

# Learn to Read Genesis Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 11



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## **SESSION 11**

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# Genesis 28 to 35 – Jacob’s exile and return

## 28 v 1 to 22 – Beersheba to Bethel

Chapter 27 left Isaac’s family in a state of turmoil:

- Rebekah had persuaded Jacob to deceive Isaac into giving him Esau’s blessing
- Esau was so angry that he was talking of murdering Jacob
- Rebekah was using her persuasion on Jacob, this time telling him to flee to her brother Laban



Read Genesis 28 v 1 to 5

*28 v 1 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.”*

**X-Ref -**  
Genesis  
28 v 1

Genesis 24 v 3

Abraham and Isaac both had the same concern that the family should not intermarry with the Canaanites, but Isaac had not managed to prevent Esau from so doing.

*28 v 2 “Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.”*

Here we see that Rebekah had persuaded Isaac that it would be a good idea for Jacob to find a wife from among her brother Laban’s family.

Verses 3 and 4 contain the full blessing that Isaac should have given Jacob voluntarily before. Now at last he recognised and accepted God’s choice. This must be the blessing referred to in Hebrews 11 v 20, which tells us that Isaac blessed Jacob “by faith”. He could not have done this if he thought he was blessing Esau.

We are not told that Rebekah ever saw Jacob again.

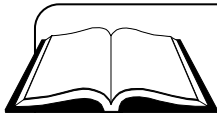


Read Genesis 28 v 6 to 9

Esau tried to please his parents in the same way that Jacob seemed to have done. He observed that:

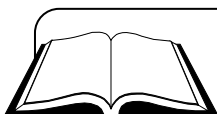
- Isaac had blessed Jacob
- Isaac had forbidden marriage to the Canaanites
- Jacob had gone to find a wife from within the family
- Jacob had obeyed his parents and gone to Padan Aram

He concluded that marriage to relations would please his parents, so he married Ishmael's daughter Mahalath.



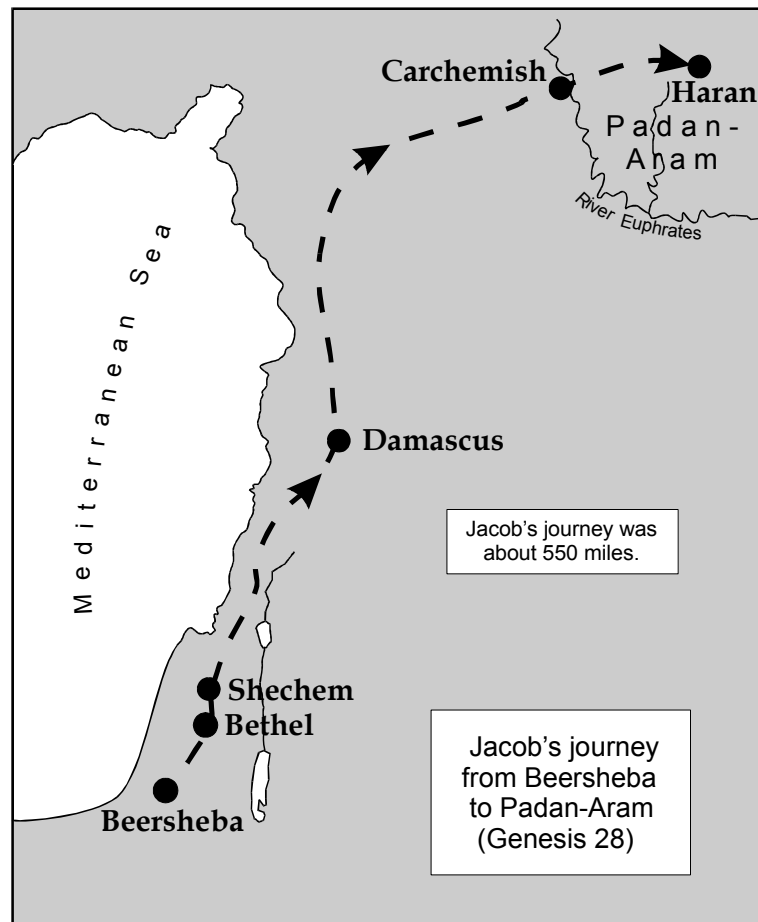
Read Genesis 28 v 10 to 15

In his dream Jacob saw a ladder reaching up to heaven. It is interesting to note that the angels were first *ascending* and then *descending* the ladder – they must have been already with him. God confirmed that Jacob would also receive the promises previously made to Abraham and Isaac. He also promised Jacob that He would look after him wherever he went and bring him safely back to the land.

