Lesson 3 – Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel

Introduction

The lesson this week will continue in the book of Genesis, examining the life of Rebekah who married Sarah's beloved son Isaac. You will then look at Leah and Rachel, the two women who married Rebekah's son Jacob.

One aspect of studying biblical narrative is to read the whole context of the narrative, not just looking at the event by itself, but looking at what took place before, as well as what followed. In this study of biblical women if you only read the exact verses that mention the woman's name, you will miss the circumstances of her life that contributed to her behavior and attitude. So then, please do not grow weary with the task of studying to develop the habit of **asking** God to help you every time you approach your time in the word. You will be strengthened as He instructs you, He will certainly equip you for whatever is ahead.

Do not let the repetition of some biblical narrative passages frustrate you. This repetition had a purpose, and sometimes it was simply to help the "hearer" of the word *remember* what the Holy Spirit directed the human author to record.

Please set aside time to meditate on God's word after you work on the lesson. When I take a walk or silently ride in the car God helps me understand the messages He has for me.

Day 1 – Genesis 24 - Rebekah

- 1. Genesis 22 introduced Rebekah and a record of her genealogy. After **praying** for God's strength, wisdom and assurance, open with these **observation questions** for today's lesson.
 - Trying to understand Hebrew genealogy is seldom an easy task, so many of the names used in the ancient near east are unfamiliar to us today, and it is hard to tell which names are men's and which names are women's! Please read Genesis 11:27-29, 22:20-24, and 25:20 then draw a simple diagram of Isaac and Rebekah's "family tree."

Now as you read Genesis 24 answer these observation questions.

- What did Abraham plan for Isaac's marriage and what did this reveal about Abraham?
- What did Abraham's servant's prayer in Genesis 24:12 demonstrate?

- Jot down the actions or words from Genesis 24 that would describe Rebekah and her attitude.
- 2. Please examine this word study for one of the **key words** in this lesson.

Strong's # and	Definition from Strong's Concordance,	Use of the word in other Scriptures:	
Transliteration:	unless written in italics:		
5650 Hebrew	Servant, bondage, bondman, bond	Genesis 26:24	
'ebed	servant		
Genesis 24:2			

- 3. Look back at Genesis 15:2 to review what was shared about Abraham's servant. What did this tell you about this man and his relationship with Abraham?
- 4. How can you tell that Eliezer told Rebekah's family about God's covenant with Abraham?
- 5. In the culture of the ancient near east, a woman's brother was often the one who "arranged" her marriage. Among people of this era, a daughter was considered a man's salvation, because through her alliances, wealth could be obtained that would benefit the entire family. What was given to Rebekah and what was given to her family as part of the marriage agreement?

6. Think back to what you read in Genesis 24 and recall how Rebekah's family treated her. What does this tell you about Rebekah?

7. After the marriage between Isaac and Rebekah was agreed upon, Rebekah, her maids, Eliezer, and his men set off on the 450 mile journey to Canaan. Rebekah had consented to leave her Chaldean homeland to marry a Hebrew man who lived in the midst of the powerful Hittite nation. Imagine how she felt traveling all that distance betrothed to someone she had never met. This account of Rebekah and Isaac's marriage gives specific evidence of the differences in their culture and the culture of the 21st century.

At the time Rebekah lived, a marriage agreement was established between the families of the bride and groom, but there was no wedding ceremony following the agreement. The marriage was consummated as Isaac and Rebekah's marriage was consummated in Genesis 24:67. What does this verse tell you about Rebekah's role in Isaac's life as they began their marriage?

Please end in a time of **prayer** before the Lord God Almighty.

Day 2 – Genesis 25 and 26

- 1. Genesis 24 ended with Isaac taking Rebekah as his bride. Now you will study Rebekah as the mother of twin sons. Please **pray** and ask God to give you His infinite wisdom with today's lesson, trusting Him with His word. Now begin with reading Genesis 25:19-34 and completing these **observation questions**.
 - What did Rebekah have in common with Sarah according to Genesis 25, and how did that situation change?
 - Something very significant happened in Genesis 25:23. What did this mean to Rebekah?
 - What was said about Rebekah and Isaac's twin sons in Genesis 25:25-28? Esau: Jacob:

• At the end of Genesis 25 you learn about Esau's willingness to sacrifice something of value. What was this, and why did he act in this way?

