



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

GENESIS

Week 3

Looking for Miss Right

Genesis 24:1-67

OPENING
up to the Word

How did (or might) you meet your mate? Which factors are most important? (a) confirmation of friends, (b) providential circumstances, (c) parental wisdom or approval, (d) prayer, (e) human initiative and ingenuity, (f) family or cultural background, (g) educational background, (h) common religious experience or values, (i) certain character traits.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Why didn't Isaac go to Nahor to pick out his own wife (24:6)? What could have gone wrong?
2. How did all concerned parties know Rebekah was the Lord's choice for Isaac (24:7-51; see factors listed under opening question)?
3. Even so, Rebekah's family had difficulty letting go and giving her their blessing (24:52-60). Why?
4. What happened when Isaac and Rebekah met (24:61-67)?
5. What did Abraham will to Isaac? To Ishmael and the other sons? Why the disparity? With what lasting result?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What advantages and disadvantages do you see in such arranged marriages? Overall, do you think it helps or hinders to rely on a third party?
2. What is the hardest thing about leaving home for the first time? About letting go or giving your parental blessing?
3. How can you know it is time for your children to leave home? To get married?
4. What would you like to inherit from your parents that has no price? What non-material quality would you like to pass along?

WINDOW
on the Word

*Parental blessings and cursings were extremely important, so **contracting a marriage** without consent of both father and mother was rare in biblical times. Ancient Semitic marriages were arranged mostly within the same clan (Ge 24:4; 28:2; 29:19; 46:8-27), often to a first cousin—even a half-sister (20:12). Later, in the priestly code of unlawful sexual relations (Lev 18), marriage with any close relative was barred. Marriage to foreigners was restricted, but Israelite kings often did so anyway for political reasons.*

Conflict Resolution: Peace at any Price

DAY 16

Genesis 25:19–26:33

When conflict arises, do you (a) stand firm, (b) fight, (c) flee, (d) negotiate, (e) sell out, (f) surrender? Give a recent example.

1. Judging by their jostling and grasping behavior and the Lord's explanation (25:21-26), what problems did Rebekah have conceiving, carrying, delivering and raising these particular twins?
2. As Esau and Jacob grew up, what differences became apparent (25:27-34)?
3. God promised Isaac a wonderful future in Gerar, despite the famine (26:1-6). So why did Isaac fear for his life and pass off his wife as his sister (26:7-11; also see 12:10-14 and 20:1-4)?
4. What fears and jealousy came between Abimelech and Isaac and why (26:12-16)? How did they make peace (26:15-22, 26-31)?
5. What went particularly well for Isaac (26:17-25)?
6. What's the moral of this story? (a) fear God's presence, (b) trust his promises, (c) God's grace is beyond human wisdom, (d) do whatever makes peace, (e) God plays favorites, (f) learn from the past.

1. Are you more like Esau or Jacob? Isaac or Abimelech? Are you at all suspicious, jealous, fearful, distrusting or feeling betrayed?
2. This week—in the face of some fear, jealousy, betrayal or tyranny of the urgent—how can you rely on, and rest in, God's reassuring presence, promise and provision?

The **birthright** (25:31-34) or inheritance was usually reserved for the oldest son and was double the allotment of any other son. In this case, the birthright contained the blessings from God to Isaac through Abraham. For despising this covenant, Esau was regarded as "godless" (Heb 12:16). Filling in the only **wells** in arid Gerar (26:15, 18) was, in effect, a declaration of war to people who lived in the desert. Isaac did not overreact to that provocation.

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Mama's Boy, Father's Blessing

Genesis 26:34–28:9

OPENING
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Of your favorite foods, which one is “to die for,” as venison was to Isaac? How much of it could you eat in one sitting?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Given the prophecy of 25:23-26, why did Rebekah take matters into her own hands (27:5-10)?
2. What initial objection to Rebekah’s plan did Jacob raise (27:11-12)? What objections did the blind Isaac raise? How was each objection overcome?
3. What might have happened had either Isaac, Jacob or Rebekah sensed the truth and trusted God to do his will, his way, in his time? Is it ever too late to do the right thing?
4. With whom do you identify in this story? (a) Isaac—duped into doing what he sensed was wrong; (b) Rebekah—playing favorites and manipulating others; (c) Jacob—succeeding, but at others’ expense; (d) Esau—short-sighted, looking for a scapegoat.
5. What did the blessing cost Jacob down the road?
6. To find an appropriate life partner, Jacob must obey Rebekah (27:42-28:9). How did Jacob obey, unlike Esau (26:34-35)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Have you been robbed of a perceived entitlement? What was your reaction?
2. In the context of your family ties and dynamics, does time heal all wounds, as Rebekah had hoped? What else is necessary?
3. Is ill-gotten gain really worth the family alienation, exile and fear that follows? Are you still paying for an unwise choice?