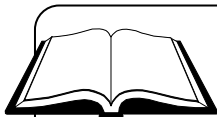


Read Genesis 28 v 16 to 22

- Jacob realised that God was with him despite the fact that he was all alone and fleeing from Esau
- He made a vow that if God would feed him, clothe him and bring him back safely to his own family, "then the LORD shall be my God". As we shall see, God kept His part of the covenant



## 29 v 1 to 31 v 55 – In the house of Laban the Syrian



Read Genesis 29 v 1 to 31 v 55

### Summary of story

- Chapter 29 v 1 Jacob went to the well of Haran.  
 9 He became acquainted with Rachel.  
 13 Laban entertained him.  
 18 Jacob agreed to serve seven years for Rachel.  
 22 He was deceived by Laban substituting Leah.  
 28 He also married Rachel, and served seven more years for her.  
 32 Leah gave birth to Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah.

- Chapter 30 v 1 Rachel, in grief for her barrenness, gave Bilhah her maid to Jacob.  
 5 Bilhah bore Dan and Naphtali.  
 9 Leah gave Jacob Zilpah her maid, who bore Gad and Asher.  
 14 Reuben found mandrakes, with which Leah bought her husband's company from Rachel.  
 17 Leah bore Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah.  
 22 Rachel finally bore Joseph.  
 25 Jacob asked Laban to let him depart.  
 27 Laban detained him on a new agreement.  
 37 Jacob's policy, by which he became rich.
- Chapter 31 v 1 Jacob was displeased by the envy of Laban and his sons.  
 3 God told Jacob to leave.  
 19 Rachel stole her father's images and Jacob left secretly.  
 22 Laban pursued after him, and complained of the wrong.  
 34 Rachel hid the images.  
 36 Jacob complained to Laban.  
 43 Laban and Jacob made a covenant at Galeed.

## Character studies

An effective way of reading the Bible is to consider the characters of the people involved. We can look at all the incidents recorded about people and see how they reacted to the various situations. Quite often we can see a particular characteristic coming out several times. From this we can see where particular character traits lead, learn to follow the good traits and try to resist the influence of the bad ones.

We shall list the passages where the particular person is involved and then indicate some points we can learn from each passage.



## Laban

We have already observed one possible characteristic of Laban in the last session, in that he appeared to be very interested in the gifts brought by the servant (Genesis 24 v 30).

Genesis 29 v 23-27	He deceived Jacob by giving him Leah instead of Rachel. He made Jacob serve seven more years for Rachel. He reminded Jacob that in Syria you live by Syrian rules.
30 v 25 to 30 v 43	He wanted Jacob to serve him even longer because he could see that God had blessed him for Jacob's sake. He agreed that Jacob could have all the dark or speckled animals. He then removed all the dark or speckled animals from the flock and put three days' journey between them and the rest of his flock. This was to reduce the number of dark or speckled animals being born.
31 v 7	Jacob accused Laban of deceit and of changing his wages ten times.
31 v 15	Laban's daughters, Rachel and Leah, said they were "strangers" to him and accused him of selling them and consuming all their money.
31 v 23	He acted quickly when he believed his possessions were under threat.
31 v 26 and 43	He still regarded Leah and Rachel as his, despite having sold them to Jacob for his labour.
31 v 29	His fear of God prevented him harming Jacob.
31 v 30	His real motive for chasing Jacob was to recover his stolen "gods". (Recent discoveries indicate that these "household idols" were a symbol of the right to inherit. So Rachel was staking a claim in the family inheritance.)
31 v 39	He had required Jacob to bear the loss of any of the flocks taken by wild animals.