• In Genesis 26:7-11 records an incident with another King Abimelech of the Philistines in Gerar. What did this incident bring to your mind from two separate chapters you studied earlier and what was behind Isaac's motivation?

2. Please examine these word studies for some **key words** in this lesson.

Strong's # and Transliteration:	Definition from Strong's Concordance, unless written in <i>italics</i> :	Use of the word in other Scriptures:
1471 Hebrew goy Genesis 25:23	Nations, (often used as) a foreign nation, hence a Gentile, heathen, people. Sometimes used for the nation of Israel.	Exodus 33:13
3816 Hebrew leom Genesis 25:23	Peoples, a community, nation	Genesis 27:29 (nations in NASB)
5647 Hebrew 'abad Genesis 25:23	Serve, enslave, keep in bondage	Genesis 27:29
3290 Hebrew ya'aqob Genesis 25:26	Jacob , heel catcher (i.e. supplanter), the Israelite patriarch	Genesis 32:28
8535 Hebrew tam Genesis 25:27	Peaceful, complete, (usually moral), pious, specifically gentle, dear, perfect, undefiled, upright, <i>quiet</i>	Used 13 times in the Old Testament. Job 1:1 (blameless in <i>NASB</i>)
1062 Hebrew bekorah Genesis 25:31	Birthright, the firstling of man or beast, abstract, primogeniture. <i>The sovereign of the family, who was the political successor.</i> ¹	Genesis 25:34, 27:36

3. The apostle Paul wrote about Rebekah's twins in Romans 9:10-13. Why did Paul make reference to this? Briefly record some of the facts to help you understand the contrast that was made.

The twins:

Esau:

Jacob:

What did Paul teach about God in the verses following Romans 9:13?

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¹ George Matheson, *The Representative Women of the Bible*, New York, Hodder and Stoughton, 1907, p. 85. 38

A Closer Look at Isaac, Esau, and Jacob

a. You might read Malachi 1:1-5 for additional teaching on the twin sons. God's judgment upon Esau:

Jacob:

b. Now please read Genesis 26:1-16. Even Abimilech knew the seriousness of Isaac's sin, for the punishment for adultery was death. God wanted to preserve marriage, and especially the line of the Messiah. What did God say to Isaac when He appeared to him in Genesis 26:24?

4. The family *birthright* was highly valued in the ancient near east, and provided a spiritual and political *blessing* to the recipient. Genesis 25 demonstrated God's sovereignty over mankind and His plan for Israel. God chose Jacob even though the established custom of birthright would have gone to Esau. God's provision for His people did not prevent Israel from having enemies.

The descendants of Ishmael are striving with Israel to this day. Esau formed the nation of Edom, south east of the Dead Sea, and remained a rival of the nation Israel for centuries. Can we really understand this?

The prophet Isaiah declared in Isaiah 55:8,9,11 that God's ways are not our ways, His thoughts are not our thoughts, and he reminded us that God's word that goes forth from God's mouth will not return to Him empty, without accomplishing what He desires.

Please read Genesis 26:34,35. What was Isaac and Rebekah's response to Esau's decision and why?

Now please turn to Hebrews 12:15-17 for a New Testament passage that provides a commentary of today's reading. What was taught about Rebekah's son Esau and why was he considered an example for the nation of Israel?

Please close in prayer **asking God** what He would have you do with the truths you studied in today's lesson.

Day 3 – Genesis 27 and 28

- 1. Yesterday's lesson looked at Rebekah's twin sons and the family birthright. The focus of today's lesson will be further strife between the two brothers. In studying biblical narrative one must first read the passage of Scripture and then observe the text by asking the "5 Ws and an H" questions. I have found that for me to go any further I must spend time ruminating through the lesson God has revealed to me, as I cannot rush through a lesson and expect to really know what God is saying and what I am to do with His truth. Some of what we have studied is confusing, but I know I will never understand every incident that has been recorded, and I must accept that fact. So please open by **praying** that your eyes would be opened to God's truth and begin with several review questions.
 - How was Rebekah's *character* portrayed in these earlier passages?

