessing on what he was about to do.

What is striking about this servant is his obvious love for his master and his master's son. He wanted to choose a God-fearing wife for Isaac so he looked for someone with signs of a caring and hospitable nature – like that of his master.

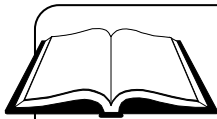
As the servant had men with him, it was unlikely that any young woman of the city would offer to give him a drink. It was even more unlikely that she would offer to quench the thirst of his ten thirsty camels! So we see that the servant chose a most unlikely sign so that he could be sure of God's guidance in choosing the right wife for his master's son. God showed him that He was with him by answering his prayer immediately.



Read Genesis 24 v 15 to 26

It could be said that the servant's prayer of faith was the means of its own fulfilment; it is possible that Rebekah saw him praying and realised he was a God-fearing man. If this is so it also gives us an indication of her spirituality. She was a very beautiful young woman, and she was a virgin.

The servant could only stand and watch Rebekah attending to the camels and wonder at the speed with which his prayer had been answered. It was then Rebekah's turn to be astonished when the man gave her jewellery, asking at the same time, "*Whose daughter are you?*" From her answer he realised that she was the grand-daughter of his master's brother, and this convinced him that God had blessed his mission, so he offered a prayer of thanksgiving.



Read Genesis 24 v 27



- The servant always referred to God as the LORD God (the God whose name is Yahweh)
- He had come to realise that the God Whom his master worshipped and served was indeed the true God as distinct from the gods of the surrounding lands
- He could see that Abraham's trust in God, expressed in verse 7 of this chapter, had been completely vindicated and he thanked God for it.

## 24 v 28 to 67 – The servant's mission completed



Read Genesis 24 v 28 to 67

*24 v 28 So the young woman ran and told her mother's household these things.*

All that we read about Rebekah in the Bible suggests she was intelligent and decisive, as well as beautiful. She realised immediately that God was arranging her future life, so she ran to tell her relatives what was happening.

*24 v 29 and 30 ... Laban ran out to the man by the well.*

*So it came to pass, when he saw the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, saying, "Thus the man spoke to me," that he went to the man. And there he stood by the camels at the well.*



Gold jewellery from the royal cemetery at Ur

Laban ran to meet the servant, but there is perhaps a hint in verse 30 that he was motivated, at least in part, by the display of wealth.

The same questionable motives in Laban caused Isaac's son Jacob much trouble later on.

The servant accompanied Laban to the house, where he and his camels were looked after, together with the men who had made the journey with him. Meanwhile a meal had been prepared, but the servant refused to eat until he had explained his mission (v 32 and 33).

He related every detail of his mission and came to the point:

*24 v 49 "Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me. And if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."*

The detail of the account convinced his hearers of God's control and blessing; and Bethuel, Rebekah's father, who until this point had been rather left out of the proceedings, gave immediate consent:

*24 v 50 and 51 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the LORD has spoken."*

When their assent had been given, the servant again worshipped the LORD.



On the following day the servant was anxious to be on his way back to Abraham with Isaac's bride. With characteristic decisiveness Rebekah agreed to go immediately, and left with their blessing ringing in her ears:

*“Our sister, may you become  
The mother of thousands of ten thousands;  
And may your descendants possess  
The gates of those who hate them.”*

## 25 v 1 to 18 – Abraham's second wife and family



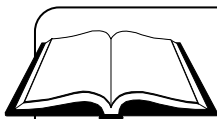
Read Genesis 25 v 1 to 18

Abraham married a second wife, Keturah. Verses 1 to 7 record the children that Abraham had by her.

*25 v 5 and 6 And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac.  
But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.*

Abraham obeyed God in making Isaac his heir. But he did not ignore his other sons; he made some provision for them and sent them away to the east.

## 25 v 19 to 34 – Esau and Jacob



Read Genesis 25 v 19 to 27

This section summarises the birth and early lives of Esau and Jacob, the sons of Isaac and Rebekah. The story is straightforward, but there are many important factors which careful reading will bring out.

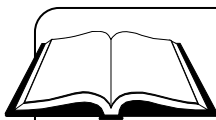
*25 v 20 Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian.*

The description of Bethuel and Laban as “Syrians” not only indicated their place of residence but also suggests they had absorbed the culture of that region. This is in contrast to Abraham, who maintained his separateness from his neighbours and therefore retained God’s values.

