



# GENESIS

PART 2  
GENESIS 22:1-50:26

# Genesis

Genesis 22:1-50:26

Anchor Church | Spring 2020

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# **The Story of Scripture**

## **Creation**

In Genesis, God shows himself to be the Creator. He has always existed, and as we study Scripture, we will find he has always existed as the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three persons. Everything else was created by him from nothing, a fact that shows us he is wholly different from us. As we are introduced to his creation in Genesis 1, we see that everything he has made is good, and we feel a tension because we recognize that the world as we know it misses the mark. It is not good that people get old, that loved ones get sick and die, that the world is filled with violence and corruption.

This tension in the story is intentional. Things are not how God created them or wanted them to be. He created a good world, and at its heart is a garden called Eden that represents the best of it. Here he places a man and woman (Adam and Eve), both created in the image of God, to rule over creation and to fill the earth with the glory of God. This is a world with no sin, no sickness, no violence and no death. They have everything that they need. They have fellowship with God, they have a purpose, and they have the use of all of creation. God gives them life freely with only one condition: they can eat of the fruit of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they eat from it, they will die.

## **The Fall**

In the next scene, a serpent enters the garden. This creature suggests that God does not have humanity's best interest in mind, that maybe they know more about what they want than God does. He suggests that God denies them the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because he does not want them to be like him. And instead of trusting in the goodness of God as displayed throughout his creation and provision for them, they disobey God. This is known as the Fall. At this point, sin and its consequences enter into the world, and it is corrupted. From here, the Bible shows how the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey God leads to increasing destruction and death. It corrupts everything it touches, and humanity can do nothing to rid itself of the problem. Evil is in our world because we invited it in, and there is nothing we can do to shut it out again. This is the tension we are meant to feel as we read Scripture: one that echoes our experience in what is often a cruel world.

But God is gracious. Instead of letting death be the last word, he makes a promise in Genesis 3:15 even as he doles out the consequences of disobedience. When talking to the serpent, God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." God promises that there will one day be an offspring (or seed or child) of the woman that will defeat the serpent. He will be hurt by the serpent, but in so doing, he will crush its head. This promise will become clearer as the story unfolds.

## **The Good Seed and Righteousness by Faith**

After this, we see the effects of sin driving the world into chaos. Just as God promised, sin has led to death. People are choosing immorality, violence, abuse, destruction, and death. A few faithful hold to the promise of a seed of the woman: a serpent slayer who will set things right, but even these show themselves to be thoroughly infected by sin. The story of Noah illustrates this. Things have gone horribly wrong up to this point: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). But Genesis 5:28–29 says, "When Lamech had lived

182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.’” Lamech, Noah’s father, understands the promise of Genesis 3:15 that God will send a serpent slayer to set things right. He hopes that his son is this man. And as Noah grows, it looks like he might be; God recognizes that he is the one righteous man on earth.

Because the world is so evil, God floods the earth, saving only Noah and his family. This story teaches us something about the heart of man. Although God has brought judgment upon the earth and is restarting with one righteous man and his family, sin has so permeated the human heart that even Noah, a righteous man who has just been spared judgment, shows his brokenness. The next time we hear about Noah, he is drunk and naked, shaming himself before his children. Even the most righteous man on earth falls far short of God’s standard for humanity. Noah looked like he may be the promised seed of the woman to slay the serpent, but he is as broken as all the rest. Though his faith is to be emulated, he cannot save even himself, much less the world. And by Genesis 11, we see the world openly rebelling against the rule of God again. This shows there is a heart problem with humanity. We choose to cut ourselves off from God, the source of life, and in doing so, we choose destruction. That is the clear trajectory for humanity established in Genesis.

But just as things are looking hopeless, God steps in and chooses a man who will later be renamed Abraham to receive a great promise. In Genesis 12:1–2, God says to Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Of particular importance here is the idea that all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (more on that in a minute). Of immediate concern to Abraham is how God can make him a great nation even though he has no children and has a barren wife. But in Genesis 15, God reaffirms his promise, and Abraham believes God and in so doing clues us into how a sinful and broken people might be able to be made right with our creator. Genesis 15:6 says, “And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Abraham believes that God will come through on his promise, and God counts Abraham’s faith as righteousness. This clues us into why people like Noah are considered righteous even though we see that man’s heart is broken. They believe the promise of the seed of the woman who will slay the serpent. And God is narrowing his promise when he covenants with Abraham to bless the nations through his offspring or seed. The serpent slayer will be a child of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations.

The OT’s definition of righteousness can be surprising to many. Many see the OT way to salvation as observance to the law of Moses, but this is not the case. It is by faith in the promises of God. Romans 4:1–3 assures us that this interpretation is correct, “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’” Faith, not works, is and has always been the basis of justification. However, it is important to note that belief and obedience are closely related throughout Scripture. Belief is counted as righteousness, but that belief is always accompanied by a heart that is motivated towards obedience by the grace and mercy received. Thus obedience is the fruit (or result) of a life of faith. Faith, not works, is counted as righteousness. Obedience flows out of this faith. Obedience can be thought of as

living out the identity God gives us because of our faith. We will look at this more in our discussion of the New Testament.

Just as we would expect from our knowledge of humanity, Abraham and his descendants continue to exhibit evidence of heart problems. Throughout the rest of the OT, they lie, they cheat, they sleep around, they murder. They are thoroughly broken. They will never make themselves pure. Even the best choose themselves over God. It is important that we see salvation as something completely out of the reach of humanity. But more importantly, God steps in and provides salvation to those who are willing to repent. God is faithful despite failures. He continues to pursue his people. He continues to offer forgiveness and mercy to those who will respond in belief to his promises.

### **The Exodus and The Law**

A few generations down the road from Abraham, we find that his family (the Hebrews or the people of Israel) has grown large, but they are enslaved to the Egyptians. It is important to note that this is predicted in Genesis 15:13, a fact that should only further confirm the sovereignty of God in our minds. Things are not good. Not only are they oppressed, but their numbers intimidate Pharaoh, and he decrees that every Hebrew male child born be killed by being cast into the Nile (Exodus 1:22). But one woman, in an effort to save her baby son, places him in a basket and floats him down the same river. The daughter of Pharaoh finds the child and raises him as her own. This man is Moses. He will lead Israel in the exodus, a climatic moment in history where God delivers Israel from Egypt and establishes them as a nation. This will be the moment by which OT believers remember the faithfulness of God and becomes the bedrock for their hope of future deliverance.

The story of Exodus shows the power of God. He uses the deliverance of Israel to tell a story that will be repeated over and over again. A man will bring a broken people out of the bonds of slavery and into a Promised Land. The story of Moses will set the trajectory for the greater redemption story where Christ comes to save his people from sin and death and restore them and the world to their intended place. Moses, through the power of God, pleads with Pharaoh to let his people go. God sends ten plagues, each proving his power over the gods of Egypt and the last of which costs the Egyptians that which they took from the Israelites: their firstborn sons. Israel is spared this fate through what becomes known as the Passover. God calls each house to sacrifice a lamb and paint its blood on the door posts. They are to then eat a special meal that becomes known as the Passover meal. That night as the angel of the Lord is putting the firstborn to death, he passes over the houses that believe God and act on his commandment to sacrifice the lamb, resulting in the sparing of their firstborn sons. This final plague convinces Pharaoh to release Israel.

Despite the miraculous ways God delivers them from Egypt, including the crossing of the Red Sea, they again choose fear rather than trust him. God leads them on the way to Promised Land in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He feeds them manna that miraculously appears on the ground. He gives them water from a rock when they have nothing to drink, and still they grumble against him.

Finally, they come to a place called Mount Sinai and something amazing happens. God makes a covenant (probably the best way to understand a covenant is a promise that is marked by loyal relationship) with Israel that they will be his people if they will obey what he calls them to do. That sounds good to them and so they say they will. Moses then goes up the mountain to meet with God and before he can come back down, they have already failed. They make an idol

and begin worshipping it. The only thing that keeps God from destroying them is his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Eventually, they move on. God leads them on towards the Promised Land (Canaan), and he continues to provide for them on the way. As they near the land, they send out twelve spies to investigate. It is a rich land but also one filled with powerful people. Ten of the twelve spies report that they do not believe they can take the land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, disagree and urge the people to trust God. Instead, they doubt his promise and try to stone Joshua and Caleb, rebelling against God. God intervenes and is again on the verge of destroying Israel. Only his promise stays his hand. The consequence for their actions? None of this unbelieving generation will get to enter the Promised Land. All but Joshua and Caleb will die in the wilderness as Israel is made to wander in it for the next 40 years.

This includes Moses. He is like Noah in that he appears to be the one who will bring about the promises of God, but despite his great faithfulness, he too sins in ways that show us he too is broken and in need of God's intervention. This is never more evident than when he strikes the rock at Meribah in disbelief and frustration, and God says to him, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12). Even the great prophet Moses falls short of God's perfect standard and is lost apart from God's intervention.

It is amazing that God continues to provide for Israel even as they wander through the desert. But the message is clear – disobedience displays a lack of belief in the promises of God, resulting in wandering through the desert rather than entering into the Promised Land (an image that will later represent entering into the rest of God). As the 40 years come to a close, Moses gives some last instructions to the Israelites before he dies, and they enter into the land without him.

In Deuteronomy 28–29, Moses reminds them of the covenant they have made with God. If they believe in him and his promises as demonstrated by their obedience, he will bless them in all kinds of ways. If they disobey, they will experience curses, most notably they will face exile at the hands of their enemies. Deuteronomy 30:15 sums it up this way, "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil." But Deuteronomy 30 also lets us know what is going to happen. They are going to disobey and go into exile. They are going to do exactly what everyone before them has done. They are going to choose to disobey God and die, and here we are clued in as to why: they have uncircumcised hearts. They can't love God how they are supposed to because their hearts are infected with sin and must be made new. This is also called a "heart of stone" (Ezekiel 36:26). But there is hope. There will be a day that God intervenes. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." God is doing something on the behalf of his people that they cannot do for themselves: change their very hearts.

This echoes what we see in Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:1–2. God is at work to bring about salvation for his people, and we are seeing his plan slowly unfold. It is something he must do on our behalf. God will send a seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He will be from the line of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations. Genesis 15:6 assures us that those who are considered righteous are those who believe the promises of God. These believers will be the ones whose hearts have been circumcised so they will love God with all their hearts and souls that they may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Despite the warning, the prediction of Deuteronomy 30 comes true. Upon entering the Promised Land, Israel's obedience quickly wavers. Numerous accounts like Joshua 7 show the Israelites disobeying God thinking they know better than him about what will make them happy. At times, they keep things for themselves they were told not to; other times, they are fearful. They do not completely conquer the land. Judges records in great detail a people who are quick to forget God. He intervenes to save them over and over again, sending judges to help, but they continue to fall into unbelief and disobedience. Judges is summed up with its last verse, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

### **Kingdoms, Prophets, and Exile**

At this point, God allows Israel an earthly king. A man of kingly stature named Saul receives the crown. However, despite his appearance, it quickly becomes apparent that his life does not match up. He becomes murderously jealous of a young man named David that God chooses to replace him as king (remember disobedience illustrates a lack of belief). David is a man specifically chosen by God. He is from the tribe of Judah. We didn't talk about this, but in Genesis 49:10, Jacob, a descendant of Abraham, declares that Judah, or more literally an offspring of Judah, will rule forever. All peoples will obey him, and the kingdom will be so wealthy he can tie his foal to the choice vine and wash his garments in wine. These are Messianic descriptors, meaning that these things describe the Messiah, the one God is sending to set things right, and the Messianic Kingdom he will usher in. This is important now because it hints to the meaning of the promises of God given here.

The serpent slayer will be a seed of the woman (a human), a seed of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, and as we will see, a son of David (meaning in the lineage of David). David seems to be the next contender for the position of serpent slayer. God handpicks him. As a boy, he slays the giant Goliath when all of Israel trembles before him. He is patient and merciful to Saul despite Saul's murderous intentions towards him. He is even called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). But we will see that he too is broken, most notably in his sin with Bathsheba. He will sleep with her, a married woman, and then have her husband killed to cover his sin. Again, the Bible clearly illustrates even the best of men have hearts that are deeply flawed. David is not the Messiah. But he does receive a promise from God that focuses the expectations of deliverance. God promises David, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). One from the line of David will rule forever as the Messianic King. This Kingdom will be described in further detail in the prophets, but the gist is that it will be an everlasting kingdom marked by righteousness and justice: the two major concerns of God's law.

After David dies, his son Solomon begins his rule. His rule, like his father's, starts out promising. He asks God for wisdom and receives it. He writes much of the wisdom literature in Scripture (Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and much of Proverbs). He is successful in his reign. The nations come to meet him and pay tribute. In some ways, he is a picture of what the Messianic King might look like, but he is as fallen as the rest. He lets his numerous wives lead his heart after idols rather than stay true to God.

The rest of the accounts of the kings of Israel are much like this. Most are outright rebellious. Some make a call for renewed faithfulness, but the trend is towards disobedience. As a result, God does just what he said he was going to do. The people choose disobedience and in doing so, they choose the curse (Deut. 30:15-20).

This leads to disaster for Israel. Under Solomon's son, the kingdom of Israel is split into two kingdoms: Israel in the North, and Judah in the South. The kingdom of Israel is conquered by the Assyrians and carried off into exile. The same happens to the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. At this point, the question is how one in the line of David will sit on the throne forever and set things right if there is no throne in Israel? But we must remember that during the periods of the kings and now in the exile, prophets are sent to tell the Jewish people they are about to be punished and then while in exile why they are being punished. They have disobeyed God and are experiencing the curse Moses discussed in Deuteronomy 29. But that is not the end of the story. They are also reminded of who God is, how he is faithful to his promises, how he is merciful, how he has redeemed them in the past, and how they can expect him to do so again. And he will do so in a way that will address the problem they have been unable to address themselves. He will give them new hearts.

There are many clarifications of the promises of God in the prophets. In our brief overview it is important to see that there will be a Messianic (anointed one, promised deliverer) King from the line of David (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-5) and yet greater than David (Psalm 110:1), who in some way is like a son of man and yet who seems to share in the divinity and authority of God (Daniel 7:13-14), who will suffer for the sins of others (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) and yet will rule forever in righteousness and justice over a world that has been freed from sin and its curse (Isaiah 11:1-9). This king will not only save Israel but will bring salvation to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). We see that the members of this new kingdom will have a new covenant with God in which he will write his law on their hearts and mind (Jeremiah 31:31-34), meaning he will make them into the kind of people with hearts that are able to love follow him. There is more than we can discuss in this short overview, but it is important to see the expectation of redemption and salvation that exists because of the promises of God revolving around the seed of the woman as declared by the prophets throughout the exile.

This is where the OT ends, with the expectation of a Messiah, a serpent-slayer from the line of David who will be a blessing to the nations, who will provide forgiveness of sins, conquer death, and rule eternally with righteousness and justice. However, as they trickle back from exile and are allowed to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, no one thinks that this new kingdom has come. Israel languishes, waiting for its promised deliverer, and they will do so for 400 years. The question for Israel is, "When will this Messiah come?"

## **The Messiah**

This is the context for the coming of Jesus—a once perfect world broken by an act of rebellion by the very ones created to be caretakers of it. This rebellion has led to broken fellowship with the creator, humanity's enslavement to sin, suffering caused by evil, and ultimately death. Hope seems distant, but deliverance is coming in a most unexpected way.

