

# A Wedding, a Death, and Two Births

Key Verse:

**“There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot.”**

Ecclesiastes 3:2

Extra: Compare and contrast Jacob and Esau.

Level 5 lesson 17

**Read: Genesis 14**

**Further Reading: Hebrews 7:1-7**

## WEDDING

Chapter 23 of Genesis tells us that Abraham’s wife Sarah lived to be 127 years old and then she died. Genesis 25 records that some years after this Abraham married a lady called Keturah. Abraham was around 141 years old when he married Keturah, and they had six children together (Note: Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born - see Genesis 21:5. Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, and it was just after this that Abraham married Keturah. Abraham then died at the age of 175).

The names of Keturah’s six children are recorded in Genesis 25:2. None of these children, however, displaced Isaac who was the ‘son of promise,’ miraculously born (by the will of God) when Sarah was well past child-bearing age. This was acknowledged by Abraham when he divided up his inheritance. He gave “all that he had to Isaac,” except a few token gifts to Keturah’s sons, who were then sent to live away from Isaac in another part of the country.

## DEATH

In Genesis 25:8, we read that Abraham “died at a good old age, an old man, full of years; and was gathered to his people.” It is good to see that Isaac and Ishmael attended the funeral. The two half brothers were able to put aside any disagreement between them to pay their respects to their father. They buried him in the cave of ‘Machpelah’ alongside his wife Sarah. So ended the long life of a remarkable man; one whose name is still well-known today and who one day will be raised to share possession of the land given to him and his seed by God for ever.

God now took a special interest in Isaac, and we read in verse 11 that just as Abraham had conferred his blessing on him, so God indeed “blessed Isaac.” Verses 12-18 then give an account of Ishmael and his descendants. Note, in particular, the ‘hostility’ mentioned in the last line of that account. This was a clear fulfilment of God’s declared prophecy given in Genesis 16:12!

## BIRTHRIGHT

The biblical record then continues in verse 19 with the descendants of Isaac, which of course, began with the twin boys, Esau and Jacob, born to Rebekah. Esau and Jacob were twins, but Esau was the first-born of the two. This is an important point because it meant that Esau was entitled to the ‘birthright’ from his father Isaac. This birthright was a very valuable thing. It conferred on Esau, as the first-born, certain rights and privileges as follows: 1) A right to the domestic Priesthood - a great honour indeed. 2) A double portion of his father’s property, which in Esau’s case, meant the inheritance of considerable wealth. 3) A right to the official authority possessed by his father; and also the father’s blessing. Esau was truly a fortunate man. Sadly, our reading tells us he didn’t really appreciate all that his birthright meant. It seems he was a man who ‘lived for the moment’, giving little thought to the future - until it was too late!

As the boys grew into manhood, we find that Esau loved the outdoor life, and became a skilful hunter, while Jacob was an ‘indoors’ man who liked to stay at home. One day, Esau came home hungry and exhausted after a hard day’s hunting. As he entered the tent, he saw his brother Jacob boiling a pot of some delicious lentil stew. Oh boy, it really did smell good! “Give me some of that to eat!” he pleaded. Jacob, seeing a rare opportunity to take advantage of his brother, replied, “First sell me your birthright!” Esau’s foolish response shows us clearly how little he valued his precious birthright. “I’m ready to die,” he said (although of course, he wasn’t), “What good is this birthright to me?” Jacob quickly made Esau promise a ‘solemn oath’ – “Swear to me this day,” he demanded. Esau foolishly agreed, and effectively sold his valuable birthright to Jacob for a plate of hot stew!

Of course, this was a very devious and mean thing for Jacob to do. He may have thought, “Since I’m a twin, I’ve got as much right to it as Esau.” Whatever his thinking was, it did not excuse him. There is only one good point about Jacob’s behaviour, and it is that Jacob valued the birthright highly. Esau despised it, and treated it only as something to be sold or traded for immediate gain! This showed Esau to be unworthy of it. However, in this story we see God’s sovereign hand at work. In His all-knowing wisdom, God had determined that the line of ‘promise’ would be through Jacob, not Esau (see Romans 9:10-13). And so, for a bowl of stew the contract was solemnly agreed to.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was Isaac the most important of all Abraham’s sons?	.....
2. How did Abraham acknowledge this fact?	.....
3. What was the birthright?	.....
4. What were some of the entitlements for the firstborn son?	.....
5. Why is the Key Verse appropriate for this study?	.....