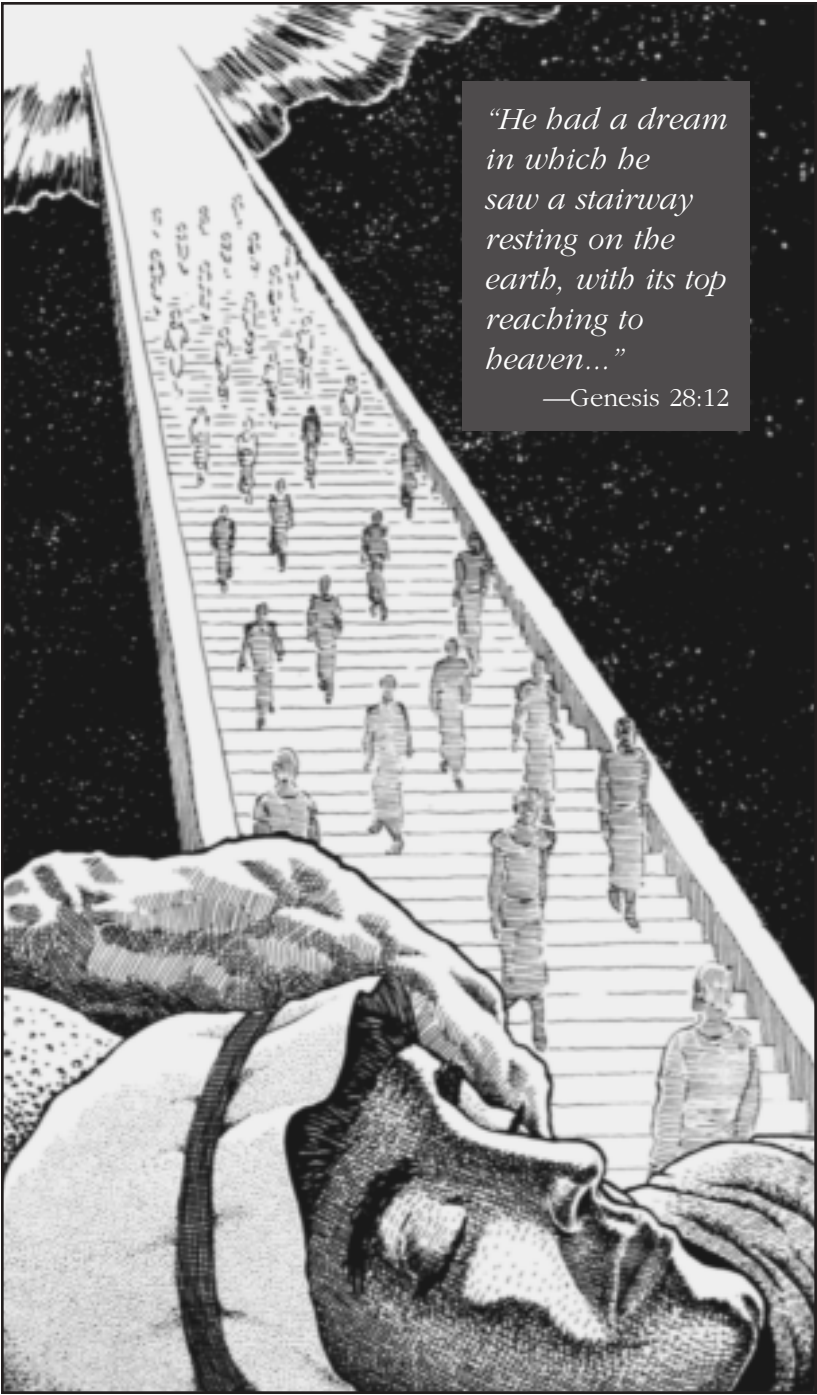
WINDOW
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*The ceremony of **blessing** formally grants the birthright (see 25:31-34 and related note on day 16); once given, the father’s word (and blessing) was irrevocable. Hence, this formal pronouncement was delayed as late in life as feasible, lest the entitled son do anything dishonorable that would cause the father to change his mind and reward or bless a more deserving son, as Jacob later did with three of his sons (49:2-27).*



*“Isaac, who had
a taste for wild
game, loved Esau,
but Rebekah
loved Jacob.”*

—Genesis 25:28

A black and white illustration depicting a man in the foreground, lying down and appearing to be in a dream. He is wearing a patterned blanket and has his eyes closed. In the background, a long, wide staircase extends from the ground up to a bright, glowing light at the top, which resembles a sun or moon. The staircase is set against a dark, starry sky. Numerous small, stylized human figures are shown walking up the stairs. The overall style is reminiscent of a woodcut or a detailed line drawing.