It is important to note that the NT writers see the coming of Jesus and his preaching of the dawning kingdom of God as the fulfillment of the OT Scripture and its promises. This is why Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus connecting him to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17), Luke records a genealogy connecting him all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38), and all of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) make frequent use of OT quotes and allusions to confirm Jesus as the promised Messianic King. They believe God's promises in the OT and see them fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Although there are plenty of examples of God choosing people of low station to fulfill his purposes, the typical Jewish expectation for the Messiah was one who would come in political

power. That is not how Jesus comes. He comes from humble beginnings. When he starts his ministry he chooses twelve men to invest in. He doesn't choose the best and brightest; he chooses fishermen and a tax collector. But as he begins to minister, it becomes clear that Jesus is different. He heals people; he casts out demons; he shows his authority over nature; and he miraculously provides sustenance. He amazes the crowds as he teaches as one with more authority than they have never seen. He forgives sins; he overturns the temple; he explains how they have misunderstood the teachings of the OT. He claims to be the fulfillment of OT, the way to the Father, the living water, the light of the world. But most amazing of all, he claims to be the Son of God: one with God the Father. That is what all his teachings and miracles are pointing towards. The Messiah (or Christ as he is called in the NT) has come and his miracles are showing the dawning of the new kingdom promised in the OT. But the Jewish leaders are skeptical, which is unsurprising as it threatens their positions of power, and they begin to plot to kill Jesus.

Jesus' teachings are surprising. He teaches an upside-down economy for the new kingdom he is ushering in. The meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). You must love your enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). You must store up your treasure in heaven, not on earth (Matt. 6:19-21). Those who want to follow him must expect to be hated and persecuted (Matt. 10:16-25). Those who are like children will be the greatest in the kingdom (Matt. 18:3-4). Those who desire to be great must serve (Matt. 23:11-12). Earthly riches make entering into the kingdom difficult (Matt. 19:23-24). Those who wish to keep their lives must lose it (Matt. 16:24-27). Then Jesus shows what he means by all of this by serving us in a way that we could never repay. He does something for us that we could never do for ourselves. He pays the penalty for our sins. The greatest among us, the very Son of God, serves a world that has been rebelling against him since the beginning of time and takes our sins upon his shoulders. He takes our penalty for our sins—death. The God of the universe becomes the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:5, "...he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." And because he is perfect, because he is sinless, because he is the Son of God, he rises again from the grave (Matt. 28:1-10). Jesus—the seed of the woman, the blessing to the nations, the Davidic king, the suffering servant, the Son of God—has fulfilled the promise of God. He crushes the head of the serpent. He defeats sin and death and inaugurates the new kingdom.

### **Our Place in the Story**

This is where you and I find ourselves in the story. Sin and death have been defeated, and we are offered a choice. Will we trust Jesus and his work on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins or will we trust in ourselves and our works? At first the answer seems easy. But Jesus calls us to count the cost of following him. He is coming back to set all things right, but until he does, we are to be sharing his story so that others might be saved. And what the Bible tells us is that many will reject him and in so doing reject and persecute us. Belief in him will mean hatred by the world. The call to follow Jesus is the call to forget about temporary, earthly gain and to pursue Jesus and his coming kingdom. It is the call to be willing, like Jesus, to suffer injustice. It is the call to share the gospel with those who are still dead in their sin so that they too can know God. We will find that we are exiles in this world, that we don't really belong, but we will also find that the temporary cost will be eternally worth it (Matt. 13:44-46). Luke 9:23-25 says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” We will all die. But Jesus tells us that a temporary life surrendered to him will result in salvation and eternal life with him in his new kingdom.

Revelation 21:1-4 says, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’” This is just a small glimpse into what God has in store for those who accept what Jesus has done on their behalf, who believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God. While we await his return, we are called to live in such a way that we demonstrate our belief, particularly in our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus to those who do not know him.

In short, we respond to the story of Scripture by knowing Jesus and making him known.

### **Questions to ask when reading Scripture:**

1. What is the author’s main point in this section of Scripture?
2. Where does what I’m reading fit in the overall story of the Bible? (i.e. before or after the Exodus from Egypt; before or after Jesus; before or after the resurrection, etc.)
3. What does it mean for those who were the original audience?
4. What does it mean for me today?
5. How should I change in response to this Scripture?

### **A Few Resources for Understanding the Story of Scripture**

#### **For Small Children:**

*The Biggest Story* by Kevin DeYoung

*The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* by Sally Lloyd-Jones

*The Big Picture Story Bible* by David Helm

*The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross* by Carl Laferton

thebibleproject.com

New City Catechism (Available as a book or for free as an app on both iOS and Android)

#### **For Youth and Adults**

thebibleproject.com

*The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* by Chris Bruno

*Multiply* by Francis Chan

#### **For a More In-depth Look**

*The Servant King: The Bible’s Portrait of the Messiah* by T.D. Alexander

*Old Testament Survey* by Paul House and Eric Mitchell

*God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* by James M. Hamilton, Jr.

## **Week 1**

### **Genesis 22:1–23:20 - The Sacrifice of Isaac and Belief in the Promise**

By Harvey Edwards, III

#### **Introduction**

On October 13, 2019, Cody Edmund Dixon was arrested in Abilene, Texas after confessing to killing his common-law wife Alia Rae Hutchison and their nine-month old daughter Aria Ellen Dixon. He told law enforcement officers that God had told him to do it. This and many other shocking and heart-breaking stories like it jar the consciences of normal people. How can anyone misread the will of God so thoroughly that he becomes able to justify the taking of innocent human life? Those of us who have been raised in modern society know intrinsically and with assurance that such an act is heinous and wrong, and those of us who believe in God find it inconceivable that God would ever direct a human being to kill another innocent human being.

And then we read in our Bibles the story of Abraham and Isaac, and the sacrifice that was ordered but never happened, and we experience the unsettling occurrence of what psychologists call cognitive dissonance. How could God demand of Abraham something so seemingly cruel as the sacrifice of his own beloved son? And how do we handle its inclusion in our Bible, which as Anchor members we accept as the inerrant word of God? We know that we can't just clip it out, as Thomas Jefferson cut out the miracles and "irrational" elements of the Gospels in his 1820 book, The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth. This account of Abraham and Isaac is an extremely important story, foundational to our faith. But how are we to understand it? How does it relate to the story the Spirit is telling us through the inspired authorship of Moses? What are its lessons, and what are explicitly not its lessons?

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#### **Read Genesis 22:1-19**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does the passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. How have you reconciled the love of God with the request that Abraham be willing to kill his long-desired son?
  2. What do you think was the state of Abraham's mind en route to Mount Moriah?
  3. What do you think are the main take-home lessons from this story of Abraham and Isaac?
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#### **Commentary**

**Genesis 22:1–19** - "After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the

land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

One of the principles we have tried to follow as we study the scriptures at Anchor is to remember that the Bible tells a story, and that as we read one part of it, we need to always relate it to events before and after. Thus, the first three words of this passage—"After these things"—cue us in on the need to consider this vignette in the life of Abraham as just the latest in a remarkable series of his interactions with the Lord God. Let's review some of "these things." First, we remember how God spoke directly to Abram in Haran, and directed him to go to the land that God would show him, promising to make of him a great nation and a blessing. Upon his arrival in Canaan, the Lord appeared directly to Abram and promised to give him the land of the Canaanites. Following this, God rescued Abram and Sarai from Pharaoh in Egypt after Abram's terribly misguided attempt to represent Sarai as being his sister rather than his wife. To spring Sarai from Pharaoh's harem, the Lord miraculously caused "great plagues" to fall upon the entire household of Pharaoh except for Sarai, leading to the expulsion of Abram from Egypt, many times richer than when he had arrived. After that, the Lord once again verbally spoke to Abram when he separated from Lot, promising him all the land that he could see, as well as offspring more numerous than all the dust of the earth. We next read how the Lord enabled Abram and a mere 318 of his men to rescue Lot, his family, and all the inhabitants of Sodom when they were taken as prisoners of war by a coalition of four kings, thereafter receiving a blessing from Melchizedek, King of Salem and priest of the God Most High. There followed more direct

communication from God, promising Abram, who was by now an old man with an old wife, that he would indeed have a son with Sarai and that his offspring would outnumber the stars. The Lord later confirmed this promise with a remarkable covenantal demonstration, passing between the halves of animal carcasses in the form of a smoking pot and a flaming torch, while not requiring that Abram do the same, thus illustrating that God would keep his covenant no matter whether Abram was faithful or not to his part of the covenant. He later witnessed the angel of the Lord caring for Hagar and Ishmael when they were expelled from the household by Sarai, heard direct communication from the Lord when he established the covenant of circumcision, interacted directly with the Lord as he interceded for the people of Sodom, and finally experienced the fulfillment of the promise of a son when his ninety-year-old wife conceived and gave birth to Isaac.

It was “after these things”—these remarkable life experiences—that God tested Abraham with the direction to take Isaac to Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering. I think it would be safe to say that no person that has ever lived has had an experience of life comparable to Abraham’s. Abraham’s life was distinctive for repeatedly hearing the voice of God, repeatedly being rescued by God (sometimes from trouble of his own making), repeatedly witnessing the miracles of God, and finally experiencing the miraculous birth of a son Isaac through whom the future promise of God would be carried forward. His consistent life experience confirmed that, before the time of written scriptures, God spoke directly to him in a way that could not be mistaken; that God’s promises to protect and bless him were always kept; and that though God acted according to his own timing, his directives would never disrupt the integrity and sure fulfillment of his promises. It was with this background, unlike that of any other human who ever lived, that Abraham faced the test of God.

What was Abraham’s state of mind after receiving this instruction from the Lord? First, the verses tell us there was no procrastination. He knew the voice of God, he heard it, and he arose early the next morning and set out to obey. If there was any attempt to argue with God, we are not told of it. Next, we see that he separates from the accompanying young men as the time for the sacrifice drew nigh (perhaps to avoid their seeking to intervene?) but assures them that he and the boy Isaac are going to worship and will then both return to them. When Isaac asks about the lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham states calmly that the Lord will provide the lamb. Finally, he somehow binds his son (who being strong enough to carry the wood could have easily overpowered a man well over 100 years old) and he takes the knife in hand as commanded by the Lord. Only then does the angel of the Lord call out, halt the sacrifice, commend Abraham for his faithful obedience, repeat the blessing that has been promised at least twice previously, and provide a ram for a substitutionary sacrifice.

As I think about this scene, it does not seem to be describing a man cold-bloodedly going about the grisly business of killing his beloved son to satisfy a jealous God who demands absolute, unquestioning obedience. The man depicted in such a way would not be a hero of the faith. In the Abraham we see, there is too much haste to obey, too much calmness, too much lack of internal conflict in his own soul and lack of external conflict with Isaac for that. And thus, I don’t believe that this passage is teaching that no matter how irrational and unorthodox a perceived word from God might seem, blind obedience to carry out inconceivable acts is what God demands and expects. Such an understanding can and has led people to do awful things, as in the case of the wife and child murderer Cody Dixon. Rather, what Abraham demonstrates is a determined and calm obedience that was perfectly rational, issuing as it did from the unique and miraculous experiences of decades of living in unparalleled close and familiar fellowship with

the Lord. Abraham obviously believed that God would keep his promise to make a nation out of Isaac, and no matter what God had ordered him to do, Isaac would be preserved. He believed this when he told the young men that he and Isaac would return. He believed this when he told Isaac that the Lord would provide the sacrificial animal. He believed this when he took knife in hand. And we are told in Hebrews 11:19 that Abraham was commended for his faith, because “he considered that God was able even to raise him (Isaac) from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

So why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac and have Moses record the particulars in the book of Genesis? In the words of writer Nancy Guthrie, “This story is not recorded to inspire sacrifice to God. Instead, it paints in vivid colors the sacrifice of God. The point of the story is not to convince you that you must be willing to sacrifice to God what is most precious to you, but rather to prepare you to take in the magnitude of the gift when you see that God was willing to sacrifice what was most precious to him—his own beloved Son—for you.” In other words, this dramatic, harrowing Old Testament story about an unthinkable sacrifice never carried out is less about what we must be willing to do for God and more a foreshadowing of the New Testament story of an even more unthinkable and perfect sacrifice he has made for us in Christ. And our reaction should be to reflect upon it with gladness and adore him even more as we comprehend the depth of his love for us.

**Genesis 23:1-20** - Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, "I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." The Hittites answered Abraham, "Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead." Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place." Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, "No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead."

And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there."

"My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead." Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants. So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites.

This is the account of Sarah's death and Abraham's negotiation with the Hittites for a burial place in the land of Canaan. This demonstrates Abraham's belief in the promise of God to give this land to his descendants.

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### **The Main Point**

God can be trusted to keep his promises. Abraham's obedience was enabled by his belief in the promises of God. The story of Abraham and Isaac and a sacrifice not required foretells the sacrifice of a perfect Lamb, the very Son of God, whose blood was spilled for us.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Hebrews 11:17-19** – Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead.
- **Hebrews 10** – An account of the perfect sacrifice that takes away all our sin.
- **Philippians 2:5-11**– Have the same mind as Christ, who humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, and is now exalted and Lord over all.

## **Week 2**

### **Genesis 24:1-26:35 – Transitions**

By Harvey Edwards, III

#### **Introduction**

I recently attended the funeral of a young man who tragically died at an early age from a heart attack. While visiting his widow, who has been a friend of my family since childhood, I was introduced to her natural father, a man in his eighties, whom she had just met a couple of months before. She had been adopted at birth and had never met her natural father until recently, when her own adult children had urged her to try to make contact through the genetic testing service “23 and Me.” Sure enough, her father was located, along with several half-siblings she had been unaware of, and a caring relationship quickly developed—strong enough to motivate her father to travel quite a long distance to support his daughter in her mourning the untimely death of her husband.

Perhaps you have heard of a similar, touching story. This strong interest in our ancestral roots is natural and certainly not new to our generation. In fact, as Genesis shows us, it goes all the way back to the origins of man. And just as now, the recordings of the histories of our families have always focused on transitions—marriages, births, highly significant events, and deaths. Today, as we leave behind the account of Sarah’s death in last week’s scripture, we move on to consider further transitions of note in the remarkable history of the family of the once childless Abraham.

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#### **Read Genesis 24-26**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does the passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. Describe how you have recognized the hand of God working in your life at times of major transitions—births, marriages, deaths, moves, job changes.
  2. Are there any events you can point to in your life that serve as spiritual markers or milestones?
  3. Even the patriarchs who heard promises spoken directly from God had trouble in times of stress believing he was willing and able to bring them about. What are some promises you have trouble believing?
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#### **Commentary**

##### **Genesis 24**

Sarah has died at age 127. About three years have passed since her death. Abraham is 140, Ishmael is probably about 55 and living far away, and Isaac is about 40, living in his

father's house and still mourning the death of his mother. Abraham determines that it's time to find a proper wife for Isaac. He commissions his long-time servant (probably Eliezer) to identify a suitable mate and makes him swear to observe two strict stipulations: The woman is not to be taken from the pagan community of the Canaanites among whom they lived, but from among Abraham's own kindred; and Isaac must not move away from the land that the Lord has promised to give to the descendants of Abraham. In faith, Abraham assures his servant that the Lord will make it happen.

And so, the servant gathers up an assortment of costly gifts to demonstrate the wealth of his master, and embarks on the long trek north to Nahor, where Abraham's kin reside. Upon arriving, he prays to the Lord that the chosen woman be indicated by her demonstration of two character traits—industry and generosity. No sooner had he finished his prayer when none other than the great-niece of Abraham appears at the town well to draw the family's water. We learn later that she comes from a family with means enough to provide her with maidens and nurses, and thus could quite possibly have avoided this menial chore if she had so chosen. But upon being addressed by Abraham's servant, she at once offers not only to share her water with him, but also to draw enough water to supply his ten camels that have just completed a long journey across the desert! As the camels drank, Abraham's servant considers what has transpired. This attractive young woman has directly satisfied the request he has just made to the Lord in his prayer, not only being a kinswoman of Abraham, but also demonstrating great industry and generosity. He moves into action, presenting her with expensive jewelry and requesting lodging for the night. And as she assents and departs to inform her family, he bows in worship to the Lord who is clearly directing events.

