

# Journey INTO THE Bible

## Leader's Guide

### Genesis, Part Two: Lesson Two

### Genesis 24—25

**Suggestion:** When you are ready to begin the Bible study, it is fitting to open with a prayer. The one given below is only a suggestion. You may have one of your own. If so, please do not hesitate to use it. It may be practical to link your prayer with some aspect of the lesson, for example, God's providential care in getting a wife for Isaac or the divine choice of rascals such as Jacob.

#### Opening Prayer

*Gracious and loving God, you direct our lives in so many subtle and mysterious ways. In the seemingly ordinary events of everyday life you are there, always caring and providing for us, just as you made the journey of Abraham's servant successful. We thank you for all those people who represent you in this ongoing task of directing and focusing our lives. Because they are involved, we know that you are involved. In turn, we ask you to make us your everyday partners in looking to the needs of others so that, like the journey of Abraham's servant, our journey may prosper as well. We ask this through Christ our Lord.*

**Suggestion:** This may be the right moment to welcome newcomers and returning participants. It is also a good time to make announcements. Afterwards, read aloud "Setting the Stage."

#### Setting the Stage

The account of the wooing of Rebekah logically follows after the birth of Isaac and the purchase of the field of Ephron. The son and heir and the symbolic possession of the land now give way to getting a bride for Isaac. Although the story may strike us as being mundane, it nonetheless exemplifies the hidden presence of the God of Israel. The various motifs in the chapter support that statement. The first motif is blessing as depicted especially in the servant's praise of God in Genesis 24:27, 48. The second motif is divine providence, a reality that the

senior servant prays for as he stands at the well (24:42). The third motif is divine steadfast love and faithfulness. In Genesis 24:27, the servant confesses that the Lord has not forsaken these qualities in the quest for Isaac's bride. The fourth motif is divine guidance (akin to divine providence). The servant speaks of the girl whom God has appointed (24:14, 44). He also notes that God has led him during this entire journey (24:27, 48).

In the second episode we are introduced to Jacob and Esau, the sons of Isaac and Rebekah. At the outset we are forewarned that they represent different peoples (Israel and Edom, respectively). We are also told that the elder (Esau) will serve the younger (Jacob). It is hardly surprising that Jacob is dubbed the heel-gripper, since the following episodes will demonstrate his trickster facility as the supplanter. In Genesis 25:29-34 we get the rather prejudged view of Esau as insensitive; he cares more for satisfying his appetite than for safeguarding his birthright. In keeping with his trickster ways, Jacob seals the deal with Esau about selling his birthright with an oath. This rivalry will continue in the following chapters.

#### Text (Genesis 24:1-67)

**Suggestion:** Since this chapter is exceedingly long, it may be practical to summarize it by having one of the participants read the servant's speech in Genesis 24:34b-49.

#### Think and Talk Questions

1. How does the character of Laban strike you in Genesis 24:30 (see 31:14-16, 36-43) and Genesis 24:55 (see 29:27; 30:25-28; 31:26-30)?
2. What do you think of the Lord's hidden providential care?
3. Would you agree that this is a marriage made in heaven?

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### Additional Questions

1. Do you think that the author's statement about the divine blessing of Abraham (24:1) is consistent with the overall plot of Genesis thus far? The leader may want to refer to the beginning of the Abraham story in Genesis 12:2-3 where we have the programmatic expression of divine blessing. While there are other passages where divine blessing is highlighted, the leader may choose to consider Genesis 22:17-18, the reward received by the patriarch in being willing to sacrifice Isaac.
2. What do you think of the Lord's apparent "absence" in this chapter? The leader may bring to the attention of the participants that there are no divine speeches or appearances here. In other words, God is present through the human characters who represent him, particularly the senior servant. Divine presence is not measured merely by extraordinary events or carefully crafted divine speeches. God is present whenever humans relate to one another in covenantal ways that express the bond between God, Israel, and individual Israelites.

### Break

### Text (Genesis 25:19-34)

Suggestion: It may be advantageous to divide the piece among five readers: (1) narrator; (2) Rebekah (25:22b); (3) the Lord (25:23b); (4) Esau (25:30, 32); (5) Jacob (25:31, 33a).

### Think and Talk Questions

1. In what ways is Jacob different from his father, Isaac?
2. Despite his many faults, is there something in Jacob's make-up that is attractive?
3. Do you think the two episodes in Genesis 25:19-28, 29-34 are overly prejudged in favor of Jacob?

### Additional Questions

1. Given Jacob's roguish figure, do you think he is really a good choice to become Israel's ancestor? Perhaps the leader could reflect on the divine method of awarding leadership positions. In this process, God does not always look for those with the most

impeccable credentials. Not infrequently, God chooses those who are "clay vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7-12). Reflecting on the New Testament, the leader may point out that the foundational figures in Jesus' community are Peter and Paul. Yet we know that Peter denied Jesus during the time of the passion and that Paul persecuted the early Christian community. In light of this, we can probably say that you may still very likely get the job.

2. Do you think there are some links between the Cain and Abel story (Genesis 4:1-16) and this Esau and Jacob episode? While Cain is a farmer, Abel is a shepherd. Similarly, while Esau is a hunter and a man of the field, Jacob is a homebody shepherd. In both episodes, there is also the case of divine preference. In Genesis 4:4, the Lord prefers Abel's offering; in Genesis 25:2, 3 the Lord prefers Jacob by having Esau serve him.

### Wrapping Up

When there are about twenty minutes left, bring the discussion to a close. You may choose to ask if any participants would care to share something they have learned. Encourage participants to be brief.

### Closing Prayer

The leader may obviously choose any appropriate concluding prayer. Psalm 23 is a psalm of trust or confidence that uses two principal images: (1) the Lord as shepherd (23:1-4) and (2) the Lord as host (23:5-6):

*"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long."*

Suggestion: Remind everyone about the next meeting time and place and to read through Lesson Three before the next Bible study session.