

word?

- Do you ever feel like you're the only one who struggles with some of these things?
- How does the gift of God's Holy Spirit enable us to encounter God more even than Jacob?

Time for Prayer

Week 10 - Jacob returns to Bethel

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 35:1-15 (35:1-29)

- How do vv2-5 demonstrate the ways that Jacob's faith seems to have grown?
- How does commemorating play a part in this family's story? (e.g. v8)
- Does God's promise in vv11-12 remind you of any earlier ones?
- How do you think Jacob would sum up his life at this point in his story?

Time for Today

- Do you have key moments you look back on as reminders of God's promise?
- Do you really know that you're a part of that community of nations through Jesus?
- How would you sum up the story of this family?
- Does it encourage you to know that the same God is still making and keeping promises to us today?

Time for Prayer

Electronic copies of this, other studies and further resources at:

www.allsaintswick.org.uk/resources



Introduction

Last Autumn we spent time with Abraham and Sarah, journeying with them and the God who keeps his promises. This year we continue following the story recorded in Genesis with their son Isaac, his wife Rebekah and then their sons Esau and Jacob and families.

Initially that might sound very removed from life today - *how could the events for this family - thousands of years ago and thousands of miles away—have any bearing on us and the lives we lead?* I believe the answer is to trust in the power and relevance of God's word - he promises to speak to us through it. Plus, two things haven't changed - the character of God and the nature of the human heart. Along the way we will encounter many familiar issues, and most importantly of all - we will see that we can find our place in this story. God continues to work his purposes out through the people adopted into that family, through faith in Jesus.

My hope is that we will come away from this with a greater appreciation of how God's grace is able to transform and bring purpose to even the messiest of lives. If God can call and use Jacob, then he can certainly have a great purpose for you!

Background and Context

Following Abraham's death, God reveals to Rebekah (Isaac's wife) that she will give birth to two sons. Esau is born first and is extremely hairy. Jacob, who is smooth skinned, is born immediately after, grasping the heel of his brother. These two sons are complete opposites. Esau is a hunter and a brash man. Jacob stays at home, soft-spoken but quick-witted.

Their story is the continuation of the promise made to Abraham that he will be the father of nations and that through his offspring the whole world will be blessed. Through all the ups and the very deep downs of these generations, we are shown the faithfulness of God who can work all things for the good of those who love him.

Week 8 - Jacob leaves Laban

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 31:3-13; 22-29; 36-45 (31:1-55)

- What is Jacob's main complaint about how Laban has treated him?
- How do we see God's justice in Jacob's dream?
- Can you feel how the relationships have deteriorated.
- How's this happened?
- Was God at work in restoring these relationships? (see v55)

Time for Today

- Family relationships are tricky, is it helpful to see that same issue portrayed in the Bible?
- What sorts of attitudes or actions can cause damage in our relationships?
- How often do we really pray into our difficult friendship and family relations?
- Do you have a story or testimony of God's power to heal broken relationships?

Time for Prayer

Week 9 - Jacob wrestles with God

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 32:22-32 (32:1-33:20)

- What stands out to you from Jacob's wrestling with this mysterious (heavenly) man?
- Do you find this story surprising in any ways?
- What is the significance of names? And why not tell us the name of the 'man'?
- Who does Jacob seem to think he encountered? (v30)

Time for Today

- Do you ever feel like you're wrestling with God/your faith/his

child by child?

- Will this family ever escape rivalry and jealousy or is there more to come? (Hint: Joseph!)

Time for Today

- Is there comfort knowing that even this chosen family got so angry and jealous?
- Are there things we can pray for our own families and others' families as a result of this?
- How does the good news of Jesus help transform our attitude to family and church family?