The brother and father of Rebekah are impressed by the gifts and prepare a feast for the servant, but he refuses to eat until he makes clear his purpose in journeying to them. He recites the whole story of receiving directions from Abraham, of his journey, of his prayer, of Rebekah's direct fulfillment of the hopes expressed in his prayer, and of his conclusion that Rebekah has been chosen by the Lord to be the wife of Isaac—and it is convincing. Her father, Bethuel, and brother, Laban (more about him later), consent, agreeing that this thing is from the Lord, and there is feasting and more giving of lavish gifts to seal the deal. The whole agreement is concluded in just a few hours, so it is understandable when the following morning her family requests a delay of ten days for further pondering. But the servant is eager to complete his mission quickly. Rebekah boldly consents to go with him, and the party departs, the family blessing her as she leaves, that she might “become thousands of ten thousands.”

As the party is concluding the long trip back, they encounter Isaac, meditating in the field as evening approaches. And we are told that Isaac takes her into the tent of his mother, and she becomes his wife, and he loves her, and is finally comforted after his mother's death.

## **Genesis 25**

Another wedding soon ensues—that of Abraham to Keturah. We are not told much of her, except that she bore Abraham six sons. And though Abraham was generous to these sons, the majority of his estate is held in reserve for Isaac, whom he recognizes as the true heir of the Lord's promise. He wisely sends the other sons away to the east, where their descendants give rise to many neighboring countries, fulfilling the Lord's promise to make of Abraham many nations. Finally, at age 175, Abraham “breathed his last,” and is “gathered to his people” (what a positive way to regard one's departure from this life!). Isaac and Ishmael together bury him in

the cave he had purchased at the death of Sarah, and we are told that after his death, God's blessing settles on Isaac.

Ishmael's descendants are next named, and we are told that they are to give rise to the many nations that populate the Arabian peninsula, further fulfilling the Lord's promises to both Abraham and the unfortunate maidservant of Sarah, Ishmael's mother Hagar.

But in the Lord's providence, descendants don't come so easily to Isaac and Rebekah. In fact, 20 years after they are married, there are still no children. Why the delay? Could it be that the faith of Isaac and Rebekah needed proving, just as that of Abraham and Sarah? Could it be so that the sovereignty of the Lord would be demonstrated? At length, the prayers of Isaac are answered and Rebekah conceives twins. Feeling them struggling within her, she inquires of the Lord as to what is happening, and he answers that two nations are within her, that they will be divided, that one will be stronger than the other, and that—counter-culturally—the older shall serve the younger. And eventually she gives birth to twins—first Esau, then Jacob.

The boys are different—Esau is active, an outdoorsman, a man's man, and consequently favored by his father Isaac. Jacob is quiet, staying close to home, the favorite of Rebekah. The scriptures recount the familiar story of Esau coming in from a hunt famished, and demanding some stew being cooked up by Jacob. Though he undoubtedly knows from his conversations with his mother that—by the will of the Lord—he will eventually receive the blessing of the first-born from his father, Jacob contrives to secure that in his own underhanded way. He agrees to give Esau some lentil stew only in exchange for the birthright—a ridiculously unfair deal. Esau doesn't shine here either, as he barter away the most valued possession of that time—an inheritance and a father's blessing—for a few hours relief of hunger. His actions are an affront both to the Lord and to Isaac, and are properly described as “despising his birth-right,” to give up so much for so little. This ill-advised transaction presages much trouble down the road, and illustrates the fact that even families who truly worship the Lord are not immune to bad attitudes and unwise actions that frequently bring painful consequences.

## **Genesis 26**

Another famine occurs, worse than the one that drove Abraham and Sarah to Egypt. Isaac treks down through Gerar, perhaps en route to Egypt, when the Lord tells him not to go to Egypt, but to sojourn in Gerar, among the Philistines. He recounts the promises made to Abraham, of innumerable offspring and the possession of the land of Canaan, and assures Isaac that the promises would be fulfilled through him and his descendants. So Isaac stays in Gerar as directed by the Lord. But—would you believe it—he then out of fear for his life passes off Rebekah as his sister rather than his wife, just as his father Abraham had done with Sarah, not once, but twice—first in Egypt, later in this same Gerar. Why is it that we—probably all of us—have no trouble believing that God desires to prosper us, but somehow have trouble believing that he is able to accomplish it? Having just been promised that he was the instrument through which the Lord would unfold his great plan to bless the nations, did he really believe that the Lord would allow Abimelech, king of the Philistines, to kill him over Rebekah? How easy it is for us to condemn him for this obvious error in judgement, this failure to trust in the Lord's goodness and faithfulness to his promises, and in so doing fail to ponder the many ways we do essentially the same thing.

But just as before, the lie is found out and king Abimelech confronts Isaac, and orders that no one is to lay a hand upon him. And the Lord prospers Isaac, and increases his crops, herds, and flocks so much that Abimelech begins to fear him, and expels him from the area. Isaac

willingly leaves, but even as he travels around, the jealousy of the Philistines leads to their continually vandalizing his wells, so that he is repeatedly obliged to move further and further away to maintain peace. He finally settles in Beersheba, in the Negev desert, at what is generally considered to be the southern extreme of the Israelite promised land. Once again, the Lord appears to him, perhaps for reassurance after all the harassment, and repeats the promises made to him and his father Abraham. In response, Isaac builds an altar, worships the Lord, digs a new well, and settles his family. Perhaps out of anxiety that Isaac will seek revenge, not to mention out of fear of the Lord who has blessed him so, Abimelech and his chief military commander Phicol, journey to Beersheba to propose a covenant of peace. Isaac agrees, makes them a feast, and oaths of non-aggression are exchanged.

The chapter concludes with a very brief account of Esau's choice to marry not one, but two Canaanite women, thus rebelling against the direction of the Lord in two distinct ways; and of the sad effect the incorporation of these women into the family had, as "they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah."

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### **The Main Point**

God is sovereign and his plans are not disrupted by human failure. His stated desire is to bless us in the most meaningful ways. His promises are sure, enduring through stressful transitions and even over generations, and they may be trusted. When we doubt them, as we all will at times, we exchange the peace of God for trouble.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Romans 8:28** – all things work together for the good of those called according to his purpose.
- **1 Peter 5:6-7** – humble yourself before God, release your anxieties to him, and trust that he cares for you.
- **Proverbs 3:5-6** – even when things look bleak, trust in the Lord to direct your life.

## **Week 3**

### **Genesis 27:1-29:30 – God Accomplishes His Redemptive Purposes in and Through Jacob as He Deceives and Is Deceived**

By Michael Green

#### **Introduction**

I don't have a memory of ever being on the receiving end of intense deception. As a college instructor, I've certainly seen my share of fake doctor's notes and "family deaths" often seem to reach epidemic proportions during finals week. But, as far as intense deception goes, I haven't ever really experienced that personally. I've witnessed people that have though. I've watched TV programs where retirees have given their life savings to a charismatic con man or people have followed a narcissistic cult leader that has the ability to warp reality all around them. But, from what I have observed, the worst kind of deception with the most damaging, lasting effects happens within families. On a podcast I listen to, a young woman described having her identity stolen around the time that she was leaving home for college. Prior to the connected internet age, someone obtained her personal information, ran up credit cards in her name, and ruined her credit. She called her mother, bound up in fear of the future, looking ahead to how this would impact her home buying, ruin her plans, etc. Her mom consoled her, telling her that the person that did this didn't mean it to be taken personally and was probably just in need of money. When her mom passed away, her father was going through her things and found documentation unequivocally demonstrating that the mother had been the culprit. The daughter was devastated, and has spent the rest of her life assisting others whose identities are stolen and delving further into the exploits of her mother. She actually got a PhD in that area of research, and travels and educates on the topic of identity theft. Oddly, her mother's wishes were for her daughter to keep her ashes. Her daughter did. They now sit on a mantle where the daughter audibly expresses her anger to her mother posthumously because her mother never confessed her deception to her prior to her death. Deception is no small matter. And it cuts very deep when it's carried out by the ones we hold dearest.

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#### **Read Genesis 27:1-29:30**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. How does it sit with you that Jacob (the deceiver in the situation) is blessed and prospers, while Esau is left out to dry? How do we think through that biblically?
2. I don't think it is accidental that Jacob's life is dramatically impacted by the deception of his Uncle Laban. And, I don't think it is accidental that Jacob's faith grows through the experience, as we will see in subsequent chapters. What is an example of a time in your

life when you feel like the LORD was disciplining you? How did it impact your faith in him?

3. What do you think about God having volition? What are God's choices based on?

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## **Commentary**

### **27:1-29:30**

In Genesis 27, Isaac is a very old man. His eyesight is failing him, and it is time for him to pronounce a blessing over his firstborn son, Esau. Esau has already sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a bowl of bread and lentil stew (Genesis 25:33) in a transaction birthed out of Jacob's conniving, deceptive heart. In Chapter 27, Jacob has a partner in crime, his mother Rebekah. Rebekah is actually the visionary of the subsequent operation. She overhears Isaac talking to Esau, asking him to prepare some of his game for him so that he might eat some delicious food and then bless Esau before he dies. These are the last dying wishes of the patriarch of the family. But, Rebekah, who plays favorites (Genesis 25:28), sets into motion a scheme to make sure Jacob is the recipient of the coveted blessing, not Esau. And the spark of contention rising out of twins wrestling in the womb (Genesis 25:22) is about to become a raging fire. Jacob, continuing to grasp at his brother's heel, obliges his mother's request, hatching a terribly deceitful plan.

Rebekah gets to work making a nice stew for her husband. Jacob puts on Esau's clothing along with goatskins on his hands and neck to imitate the hairiness of his brother. That way his father won't catch on to the deceit and pronounce a curse on Jacob rather than a blessing (Genesis 27:12). The scene that ensues is so tragic. What great deception. What thoughtlessness. What cold-heartedness. To take what should be a beautiful last moment in the heart and life of the dying patriarch of the family, a profound act that he has no doubt envisioned since becoming a father, and hijack it, is callous at best and psychotic at worst. The possibility of deception is present in Isaac's mind as evidenced in his multiple checkpoints to ensure that he really is speaking with Esau (Genesis 27:20-27). But, his advanced age and failing eyesight are outmatched by the craftiness of his wife and son. As a final confirmation, he brings Jacob in close for a kiss and smells the scent of an outdoorsman so characteristic of his son Esau. In joy, he blesses him with all that he has (see his own summary statement in Genesis 27:37).

Deception complete, Jacob and Esau almost pass each other as Esau comes in from hunting. The revelation of the ruse is devastating to both Isaac and Esau, even manifested physically in the elderly Isaac trembling uncontrollably. Esau's bitter cry is met by a harsher reality: "the older will serve the younger" as declared by the LORD in Genesis 25:23. I bring us back to that statement because I have spent a great deal of time ruminating on the sinfulness of Jacob and Rebekah in this event. Jacob and Rebekah are responsible for their sin. In cahoots with one another, they have robbed an elderly man of a last wish of unrivaled significance in his heart while swindling his son Esau out of what is rightfully his. Genesis 25:23 is meant to bring us back to the fact that God foretold all of this when the twins were in the womb. God did not cause Jacob and Rebekah's sin, tempt them to sin, or condone their sin. However, in the mystery of God's providence, even their sin is wrapped up in the LORD's redemptive purposes. In Romans 9, Paul uses this specific event to illustrate that the promises of God are being worked out according to his will, not according to man's merit. It is based on God's volition. Paul even states that Rebekah was told "the older will serve the younger" when "they were not yet born and had

done nothing good or bad – in order that God’s purposes of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls” (Romans 9:11). The Lord set his love upon Abraham, then Isaac, and now Jacob. That will become apparent as we progress in Genesis. God will come to Jacob. Jacob will receive a new name, Israel. Through Israel will come the people-group that bears his name. Moses describes it well when speaking to a future generation of Israelites in Deuteronomy 7:6-8:

<sup>6</sup>“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup>It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup>but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

It is through his treasured possession that salvation will be brought to the world. Jesus will come in the line of Jacob, of the tribe of Judah, bringing salvation to the nations. As Paul says elsewhere in Romans, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

With Esau now enraged by Jacob’s deception, momma thinks it a good idea for the boys to separate. Jacob heads out toward Paddan-aram in order to find a wife, making sure not to marry a Hittite woman per his mother’s request. It is on this journey, in a place he will later name Bethel (which means House of God), that we see the first recorded direct interaction between God and Jacob. At night Jacob has a dream of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending the ladder. God then speaks to him directly, telling him that the land that he now lies on will be his in all directions. Jacob’s offspring will be innumerable, “like the dust of the earth,” and through them, “shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 28:14). The LORD tells him, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:15). Jacob awakens frightened by the Power of Providence and is moved in the morning to make a memorial out of stone and name the place Bethel. God initiated a relationship with Jacob, keeping his promises to Abraham and Isaac. Although Jacob’s vow that if (more or less) God will take care of him, then the LORD shall be his God, leaves much to be desired, the seed of faith is evidenced in his life.

Jacob then continues on his journey until he reaches the land of Laban, Rebekah’s brother. Jacob arrives at a well to see shepherds gathered with three flocks of sheep. He inquires as to whether or not this is the land of his uncle Laban, and they answer that it is. In fact, “Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!” (Genesis 29:6). When Jacob lays eyes on the shepherdess Rachel, he kisses her and weeps aloud, telling her that he is related to her father. She runs to tell her father who, in turn, runs to meet Jacob. Laban embraces Jacob, kisses him, and brings him to his house, exclaiming, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” (Genesis 29:14). Jacob stays there a month, and Laban offers him compensation for his work, asking Jacob to name his price. Laban has two daughters, Leah and Rachel. “Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance” and “Jacob loved Rachel” (Genesis 29:17&18), so Jacob offered seven years of labor in return for her hand in marriage. Laban agrees. Jacob serves his seven years, and he is so enamored with Laban’s youngest daughter Rachel that he says the seven years “seemed to him

but a few days because of the love he had for her” (Genesis 29:20). Jacob is quite the smitten kitten. And, now, it’s time to reap the harvest for all of those years of labor! He asks Laban to give him Rachel as his wife, they have a great feast, and the evening culminates with Laban taking his daughter in to be with Jacob.

Jacob must have inherited his father’s eyesight, because the next morning brought the startling realization that he had spent the night with Leah, Laban’s oldest daughter, not Rachel! The deceiver had been deceived! Laban possibly outdid his nephew’s own penchant for nefarious dealings: going back on his word, intertwining the life of his daughter Leah with a man that does not desire to be with her, and withholding his promised daughter Rachel whom Jacob adores. When Jacob confronts Laban, he states that it isn’t customary in their land to give away the younger daughter first. Laban tells him that he will give Rachel to him as a bride as well at the end of the week if he agrees to stay on and work for him seven more years. Jacob works that week, and Laban gives Rachel to him to be his wife. Genesis 29:30 ominously states that Jacob “loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.”

The story of Jacob, Esau, and God’s subsequent (and prior) working through Jacob’s lineage can certainly be unsettling. Esau doesn’t seem to do anything wrong, and Jacob acts treacherously. Then, Jacob is blessed by God and Esau is not. A cursory reading could easily render the interpretation that Jacob actually is successful in securing a blessing through deception, an eternal blessing even! And, God is complicit in the situation. But, there are two truths that completely rule out that way of thinking. First, God is good. He is perfect, and thus so are his purposes, plans, and procedures. He is light and in him there is no darkness. In this story, the macro-plans of God for humanity are unfolding, while simultaneously, the micro-plans for Jacob are being worked out. On the macro-level, God is working out everything according to his design, which was set before time was in place. Jacob’s deception is wrapped up in that macro-plan to the point that even his willful rebellion against God is used to accomplish the purposes of God.