Here is another example of the tension between God’s ways and the ways of people in general, which we saw in the summary at the end of Session 7. As we continue through the story of the life of Isaac and Jacob we shall see several examples of the conflict between “Syrian” ways and God’s ways. However, we must not condemn Rebekah or anyone else for their “Syrian” ways, because all of us have values and behaviour that are determined by the culture which surrounds us. The record is there so that we can be aware of the effects that society around us can have on our outlook.

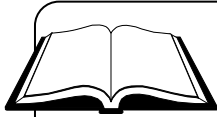
*25 v 21 Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.*

- Isaac had the same problem as Abraham in that initially his wife could not have children
- Like Abraham, he consulted God about the problem
- God answered both requests



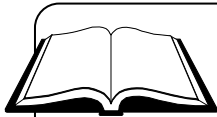
Read Genesis 25 v 21 to 23

- Like Isaac, Rebekah took her problem to God in prayer
- God told her that she would be the mother of twin sons from whom two nations would descend
- One of these nations would be stronger than the other
- The older would serve the younger



Read Genesis 25 v 24 to 28

- Jacob's name means "one who takes the heel" or "supplants" a phrase suggesting one who "gets the better by cunning"
- Esau became a skilful hunter – loving the excitement of the chase and the outdoor life
- Jacob was very different – a thoughtful quiet man, happy to stay at home
- Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the game he brought in.
- Rebekah, however, loved Jacob
- Rebekah was aware that God had determined that her younger son would predominate



Read Genesis 25 v 29 to 34

This section again brings out the contrast in character between Esau and Jacob.

- Jacob was more concerned about the birthright than food
- Esau's hunger was his sole concern, and his birthright did not mean much to him, so he sold it to Jacob for a meal.

Even though it was prophesied before his birth that the older would serve the younger, the decision to sell the birthright was still Esau's.

## **26 v 1 to 35 – Isaac and Abimelech**



Read Genesis 26 v 1 and 2

With the onset of the famine Isaac moved to the Philistine city of Gerar. God's command not to go down into Egypt would seem to indicate that Isaac had previously intended to do so, in the hope that Egypt was unaffected by the famine.

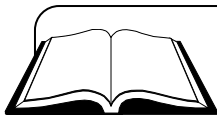


Read Genesis 26 v 3 to 6

Isaac was asked to put his trust in God just as Abraham had done. If he obeyed God's command:

- God would be with him
- God would bless him
- He and his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan
- He would receive the same promises as Abraham

Isaac obeyed and stayed at Gerar, which is in the southwest of Canaan.



Read Genesis 26 v 7 to 11

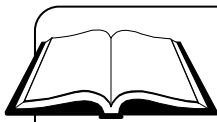
*26 v 7 And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, “She is my sister”; for he was afraid to say, “She is my wife” because he thought, “lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold.”*

Isaac showed the same lack of faith that Abraham twice did in similar circumstances (Genesis 12 v 11 to 13 and 20 v 2). These incidents reveal that the circumstances of Abraham's and Isaac's lives must have been dangerous, since they feared death because of their wives' beauty.

God, however, ensured that Rebekah did not come to any harm. God made sure that Abimelech was at the right window at the right time.

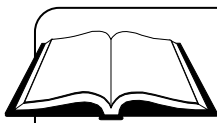


- God cares for those who try to put their trust in Him despite their failures



Read Genesis 26 v 12 to 23

- Isaac was blessed as God promised in verse 3
- The meekness of Isaac is evident:
  - He moved at Abimelech's demand (v 16 and 17)
  - His servants dug two new wells and left them for others to use rather than quarrel over them



Read Genesis 26 v 24 to 35

The promises were renewed to Isaac in verse 24 with the phrase “do not fear” added. This was possibly in anticipation of the arrival in verse 26 of Abimelech together with Phicol the commander of his army. Isaac may have feared for his and Rebekah's lives. But he had been reminded that God was “with him”. As it turned out, the visit was not hostile. Abimelech realised that God was with Isaac (v 28) so that any attempt at conflict would fail. So they made a covenant that neither party would harm the other. Having done so they parted amicably.

Verses 34 and 35 tell us that Esau's choice of wives from surrounding peoples grieved Isaac and Rebekah.