Time for Prayer

Week 7 - Jacob Prospers

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 30:25-43

- Do you get the sense that the plots and plans of this family would make a great soap opera?!
- Why does Jacob want to leave but Laban want them to stay?
- It took me a few goes to understand their arrangement! Can you explain the deal in 31-36?
- Why should Jacob talking about 'his honesty' set off alarm bells?
- How does Laban try to cheat the deal?
- Are we offered any commentary on whether Laban and Jacob's actions were good or bad?

Time for Today

- How does your faith impact the way you work/use your time?
- Are we ever tempted into seeking gain at others expense?
- How does knowing God's provision, help us to avoid becoming greedy and dishonest?
- What's wrong with the idea that God's blessing always means financial prosperity? (Think of Jesus' teachings!)

Time for Prayer

As you read through, you'll probably find yourself thinking 'what a mess!' But then life can be messy, people really do make bad choices, and we'd be foolish to think we're any different. Some shocking things happened, and it's worth remembering that the Bible often records events that God doesn't condone. And yet, even in the midst of severe mistakes and terrible sin, God is gracious and will achieve his purposes. Ultimately through this family and their descendants, Jesus would be born and he would be the fulfilment of these promises.

And that is a great signpost to the gospel: that when we have each messed up and fallen away, God's grace finds us and in Jesus brings forgiveness, restoration and new life. This is not really the story of Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel and Leah. It's the story of God working through broken people to bring his salvation plan to the world.

A plan in which we can now find our place through trusting in Jesus. And a reminder that the Lord can and does work through all sorts of people in all sorts of situations.

Notes on small groups

My hope for small groups is that they are a place of encouragement, challenge and fellowship on our Christian journeys. I believe that as we build trust with each other we are able to hear from God through his Word and support one another faithfully. The questions offer a framework but please feel free to explore and develop your own discussions of what God is saying to us through this story for today.

My suggestion is that you begin each week with time for one another before getting into the Bible - find out how people are, what's God been showing them from this story, what have you found encouraging or challenging - those sorts of things. You might like to use worship music, quiet or begin with prayer, rather than at the end.

Covering large narratives in the Bible isn't easy, and we've tried to break the story down into manageable sections. The readings given are what we'll have in Church, (but in brackets are longer readings that you might like to do before you meet together.)

Enjoy!

Please don't neglect to have fun and enjoy spending time together - whether that's a little time each week and/or making space for some socials and getting to know each other outside the group. At the time of writing, that may be tricky whilst we're under some social restrictions, so you may need to be inventive in finding ways to support one another and to include all members of your group.

Further Reading

Nancy Guthrie's The Promised One: Seeing Jesus in Genesis is an excellent book for showing how God's plan to send Jesus as the promised Saviour was already foreshadowed and enacted throughout the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: <https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products/13081/the-promised-one>

If you want to study a little more in depth, then Joyce **Baldwin's commentary on Genesis 25-50 in the Bible Speaks Today** series is very readable, whilst exploring aspects of language, context and theology.

Reading the stories of people like Isaac and Jacob can prompt questions about the relationship of Jewish and Christian faith. There's a helpful article (among many) on this at the [jewsforjesus.org](https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v10-n01/jewish-and-christian-can-it-be) site: <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v10-n01/jewish-and-christian-can-it-be>

Week 5 - Jacob marries Rachel and Leah

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 29:1-6; 9-28 (29:1-30)

- First things first, how many cultural and customs differences are there between this story and us?
- Can we still learn about God, our world and ourselves even when the events seem difficult?
- Do you see any irony in the fact that Jacob the deceiver is deceived by Laban?
- How does Matthew 19:4-6 show us what God's design for marriage was meant to be? (Whilst recognising grace for when we've got things wrong!)
- Do you get the sense that this family's troubles are set to continue with Jacob's two marriages?

Time for Today

- Is there anything in this account that is helpful for Christians considering marriage these days?
- How does it show us that God can redeem and use people even through messy situations?
- How do we make sure we treat people in our family and outside in the way the Lord would want us to?

