

3. How does Jacob's behaviour towards Esau compare to before Jacob was exiled?
4. What do you think might be the significance of Jacob's words, "Please accept my blessing..." in verse 11?

PONDER

What does this passage teach you about God?

Jacob is Jacob no longer. He knows that blessing can come only from God and that it cannot come by deceit or trickery.

When are you tempted to take what you want through deceit or trickery?

What stops you from relying on God?

PRAYER IDEAS

Confess your sin to God, and ask for help to rely on him.

Thank God for delivering our lives through Christ.

Ask him to help you persevere so that you, like Jacob, will see him one day face to face.



15 Steps through the Bible

Pledge

Already, we've seen that humans have set themselves against God. They have refused to rule creation rightly under God's leadership.

Throughout the rest of the Bible, we'll see God at work to save his rebellious world, and establish his kingdom, by choosing a human to rule rightly, under him.

The message of the Bible can be summarized as "the story of God's kingdom". It is all about God the King who rules and saves, and who calls humans to rule creation rightly under him.

As we saw in the previous stage, God did not give up on humanity. The Bible tells us that God chose one man, Abraham (initially called Abram), and made a special pledge to him (also called a 'covenant' or 'promise').

Whereas at Babel, the people had sought to make a name for themselves, God promised to make a "name" for Abraham, and pledged to him a special relationship.

God would make a great nation from Abraham's descendants, and give them a land of their own.

He did this so that in the end, the whole world would be blessed, and humanity's rejection of God would not go on forever.

GENESIS 12:1-3

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

More detail

God's pledge (or 'promise' or 'covenant') to Abraham shows us:

Who God is

He is a merciful God who initiates relationship with undeserving humans. We also see that God makes promises which we can expect him to keep.

With God, nothing is impossible (as is demonstrated in the story by Abraham's age and Sarah's barrenness).

GALATIANS 3:6-9

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."⁹ 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

What God does

God commits himself to bring blessing to humanity. He is a loving and generous God.

GENESIS 17:7

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

HEBREWS 6:13-20

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. 16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

How God works

God makes promises and keeps them. He is faithful, even when we are unfaithful. But he also rewards people's faith in him.

GENESIS 15:5-6

He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

ROMANS 4:16-17

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring — not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Jesus is Abraham's descendant through whom God fulfils his promise to bless the nations.

In Jesus, we see that God mercifully initiates relationship with undeserving humans, thereby ultimately bringing blessing to humanity.

Those who trust in Jesus are brought into friendship with God.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the three parts to God's pledge?
2. Read through the 'More detail' section. What's something that strikes you about what God reveals here?
3. How is the promise made to Abraham relevant for you

POINTER

The birthright referred to the special place and responsibility of the firstborn, probably to inherit the privileges and responsibility of leading the family.

PONDER

As a child of God you also have privileges given to you by God. They include, for example, an eternal salvation among God's people.

What are some of the other privileges you have received (read Ephesians 1:3-14 and 2:18)?

How might you despise the privileges given to you by God?

PRAYER IDEAS

Thank God for the immeasurable privileges of being called into his family.

Thursday

- Read Genesis 28:10-22

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the things that strike you about Jacob's dream?
2. In what sense is God's promise to Jacob a repetition of his promises to Abraham and Isaac? What is personal and particular to Jacob in these promises?
3. What is Jacob's response to God's promise? Is this appropriate?

PONDER

'Bethel', the name Jacob gave to the place he had the vision, means 'house of God' — the place of meeting with God.

The ladder with the angels ascending and descending also signals God's presence, his connectedness to all that is happening on earth.

How do you know that God is close to you and that he is connected to all that is happening to you?

PRAYER IDEAS

Praise God that Jesus is close to you by his Spirit. Bring any problems that you are facing to God in prayer, whatever they might be.

Friday

After many years of 'exile', in fear and safely away from his brother Esau, Jacob returns to the land promised to him and his descendants.