However, God is also at work on the micro-level within the heart of Jacob, which leads us to the second fundamental truth that helps us better understand these events. Jacob is responsible for his sin, and that sin is not pleasing to a holy God.\* However, God pursues Jacob in his sin. Shortly after these events, he initiates a relationship with Jacob, and as the years progress, Jacob will respond more and more in faith and love toward the God that first loved him, when he was a deceiver by nature. That is a story that is true on the micro-level for any person that has ever come to Christ. Esau is not sinless in this story. Esau has the curse of indwelling sin, as does Jacob, as do you and I. But, if you are in Christ, it is because he set his saving love upon you when you were dead in your sin. This isn’t a story of Esau who was good by nature, Jacob who was evil by nature, and God choosing to bless the evil one. Only God is good by nature. We are dead in our sins prior to the God of the Universe pursuing us and making us alive. Dead men can’t bring themselves to life. Only God can do that, causing us to turn from our sin natures and receive unmerited eternal blessings from him. Ephesians 2:4-9 states,

<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ

Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

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### **The Main Point**

God is working out his redemptive plan for humanity through the lineage of Abraham, working intimately in Jacob's life. On a macro-level, the path is being forged for the promised deliverer. On a micro-level, the Lord is building faith and trust within Jacob's heart.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Deuteronomy 7** – Moses talks to the Israelites about the fact that God has set them apart.
- **Romans 9** – Paul discusses the sovereignty of God in choosing Jacob and not Esau. Along the way, he will discuss the difference between Israel the people group, and the true Israel, those that put their faith in the one true living God.
- **Ephesians 1-2** – Start to finish, salvation is a gift of God, lest any man should boast.

\* Note: I don't think it's an accident that Jacob walks through years of intense deception at the hands of a family member that profoundly affects his life. The Lord disciplines his children in love, cultivating the faith that he has implanted in them, and warring against the sin nature that still resides within them. The events the Lord leads his children through are for his glory and our good.

## Week 4

### Genesis 29:31-33:20 – God is Faithful and Keeps His Promises

By Michael Green

#### Introduction

My boys love to wrestle with their daddy. There's barely a day that goes by that Michael, Matthew, or Miller doesn't ask me to roll around on the floor with them. Or on the trampoline. Or catapult them onto the couch. Or dangle them by their ankles. When and where really doesn't matter. With my boys, any venue can be transformed into Wrestle Mania in an instant. I've taken knee drops to the back and upper cuts to the face (in Miller's defense, his prefrontal lobe hadn't really developed much at that point, and you have to applaud his opportunism given that the other boys were on my back, distracting me at the time). They love that time with their daddy, and I love to love them in that way. I invite them into that kind of relationship with me. But, in this case, and contrary to Jacob's encounter with the Lord, I am usually the one walking away with a limp.

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#### Read Genesis 29:31-33:20

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. In your own life, how has the Lord proven faithful even when you haven't been?
  2. Have you wrestled with the Lord? Will you share your experience with the group?
  3. How would you describe a wrestling with the Lord that exhibits faith and trust in him versus a wrestling that dishonors him?
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#### Commentary

##### 29:31-33:20

What a sad situation for Leah, Laban's oldest daughter. With her father having tricked Jacob into marrying her, she now finds herself in a situation where she is trying to earn the affection of a man that has given his heart to her sister, Rachel, the woman he thought he was marrying the first go-around. According to Genesis 29:31, the Lord sees her pain and opens her womb. The names of her children betray a heart seeking to earn her husband's affection through child-bearing. Leah's first three children, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi are all given names explicitly tied to Jacob's perceived disdain for her. Leah gives God the glory for providing her with children, stating in Genesis 29:32 that "the Lord has looked upon my affliction," and naming her fourth child Judah which sounds like "praise" (HCSB Study Bible).

On the heels of stating that the Lord opened Leah’s womb in response to her sad situation, Genesis 29:31 also states that “Rachel was barren.” Barrenness coupled with her sister’s prolific propagation aroused envy within Rachel, causing her to tell her husband Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die!” (Genesis 30:1) Jacob gets angry, appealing to the sovereignty of God in all things by presenting the question, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (Genesis 30:2) The societal norms of Rachel’s day make this a very vexing situation. A woman’s sense of self-worth during those days was heavily tied to her ability to produce children for her husband. (As a necessary side note on such a sensitive topic, the believer’s “self-worth” or identity is found in Christ, not in what or who he or she can produce). Ironically, this misplaced hope is clearly displayed in her sister Leah’s comments like “now my husband will love me” (Genesis 29:32) and “this time my husband will be attached to me” (Genesis 29:34). These statements were made in direct relation to the fact that she had provided Jacob with children.

In response to the situation, Rachel takes the same path as Jacob’s grandmother, Sarai, the wife of Abram. As Sarai, in her apparent infertility, gave Hagar her servant to Abram to conceive a child with him, so too Rachel makes the same suggestion to Jacob regarding her servant, Bilhah. Jacob concedes to the plan, Bilhah gives birth to Dan and later to Naphtali. Leah, seeing that “she had ceased bearing children” (Genesis 30:9), took the same approach as Rachel. She offered her servant Zilpah to Jacob as a wife, and Zilpah bore Gad and Asher. Then, after a rather troubling negotiation between Rachel and Leah involving mandrakes and quality time with the husband, Leah conceives and gives birth to Issachar. Next, she gives birth to a son named Zebulun and a daughter named Dinah. In all this child-bearing, Rachel remains childless. But, “God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb” (Genesis 30:22), a testament to the graciousness of the Lord in seeing Rachel’s daily struggles in a very tough situation as well as the power of the Lord over all things at all times, harkening back to the truth behind Jacob’s question posed in Genesis 30:2. Rachel conceives and gives birth to a son she names Joseph. Eventually, the Lord will bless Rachel with a second son, Benjamin, but at a very high cost as sadly, she dies during his delivery (Genesis 35:16-20).

If, at this point, you are as lost as I am in the tribe-making, I hope the table below will be a help to you in keeping things straight. The number represents the birth order and Dinah is a daughter; the rest are sons. From the sons will come the tribes of Israel bearing their names (Joseph is the exception, having two sons Ephraim and Manasseh, for which tribes are named.)

<b>Leah</b>	<b>Bilhah (Rachel’s servant)</b>	<b>Zilpah (Leah’s servant)</b>	<b>Rachel</b>
1. Reuben	5. Dan	7. Gad	12. Joseph
2. Simeon	6. Naphtali	8. Asher	13. Benjamin
3. Levi			
4. Judah			
9. Issachar			
10. Zebulun			
11. Dinah			

After Rachel gives birth to Joseph, Jacob decides it’s time to leave Laban’s household and he requests that Laban send him away. Laban tells him that through divination he has learned that he has been blessed by the Lord due to Jacob’s presence, and tells Jacob to name his

wages (Genesis 30:28). Jacob attributes Laban's prosperity to the LORD as well, and makes a proposition to him. Jacob asks Laban to give him every spotted and speckled sheep and goat from among his flocks as well as his black lambs. If Laban is willing to do this in order that Jacob might provide for his own household, then Jacob will agree to "again pasture [his] flock and keep it" (Genesis 30:31). Laban, true to pattern, agrees and then deceives, secretly removing the animals promised to Jacob. Jacob then sets about doing some creative breeding in order to try and produce offspring that would benefit him in the arrangement. The Reformation Study Bible is helpful here.

In the ancient Near East, most lambs were white and most goats black or dark brown. Thinking the agreement posed little risk to himself, Laban eagerly granted Jacob's request for the unusually colored animals (30:34). Jacob's proposal depended upon the faulty notion that vivid visual impressions during the act of reproduction determined the traits of the offspring. He thought that placing alternating colors in front of mating animals would result in unusually colored offspring (30:37, 38, 41, 42). Even though Jacob's scheming would deny God his rightful praise, God's intention to bless Jacob was not thwarted (Genesis 31:11, 12).

Jacob increases in every category of wealth, and Laban's sons take notice. They feel like Jacob is siphoning off their father's wealth, and Jacob feels that Laban is starting to look at him a little differently as well. "Then the Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you'" (Genesis 31:3). Jacob discusses the situation with Rachel and Leah, telling them that their father Laban has been cheating them and that the Lord revealed that to him in a dream. And, the Lord had told him to leave and go back to the land of his kindred. Rachel and Leah are on board, stating that they too have witnessed their father's misdeeds. Without saying goodbye to Laban, Jacob, along with his household, his livestock, and all of his possessions, sets out to return to see his father Isaac in Canaan. Unbeknownst to Jacob, Rachel steals Laban's idols.

When Laban finds out what has happened, he and his kinsmen set out to catch up with them. Along the way, God warns him through a dream to "Be careful and not say anything to Jacob, either good or bad" (Genesis 31:24). Laban catches up with Jacob and confronts him, letting him know that he could harm him. Jacob, in turn, confronts Laban's misdealings with him, telling him that the "God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac" had been with him and seen his "affliction and the labor of his hands" (Genesis 31:42). Agreeing to relinquish the matter into the hands of God, they set up a pillar of stones as a boundary line over which neither of them can cross to do the other harm. The next day, Laban says his goodbyes and returns home.

Jacob's household then continues on their journey and they come to the land of Seir, where Esau, Jacob's brother is living. Jacob sends messengers ahead to see if things are all good with Esau given that the last time they were together Jacob grossly deceived his father in order to steal from his brother, resulting in Esau vowing to kill him (Genesis 27:41). The messengers return saying Esau is coming to meet him, and he's bringing 400 men with him. Jacob, assuming his brother is angry and in attack mode, fearfully and frantically starts strategizing. He divides up all of his family and possessions into two camps thinking that at least the camp that doesn't get attacked will survive.

Then, Jacob turns to the Lord. In Jacob's prayer, it's really neat to see the growth in faith that has taken place since God's initiating conversation with him through a dream of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. God spoke to Jacob directly at that point, telling him, among other things, that Jacob's offspring will be innumerable, "like the dust of the earth," and through them, "shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:14). The Lord told him,

“Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:15). God initiated a relationship with Jacob, and in response, the seed of faith in Jacob is evidenced by Jacob’s response that if (more or less) God will take care of him, then the Lord shall be his God. More than twenty years have passed since God’s promise in that dream, and this prayer of Jacob prior to meeting Esau demonstrates the growth in that seed of faith that the Lord planted. That seed has now been cultivated through years of toil and deception, accompanied by the steadfast presence and blessings from the Lord in Jacob’s life. God has been faithful to Jacob, and Jacob’s prayer reflects a heart that sees that, saying, “I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps” (Genesis 32:10). He then prays that the Lord would deliver him from Esau, resting his request on God’s previous promises to multiply his offspring. In this prayer, we see that Jacob acknowledges his unworthiness before the Lord, the fact that all he has is because of the Lord, that the Lord is his hope for deliverance, and that hope rests on the promises of God. All of this exhibits a trust in the Lord.

Next, Jacob prepares herds of gifts, an extravagant collection of different animals, to give to his brother Esau. He sends them ahead in droves, instructing his servants to tell Esau that they are a gift from his brother Jacob. That night, he also sends his wives, female servants, and children across the Jabbok. “And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day” (Genesis 32:24). In verse 30, after the encounter, Jacob states, “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” Jacob’s wrestling is an intimate encounter with the Lord. As a result, the Lord blesses him and gives him a new name, Israel, and a reminder. Demonstrating that Jacob’s wrestling with God is not an overpowering in the sense that Jacob is stronger than the Lord, with just a touch to the hip, Jacob’s hip is dislocated. This leaves him with a powerful reminder of his encounter with the Lord. In a way similar to how I wrestle with my own children, the Lord invites each of us to wrestle with him. When I wrestle with my boys, I could obviously overpower them at any moment. But, that’s not the point. The point is the intimacy. The point is the freedom they feel to engage with me in that way. The point is the way they walk away feeling ten feet tall after a close encounter with their daddy. I invite that kind of intimacy with my children, and they benefit greatly from it. This is evidenced by the fact that I am often home less than five minutes before sustaining a strike to the backside or a smack to the belly, followed by a karate stance and an invitation to wrestle. Our Creator is an intimate God. He invites us into intimacy with himself. Jacob, alone with God, *mano-a-Dios*, has the audacity to wrestle a blessing from the hand of his Heavenly Father. All of that reminds me of the passage from Hebrews 4:14-16, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.<sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Who just busts up in the throne room of a king and asks for a blessing? A son does. Who has the boldness to bring daily, mundane struggles to the attention of a king that upholds the planets, oversees the affairs of history, and is executing his plans for all of mankind? A child does. The God of the Universe offers that kind of relationship to us. He invites us to be his children. He invites us into the throne room to wrestle with our Father—to get alone and to engage with him. As it says in 1 John 3:1a, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

With a new name and a lame hip, the time has come for Jacob to meet his brother Esau. To his surprise, “Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (Genesis 33:4). Contrary to what was anticipated, Esau receives Jacob with love and grace. After a sweet reunion, Jacob sets out to see his father, Isaac.

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### **The Main Point**

God is faithful and keeps his promises. He initiates a relationship with Jacob, cultivates his faith, and gives him a new name - Israel.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Psalm 44** – The psalms are full of honest wrestling with the Lord in prayer. This is an example.
- **John 15:12-17** – The Lord invites us into close fellowship with himself.
- **Luke 11:1-13** – Jesus invites us to bring our needs before the Lord, using the example of an earthly father’s love for his child.

## **Week 5**

### **Genesis 34:1-36:43 – Jacob’s Family Threatens the Blessing, But God Renews His Promise**

By Aaron Barnes

#### **Introduction**

If you have siblings, you know the struggle of having to “live with” the consequences of a sibling’s disobedience or overall poor decision-making. It could be something that is minor, like having your TV privileges taken away or not being able to stay up late with mom and dad, or something major like getting a ticket for improper driving or some kind of physical or emotional injury. Other people’s decisions can have a great impact on our lives both in positive and negative ways. It is easy for us to trust God and follow him when the repercussions of our decisions and those around us are positive and causing us to prosper. However, it is in the not-so-great times that our faith is tested. God doesn’t allow our faith to be tested in order that we might sin or make poor decisions. Instead, the way our faith is tested is similar to the way that gold is refined. In order for gold (or another precious metal) to be refined, it must pass through fire. This refining fire is VERY hot. It brings out and burns up the impurities so that what is left is the gold and nothing more. What God is doing in our lives when we are being tested is similar. The testing of our faith is for his glory and our good. We are to lean into his provision. We are to trust in his unfailing love and sustaining mercy in our lives. What we see happen to Jacob at the end of Chapter 35 is not dependence upon God, but despair in light of his current events. As you read and study this week’s text, pray that God would allow you wisdom and discernment to see how you may have doubted him and how you can learn to trust him moving forward.

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#### **Read Genesis 34:1-36:43**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. What is your first reaction when you have been wronged, whether it was intentional or accidental? How does that compare or contrast with God’s word?
2. Has there been a time in your life that you were wronged and God used that situation as an opportunity to bring you back to himself through repentance? Would you mind sharing that with your group?
3. Has there been a time in your life that you have experienced tough times? How did you respond? Did you lean into God’s love and mercy? Or did you lean on your abilities to “pick yourself up by the bootstraps?” Knowing what you know now, would your response be different? How so? Would you share that with the group?