Time for Prayer

Week 6 - Jacob's Children

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 29:31-30:24

- How do we see the grace of God in v31?
- Have a read of your Bible's footnotes to see the significance of Leah's sons
- How many echoes of earlier mistakes and troubles do we see in 30:1-13?
- Why do you think this part of the story is told in this manner -

priorities align with the Lord's?

- Why do we often find it tempting to lie and deceive?
- Do we consider how much one generation's attitudes affect the next?
- How might we seek God's help to break any damaging cycles and generational issues?
- Do you know God's forgiveness for any times you know you've fallen short of his purposes?

Time for Prayer

Week 4 - Jacob encounters God

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 28:10-22

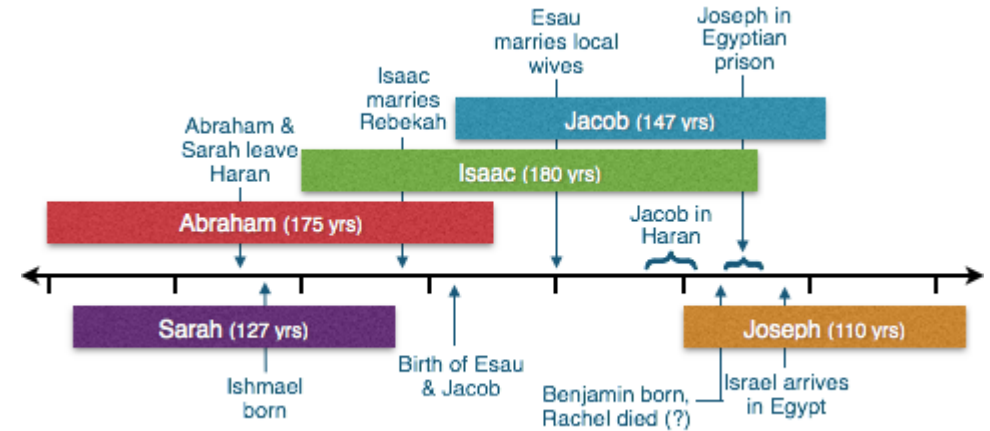
- Why do you think God often used dreams to communicate throughout the Old Testament?
- How does that change now that we have the complete Word of God?
- What are the key blessings the Lord speaks to Jacob in the dream?
- How is Jacob's understanding of God developed by this encounter?
- Some think Jacob's 'conditional' vow (20-22) reveals that he still lacks complete faith, do you agree?