- Read Gen 32:22-32; 33:1-17

QUESTIONS

Before he gives a blessing, God changes Jacob's name to Israel. The name means 'He strives with God'.

1. In what sense did Jacob strive with God, and to what end?
2. Did Jacob receive what he strove for?

Consider the blessing that Jacob stole from his father Isaac in Genesis 27:29, and then note of verses Gen 33:3 and 11.

PONDER

What made Abraham different from those who came before him (think particularly of the previous stage)?

Did this difference originate with God, or with Abraham?

PRAYER IDEAS

Thank God for his great and precious promises, and for extending them to you through Jesus Christ.

Further Readings

In this set of readings, we look at what happened in response to God's promise to Abraham as seen in the book of Genesis.

Genesis 1-11 is followed by the history of the patriarchs, the forefathers of the nation, Israel. In Genesis 1-11, we read about the creation account and the fall of mankind into sin with its terrible consequences.

Sin, with its denial of God, resulted in the exile of mankind from the garden, life under the curse of God and captivity to death.

People provoked God's judgement, which was seen in the flood and the dispersion of mankind at the tower of Babel.

God's answer to the rebellion of humanity and our captivity under sin and death is found in his promise, given to Abraham, the man of God, and to his descendants, Isaac and Jacob.

In their stories, we find the partial fulfilment of those promises.

The account of Jacob is found in Genesis 25:19-35:29. It is the second of three major biographies in Genesis — those of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph.

These three biographies are divided from each other by the family histories of the non-elect lines, namely Ishmael, the son of Abraham (Gen 25:12-18) and Esau, the son of Isaac (Gen 36:1-37:1).

Although he is one of the patriarchs, Isaac — the son of Abraham and father to Jacob and Esau — does not feature strongly in Genesis.

His story is drawn into the account of Jacob. Jacob has a special place in the programme laid out by God's promises, since Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes, and it was to Jacob that God gave the name 'Israel'.

WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

In terms of the 15-stage Bible Overview you've already seen, this part of Genesis covers the Pledge made to Abram (Abraham) concerning his descendants.

PRAYER

Here's an opening prayer you might like to use before each of the studies:

*Our God and Father,
I praise you for the promises that you gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that these promises have now come to me through Jesus Christ.*

Thank you that you call me and save me through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. Thank you that you transform me by your word and Spirit, just as you did with Jacob.

*Please enable me to depend on you in every situation that I face, to be thankful for the blessing that Christ has won for me, and to pass that blessing on to others as Christ enables me.
Amen.*

Monday

Read Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-21; 17:1-8.

QUESTIONS

These readings give us a background to the account of Jacob, which is founded on the promises given to Abraham.

1. From these passages, what themes do you find repeated in God's promises?
2. Why do you think these promises would have been difficult for Abraham to believe?
3. To what extent did Abraham actually see the fulfilment of these promises?

PONDER

What made Abraham different from everyone else? Did this difference originate with God or Abraham?

PRAYER IDEAS

Thank God for his very great and precious promises, and for giving them to you through Jesus Christ.

Tuesday

- Read Genesis 25:19-28

QUESTIONS

1. What did Isaac do about his wife's barrenness, and what was the result?

2. God spoke to Rebekah when she had the twins, Jacob and Esau, in her womb. What is prophesied about them? What do you expect will happen to them?

3. Why is Jacob's name significant? (Jacob means He takes by the heel, or He cheats.) What might this tell us about Jacob's nature?

PONDER

Read Ephesians 1:11-14.

What does this passage tell you about the nature of God's sovereignty?

PRAYER IDEAS

Thank God for his sovereignty. Ask him to help you trust in the fact that he is in control no matter your circumstances.

Wednesday

Read Genesis 25:29-34

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Esau was really "about to die"?
2. What was Esau's attitude towards his birthright and therefore to his place among God's people?
3. How do you see the prophecy given to Rebekah in Genesis 25:23 being worked out here?