## Commentary

### 34:1-36:43

As we step from Chapter 33, where Esau and Jacob have just reconnected and seemed to have buried the proverbial hatchet, and step into Chapter 34 where a terrible turn of events takes place, we will see the never-ending sovereignty of God stepping in to protect his promise and fulfill his covenant. Chapter 34 begins with an event that no one would ever wish upon their worst enemy. One of Jacob's daughters, by no fault of her own, is raped by Shechem, one of the sons of Hamor. Hamor was the ruler of the land of Shechem. After defiling Dinah, he returns to her father asking for his help in making her his wife. Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah's brothers, catch wind of what has taken place and, filled with rage, they devise an ungodly plan by avenging one crime with another.

When Hamor approaches Jacob and his sons with the proposition for Dinah to become Hamor's wife, Hamor offers basically anything they desire from him in order to "seal the deal." He even goes as far as saying he would like to become one people with them. So in true Jacobian fashion, his sons respond to Hamor deceitfully. They tell Hamor that in order for them to become "one people," all the men of Shechem must become circumcised as the Hebrew nation is circumcised. Hamor and Shechem, overcome with joy about the upcoming marriage, agree and the plan begins to unfold.

Now, before we move further we need to remember what circumcision was meant to represent. It is a physical action that symbolizes a spiritual relationship. In other words, as Dr. Michael Green would say, "An outward representation of an inward disposition." All males within the Hebrew nation would be circumcised. This covenant ritual began with Abraham and would continue on until a new and better covenant would come...Jesus' life, death, and resurrection! But, acting deceitfully, the sons of Jacob take the covenant meant to signify their relationship with God and use it as a weapon of destruction.

Now, before we become self-righteous and lash out at Simeon and Levi, let us not forget that we are human as well. We are susceptible to heinous acts much like these. Think with me for a moment...as kids, when our sibling/cousin/friend took the toy we wanted, or the one that we "had first," what did we do? Walked right up to them and smacked them across the head, pulled their hair, and/or snatched the toy back. Now that we are older, our acts are a bit more sophisticated. At work, when someone speaks ill of us to our superiors or when someone does/says something in order to get ahead of us, what do we tend to do without thought? We say something that would place us in a brighter light. We do something that would place us maybe a step or two ahead of "the competition." You might say, "But Aaron?! C'mon man. The things I am doing/have done do not even compare to taking someone's life. And besides, they deserved it. You should've heard what they said about me. It wasn't even CLOSE to the truth. I HAD to do it. They needed to be punished for their actions, and if I don't do something, who will?!"

I would like to submit to you a few verses of scripture for thought on this topic. First, in Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus equates anger in one's heart with the act of murder itself. Second, in James 1:19-21 the brother of Jesus reminds us that man's anger cannot and will not achieve the righteousness of God. Instead, we are told to exchange that anger and hate for the word of God which can and will produce the righteousness of God. And finally, 1 John 4:19-21 reminds us that if we truly love God, it is impossible to harbor hatred and bitterness toward others. If we are harboring and cultivating hatred and bitterness in our hearts toward others, 1 John 4 says that we are liars and the love of God is NOT in us. However, the story does not end there. 1 John 1:9

says that if we confess our sins to God, he is faithful and just to forgive us of all our sins. YAY! Don't harbor hatred and bitterness. Confess that sin to God. Cling to his word. Let his Spirit breathe new life into your lungs and lean into his life-giving power that is able to change you.

Now, back to the happenings in Genesis 34. Once the men had been circumcised and while they were recovering in their homes, "on the third day" Simeon and Levi entered the city and killed all the men of the city. Jacob's other sons entered the city and plundered it and took the women and children as captives as well. As you can imagine, Jacob is NOT at all thrilled by the actions of his sons, especially Simeon and Levi. He is distraught and now very afraid of retaliation from the other cities in the land once the word gets out. They were harmless shepherds that were "minding their own business" and now they could potentially become bullies that take what they want and leave nothing behind. This third day action of the sons of Israel is in stark contrast with the "third day" we think of in today's worship gatherings. When we think of the "third day" we think of Jesus conquering sin, death, the grave, and all evil for all time. We are reminded that we are no longer slaves to sin and in bondage to our hearts' desires, but are freed to love God and live in light of that truth. However, in Genesis 34 we read how sin has impacted us on every level. The Genesis 34 "third day" ended in death and destruction, in wrath and acts of revengeful hatred. The final words from Jacob in this chapter are in fear and he unassumingly doubts the goodness and faithfulness of God to provide for him and his family. Thankfully, in God's sovereignty, he would not allow this to be the final say. The better "third day" would come and with it bring life and hope, purpose and peace!

Genesis 35 opens up with God calling Jacob back to the covenant. Jacob has just voiced his shortcomings and doubts through what we can only assume was a cry for help out of fear. But God...in his love for his creation and his children, graciously calls him back. Not to mention, God goes to great lengths to keep Jacob and his family safe by causing fear to overcome the people of the land, keeping them away from Jacob and his family. Can I tell you how thankful I am for God calling me back to the covenant? I am thankful that even in my own broken and fallen desires, God continues to call me back to himself. The truth is, God made the covenant between him and us. Because he made the covenant, it is up to him to fulfill it. Thanks be to God for his unfailing and unwavering sustaining love and grace that he calls us into each and every day.

In verse 9 we see God declaring, once again, that Jacob will now be called Israel. This is not simply a protective custody move by God in an effort to protect his people. This renaming of Jacob is for Jacob to know that God is going to sustain him and fulfill his covenant and that there would be nothing that will stop God from fulfilling his plan. God gives to Jacob the same command to be fruitful and multiply as he did Jacob's fathers Adam, Noah, and Abraham. Once again, God is going to great lengths to make sure Jacob (now Israel) understands that his job is to be obedient in the every day. He is not asking him to perform differential equations. That's faithfulness, obedience in the ordinary, mundane things of life. And, as a reward for his faithfulness, Israel will inherit the land that had been promised to Abraham and Isaac. After this declaration had been given, the calling back to the plan, and God had finished speaking to him, Israel (Jacob) built an altar and named the place Bethel (House of God).

At the end of Genesis 35, we read of the death of Rachel while she's giving birth to Benjamin and we see Isaac, who we haven't seen nor heard from in the last seven chapters. This is in contrast with Abraham. We watch his whole life – from when God calls him until he dies. One commentator said that this is one more layer of God's sovereignty displayed in scripture. God does not always act in ways that we think he should, or in cultural norms that we'd hoped.

Instead of God passing his blessing through Abraham's first-born Ishmael, he uses the second-born Isaac, the one he promised to Abraham and Sarah. Instead of God continuing his blessing through the first-born Esau, he uses the second-born Jacob. Throughout the scriptures, one truth is abundantly clear: God is sovereign. You see, God is love. Many other characteristics of God are named in scripture, but he is called love in 1 John 4:8. This doesn't mean he is given the name love because he acts in loving ways or that he is called loved because he gets "butterflies" whenever we come around. He is called love because it is his essence. It is who he is. Because he IS love, what he does and allows to take place in our lives is loving. Even when we do not understand, because we are finite created beings, God loves us and acts sovereignly over us for his glory and our good!

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### **The Main Point**

Despite the blatant and sinful actions of Jacob and his family, God's plans cannot and will not be thwarted. He is sovereign and will uphold his covenant in his own power and timing. He is causing all things to work together for his glory and our good.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Matthew 5:21-26** – These verses were an excerpt from a large text referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. These verses specifically speak to not harboring anger in our hearts toward others.
- **Romans 8:26-30** – These verses remind us that God is in control of all things for all time. He works outside of time and space in order that he would receive all glory.
- **James 1:19-21** – These verses remind us that our anger and God's anger are different. Our anger does not and will not achieve God's righteousness.
- **1 John 4:8** – This verse tells us that God is love. It is not something that we attribute to him. It is his essence. He IS love.
- **1 John 4:19-21** – These verses remind us that we cannot both love God and hate others. We either love God and love others, or we do not love either.
- **1 John 1:9** – This verse reminds us that God will forgive us if we will confess our sin to him.

## Week 6

### Genesis 37:1-36 – Dreams of Grandeur and Family Jealousy

By Aaron Barnes

#### Introduction

I am sure you've heard it about a million times...right? Sharing is caring. I don't know about you, but that saying has never been more misunderstood than when the Christmas season is in full swing. It really is amazing to watch...and not in a good way. You have spent hours thinking through the perfect gift for the kids, or maybe it was for a niece or nephew. You have the best wrapping paper. You even bought the paper that matches their favorite cartoon character. Then the carnage hits and as they tear into their gift as a lion would on the Serengeti, your smile quickly fades at your failed attempts to keep their sibling from snatching the new toy from their hands. You're too late. Tears are falling. Screams have already hit DEFCON 5. And jealousy has reared its ugly head! Why would they do that? You have basically purchased the same thing for both kids. One was for a girl and the other for a boy. Yet, one thinks that they **MUST** have what the other has or "it's not fair!" Jealousy as a kid can be hard to navigate by yourself. I experienced it as a kid (HINT: The illustration may or may not have been one I personally experienced once upon a time). As adults, we are supposed to help children navigate those choppy waters. Helping them understand that just because one person gets one thing and they do not get the same exact thing does not mean that they are not loved just as much as the other. That's an easy one for us...right?

The problem comes in when it is almost a blatant offense. Whether or not we mean to, there are times when we favor one person over another. I'm still a younger parent (my kids are currently five and two), so I do not have it all figured out. What I do realize though is that there are times when I would much rather be around the five-year-old. Why? Because she's older. We can do more activities. She can communicate clearly and tell me what she does or does not want. Then there are other times when I would rather be around the two-year-old. Why? Because I love cartoons! He loves anything I say. He laughs at everything and his laugh is so contagious. Does that make me a bad parent? I don't think so. However, it is important for my wife to help me with that. We are a team. When one is in need of help, the other is there to lend a helping hand...rain or shine. Thankfully our kids are still young. We are still working on being better parents. We do not want to be the cause of jealousy between siblings. There is plenty in our culture that will work toward that end. It is up to us to help them learn to work through their disagreements and jealous fits.

In today's text, we have a situation like this, but I would say it is extreme compared to fighting of whose turn it is to choose the cartoon. Jacob (Israel) has twelve sons. Scripture tells us that he strongly favored Joseph. So much so that he gave him a coat that signified his feelings toward him over all of the other eleven brothers. To add injury to insult, Joseph had a couple dreams that when interpreted meant he would rule over his brothers and even his parents. These dreams were given by God. Be that as it may, his brothers were not excited about this and they devised an evil plan to rid themselves of their brother, the dreamer. Their jealousy was a bit extreme. What would happen to God's plan? To Joseph?

... and just so we're clear, JEALOUSY is *not* a fruit of the Spirit.

## Read Genesis 37:1-36

### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

### Passage Specific Questions

1. Can you think of another time in Genesis when jealousy led to someone committing a heinous crime? Who was involved?
  2. Has there ever been a time when you let your jealousy get the best of you? How did you respond?
  3. On the other hand, has there been a time when someone else's jealousy did you harm? How did you respond?
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### Commentary

#### 37:1-36

Within the Bible, we see God stepping into the lives of his people in order to set events in motion and to orchestrate specific opportunities, often ignoring cultural norms. In this section of text, we see God use one of the younger sons instead of the oldest. We see God operating in ways that we might not expect. This is a good thing. If we could always predict God's "next move" or fully exhaust all that he is, then we would not be worshiping much of a god...it would be us as the center of worship. It is important for us, the created, to read scripture the way that it was intended to be read so that we might come to know God, the creator, in the way that he has designed. So when we read things within the pages of our Bibles that do not seem to fit our paradigm, instead of casting it aside or attempting to redefine scripture (retelling the scriptures contrary to the author's intent), we should allow God's word to change our paradigm. He is good. He can be trusted. In all things and with all things.

So, here we are in the land of Canaan. Jacob and his family have arrived in the land that God had promised to Abraham. I imagine there may have been a huge sigh of relief once they unpacked all of the wagons, got their animals settled, and set up their homes. It has been many MANY years since the promise was given to Abraham. Finally, it has happened. And just like most of human history, it doesn't take very long before human brokenness and depravity show their ugly faces.

Joseph wasn't the youngest of the sons, but the next-to-the-youngest. Benjamin was the youngest. Reuben was the oldest. In most of the recognized world at this time, the oldest son would have been seen as the one that held the father's affection more than the rest, but in this particular family it wasn't Reuben. It was Joseph. Israel loved Joseph so much that he made him a coat that made him stand out in a crowd. One translation (Septuagint), along with most of our kids' curriculum, says that Joseph's coat was multicolored. Another translation (Hebrew) says the coat had long sleeves. Whether it was long sleeved or multicolored isn't the main idea. The

fact that he had the coat and his father loved him more drove his brothers bonkers, as you can probably imagine.

On top of the coat situation, Joseph was also given dreams from God. The first one was about sheaves of grain. Once the grain had been cut, it was then bundled into sheaves and allowed to dry out before being collected at another time. The odd thing about this dream, besides the fact that Joseph is literally dreaming about his job while away from his job, was that his bundle began to stand upright and the remaining bundles bowed down to his. Yes, you are correct in thinking that his brothers were not thrilled about this dream. In verse 8, we are told that they “hated him all the more.” Then when he announced there was a sequel to his dreams, you can imagine that his brothers were not so excited to hear it. This time Israel was there to hear the dream. This dream was about the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to Joseph. This time Israel spoke up and rebuked him. Remember, the oldest son is the one that is to guide, protect, and provide for the family in the father’s absence. So the rebuke is not unexpected.

When we pick up the narrative in Genesis 37:12, the older brothers were in the fields of Dothan shepherding their father’s flocks. Joseph is sent by his father to check on them. As you can probably already imagine, the brothers see him coming and begin to mumble to themselves about how to stop this “dreamer” and his dreaming once and for all. One of the brothers proposes they just kill him. Thankfully for Joseph, Reuben steps in and offers another plan. Instead of killing the brother, he talks them into just putting him into a nearby pit. These pits were pretty common in this area. The pit is thought to be an empty cistern. A cistern is a makeshift well of sorts. Someone would dig a huge hole in the ground, line it with a waterproof substance, then the rains would fill it and provide water in a dry season. Think about it this way, it is a VERY large ceramic jar buried in the ground. Reuben thought he could return later and get him out and no one would be the wiser. However, Judah jumps in on the vision casting and decides to sell Joseph for a profit. In his eyes, it’s a win-win situation. Not only will they be rid of “the dreamer,” but now they would be a bit richer as well. So when Reuben returns, he sees that Joseph is gone and now he has to cover it up. Being the oldest son, he is responsible for the care of his brothers. Now he has to return and give the bad news to his father. The response he gives once he realizes his brother is gone, doesn’t sound like, “OH NO! WHAT HAVE WE DONE?!” It sounds more like, “What about me? What am I supposed to do now?” Not that he wasn’t sorrowful, but maybe more of a guilt trip and less of an apologetic situation of the heart.

Reuben takes Joseph’s coat and dips it in goat’s blood and then goes to tell dad the news. Israel hears the news and, as we would respond, is broken due to the death of one of his children. Chapter 37 ends with a bit of a “...to be continued” vibe. If you have read these scriptures before, you know what is about to take place. If you have not, here is what you need to remember, God is in control. He will always protect and provide for his children. If it seems as though there’s no way he can come through this time, it is just because we are finite and created. We cannot understand the ways of God. By definition, we cannot understand him fully due to the fact that he is God and we are not. If we could understand him fully, he would be a puny god. However, since we cannot exhaust all that he is, then we are called and commanded to submit to him in worship. He is good. He can be trusted. What he promises, he will provide. God has a way of placing himself in a seemingly inescapable situation, but in every situation, God is in control. We can walk in peace knowing that he is working all things for his glory and our good. At the end of Chapter 37, Joseph has been sold by his older brothers to the Midianites and ends up being sold to Potiphar (Egyptian ruler) as a slave. Even though this situation seems dismal, he would not remain a slave for long. God would use this as an opportunity to put his glory on

display and show up in a way that no one could plan for nor could they imagine. This account of Joseph points us to the one that came to purchase out of slavery. Jesus came into this world as a human, in order that he might live the life we could not live, die the death we were condemned to die (paying for our sins and freeing us from sin), and on the third day he took his life back up, defeating death once and for all. Even though our lives can look dismal at times, as followers of Christ we can be encouraged by reminding one another of this hope we have in Christ. He has redeemed us from slavery. Now we can walk in freedom. Freed from slavery and free to worship him!