Time for Today

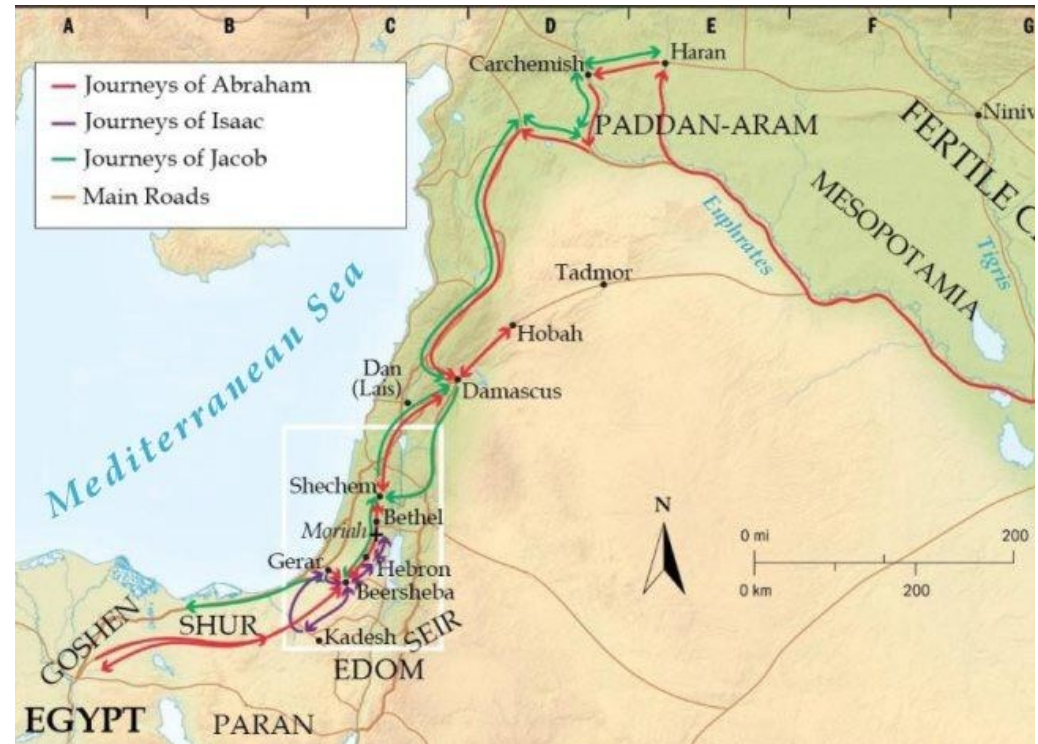
- In what ways does Jesus now act as the ladder between heaven and earth?
- Do we need special places or can we know the God's presence wherever we go?
- How tempting is it to make our faith 'conditional' on whether God does what we want?
- Do you have a story to share of when God clearly spoke to you, perhaps a scripture had a particular meaning?

Time for Prayer

Timeline



Map



Week 1 - Esau sells Jacob his birthright

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 25:19-34 (25:1-34)

- Before you begin, what do you know about this family?
- Are you ready for God to challenge, encourage, convict and equip you—even if you know it well?
- Did you do the Abraham studies last year and do you remember much from them?
- Is there anything from this account in Genesis 25 that particularly stands out to you? Why?
- What do you think God wants us to know about Isaac and Rebekah from vv21-22?
- In a culture that prioritised the 1st-born, what do we learn about God from v23?
- Does God's choice sometimes seem arbitrary or even unfair?
- Why do you think that might be?

Time for today

- How could we better support couples going through infertility?
- Will Isaac and Rebekah's attitude inspire you to trust the Lord?
- How damaging can rivalries within families become?
- Are you comforted by the fact that God uses families like this?
- Can we be encouraged that God used their bad choices to advance his plan?

Time for prayer

Week 2 - God blesses Isaac

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 26:1-16; 23-25; 32-33 (26:1-33)

- How tempted would Isaac be to go to Egypt during famine?
- How many echoes of Abraham's story are in this chapter? And what is the Bible trying to tell us?

- Is it strange that in v12 God blesses Isaac just after he's been deceptive? What does this say about grace?
- Are God's plans dependant on his people always making good choices?

Time for Today

- Are there times when you're tempted to disregard God's word and do what you think best?
- Why is it so important for our own faith that we remind ourselves of these stories of God's faithfulness?
- Do you know that through faith in Jesus you are included in the amazing promise of v4?
- God's blessing on Isaac included great wealth - is that always the case for us too?
- Can you think of Bible accounts that show God's blessing can take all sorts of forms, including patience through hardship?

Time for Prayer

Week 3 - Isaac Blesses Jacob

Time for one another

Time for God's Word - Genesis 27:1-35 (26:34-28:9)

- Despite lots of seeming advantages, Isaac & Rebekah's family implodes, why does that happen?
- Why do you think the Bible includes so many people who seem to go off track?
- How would you summarise this chapter in just a few words?
- What does Isaac's end-of-life request reveal about him?
- You might like to revisit James 3:13-18 and think how it provides a commentary on this passage?
- How do Rebekah and Jacob spiral into this deception?
- Why doesn't Isaac just withdraw his blessing and give it to the real Esau instead?

Time for Today

- How can we seek to live so that when our end of life arrives, our