Genesis 24:15-28	Genesis 24:54-60	Genesis 24:64-67	Genesis 25:21-28	Genesis 26:6-11

- What was the prophecy God revealed to Rebekah about her children in Genesis 25:23?
 - Now read Genesis 27 and 28 and answer these **observation questions**.
- In the early Hebrew culture, the first born obtained the "birthright" at the moment of his birth. When the son was older, he would receive his father's blessing as the head of the family and would pass along the mantle of his responsibility to his oldest son. Please review the two important elements of his family history that Isaac was ignoring when he called Esau to himself in Genesis 27:1-4?

 Genesis 25:23

 Genesis 25:29-34

Please compare "Isaac's blessing" with God's prophecy to Rebekah and God's covenant with Isaac. What do these have in common?
 Genesis 25:23 Genesis 26:2,4,5,24 Genesis 27:27-29

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What was Jacob's vow in Genesis 28:20-22, and how was this different from the covenant God made with him?

2. Please examine these word studies for some **key words** in this lesson.

Strong's # and	Definition from Strong's Concordance,	Use of the word in other Scriptures:
Transliteration:	unless written in italics:	
7045 Hebrew	Curse, vilification, accurse, accursed,	Deuteronomy 30:1
qelalah	cursing, a reviling, a reproach. The	
Genesis 27:12	opposite of blessing.	
1293 Hebrew	Blessing, benediction, by implication	Genesis 33:11 (present in <i>NIV</i>)
berakah	prosperity, a liberal blessing. The one	
Genesis 27:35	who received the blessing took on the	
	role of the "priest" in the family. ²	
779 Hebrew	Curse, to execrate, bitterly curse.	Genesis 3:14,17
arar	There are six words that mean "to	
Genesis 27:29	curse," this has the meaning of binding	
(The same word	with a "spell," and hemming in with	
was used twice.)	obstacles. ³	
1697 Hebrew	Word, a matter (as spoken of), or a	Exodus 20:1
dabar	thing; chronicle, commandment, tiding.	
Genesis 27:34		

- 3. Jacob's comment to his mother in Genesis 27:12 showed his concern that he would be cursed rather than blessed by his father. Read again Genesis 25:23 to see Rebekah's motivation behind her plan. The truth is that the account in Genesis 27 showed that every member of Isaac's family sinned against God. Briefly describe each member's disobedience. Isaac's sin:

 Rebekah's sin:

 Esau's sin:

 Jacob's sin:
- 4. One aspect of the Hebrew culture that is critical to understanding Rebekah's life is the importance associated with giving one's word. The Hebrew word for *word* (*dabar*) was very important. When someone made a promise, or gave their *word* concerning something, it was a concrete declaration that could not be taken away or undone, and was taken seriously by everyone who was involved. The Old Testament prophets introduced God's proclamations with "the word of the Lord came to..." The Ten Commandments are actually ten declarations, ten statements, and in fact, ten *words* (the plural form of *dabar*). Read Genesis 27:33,34 and meditate on what took place in this incident.

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² Matheson, Ibid., p. 85.

³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, Chattanooga, AMG Publishers, 1990, p. 1713.

5. When someone married they set up their own home near the home of their parents. Even today, while traveling in the middle-east you can see Bedouin communities in the desert with a separate tent for each of the man's wives, as well as a separate tent for each of his adult son's if they have chosen to follow the family's lifestyle. When Genesis 27:30 recorded that Esau came in from his hunting and made savory food for his father, he was most likely occupying his own dwelling, as Genesis 26:34 recorded his marriages.

It is interesting that Jacob cooked lentil soup and that tempted Esau in Genesis 25:29. Then in Genesis 27:31 Esau himself cooked food in order to please his father, and to obtain his father's blessing. Think about the two situations and what circumstances were different in these two that changed Esau's attitude and his behavior.

I find it VERY interesting that food played such an important and unique role in the life of Rebekah and her family. For some people Esau's desire for food would never be a personal issue, but some could empathize with Esau's response in Genesis 25:29-34. Esau gave up the spiritual blessing of his birthright to satisfy his immediate physical longing. Is there a physical longing that has tempted you to sacrifice your spiritual blessing or your relationship with your Father God? What can get in the way of your relationship with God?