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### **The Main Point**

God is good and can be trusted. God is sovereign and will not allow his plans to be thwarted. What he promises, he will provide.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Genesis 4:1-16** – This text refers to the jealousy Cain had for Abel and which ultimately led to Cain killing Abel.
- **Romans 8:1-11** – These verses remind us that God has freed us from sin and freed us to live for him empowered by his Holy Spirit.
- **Romans 8:28-30** – These verses remind us that God is in control of all things for all time. He works outside of time and space in order that he would receive all glory.

## Week 7

### Genesis 38:1-30 – Judah and Tamar

By Rand Nelson

#### Introduction

One of my favorite television shows when I was in college was the global phenomenon of ABC's *LOST*. The show follows 14 passengers of Oceanic flight 815 who survive a plane crash on a mysterious, tropical island. The space I have here is insufficient to explain the thrilling, confusing (and disappointing) narrative from season 1 to season 6—and I'm not sure I could explain it if I had pages and pages to work with. Ultimately, the show ends leaving many questions unanswered, many critics unsatisfied and many fans confused.

However, one thing the show did really, really well was storytelling. Each of the main characters had backstories that explained their actions while on the island. A former con man, a brilliant back surgeon/alcoholic, a punk musician with a drug habit and a lottery jackpot winner all find themselves working through their pasts as they work towards getting off the island and back to civilization.

Each episode centered around one main character and their past. As a fan, I became invested in the storylines of many of the characters, but grew frustrated when the main storyline would hit "pause" to further investigate the backstory of a character I cared little about. "Oh, great," I thought, "another story about Charlie and his stupid band. When are we getting back to the main story?" But their stories always mattered; their stories always somehow tied back into the plot of *the* story.

When I read through Genesis, it's easy to get invested in the storylines surrounding each main person: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. When things pop up that seem to deviate from the main plot, it's easy to wonder why Moses is giving so much time to chasing storylines that seemingly have nothing to do with Genesis as a whole. Chapter 38 can feel that way—why go into such detail to investigate Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar? The answer is that from Genesis 3 to the end of the book, there is one main story, one main promise that all the people in Genesis are clinging tightly to: one day there will be a serpent slayer from the line of Eve that brings an end to our toil and a peace to our world. God ordained that the family history from Eve to that promised offspring would come about because of the offspring of Judah and Tamar. Genesis 38 is not episodic filler; it is essential to the story of redemption.

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#### Read Genesis 38:1-30

#### Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### Passage Specific Questions

1. Why do you think Moses included the story of Judah and Tamar in the Genesis narrative?

2. Judah and Tamar are both clearly sinful, flawed people. How does God use their decisions to accomplish his purposes?
  3. Can you think of other times when God uses even human sinfulness to accomplish his purposes in the Bible?
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## **Commentary**

### **38:1-5**

In Genesis 37, Joseph was sold by his brothers to Ishmaelite traders from Midian and was eventually purchased as a slave in Egypt, working in the house of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. From Genesis 37 to Genesis 50, the narrative is almost completely preoccupied with the story of Joseph and how his time in Egypt was the predetermined plan of God to rescue his people from a 7-year famine. The exception appears to be the story of Judah and Tamar, found in Genesis 38.

After participating in the sale of his brother and subsequent cover-up, Judah departs from his family for reasons not mentioned in the text. He takes a Canaanite woman as a wife (Shua), and she bears him three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah.

### **38:6-11**

Judah takes Tamar as a wife for his eldest son, Er. God puts Er to death because he was “wicked in the sight of the Lord.” The text does not hint at what his wickedness was, and it is not worthwhile to speculate. Because of the death of Er, Judah directs his second-eldest son, Onan to take Tamar as a wife and impregnate her. In 2020, this would be an odd practice; however, in that day, this was to be expected. This cultural practice would eventually come to be known as “Levirate marriage,” and has numerous biblical references (the story of Ruth, Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Matthew 22:23-28 to name a few).

In Levirate marriage, a brother steps up to provide his brother’s widow with children. This practice seems to have two main areas of concern. Of first concern was the legacy of the brother. The intention behind impregnating the widow is to produce a male child that would keep the deceased brother’s name alive. The secondary concern is to provide for the widow. Having male children would ensure that she is taken care of.

If the idea of Levirate marriage seems really foreign and unromantic to you, that’s because it probably is. There is a vast difference in time and culture that separates us from this practice. However, understanding Levirate marriage as a practice is important for understanding why the people in Genesis 38 acted the way they did.

Onan knew that the children he provided Tamar would not be his children. So, while having sex with Tamar, he would withdraw at the moment of sexual climax to prevent his semen from impregnating her. With only his interests at heart, Onan is willing to enjoy the pleasure of sex with his brother’s widow but has no intention whatsoever of providing for her. God views Onan’s actions as wicked and puts him to death. Perhaps Judah is starting to wonder if Tamar is cursed or maybe it’s just that he’s running out of sons himself—either way, he tells Tamar to go back to her father’s house to live as a widow. He promises to give her Shelah when he grows up, but the text reveals later (v. 26) that he never had any intention of keeping that promise.

At this point in the story, Moses wants us to understand that the behavior of Judah and his sons is wicked and that the person who is paying the price for their wickedness is Tamar.

### 38:12-23

Following a large passage of time, Judah's wife dies, and he resumes his normal activities after a period of mourning. Hearing that Judah is away on a business trip shearing his sheep in Timnah, Tamar devises a plan. She races to Enaim (on the road to Timnah), covers her face with a veil and waits for Judah. Judah sees her and thinks her to be a prostitute. In possibly the most forward, least romantic sentence in the Bible, he propositions Tamar. Because Judah does not have anything to give Tamar in exchange for sex, Tamar suggests he leave with her his signet, cord and staff—items unique to Judah that would have verified his identity, his status and authority. Judah gives Tamar these items as a collateral pledge for payment, and has sex with Tamar.

Tamar conceives a child from this single, sexual encounter. Some have pointed to this as a sign that—though the actions of Judah and Tamar were both sinful—God's hand was guiding the encounter to produce a child who would continue the line of Judah, ultimately leading to the birth of Jesus Christ. When Judah later sends a goat to Enaim as payment, Tamar is not there, and no one there remembers her. He decides to cut his losses and let her keep his valuables.

When about three months pass, Tamar has begun to show from her pregnancy. Word gets back to Judah that his daughter-in-law has been immoral. Judah's response is drastic and hypocritical—he orders her execution. Tamar plays the cards she has been holding all along, the signet, cord, and staff, revealing to Judah that he is the father of her unborn child. The response from Judah illustrates his humility: "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son, Shelah." That he did not sleep with her again (v.23) illustrates his repentance.

### 38:24-30

When the time comes for Tamar to give birth, they find that she is pregnant with twins. At the hour of the birth, one child (Zerah) reaches his hand out from his mother. The midwife tied a scarlet thread around his hand to confirm that he was the firstborn. However, the child then withdrew his hand back inside of his mother, and his brother (Perez) was completely born first. The point of this being included in the narrative is to signify that, though Zerah was technically the firstborn, the child that would be favored and would be in the line of Christ is Perez.

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### The Main Point

God's plan is not dependent upon our righteousness, nor thwarted by our wickedness. He works to accomplish his purposes for redemption even through the wicked actions of his people.

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### A Few Relevant Scriptures

- **Genesis 49:1-27** – Jacob blesses his sons, and mentions in v.10 how the "Scepter will not depart from Judah," prophesying the future of King David and ultimately King Jesus.
- **Deuteronomy 25:5-10** – this outlines the practice of Levirate marriage as it is made the legal practice for Israel.
- **Ruth:** The story of Ruth hinges on the practice of Levirate marriage, where Boaz redeems Ruth and continues the family line which leads to Jesus.

## **Week 8**

### **Genesis 39:1-23 – Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife**

By Rand Nelson

#### **Introduction**

When I was a senior in high school, I needed money so that I could put gas in my car, take my girlfriend out, and occasionally go see a movie with friends. I applied and was hired at a Firehouse Subs just up the street from my house. I worked there in the evenings most weeknights.

As a job, working as a sandwich engineer was not completely awful—you could drink all you wanted from the soda fountain and were given a discounted sandwich every shift. However, there were definitely drawbacks. Filling bulk orders was a pain, there was at least one irate customer per shift and even a really long shower didn’t seem to wash off the stench of deli meat.

When I first started working there, I really didn’t like it, but something changed about six weeks in. My best friend Grant was hired at the same location, and we worked a lot of the same shifts together. Suddenly, I wasn’t just cleaning toilets at Firehouse; I was cleaning toilets with Grant. I wasn’t drudgingly prepping deli meat for a long shift; I was prepping deli meat with Grant. And I wasn’t enduring angry customers alone; I had Grant there to back me up and to joke about the customer’s mayonnaise addiction once they left. Every chore seemed easier and the long hours didn’t seem so long because Grant was with me.

I can’t imagine what it would feel like to have your family sell you into slavery and after working really hard to regain some semblance of a life back, be falsely accused of rape and thrown into prison in a foreign country—but that’s exactly what happens to Joseph. Yet throughout his story from favored son to Egyptian convict, there is one constant: The Lord was with Joseph. Everything about his experience (and his perspective) was shaped and guided by this truth.

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#### **Read Genesis 39:1-23**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. What are some similarities you can point out between Joseph and Jesus?
2. Contemporary Christianity speaks far more of blessing than it does of suffering. What does Joseph’s story show us God’s sovereign rule even over our suffering?
3. Have you ever had a moment of unjust treatment or suffering that you were able to look back and see God’s hand on?
4. How has the presence of God comforted you through moments of pain, suffering or mistreatment?

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## Commentary

### 39:1-6a

Sometimes when we read the Bible, we read stories as if we are reading fiction—as if it were a fantasy so far removed from reality that the simple text does not wow us as it should. Whether it's because “things were different back then” or because we don't stop to think about the implications of the story, it just doesn't sink in. When last we heard of Joseph, his jealous brothers had just sold him to Midianite traders and faked his death. This is a part of the story that should sink in: all of Joseph's brothers hated him so much that they sold him to traveling strangers and set up an elaborate lie to convince their father of his death. At this point, the reader does not know where the story is headed, but where the story begins is dark, evil, and seemingly hopeless.

Verse one restates what we read in Genesis 37:36—Joseph is working in the house of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guard in Egypt. Verse two inserts hope back into the story: “The Lord was with Joseph.” This is a major theme throughout the story of Joseph, and especially in Genesis 39. With the Lord blessing Joseph's efforts, everything he does succeeds. His master sees this and decides to entrust him with more responsibility until Joseph is attending to Potiphar personally and overseeing all that Potiphar has. And because the Lord was with Joseph, blessing his work, blessings continued to rain down on the house of Potiphar so much so that he had no worries at all. This is an echo of the promise of God to Abraham, that he would bless the nations through him (Genesis 12:1-3).

### 39:6b-18

Not only is the Lord blessing Joseph's every action and thereby blessing the entire house of Potiphar, the text also tells us that Joseph was well built and physically attractive. As time marched on, Potiphar's wife began to desire Joseph. She asked Joseph to sleep with her, but he refused. His refusal points to the state of his heart. He was not flattered, and he didn't brush it off as a casual joke. Instead, he refuses and communicates clearly that to sleep with her would be sinful. He points out the state of Potiphar's house and how well things are going because he is in charge, and he recognizes that Potiphar has been good to him and withheld nothing from him but his wife. Then he puts the matter in the realm that matters most, the spiritual: “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” (v.9). Much like David's confession after the murder of Uriah and his adultery with Bathsheba (Psalm 51:4), Joseph realizes that far above potentially losing his place in Potiphar's house and damaging his relationship with his master, to commit adultery with Bathsheba would dishonor and disobey God.

Unfortunately for Joseph, Potiphar's wife was not one who took rejection well. Day after day, her pursuit of him continued. Taking a page out of Billy Graham's book, Joseph ignored her advances and set boundaries to avoid being alone with her. It should be noted that Joseph ran Potiphar's household. He could have created an ideal situation when Potiphar was away where the staff was limited. He could have easily gotten away with it, but his fear was never that he would get caught, it was that he would be acting wickedly and contrary to God's desires.

### 39:11-18

One day, when Joseph found himself in the house alone with Potiphar's wife, she made another advance. “She caught him by his garment” illustrates an escalation—her hands were on him. Joseph no longer wishes to discuss the matter with her. He wisely flees the sexual

temptation (1 Corinthians 6:18), leaving his garment behind in her hand. The continual rejection of a Hebrew slave had finally taken its toll on Potiphar's wife. With Joseph's cloak in hand, she realized her opportunity. She called out to the men of her household, claiming that Joseph had tried to convince her to sleep with him—a mirrored falsehood of what actually occurred. She used the left behind cloak as evidence, and repeated the story to her husband when he came home.

Especially in light of her constant advances and Joseph's caution around his master's wife, it's hard to consider how he could have done more to protect himself. Part of living in a broken world is the susceptibility we all have to evil—both the evil we commit ourselves and the evil perpetrated against us. In this story, Joseph is meant to be shown as an innocent and righteous man who suffers unjustly—first at the hands of his brothers and now Potiphar's wife. Similar to how Jesus suffered, Joseph will end up being used by God as a divinely appointed vehicle of grace for multitudes. As Christians, we should see whispers and foreshadows of Christ in the story of Joseph. Erik Raymond put it this way, “When we collect the details of Joseph's life, we see a glorious reflection that closely mirrors another life we are so intimately familiar with. This is not because Joseph was Jesus's favorite Bible hero he wanted to emulate. It is because God is sovereign, and he has been laying the tracks for the glory of Christ throughout redemptive history.”

### **39:19-23**

The only thing surprising about Joseph's imprisonment is that he was not executed on the spot as a rapist. The hand of God preserved him and kept him safe. He is placed in prison with the king's prisoners. This was a new low. Sure—being his father's favored child and talking too much about his dreams may have incited his brother's hatred, but all he had done in Egypt was work hard and cause his master's household to flourish. Things were going so well, and now he was suffering in prison because he wouldn't sleep with Potiphar's wife. Miles away from home and rotting in a prison as a foreign slave, things couldn't seem bleaker for Joseph.

But then verse 21 invades the lightless, hopeless space of Joseph's prison cell the way only the presence of God can do. Echoing verse 2, we read, “But the Lord was with Joseph.” Comforted and guided by God's presence, Joseph is soon made the manager of the prison. He does such a good job that the keeper of the prison pays no attention to anything he does, because the Lord is with him, bringing everything he does to success.

The Lord was with Joseph as he sat in the bottom of a pit wondering if his brothers were ever coming back to fetch him. He was with Joseph as he worked for a foreign leader in a far-off country. And he was with Joseph through the years he suffered a prison sentence for crime he did not commit. Spoiler alert: God's hand guiding Joseph's life made it so that he got out of prison, became second in command over all of Egypt, got married, had children, and reunited with his brothers and father. God had a plan for Joseph's life that included all these hardships and setbacks on the way to so much success and fame.