- Laban showed characteristics that we should avoid. He was motivated by wealth; he was deceitful, scheming and self-centred, having no consideration for others. He also exploited those working for him
- He believed in God (30 v 27 and 31 v 29), but preferred not to let that affect his life too much since he was quite comfortable with the culture of Syria. There are many New Testament examples of people with the same attitude – have a look at Luke 18 v 18 to 25 and Acts 5 v 1 to 11

## Rachel

29 v 9 and 10	Rachel let Jacob do the work of watering the sheep. Contrast this with Rebekah's eagerness to water the camels (24 v 17 to 21).
29 v 17	Rachel was very good looking and Jacob fell in love with her. Jacob loved her in preference to Leah.
30 v 1	Rachel was envious of her sister's fertility and demanded children from Jacob.
30 v 3 and 4	She gave her maid to Jacob to produce children for her.
30 v 6 to 8	She believed in God, but named the two children in a very self-centred way.
30 v 14 to 16	It appears that Rachel prevented Leah sleeping with Jacob, but allowed her to sleep one night with him in exchange for Reuben's mandrakes. The fruits of the mandrake plant were believed to help in conception of children.
30 v 22	Rachel prayed to God for children and was heard.
31 v 19	She stole Laban's household idols – staking a claim to Laban's inheritance.
31 v 34 and 35	She deceived Laban by hiding the idols in the camel's saddle.

The Mandrake



- Rachel was like most of us – a mixture of good and not so good characteristics
- She believed in God, but that didn't stop her being selfish, jealous, deceitful and a thief
- Yet God in His mercy and to fulfil His purpose heard her prayer when she stopped trusting in her own "Syrian cunning"
- She would have done better to learn from Leah the characteristics that God approves of. There is an "echo" of this in 1 Peter 3 v 1 to 6

## Leah

29 v 17	Leah had delicate or weak eyes and was not as attractive to Jacob as Rachel.
29 v 30	Leah was loved by Jacob much less than Rachel.
29 v 32	She showed a love for Jacob which he did not reciprocate. God was a reality in her life.
29 v 32 to 35	She was less aggressive and less self-centred than Rachel in naming her children.
30 v 15	She negotiated with Rachel for the right to sleep with Jacob.
30 v 17	She prayed to God and was heard.
30 v 20	She showed a thankful spirit.



- Leah was less assertive and more gentle than Rachel
- She lived “in the shadow” of Rachel
- She did her best to win Jacob’s affection
- She demonstrated her belief in God

## Jacob

In this section, we can learn much from what Jacob did and what happened to him.

29 v 20	Jacob served faithfully for Rachel.
29 v 21 to 25	Jacob, who had previously deceived his father was now in turn deceived by Laban.
29 v 30 and 31	Jacob loved Rachel much more than Leah. He served Laban faithfully for a further 7 years.
30 v 30	Jacob wished to provide for his own household. He served Laban faithfully, looking after flocks despite Laban’s treatment of him.
30 v 37 to 43	He used his cunning in an attempt to increase his own flocks at the expense of Laban’s.
31 v 20	He was afraid of Laban and left secretly.
31 v 36	He was angry with Laban when he thought he was falsely accused of theft, and rebuked him at length.
31 v 42	He acknowledged that God had been with him despite Laban’s bad treatment of him.

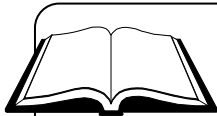


- Jacob finally learned not to deceive others through being deceived himself
- He learned that God was with him and would help him through all his problems

The process by which Jacob learned to trust in God and to be obedient to Him is one which we can observe in our own lives if we want to.

The New Testament tells us that even the Lord Jesus Christ was “made perfect through suffering” (Hebrews 2 v 10 and 11; 5 v 7 and 8).