## **27 v 1 to 46 – Isaac blessed Jacob**

### **Introduction**

We are now to look at a low point in the lives of Isaac, Rebekah and Jacob. This chapter shows that they all failed to trust in God when put under pressure. We must remember, however, that these were great people of faith in God's purpose. These events show us that even the greatest people in God's plan had their weaknesses.

## 27 v 1 to 4 – Isaac’s request to Esau



Read Genesis 27 v 1 to 4

- Isaac was determined to give Esau the blessing
- He was either unaware of, or chose to ignore, the fact that Esau had already sold his birthright (Genesis 25 v 29 to 34)
- He disregarded Rebekah’s message from God that “the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25 v 23)

## 27 v 5 to 46 – The deception by Rebekah and Jacob



Read Genesis 27 v 5 to 29

*27 v 5 and 6 Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it. So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, “Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother ...”*

The text seems to imply that Rebekah should not have been listening. Note that Esau is referred to as his (Isaac’s) son and Jacob as her (Rebekah’s) son. A degree of family tension is indicated here. Maybe Rebekah should have discussed the matter with Isaac rather than resorting to subterfuge.

Rebekah was determined to make sure Jacob received the blessing due to Esau. She seemed to think that God would allow His purpose with Jacob to go wrong without a little underhand work on her part. This was possibly a sign of her “Syrian” thinking. She asked Jacob to prepare food from his flock for his father and deceive him into giving him the blessing.



Read Genesis 27 v 11 to 17

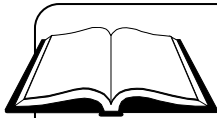
- Jacob was worried about receiving a curse from Isaac
- Rebekah, in her determination, overruled Jacob’s conscience
- She said, “Let your curse be on me”



## Read Genesis 27 v 18 to 29

- Isaac was surprised and suspicious at the speed at which food arrived
- Jacob then aroused his suspicion even more by making a comment about God which was probably uncharacteristic of Esau. Esau would have described the hunt in all its detail
- Isaac then asked Jacob to come near so that he could feel him. Isaac was still suspicious, saying, *“The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”*
- Isaac, still suspicious, again asked Jacob to confirm his identity (v 24)
- He then ate the food and gave Jacob the blessing

We do not know what was going through Isaac’s mind, but notice that he did not give the full blessing involving the promises to Abraham that we looked at in the last two sessions. He gave only material blessings relating just to his lifetime.



## Read Genesis 27 v 30 to 46

- God ensured that Esau did not return before Isaac had blessed Jacob
- Isaac “trembled exceedingly” when he discovered that he had been deceived. He accepted that his decision had been overruled
- Isaac upheld the blessing he had given to Jacob despite Esau’s protestations
- Isaac accepted the situation
- Esau could not see God’s hand at work and accept what had happened. He was not submissive and was not satisfied until he had been given some sort of blessing
- Instead he planned to kill Jacob
- Rebekah again used her persuasiveness – this time to get Jacob out of danger
- She persuaded Jacob to flee to her family in Haran, and planted a suggestion in Isaac’s mind that Jacob should not marry a wife from the surrounding tribes as Esau had done

## Summary



This section is full of lessons from the characters of the people we have looked at.

- Abraham:** showed great faith in allowing God to guide events leading to the choosing of a wife for Isaac
- The servant:** followed Abraham's example of faith when choosing a wife for Isaac  
showed great wisdom in thinking of an appropriate sign to guide his choice
- Rebekah:** was intelligent, decisive and persuasive  
was determined that the purpose of God would not fail  
thought that God's purpose needed a little deceitful help  
relied on her own devices instead of trusting in God
- Isaac:** was thoughtful, meek and obedient  
had lapses of faith, but God was still with him  
was peaceable and yielding in quarrels over wells  
was sometimes weak where Esau was concerned  
did not willingly submit to God's choice of Jacob rather than Esau  
did not yield to Esau's demand for the blessing when he realised that it was God's will that Jacob should have it

We can all learn from these strengths and weaknesses and take comfort from the lives of such people of faith. God blessed them despite their temporary lapses because they remained faithful to Him.

## Optional assignment 10

### The blessings given to Jacob by Isaac

Compare the blessing that Isaac gave to Jacob in Genesis 27 v 28 and 29 with the promises made to Abraham that we looked at in Sessions 8 and 9. Do you think Isaac was intending to give the full blessing to Jacob later?