But you are not Joseph. The hardship you're experiencing may never end. You may never have reconciliation with the people who have wronged you. You may die having accomplished nothing extraordinary, without ever tasting luxury and lacking in close, meaningful relationships. While God will ultimately judge sin and make all things new, not everyone experiences the closure that Joseph does. However, every Christian can be known and comforted by a God who isn't afraid of family drama, hospital rooms, bankruptcy court or funeral processions. He still is

in the business of being with his people, guiding them and leading them to accomplish his plan for their lives—whatever that may be.

This reminds me of one of my favorite verses from a hymn hardly anyone has heard:

“Content with beholding His face,  
My all to His pleasure resigned;  
No changes of season or place,  
Would make any change in my mind.  
While blessed with a sense of His love,  
A palace a toy would appear;  
And prisons would palaces prove,  
If Jesus would dwell with me there.”

- *How Tedious and Tasteless the Hours*, John Newton

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### **The Main Point**

Though Joseph was sold into slavery and imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, God was with him, bringing his every move to prosper according to God’s plan.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Psalm 23** speaks of the Lord as a shepherd whose presence comforts us, guides us, and protects us in all circumstances
- **Matthew 26, Luke 22 and John 18** all catalog the betrayal, false accusations and arrest of Jesus.
- **Romans 8** illustrates how God has his hand on all things and sovereignly directs all things for our good.

## **Week 9**

### **Genesis 40:1 – 41:57 – God Positions Joseph for His Purposes**

By Garrett Pinkerton

#### **Introduction**

The story of Joseph and his waiting makes me think a lot about my life. Like Joseph, I believe God has a plan for my life. I believe God has shown me mercy and grace so that I might know him and serve him with all that I do. I have thought about this a lot over the past few years of college, a time in which I have a lot of decisions to make about my future but also a lot of waiting to do in pursuit of my purpose and dreams.

Like Joseph, I think that my desired plans and timing for those plans may not always be the way God allows it to play out. Joseph desired freedom from prison and slavery, and we often desire freedom from other things that we feel restrain us from fulfilling the Lord's plans for our life. I think people can feel this way about school, work, seasons of the year, and probably other things. Yet Joseph, in slavery and prison for around thirteen years, was obedient to the Lord, was prepared for the task given, and gave all credit to God for his success and abilities.

Reading this portion of Joseph's story has been a great reminder to me that God allows things to happen in ways that make him most glorified according to his good and perfect will. In the meantime, we must devote ourselves to worshiping and honoring him because he is worthy of our hearts' affections. In the end, it isn't about us, but him working through us to carry out his plan. It is a joy and privilege for us to be loved by the Father and to have a part in his plan for creation.

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#### **Read Genesis 40:1-41:57**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. Does Joseph question or blame God for his imprisonment? How do we react when circumstances aren't in our favor?
  2. The wisest men in Egypt called upon by the Pharaoh couldn't interpret his dreams. How must we approach things that we have trouble understanding or accepting?
  3. Is your contentment and purpose in knowing the Lord, regardless of what he calls you to do?
  4. How are you seeking the Lord right now so that you are ready for an opportunity to share the gospel or serve him in some way?
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#### **Commentary**

#### **Recap of Genesis 37-39**

In chapters 40 and 41 of Genesis, the story of Joseph is continuing after a couple of different periods of Joseph's life. First, in chapter 37, we see that Joseph is loved by his father more than his brothers, and his brothers become jealous and angry. After Joseph has dreams in which his brothers bow down to him in the future, his brothers become angrier and conspire to kill him. Instead, they sell him to Midianite traders, who then send him to Potiphar. In chapter 39, while enslaved to Potiphar, the Lord was with Joseph and he was shown favor in Potiphar's household. Though Joseph lives honorably and is entrusted with all of Potiphar's belongings, Joseph is accused by his master's wife and thrown into prison. But the Lord was with Joseph, and he gained favor with the keeper of the prison.

#### **40:1-8**

In the first few verses, we see that the Pharaoh is angry with his two servants, the chief cupbearer and chief baker, but we aren't told their offense. These two servants are highly regarded by Pharaoh, as those that prepare and test food and drinks for him. Joseph is appointed to oversee them for their stay in prison.

When both servants have dreams during the same night, Joseph sees their troubled looks and asks about them. Because of Joseph's belief and trust in God, he believes God will interpret the dreams for Joseph. Joseph acknowledges God's ownership of the dreams and the interpretations rather than lifting up himself.

#### **40:9-20**

As the chief cupbearer retells his dream to Joseph and has it interpreted, I can't help but think of Christ. Jesus left the Father to take on flesh and suffer for the sins of the world, was crucified and raised to life after three days, and asked on the cross by another criminal to remember him. The cupbearer is sent to prison by Pharaoh. He is asked by Joseph to remember him. He is restored to his position three days after his dream. He could have remembered Joseph in his freedom. But scripture tells us he "did not remember Joseph but forgot him." Although the cupbearer forgot Joseph, Jesus does not forget us. What the cupbearer failed to do for Joseph, Jesus did for us when he gave up his life and was resurrected so that we may be made right in the eyes of the Father.

Joseph's interpretations of these dreams show that God is with Joseph in these situations and that Joseph is trusting God to use him for his purposes. He recognizes that all this works in accordance to God's plan and trusts the Lord for provision.

#### **41:1-8**

In verses 1-8, Pharaoh's dream is described in detail that just doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense. Even the wisest men and magicians couldn't figure out the meaning of the dreams. This was a good moment for me to just sit and realize that we are completely helpless without God's intervening to show us his goodness and his ways. Not even the wisest and most powerful men in Egypt could figure this out, but Joseph, a man who found favor with God and trusted him, was given the interpretation.

#### **41:9-24**

When the chief cupbearer realizes he has forgotten Joseph and tells Pharaoh of his interpreting abilities, Joseph is immediately summoned to interpret Pharaoh's own dreams. Joseph again is ready for the task God has given him and quick to acknowledge that it is God

who works, not him. Pharaoh retells his dream to Joseph and admits that he has no one else who has any idea what his dream means. Keep in mind, from verse 1, this is two whole years after the occurrence of the first two dreams that Joseph has been persisting in faith in prison. Through this, God uses him to show Pharaoh and others that there is no understanding and no provision without him. Without God speaking through Joseph, Egypt would have gone to ruin!

#### **41:25-57**

In this section of the chapter, Joseph gives Pharaoh the dream's interpretation. Having been used by God to interpret past dreams and now being the only one with an interpretation for Pharaoh, Joseph is considered by Pharaoh to have the Spirit of God. He then lays out the detailed plan for combating this forthcoming famine, and Pharaoh trusts him because of the Spirit of God's work through his faith.

Because of Joseph's God-given wisdom and discernment, Pharaoh recognizes the Spirit of God in him and places him second in command over all of Egypt with pretty much full control of resources. However, even though Pharaoh says he chooses Joseph because he has the Spirit in him, he still misses the whole point that God is trying to prove through Joseph. God is trying to show his greatness, yet, when Joseph acknowledges God's hand on the things he has done, Pharaoh still rewards Joseph with a ring and fine clothing, gives his daughter in marriage and parades him in the streets to be worshiped. God deserves to be glorified for his redemption of Joseph from prison and Egypt from the famine.

When all this happened, Joseph was thirty years old! This means he was held captive as a slave or prisoner for thirteen years and was still used by the Lord to carry out his purposes. After God delivered Joseph from prison, he entrusted Joseph with his work and Joseph was obedient to carry out the plan for saving up grain during the plentiful times in order to make it through the famine.

In verses 50-52, we see that Joseph has two sons. These sons are the fruit of Joseph and are named to represent God providing for Joseph and raising him up despite his brothers' efforts to trade, hurt, and even kill him, and to recognize God allowing Joseph to be fruitful, even in the land of his affliction. This can serve as a foreshadowing scripture to Israel's affliction to come in Egypt as Jacob's family is delivered over to the hands of Joseph, fulfilling the dreams Joseph had about his brothers bowing to him. The seven years of plenty and famine came, and during the famine, the whole world came to Egypt to get food from Joseph's stored supply, setting up his family and the people of Israel to be enslaved in a foreign land, as God promised to Abraham way back in Genesis 15:13.

This story of Joseph's life and his favor with God shows us that God is the provider and protector, that he keeps his promises, and that his plan will prevail for the good of those that love him and are called according to his purpose. In fact, we will see that God has positioned Joseph to provide for Israel and preserve the seed of promise through the famine.

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#### **The Main Point**

God positions Joseph for the work he has prepared for him. He is working out his plans and purposes and can be trusted, even if we do not understand it in the moment.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Genesis 15:13** - God's promise to Abraham about Israel's affliction in a foreign land.
- **Genesis 37:5-9** – Joseph dreams about his brothers bowing to him.
- **Genesis 42:6** – Joseph's brothers bow before him in Egypt.
- **Exodus 1** – Israel is enslaved and oppressed in Egypt.

## **Week 10**

### **Genesis 42:1- 48:22 – Promise, Provision, and Reconciliation**

By Brandon Wingler

#### **Introduction**

Experiencing betrayal from those closest to us is one of the deepest forms of hurt imaginable. The damage caused can leave profound wounds that affect us in great ways. Naturally, we all seek to fix the problem of pain in whatever way we feel will work. Sometimes we seek to avenge those who wrong us, maybe even denying them forgiveness or mercy along the way. We might try to ignore the pain the best we can and pretend that it isn't there and that everything is fine. In contrast, we may spend most of our time consumed by our grief and feeling hopeless. Then there are moments where we learn to forgive and extend grace, even to those who have hurt us so deeply. Our response to those who hurt us communicates where we place our ultimate hope.

Joseph's life is a testament to God's promise, provision, and reconciliation. Through all of the circumstances in Joseph's life, God keeps his promises and displays his faithfulness. God uses Joseph to provide for his family, the people of Egypt, and the surrounding nations during a time of severe famine. Finally, God reconciles Joseph with his family, restoring their relationships. In all of this, we see Scripture pointing toward the one who will fulfill all of God's promises, provide the greatest gift of all to the entire world, and reconcile humanity back to God. That person is our one true mediator, provider, comforter, defender, savior, king, and refuge. He is Jesus Christ.

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#### **Read Genesis 42:1-48:22**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. Think of a time where you were deeply hurt/betrayed/abandoned by those you loved. How do you deal with the hurt? How do you respond to those who have hurt you?
2. Think of the relationships in your life, particularly with your family. Are there ways you can reconcile fractured relationships? Are there ways you need to repent for hurting others?
3. God worked through all of the difficult and messy situations in Joseph's life to ultimately provide for many people, including reconciling Joseph and his family. How have you seen God work through the events in your life?

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#### **Commentary**

Last week, we read about God’s sovereign positioning of Joseph as the chief administrator of Egypt. God elevates Joseph from a prisoner to a leader, preparing him for the events that would soon unfold throughout the region. Scripture reminds us that God reigns supreme – his plans are still to prosper and he does not forget his people. How comforting it is to remember that we serve and worship a God who cannot and will not be overcome. God keeps his promises and he provides for his people. We’ve seen this all throughout Genesis, and we continue to see God’s faithfulness here in the story of Joseph.

**Genesis 42:1-6** - <sup>1</sup>When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” <sup>2</sup>And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” <sup>3</sup>So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. <sup>4</sup>But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. <sup>5</sup>Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

<sup>6</sup>Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.

As we saw in the previous chapter, famine spread throughout all of Egypt and then to the surrounding lands. This included Canaan, the land where Joseph’s brothers and father still lived. Concerned by the shortage of food and aware of the possibility of food in Egypt, Jacob charges his sons to leave Canaan and return with food from Egypt so that they will not starve. However, instead of sending all of his sons, Jacob elects to keep Benjamin in Canaan. Undoubtedly, Jacob is still grieving over the loss of Joseph. Therefore, Jacob will not allow for the possibility of harm to befall all of his sons at once.

Unbeknownst to Jacob and his sons, Joseph is alive and prosperous in Egypt. As the leading administrative officer of Egypt, Joseph wisely stores up an excess supply of food in preparation for the famine. When his brothers travel to Egypt in search of food, they do not recognize their younger brother Joseph, but he recognizes them. In a gesture of respect and humility, the brothers bow before Joseph and demonstrate their submission to his authority. This picture reminds us of Joseph’s earlier dreams in Genesis 37:5-11. In those dreams, Joseph told his brothers he saw them and his parents bowing before him. While Joseph’s brothers hated him for these dreams and attempted to remove him from the picture, God remained faithful in carrying out his promises and providing for Joseph. And as we see in the rest of this narrative, God uses Joseph to provide for his family and many others throughout Egypt, Canaan, and the surrounding regions.

Joseph instructs his brothers to go back to Canaan and return with their brother Benjamin. Jacob reluctantly allows Benjamin to travel back with the brothers to Egypt once Judah offers himself as a pledge for Benjamin’s life. This act from Judah is important to note. He assumes personal responsibility for Benjamin’s safety and offers to bear the guilt should anything happen to Benjamin. Judah’s leadership within the circle of brothers stands out, especially in contrast to the failure of his other brothers earlier in Genesis. Reuben’s sin of incest in chapter 35 and Simeon and Levi’s sin of wrath in chapter 34 diminished their authority and prestige within the family. Judah begins to figure more prominently within the family’s leadership, a development that will continue throughout the Old Testament narrative.

After all of the brothers return to Egypt, Joseph prepares a grand meal for them and provides Benjamin with five portions greater than the other brothers. Perhaps this was to test his brothers and see if they would allow jealousy into their hearts as they did earlier when they envied Joseph and sold him into slavery. When the brothers leave to go back to Canaan for a second time, they discover that one of Joseph's cups was stashed away in Benjamin's bag. Standing accused of theft and fearful that Benjamin's life will now be taken, Judah declares their guilt and states that all of the brothers will suffer together. But Joseph will not allow it, instead choosing to punish only Benjamin. In this crucial moment, Judah intercedes on Benjamin's behalf. By interceding, Judah demonstrates repentance for their sins and their earlier betrayal of Joseph. On a grander scale, Judah's intercession foreshadows the ultimate intercession that Christ would make for us on the cross. As Joseph hears this genuine repentance and witnesses this change of heart played out in Judah's intercession for Benjamin, he weeps.

**Genesis 45:4-8** - <sup>4</sup>So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup>And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup>For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup>And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup>So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers. Imagine this climactic moment in the story and consider how easy it could have been for Joseph to condemn his brothers. After several years of persecution, imprisonment, and isolation from his family and homeland, Joseph could have unleashed all his rage against his brothers. He could have denied them food or taken them prisoner or even taken their lives. Instead, Joseph demonstrates incredible grace and undeserved mercy to his brothers.

Joseph is a type of Christ in the Old Testament narrative, a picture that helps us recognize the true Christ when he arrives. Since the promise of Genesis 3:15, the people have waited for that royal king who would crush the head of the serpent. Joseph's story begs the reader to ask if he is the one they have waited on to bring rest and reverse the curse. While we find that Joseph is not the predicted Messiah, we do see that Joseph foreshadows the perfect and righteous Savior who would fulfill the promise. And just like Joseph extends grace and mercy to his brothers, Christ extends immeasurable grace and mercy to us. Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers foreshadows the reconciliation that Christ established between God and man. Jesus is our one true mediator who reconciles us back to God through his sacrifice.

**Genesis 48:1-22** - <sup>1</sup>After this, Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. <sup>2</sup>And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you." Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. <sup>3</sup>And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, <sup>4</sup>and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.' <sup>5</sup>And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. <sup>6</sup>And the children that you fathered after

them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. <sup>7</sup>As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).”