My Name is ..... Age .....

# Esau and Jacob

**Key Verse:**  
**“When he (Esau) wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.”**

Hebrews 12:17

**Extra:** Evaluate the behaviour of each of the characters mentioned in this story.

**Level 5 lesson 18**

## Read Genesis 27

**Further Reading: Hebrews 11:20**

### BLESSING

The ‘birthright deal’ recorded in Genesis 25 seems to have been a secret between Jacob and Esau.

Certainly, neither would have wanted their father to know about it – neither Jacob for obtaining it in such a devious manner, nor Esau for treating it so lightly! When Esau recovered, he probably regretted his foolishness and hoped that somehow, over time, it might be forgotten. Jacob on the other hand, no doubt pleased with his shrewdness, was determined that the contract would stand!

Years went by until one day, Isaac, who was blind and near death, called Esau in to see him. He told him to go hunting and bring back some venison. He wanted Esau to prepare it his favourite way, so that he could eat it, and then confer on him his fatherly blessing before he died. I can imagine that Esau didn’t hang around too long after that! Here was his chance to receive his birthright after all, despite his deal with Jacob years earlier.

### BLUFF

However, Rebekah had overheard Isaac’s instructions to Esau! Hurrying to Jacob, she told him what she had overheard. Then she ordered him, “Go out to the flock and bring me two kid goats. I will cook them up the way your father loves; then you must take it to your father and get the blessing!” Jacob saw an immediate problem; “I’m smooth skinned,” he said, “and Esau’s a hairy man. Isaac will know my identity by feeling and find out the fraud. Then he will curse me instead of blessing me!” “Just do what I tell you,” demanded Rebekah. “I’ll fix that!”

So Jacob obeyed his mother’s plan. Rebekah cooked the savoury dish just how Isaac loved it, then she put the goats’ skins on Jacob’s hands and on his neck. Jacob then took the meal and presented himself to his father. Isaac asked, “Who are you?” “Esau, your first-born,” Jacob lied. “How did you get the venison so quickly?” asked Isaac, surprised. “The Lord helped me,” Jacob quickly lied again. But Isaac was still not entirely convinced.

“Come here; let me feel you, my son,” he said. Feeling Jacob’s hands and neck, Isaac continued, somewhat puzzled, “The voice is Jacob’s, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” Finally, Isaac’s logic and reason were over-ruled by his feelings, and he blessed Jacob (v26-29). No sooner had Isaac finished blessing Jacob, than Esau arrived back from hunting! Cooking up the venison, he took it in to his father where he lay in his tent. Inviting his father to eat, he said, “I am your son, your first-born, Esau.”

### BLUNDER

At these words, Isaac trembled and he realised he had been deceived. “I have blessed Jacob,” he told Esau, and added emphatically “and he shall be blessed!” Oh what despair and remorse we hear in Esau’s cries now! Now he realised the true extent of his youthful foolishness and what it had cost him! Desperately he pleaded tearfully with his father, “Haven’t you got even one blessing for me?” Sadly, Isaac had to tell him, “I have blessed Jacob... what can I do for you now, my son?”

There is much more to learn from this chapter full of incidents. But most importantly, we see in a wonderful way, how the Almighty God works out His sovereign will and purpose in the lives of people, through their own wills and decisions. You may wonder about this, but the fact is (as we considered earlier in Romans 9), it was God’s purpose before both boys were born that Jacob should have the birthright with its rights and blessings.

God had earlier said, “The older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23), and so from His point of view, Esau did not ‘lose’ the birthright because he was unworthy, and neither did Jacob get it because of any merit. Before they were even born, and therefore before they had done either good or evil, the possession of the birthright was fixed by God. It was entirely a matter of God’s sovereign grace and infinite wisdom as to who received it.