## 32 v 1 to 32 – Preparation to meet Esau again



Read Genesis 32 v 1 to 23

- Jacob still seemed unable to trust God completely and sent messengers to “check things out” (v 3)
- He referred to Esau as “my lord Esau” (v 4) despite the fact that Jacob had been made “lord” over Esau (27 v 29)
- He was greatly troubled by the result of his enquiries (v 6 and 7)
- Jacob divided his camp in an effort to reduce the effects of the feared attack by Esau (v 7 and 8)
- He then asked God’s help (v 9 to 12). He should have done this *before* arranging all of his own elaborate plans

That night was a very busy one for Jacob:

First he prepared 580 animals and sent them before him in droves, giving each servant in charge precise instructions as to what to say to Esau (v 13 to 21).

He then roused his whole family of 4 adults and 11 sons, dismantled the camp and sent them over the brook Jabbok (v 22 and 23).

Jacob was then left alone. He was obviously apprehensive. He had done his best to ensure that Esau would be friendly when they met – and if not, he had done his best to limit the damage.



Read Genesis 32 v 24 to 32

The wrestling match with the stranger recounted in these verses is a strange episode. So let's look up a cross-reference:

**X-Ref -**  
Genesis  
32 v 24

→ Hosea 12 v 2 to 5

Hosea was using this incident to encourage trust in God (Hosea 12 v 6), but from his words we learn that the “man” was in fact an angel.

The angel did not use physical strength to overcome Jacob. He demonstrated the power he had by putting Jacob's hip out of joint. This convinced Jacob that this was God's angel. His determination to receive a blessing from God's angel showed that he realised by then that God's blessing would be of more value than his own strength. Also, with his thigh “out of joint” he couldn't now meet Esau in his own strength. So this time he had to put his trust in God.



- Jacob means “supplanter” – by implication one who uses his own skill or cunning to take someone else's place
- Jacob had been frantically preparing to meet Esau by his own methods, but his plans were altered by God
- Because too much self-reliance had been a major flaw in Jacob's character, he needed to learn, by the loss of his physical fitness, to overcome his own nature and rely more on God

## 33 v 1 to 20 – Jacob and Esau meet



Read Genesis 33 v 1 to 20

We see in verse 4 that Jacob's fears had all been ill-founded. Jacob must have been a sight to rouse the pity and mercy of his brother, limping and perhaps dirty and dishevelled from the struggle of the night before. Jacob's actions and words to his brother were utterly humble, as becomes one who has struggled with an angel and overcome his own nature.

**Echoes -**  
Overcoming  
our nature

Job 42 v 1 to 6; Matthew 16 v 24 to 26; Galatians 5 v 22 to 26

**X-Refs -**  
Genesis  
33 v 4

Psalms 34 v 4; Proverbs 16 v 7

The cross-references lead us to the lesson that Jacob was learning – that God is in control of all situations, even those where we have deliberately caused ourselves difficulties.

*33 v 11 “Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” So he urged him, and he took it.*

Here Jacob seemed to be giving back to Esau the blessing that he took from him by deceit which we read of in chapter 27 verse 28. Jacob was quite content to relinquish material blessings which only related to this life. He preferred the blessing we read about in chapter 28 verses 3 and 4 which Isaac gave to him when he fled from Esau.

We see from verses 12 to 16 that Jacob was not keen to extend the meeting with Esau any longer than necessary. This is quite understandable as they were totally different characters. Esau was a man who lived by his own prowess and had no interest in the things of God. Jacob had learned a different approach.

In verse 14, Jacob implied that he was going to follow Esau to Seir – but he didn't. He went to Shechem.

*33 v 18 Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city.  
19 And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money.*

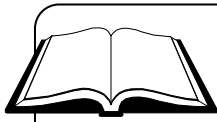
Verse 18 reads as though Jacob was relieved to have arrived back in the land of Canaan. You may remember that it was God who told Jacob to come back to the land of Canaan in chapter 31 verse 3:

*Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."*

Jacob had obeyed and God had "been with Jacob" despite all his fears.

Verses 19 and 20 read as though Jacob intended to settle down and recover from the events of the turbulent past. He bought land to live on and built an altar. Jacob was soon to realise that his life could not be lived like that if he was to follow God as one of his people.

## 34 v 1 to 31 – The Dinah incident



Read Genesis 34 v 1 to 31

*34 v 1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.*

Dinah went to "see the daughters of the land". It would appear that Dinah had no other young female company in Jacob's household. She was to learn that Canaan was not a safe place to seek friends.