*“He had a dream
in which he
saw a stairway
resting on the
earth, with its top
reaching to
heaven...”*

—Genesis 28:12

Let's Make a Deal!

DAY 18

Genesis 28:10–29:30

Consider two deals you've made—one bad, one good. How did you get the short end of the stick? How did you get the best of the deal?

1. As Jacob journeyed from Beersheba to Haran, how was the covenant promise to Abraham and Isaac being fulfilled?
2. What did Jacob's dream and subsequent action reveal about this covenant relationship (28:12-22)?
3. With God as well as Laban, Jacob was a deal-maker. What conditions did Jacob put on God (28:20-21)? What pledges did he make to God? Did God buy Jacob's terms?
4. What is Jacob's double blessing as the next chapter unfolds (29:1-30)? How was the deceiver himself deceived?
5. Who ended up with the best deal? (a) Leah, (b) Jacob, (c) Rachel, (d) Laban. Why do you think so?

1. Jacob's dream makes him want the God of Abraham and Isaac to be his God. What would make *you* follow this God?
2. Jacob's deal ends up making him a slave of love. Have you known a love that was worth that? For what would you be willing to work and wait seven years?
3. Why do you think these stories—revealing a rather negative history—are included in the Bible?

*By ancient Jewish custom, a **mohar**, or "bride-price," was paid to a girl's father to compensate him for the loss of a working asset. In return, the father of the bride gave the couple a dowry, which also provided for her in the event she was widowed. Having no money for the woman he wanted, Jacob agreed to work off his bride-price over a 7-year period.*

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Baby Boom

Genesis 29:31–30:43

OPENING
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Where were you in the birth order? What is the advantage of being born first? Last? In the middle? What do you feel is the ideal family size?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What do you think Rachel and Leah both really wanted? (a) love, (b) respect, (c) fidelity, (d) Jacob's undivided attention, (e) security, (f) a baby boom.
2. What made Rachel resort to a surrogate mother and a mandrake plant (considered an aphrodisiac)? (a) desperation, (b) superstition, (c) stupidity, (d) faithful cooperation, (e) social custom, (f) pride.
3. What was the relationship between Laban and Jacob like? (a) manager-laborer, (b) loved the same women, (c) mutual distrust, (d) secret admiration.
4. Why did Jacob want to leave?
5. How and why was Jacob blessed despite his scheming (30:32-43; 31:9)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What does this story tell us (if anything) about using surrogate mothers today? (a) unbelievable, (b) unforgivable, (c) understandable, (d) ungodly, (e) unwise.
2. When things do not turn out as expected, are you tempted to think God has forgotten you? How do you fight that temptation?
3. Are you feeling pressure to produce, and take matters into your own hands, as did Rachel? Does any of that pressure come from religious sources?
4. Has God ever blessed you, despite your goof-ups and scheming?

WINDOW
on the Word

*While the use of maidservants as **surrogate mothers** was an acceptable social custom among the Hebrews, it was not without drawbacks.*

Run, Baby, Run

DAY 20

Genesis 31:1-55

Have you ever been trapped in a situation, contract or relationship from which you wanted to escape? Did you, or didn't you escape? Do you believe God supported your decision?

1. What made Jacob want to escape (31:1-3, 13-16)? In this case, God commanded him to leave.
2. Why not tell Laban he was leaving (31: 20, 27, 31)? If he had told Laban, what would Jacob have said (31:36-42)?
3. What did Laban really want (31:30, 43, 50)?
4. Why didn't Laban trust Jacob, his son-in-law and employee of 20 years?
5. Was Rachel justified in taking the household gods (31:30-35)? Why didn't she believe the God of Jacob was sufficient to protect her? What if she had told the truth?
6. A covenant ended the whole Laban-Jacob dispute (31:44-53). Why was (or wasn't) this agreement more trustworthy than other contracts between these two?

1. Do you ever want to run away from relationships or responsibilities? Is the problem better faced head-on? Or are some relationships and "responsibilities" better left behind?
2. Ever run from God? Have you ever run away from God because you decided to trust in religious schemes and idolatry?