Despite Esau’s regretful tears of remorse, there could be no changing things (see the Key Verse). As a result, Esau hated Jacob and planned to murder him as soon as his father Isaac had died, which he thought would be soon. Rebekah overheard this and warned Jacob to flee to his uncle Laban in Haran. “Stay with him for a while,” she said, “until your brother’s fury subsides.” She thought Esau would cool down, accept the position quickly, and Jacob could return home. In fact, little did she know, but “a while” would become twenty years!

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did Isaac plan to do before his (expected) death?

.....

2. Do you think cheating is ever right?

.....

3. While Rebekah was pregnant, what message was she given about who would receive the blessing?

.....

4. Why would Isaac not change his mind?

.....

5. What were the results for Esau and for Jacob?

.....

# Jacob's Journey

## Read Genesis 28

Further Reading: Genesis 17:1-8

Key Verse:

**"I tell you the truth, you shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."**

John 1:51

Extra: How could it be that Isaac was so loving even after being deceived?

Level 5 lesson 19

### DEPARTURE

There were two reasons why Isaac and Rebekah thought it wise to send Jacob away from home; firstly, because of Esau's anger and intention to kill Jacob. Secondly, although hardly less important, it was so Jacob wouldn't marry a pagan (ungodly) woman. We know that Esau was married to two wives, and both of them were pagan women from the Hittite tribe. We also know that these women were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah (see 26:35). No doubt their pagan practices and lifestyles were the main cause of this, although the Scriptures are not specific.

Therefore, the danger that Jacob, like Esau, would be tempted by the lewd behaviour of these pagan women and marry one of them, was a real concern to his parents. When we remember who the Canaanites were, and the level of depravity and corruption for which they are known in Scripture, we can understand the deep parental concern. So before Jacob left for his uncle Laban's home in Haran, his father called him to his side, and gave him this very clear and solemn instruction, "Do not marry one of the Canaanite women!" Instead, Isaac continued, Jacob was to "Go to Paddan-Aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and take a wife from one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother."

Isaac then gave Jacob this beautiful blessing. "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." So with these words ringing in his ears, Jacob commenced the long and lonely journey to Paddan-Aram, far to the north in the plain of Syria, in Mesopotamia. Notice how Esau, hearing what Isaac had said to Jacob concerning his wife-to-be, and perhaps seeking to appease his parents for the grief his other marriages had caused, went and married a daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's other son.

### DREAM

Jacob travelled northward from Beersheba for about 50 miles, where we read, "when he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night." The sun had gone down, and so he took a stone, and using it as a pillow he fell fast asleep. As he slept, he had a remarkable dream, in which he saw a ladder, or a stairway, reaching from earth to Heaven with the angels of God going up and down on it. This was a marvellous display of a free and glorious communication between earth and Heaven. Surely, this points toward to the wonderful time that our Lord speaks about, when He, the Son of Man, will establish His kingdom on earth; and an angelic ministry will exist between earth and Heaven, for the glory and service of Himself.

As the dream continued, the Lord stood above the ladder, and re-iterated the promise He had made to Abraham and Isaac, to Jacob. "I am the Lord God of Abraham, your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth ... and by you and your descendants shall all families of the earth be blessed." Then the Lord made it very personal, saying to Jacob, "I am with you, and will watch over you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done what I promised to you."

Suddenly, the dream ended and Jacob awoke. Overawed by the 'reality' of the dream he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it!" A great fear came over him. "How awesome is this place!" he exclaimed, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven!" He then appropriately named the place Bethel, which means "House of God." Our lesson concludes with Jacob making something of a strange vow - and one that shows he still had much to learn about the God who had just revealed Himself so plainly to him. Notice Jacob says, "If God will be with me... watch over me... give me... so that I return safely... then the Lord will be my God." God had just assured him of personal well-being, and yet Jacob still used the words "if... and ...then". He was trying to put conditions on his commitment to God. Judging by his words, Jacob's faith was certainly small. However, God by grace only requires faith "the size of a mustard-seed" (as Jesus explained much later to his disciples)!

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What lesson can you learn today from Isaac's command about the Canaanite women?

.....

2. What blessing did Isaac give to Jacob?

.....

3. What impressed you most about Jacob's dream?

.....

4. What was the personal message God gave to him in this dream?

.....

5. What did Jacob's vow reveal about himself?

.....