*34 v 2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her.*

*3 His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman.*

We are given no indication of the time scale in these verses. It may be that verse 2 is descriptive of what we would call rape, or it could be that an association was made and developed from there. Verses 3 and 4 indicate that Shechem was not motivated only by lust, yet his actions here and his subsequent words to his father suggest someone who was used to getting his own way. Jacob heard what had happened to Dinah but said nothing until his sons returned home.

*34 v 7 And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done.*

Verses 7 to 17 tell us of the reaction of Jacob's sons. They were extremely angry. After discussion with Hamor and Shechem they deceitfully suggested that if the Hivites were circumcised they could intermarry with Jacob's family. But, as we saw in Session 8, circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. Only God had the right to admit others into that relationship.

The comments of the Hivites in verses 22 to 24 show that their motive in agreeing to this was to get hold of Jacob's property and flocks. So the proposed plan would have brought problems for Jacob.

Verses 25 to 31 show us that at least two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, wanted no alliance with the Hivites, they wanted Dinah back again!

It is noteworthy that Jacob showed no sign of resorting to the guile and cunning he had used on so many occasions earlier in his life. Simeon and Levi, however, showed that the old Jacob still lived on in their father's sons.

Jacob was, however, very worried about the possibility of revenge attacks from the surrounding inhabitants of the land.

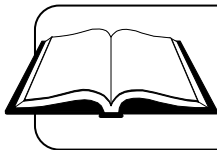




- God's servants should be careful not to become too involved with those who do not share the same respect for God's principles

This whole episode did more than anything else could have done to separate Israel from the Canaanites and the Canaanites from Israel. The antagonism which was to make the nation of Israel a separate people all down history was already powerfully at work.

## 35 v 1 to 15 – Jacob's return to Bethel



Read Genesis 35 v 1 to 15

*35 v 1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."*

It would no doubt be a relief to Jacob to be told to move away from the immediate area of Shechem. Here is God's comment on where Jacob should settle down. This was to be at Bethel, the place where Jacob saw the vision of the ladder which we read about in chapter 28 verse 10 onwards.

*35 v 2 And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments."*

*3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone."*

Jacob was determined to get rid of all bad religious influences and to make a fresh start, having now learned that he should trust in the God of Abraham.

Verse 5 reminds us that God was protecting the household of Jacob. The same protection had been available to Jacob ever since he left home, but he chose to take matters into his own hands.

So Jacob journeyed to Bethel and built an altar there.

35 v 9 *Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him.*

10 *And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob any more, but Israel shall be your name.” So He called his name Israel.*

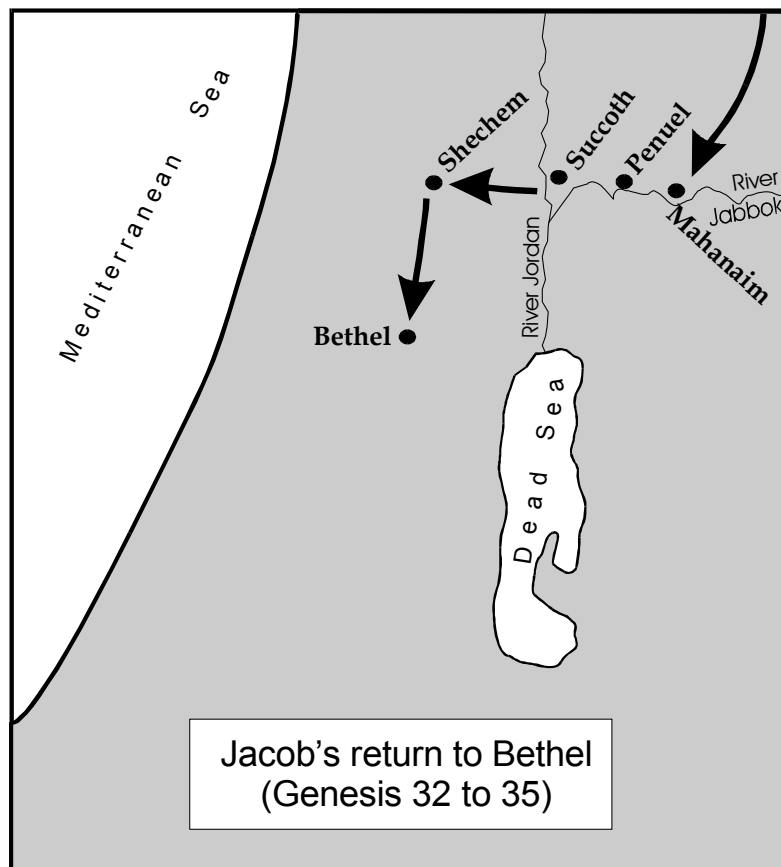
11 *Also God said to him: “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body.*