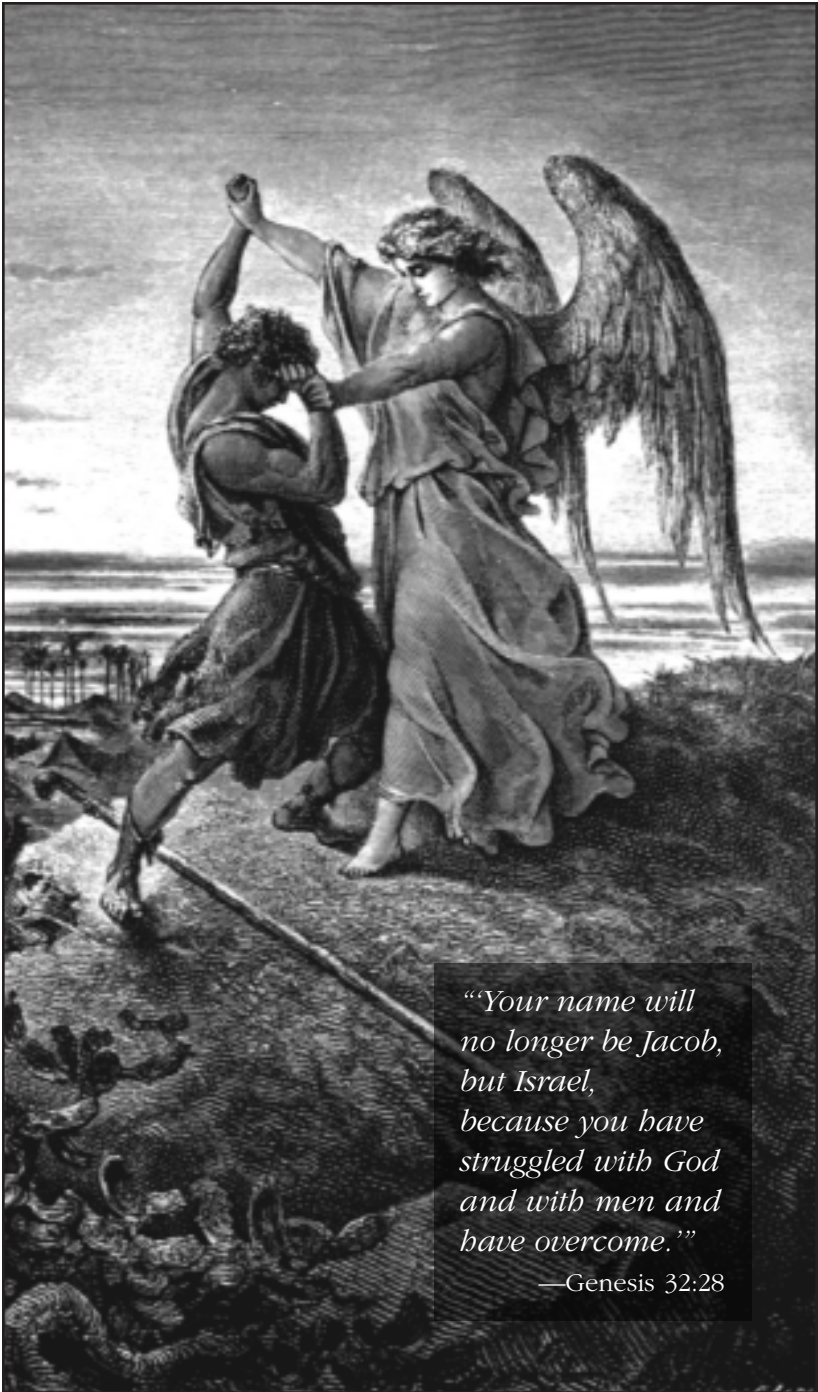
*The **gods** (Hebrew, teraphim; 31:30, 32, 34-35) that belonged to Laban were small household idols used for divination. Rachel may have taken them for protection on her journey to Canaan. God must surely have smiled at the irony of those small and powerless objects of human adoration being sat on.*

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*“Your name will
no longer be Jacob,
but Israel,
because you have
struggled with God
and with men and
have overcome.”*

—Genesis 32:28

Wrestlemania

DAY 21

Genesis 32:1–33:20

What do your family members wrestle over? (a) authority—who's in charge, (b) boundaries, (c) channel surfing, (d) everything, (e) food, (f) guilt from the past, (g) hope for the future, (h) in-laws, (i) religion.

1. What effect did the angels have on Jacob (32:1-2)? Why then did he still fear and scheme (32:7, 10; 33:1-11)?
2. Given their 20 years of alienation (25:33; 27:27-41), how did Jacob manage to face his brother?
3. Jacob wrestled with a man, as though with God (32:22-32). Why, do you think? Who won and why? With what changes and lasting results? Why the name change and wrenched hip?
4. Meanwhile, Esau was undergoing a change of heart (33:1-11). In response to what overtures from Jacob? Having become friends, why part company?
5. What aspects of this meeting between Jacob and Esau impress you as miraculous? As practical? Overdoing it? Too costly to imitate? Lamentable?

1. How would you respond to such overtures from a lifelong enemy?
2. What relationship are you struggling with now? What would it take, judging from the story of Jacob and Esau, for you to meet that person face-to-face?
3. Are you wrestling with God right now? Over what issues and with what results?

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