# Jacob Finds a Wife

Key Verse:  
**“For this God is our God forever and ever, He will be our guide even to the end.”**

Psalm 48:14

Extra: What evidence do you see that God was with Jacob?

Level 5 lesson 20

## Read Genesis 29:1-20

### Further Reading: Proverbs 3:5-6

#### FANTASY

In the last lesson, Jacob used a stone as “a pillow” before turning it into “a pillar” by anointing it with oil and leaving it as a memorial of his wonderful experience. The “Coronation Stone” in London is thought by some Christian people to be this very stone. It was supposedly brought by Jeremiah to Ireland, taken from there to Scotland by another person, and then finally brought to England, where all English monarchs are said to be crowned on it. This is an interesting story, but like the majority of the so-called scriptural ‘relics’ made popular during the Middle Ages, it is simply not true! Competent authorities, including the “Geological Survey” of Great Britain, have stated that the “Coronation Stone” is of a type not found anywhere in Israel!

#### FLIGHT

As Jacob continued on his long flight from home, we can imagine him trudging along, staff in hand, perhaps entirely alone as far as human beings are concerned. However, we know that Almighty God had not left him, and was in fact, directing his steps all the way. After travelling about 400 miles Jacob found himself by a well in a field, where flocks of sheep were waiting to be ‘watered’ by the shepherds. “My brothers, where are you from?” Jacob greeted the shepherds. “Haran,” they replied - the very place Jacob was making for! “Oh,” asks Jacob, “Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?” “Yes” they replied, “We know him.” So Jacob had finally arrived at his destination. I’m sure he was happy to have that long journey behind him, and thankful to God for His guidance and protection.

#### FAMILY

“Is Laban well?” Jacob continued politely. “Yes,” replied the shepherds, “He is well - and here comes Rachel, his daughter, with the sheep.” At this point, Rachel arrived at the well with her father’s sheep, and Jacob rolled the heavy stone away from the well and helped her with the job of giving them water. Then in Eastern fashion, he introduced himself formally to Rachel, with a kiss of greeting. Overcome with tears, he told her he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah.

What amazing parallels with the scenes which took place years before, when Abraham’s servant Eliezer came seeking a bride for Isaac at the same place! Excitedly, Rachel ran and told her father that Rebekah’s son was at the well. After all, it was not every day that relatives from far away turned up at the well! Laban came out to see Jacob and embracing him with a kiss of greeting, escorted him joyfully into his home. Over the evening meal, Jacob told his story, and possibly with eyes only for Rachel, stressed the point that he had been instructed to obtain one of Laban’s daughters for a wife! Laban listened, and then in acknowledgement of their close family relationship, exclaimed, “Surely you are my flesh and my blood!” Jacob stayed for a month and obviously made a good impression on Laban. At the end of this time, he came to Jacob and offered him an employment contract. “Just because we are related” he said rightly, “doesn’t mean that you should work for nothing. What wages do you want?”

#### FRAUD

At this point in the drama, Jacob loved Rachel, and so He said to Laban, “I will serve you seven years for Rachel your youngest daughter.” Laban also had another daughter called Leah, and he no doubt preferred that she would be married first, because she was the eldest. You see, it was customary that the eldest sister should marry first. Despite this, Laban agreed with Jacob’s request and officially put him to work for seven years – tending his flocks and herds. It was often hot, lonely and dusty work, but what a wonderful statement we read in Genesis 29:20 concerning Jacob and Rachel; the seven years “seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her!” Finally, the day came for them to be married. Imagine Jacob’s dismay to find that Laban had tricked him and given him Leah as his wife instead of Rachel! Of course, Jacob complained bitterly to Laban about this deceit. So Laban agreed to give him Rachel as his wife also, but in return for another seven years work! Jacob certainly learned a lesson about deceit during this time. In all, he served Laban for nearly twenty years, giving him faithful and loyal service, and depending on God to vindicate him. Read the whole story to see how God did this in a marvellous way, despite Laban’s often crafty and unfair treatment of him.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was Jacob sure to reach his right destination?	.....
2. How did Laban welcome Jacob?	.....
3. In what ways did God guide Jacob?	.....
4. What was Jacob willing to do to gain the one he loved?	.....
5. In what way did Jacob reap what he had sown?	.....

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