12 *The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.”*

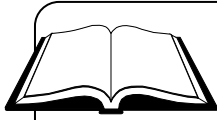
Verses 9 to 15 can be regarded as the climax of Jacob’s journey from Bethel to Syria and back.



- God confirmed Jacob’s change of name to Israel and repeated the true blessing that Isaac previously gave him (28 v 3 and 4)
- Jacob had many experiences, all of them designed by God to develop his character and make him realise that he should trust in God



## 35 v 16 to 29 – the death of Rachel



Read Genesis 35 v 16 to 29

*35 v 16 Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel laboured in childbirth, and she had hard labour.*

It seems strange that Jacob should move from Bethel when God had clearly told him to stay there. It is even stranger when we learn that Rachel was near to giving birth.

The answer may be found later on in this chapter (verses 27 to 29) where we read of the death of his father Isaac in Mamre. Possibly news of Isaac's impending death reached them, causing them to make such a journey at such an inconvenient time.

*35 v 18 And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin.*

Benjamin was Jacob's twelfth son. Rachel in her self pity called him "Ben-Oni" meaning "son of my sorrow", but Jacob renamed him "Benjamin" meaning "son of the right hand".

*35 v 19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).*

After burying Rachel, Jacob continued his journey to Mamre to see Isaac before he died. Together Jacob and Esau buried their father. Jacob then ceases to be the central figure in the story.

## 36 v 1 to 43 – Esau's descendants

This chapter lists Esau's descendants.



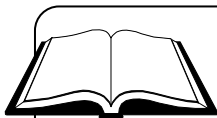
Read Genesis 36 v 6 to 8

Esau moved away from the land of Canaan and went to live in Mount Seir away from his brother Jacob.

## Summary of Jacob's life up to the death of Isaac

25 v 29 to 34	Jacob obtained the birthright from Esau.
27 v 1 to 29	Jacob deceived Isaac and received Esau's blessing.
27 v 41 to 28 v 5	Jacob escaped from Esau's anger.
28 v 10 to 22	Jacob's first visit to Bethel – the promises were renewed. God promised to be with him.
29 v 1 to 14	Jacob arrived at his uncle Laban's home at Haran.
29 v 15 to 30	He fell in love with Rachel and offered 7 years service for her. Laban deceived him and gave him Leah instead. He served 7 more years for Rachel.
29 v 31 to 30 v 24	11 sons were born to Jacob by 2 wives and 2 handmaids amid much bitterness.
30 v 25 to 43	Jacob served Laban 6 years for his flock.
31 v 1 to 55	Jacob fled from Laban. Rachel stole Laban's gods, which Laban failed to find.
32 v 1 to 33 v 17	Jacob, terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau, made elaborate preparations that were not necessary – Esau was not hostile. Jacob's hip was put out of joint to make him trust in God rather than his own strength.
33 v 18 to 34 v 31	The Dinah incident. Simeon and Levi deceived the Hivites.
35 v 1 to 29	Jacob returned to Bethel where the promises were given again. Rachel died in childbirth. Isaac died and Jacob and Esau buried him.

## Optional assignment 11



Look at Exodus 3 v 6 and 16; 4 v 5

You will see that God refers to Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in all three passages. Does this imply that God approved of their lives? Have a look at the summaries of the lives of all three and see what their strengths and weaknesses were and how God dealt with them. What can we learn from their lives?