What have you learned from Rebekah? What qualities of Rebekah can you model yourself after? What qualities of Rebekah do you need to avoid?

Please close by bowing before God and seeking His wisdom concerning your life and what is important to you.

Days 4 and 5 – Leah and Rachel – Genesis 29 – Genesis 33

- 1. The New Testament used the word *patriarch* to describe Abraham's position. The culture of the Old Testament was regarded as a patriarchal society, although this word was not actually found in the Old Testament. A dictionary defines a patriarch as the father and ruler of a family or tribe. As you proceed with this study, you will see the impact the patriarchal society had upon Hebrew women. In the next two days you will study Leah and Rachel and the role God entrusted to each of them. Begin by **praying** for God's help and open with these **observation questions**.
 - What do you learn about Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29:1-17?
 Leah: Rachel:

•	After reading all of Genesis 29, what do you learn about Laban's actions and his character, especially in regard to his daughters and Jacob?
•	Look in Genesis 29:31 through Genesis 30:24, and Genesis 35:16-18 for the record of the children born to Jacob. What was the response that was recorded at their births? Names of Jacob's children: Mother of child: The mother's response:
•	Jacob made plans to leave his wives' homeland and return to Canaan in Genesis 31:1-13. After reading Genesis 31:14-16, think about what Leah and Rachel's response to Jacob's plan tells you about the character of these two sisters.
•	What does the incident shared about Rachel in Genesis 31:32-35 add to what you know about this woman?

2. Please examine these word studies for some **key words** in this lesson.

Strong's # and Transliteration:	Definition from Strong's Concordance, unless written in <i>italics</i> :	Use of the word in other Scriptures:
1736 Hebrew duwday Genesis 30:14-16	Mandrakes, boiler or basket, also an aphrodisiac. A poisonous herb, used in ancient times as medicine, also an aid to conceiving a child. ⁴	This word is used once in the Old Testament: Song of Solomon 7:13
3478 Hebrew yisra'el Genesis 32:28	Israel, he will rule as God, a symbolic name for Jacob, also of Jacob's posterity	Genesis 33:20 Genesis 35:10

3. A custom in Mesopotamia made provision for an heir coming through a woman's servant. When the baby was being born, the servant was to sit upon the lap of her mistress, who would sit upon a birthing stool. Read Genesis 30:2-5 to see how Rachel's plan made mention of this ancient near east custom.

A Closer Look at Jacob

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a. Briefly summarize Jacob's plan for success, according to Genesis 30:25-40?

b. What was recorded in Genesis 30:41-43, that showed the results of Jacob's plan?

c. Why did Jacob plan to leave Laban's home land and move back to Canaan according to Genesis 31:1-3?

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⁴ World Book Dictionary, Chicago, World Book, Inc., 1985, p. 1264.

4. Now please read Genesis 31:30-35 to see the reference to household idols. This type of idol was kept by families who believed that the idols offered protection and the idols were worshipped at a family altar. For those who believed in Almighty God, owning household idols was considered to be idolatry, as it was religious "polygamy." What does this incident in Genesis 30 tell you about Jacob's family?
5. What was the agreement between Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31:43-55 and how did this affect Leah and Rachel?
6. Next week's lesson will finish the study of Leah and Rachel, as well as move ahead to other women to complete the book of Genesis. I know this lesson has asked you to read a great deal of Scripture, but the lesson for this week is drawing to a close! Please take the time to read Genesis 32 and 33, and jot down notes about the evidence shown here as to the power and faithfulness of God. Look also at what you learn about Jacob as well as what these chapters reveal about Jacob's wives, Leah and Rachel. God: Jacob: Leah and Rachel:
Proverbs 31:30 says, "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that fears the Lord, she shall be praised." To say someone "fears the Lord" in the Hebrew culture was a euphemism, or "a saying" that meant someone "kept God's law" and followed after God's righteousness. Can you think of a hymn or chorus that you might sing as a tribute to God, acknowledging Him for the power He gives His children to follow Him and be obedient to His will.