<sup>8</sup>When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, “Who are these?” <sup>9</sup>Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me here.” And he said, “Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.” <sup>10</sup>Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. <sup>11</sup>And Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also.” <sup>12</sup>Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. <sup>13</sup>And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. <sup>14</sup>And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). <sup>15</sup>And he blessed Joseph and said,

“The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,  
the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day,  
<sup>16</sup>the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys;  
and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and  
Isaac;  
and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

<sup>17</sup>When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. <sup>18</sup>And Joseph said to his father, “Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head.” <sup>19</sup>But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.” <sup>20</sup>So he blessed them that day, saying,

“By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying,  
‘God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.’”

Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. <sup>21</sup>Then Israel said to Joseph, “Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow.”

As Jacob nears the very end of his life, he exercises his faith in God’s promise once more through blessing Joseph’s sons. In this blessing, Jacob adopts the sons of Joseph into the nation of Israel. As Israel (Jacob) blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph presents the boys to his father so that his right hand can easily rest on top of Manasseh, the firstborn son. However, Israel crosses his hands and places his right hand on top of Ephraim. This act elevated Ephraim above his older brother Manasseh, upsetting Joseph. After Joseph attempts to correct his father’s perceived mistake, Israel assures Joseph that he purposely chose Ephraim.

Israel's act reminds us that God is sovereign, and his grace is unable to be controlled or held captive. God gives and he takes. God exalts and he humbles. God accepted Abel's offering while rejecting Cain's (chapter 4). God chose Isaac over Ishmael (chapter 17). God chose Jacob over Esau (chapter 27). God chose Joseph to lead his family and provide for them and here God chooses to exalt Ephraim through Israel's blessing. Ultimately, God is sovereign, and his ways are beyond our understanding.

In the Old Testament, the Lord proclaims this truth in Isaiah 55:8-9:

<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.  
<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul reflects on God's sovereignty in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29:

<sup>27</sup>But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

God's sovereignty is not something we have to fear. It also is not something we need to comprehend completely, because we never could. What we can do is know that the God who created everything cares deeply enough about his creation that he acts in time and history to fulfill his promises and to lead us in the way of salvation. So what is the way of salvation? Jesus Christ. He declares this in John 14:6 when he says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus reconciles us back to God and restores our relationship with God and with one another. True healing, forgiveness, and restoration comes only from Christ. Trust in Christ, follow him, and walk in the newness of life, today and for all eternity.

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### **The Main Point**

Through every circumstance, the Lord is faithful and keeps his promises. He provides for his people and carries them through all trials for his glory and for our ultimate good.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Genesis 50:20** – "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." A great summary statement of Genesis and of the Joseph narrative.
- **Psalms 105:16-23** – God sovereignly determines to raise Joseph up to provide for his people.

- **Acts 7:12-19** – Stephen recounts the Joseph narrative in part of his defense before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish religious and judicial council).
- **Romans 8:28-30** – God works for his glory and for our good, securing us in Christ and fulfilling his promises.

## **Week 11**

### **Genesis 49:1-50:26 – The Sovereign God’s Good Purposes**

By Harvey Edwards IV

#### **Introduction**

Have you ever watched a really talented artist draw? Many times, there will be a succession of lines that seem disconnected from what they have told you they are drawing, but as you continue to watch, what once seemed out of place suddenly appears to belong perfectly. In fact, were that line any other shape, it would not fit.

As you read the Scriptures, we all at times probably wonder why God allows certain things to occur. We probably feel this way in our lives as well. But what has occurred in the life of Joseph and his brothers demonstrates that no line on God’s canvas is wasted or out of shape. We may not understand them all, but God is sovereign and is working all things out according to his plans and purposes, even the things meant by others to be at cross-purposes to his. At the end of Genesis, a Messiah has been promised, but we wonder how God could ever bring about a seed of the woman who could live righteously. Genesis doesn’t explain this fully – the rest of the Scriptures do that, but it leaves us with a story that demonstrates God’s sovereign ability to work even what is meant for evil for good. And so we can trust that every line our God draws will be shown in the end to be right where it was intended, and that the beauty of his work would be somehow diminished were it not.

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#### **Read Genesis 49:1-50:26**

#### **Study Questions**

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

#### **Passage Specific Questions**

1. Are you surprised that God chooses Judah’s and not Joseph’s family to bear the righteous seed (Genesis 49:8-12)? What does this say about God’s plans and purposes?
  2. What do you make of Joseph’s statement that what his brothers meant for evil, God meant for good? How does this affect how you view the events that are happening in your life?
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#### **Commentary**

##### **49:1-27**

As Genesis is coming to a close, we have seen how God has preserved the righteous seed first promised in Genesis 3:15. Just as this promise has been further clarified and expanded upon throughout Genesis, in Jacob’s blessing, we learn something new about how God is bringing

about his purposes. And just as we have seen time and time again, God works in ways that ensure that he receives glory for his mighty work of salvation.

In chapters 37-50, apart from Joseph's insensitive presentation of his dreams to his family, he has been a character that has acted with faithfulness and loyalty, even in really difficult circumstances. This includes the forgiveness that he extended to his brothers who sold him into slavery. Joseph is put forth as a type of Christ. Through his suffering, he is lifted up. He is positioned by God in such a way that although he is second in command to Pharaoh, he is the one used by God to bring salvation to his family and the line of the seed through provision during the famine. Similarly, he brings blessing and salvation from the famine for Gentiles (Egyptians and other surrounding nations) as well as his brothers who give rise to the nation of Israel.

Joseph is a type of Messiah. He is chosen by God to rule; he trusts in the promises of God despite his sufferings; and when he rises to power through his sufferings, he forgives and makes a way for those who have wronged him to be delivered as well. Yet Genesis makes it clear that Joseph is only a type as it closes with the death of Joseph. The curse has not been undone; the ultimate deliverer is yet to come. But Joseph creates an expectation that another Joseph-like figure will arise. And as God so often does, he chooses a branch in the tree of Israel that proves his plans and purposes are his own. He chooses an unexpected man at the end of Genesis to carry forth the righteous seed.

As Jacob bless his sons, we are told that it is not Joseph's line that the Messianic King will arise from, but rather the line of Judah. Joseph is greatly blessed, but to Judah he says,

- <sup>8</sup>“Judah, your brothers shall praise you;  
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;  
your father's sons shall bow down before you.  
<sup>9</sup> Judah is a lion's cub;  
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.  
He stooped down; he crouched as a lion  
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?  
<sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him;  
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.  
<sup>11</sup> Binding his foal to the vine  
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine,  
he has washed his garments in wine  
and his vesture in the blood of grapes.  
<sup>12</sup> His eyes are darker than wine,  
and his teeth whiter than milk (Genesis 49:8-12).

Judah is the one through whom the Messiah comes. The scepter will not depart from his line. He will be obeyed by all the peoples as he rules forever over a kingdom marked by blessing and plenty. The world will now only bring forth its bounty by sweat and toil, but when the king comes, it will be a land of such abundance that the choice vine may be used as a hitching-post and clothes may be washed in wine. Kidner points to the effect of the promised one, “Up to [the ‘until clause of 10b] the theme is the fierce dominance of the tribe among its fellows (8b,9). Then with the advent of the promised one, who will rule the nations, the scene becomes an

earthly paradise such as the prophets foretell in their Messianic poems. It is a miniature of the biblical scheme of history.”<sup>1</sup>

The promised seed of the woman is undoing the effects of the curse. This is what Genesis is preparing us for—the expectation of a messianic king who ushers in a new kingdom and sets creation to rights. Later Scripture will pick up on this motif and advance it. In Numbers, a star comes out of Jacob to exercise dominion (Numbers 24:17–19). In 2 Samuel 7:16, God promises that he will establish the house and kingdom of David forever. Psalm 2 looks forward to the Lord setting his Anointed on Zion, ruling over the nations. Isaiah 11 looks forward to the rule of a shoot of the stump of Jesse who will rule with righteousness and justice and institute a kingdom in which the wolf can dwell with the lamb and children can safely play near the hole of a cobra. The New Testament will pick up on these expectations and show that Jesus is the messianic king who fulfills the Scriptures and that his coming initiates the kingdom of God. Examples of this would be the tracing of Jesus’ genealogy to connect him to the promised seed (Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 23:38) and his performing signs and miracles that demonstrate his identity, like turning water in to wine (John 2:1–11)—a miracle that would allow the kind of nonchalance described in Genesis 49:11.

God’s choice of Judah to carry forth the line of the seed is surprising. But this is true of all of the men God has chosen. God is sovereignly working things out according to his plan, not ours. Alexander states, “The choice of Judah, however, is a further sign that the royal line is determined by God rather than by human preference. Genesis suggests that each patriarch would have selected someone else as principal heir: Abraham speaks out in favor of Ishmael (17:18); Isaac seeks to bless Esau (27:4); Jacob idolizes Joseph (37:3). On every occasion, however, the line of descent is traced through another son.”<sup>2</sup>

That the line of the seed is to continue through Judah and not Joseph is unexpected, so much so that it is easy to miss the true point of the narrative of Genesis 37–50. God is not just preserving a group of people from starving; he is preserving the seed through which his promises will be fulfilled. He is preserving the line from which the Messiah will come. Joseph helps us understand what the Messiah will look like, but his major role in the plan of God is to preserve the line of Judah.

The surprising choice of Judah does not mean, however, that there is nothing to be learned from God’s choice of Judah. When the planted silver cup is found in Benjamin’s bag (Genesis 44:1–13), Benjamin’s life is forfeit to Joseph. In the climactic moment of this family’s tale of envy and forgiveness, Judah offers his life for Benjamin’s (Genesis 44:33). Judah no longer responds in jealousy to the favored son, but with loving sacrifice. In this moment in the narrative of Jacob’s family, Judah models the Messiah and helps us to understand God’s plans and purposes. Much later in the narrative of Scripture, in the climactic moment of the macro-story of the Bible, Jesus offers his life for those of his brothers as the method of salvation for all of God’s people.

#### **49:28-50:14**

Jacob makes a request that might sound strange to some of us. He commands his sons to bury him in the cave that Abraham bought in the land of Canaan. But this command

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<sup>1</sup>Kidner, *Genesis*, 217–18.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander, *The Servant King*, 33.

demonstrates Jacob's belief in the promises of God. He believes the promise God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and himself – that God will give them the land of Canaan. Jacob's statement demonstrates his faith in the surety of God's promises.

### **50:15-21**

Once Jacob has died, Joseph's brothers begin to worry that maybe Joseph has delayed his revenge for the sake of Jacob. They send a message to Joseph and fall down before him, offering to be his servants. Thus Joseph's dream of his brothers bowing down to him is fulfilled. However, Joseph has truly forgiven his brothers. He has learned to trust God and has learned to interpret events occurring in his life through an eternal lens. He says, “<sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup> So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (Genesis 50:20-21).

Joseph's statement is incredibly important for understanding the overall message of Genesis. God has promised to bring about a seed of the woman, a Messianic King who will defeat the serpent, bless the nations, and restore righteousness and peace to God's creation. However, we have seen time and time again that even the most righteous men are unable to earn a righteousness before God. What man could ever set creation right? Even those who are heirs of God's promise threaten the fulfillment of God's promise. But what we see in the story of Joseph, and what he makes so clear in his statement is this: God is sovereign and has the ability to work even what people intend for evil for good. His plans and his purposes cannot be thwarted. And so even though at this point in the biblical narrative (Genesis) we have no clue how a seed of the woman could ever fulfill what God has promised, we are given a peek behind the curtain of God's activity to see that he is orchestrating everything to fulfill his plans. His plan is to redeem a people for himself according to his promises, and he always keeps his promises. As a result, we can be a people who have faith that while we may not understand why God allows the things to happen that he allows to happen, we can rest assured the he has the desire and the power to bring about his plan of salvation.

**50:22-26** – Like his father, Joseph desires to be buried in Canaan, again demonstrating his faith in the sureness of God's promises, even if they are fulfilled after his death.

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### **The Main Point**

God has promised a Redeemer, and nothing can thwart our sovereign God from keeping his promises.

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### **A Few Relevant Scriptures**

- **Numbers 24:17–19** – a star comes out of Jacob to exercise dominion.
- **2 Samuel 7:16** – God promises that he will establish the house and kingdom of David (from the line of Judah) forever.
- **Psalms 2** – looks forward to the Lord setting his Anointed on Zion, ruling over the nations.
- **Isaiah 11** – looks forward to the rule of a shoot of the stump of Jesse who will rule with

righteousness and justice and institute a kingdom in which the wolf can dwell with the lamb and children can safely play near the hole of a cobra.

- **Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 23:38** – Jesus’ genealogy is traced to connect him to the promised line
- **John 2:1–11** – Jesus turns water into wine, a miracle that would allow the kind of nonchalance described in Genesis 49:11.
- **Romans 8:26-30** – God is sovereign and is working things out according to his good plans and purposes. All this is for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

## **Week 12**

### **Genesis Overview**

By Harvey Edwards IV

#### **Introduction**

As we have studied Genesis, hopefully it has become clear to us that the Bible is not ultimately about us, it is about God. From the seemingly simple first line, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” (Genesis 1:1) we see that our very existence is dependent upon God as the creator. Everything that exists does so because he created it. He spoke it into existence out of nothing.

As we read the story, he reveals himself to us. He creates a world that is good. He creates humanity in his image. He creates us to live in relationship with him and to rule over his creation. Over and over again we see his goodness and provision. But this doesn’t just occur when humanity obeys. When humanity rebels against him, bringing sin and death to his good world, we see his patience, mercy, and grace. There is judgment, he will not allow evil to go unpunished, but his desire is to forgive and redeem his creation. In fact, God’s intent to forgive and his intent to uphold righteousness and justice set up the major question in Scripture, introduced in Genesis and asked throughout the Old Testament. If even the most promising characters in Scripture – Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Judah, etc. – fail to live righteously, how can a sinful, broken humanity ever dwell with a holy God?

Genesis begins to show us something of how God can be both just and merciful, preparing us to recognize what he will ultimately accomplish through sending his Son, Jesus. In Genesis 3:15, even as God is laying out the consequences of humanity’s rebellion, he promises that there will one day be a seed, or offspring, of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. We are shown how those who received this promise recognize that God is going to set his creation right through this seed. In Genesis 5:28-29, Lamech hopes Noah will be the one to deliver the people from the curse. But we see that Noah is just like Adam. He has a heart that is unable to be true. And so God intervenes, preserving a line of people who will believe. God chooses a man named Abram, and in Genesis 12:3 he tells him that through his line, God will bless the nations. God shows himself to be the sustainer of his promises as Abram had no children with his wife Sarai who was both past the age of bearing children and had been barren her whole life. And through this seeming obstacle to God’s stated purpose, we are given insight into how a righteous God would redeem a people for himself. God has promised Abram offspring, and though his faith is faltering, Abram believed God, and in Genesis 15:6, it tells us that God counted it to Abram as righteousness. Abram will not earn righteousness for himself, but God will credit a righteousness because of his belief in God’s promise. But how can a just God overlook Abram’s sin? This is a mystery that will go unanswered until Jesus comes, but God shows that while he keeps his own counsel in how this will ultimately be accomplished, he is a promise keeping God. He promised Abram that he would bless the nations through his line, and Sarai’s barrenness is no obstacle to him.

God is the God who brings life out of nothing. He provides them with a child they name Isaac. And through Isaac’s life, and the life of his son Jacob, God reaffirms his promises to Abram by extension to them. But even those who are the recipients of God’s promises seem to endanger the promises. At times their faith falters, at other times, their actions are working directly against God’s purpose. But this sets us up to see that not only does God intend to redeem

a people for himself, he has the power to do so, even if we don't completely understand his plan until it reaches its fulfillment.

Throughout Genesis, God's intent to redeem a people for himself is clear, but how that will happen, particularly with humanity's continued rebellion even by those God is rescuing, is unclear. How can God ever redeem a people who stray so regularly? Can God keep his promises and set things right even though no one is able to live righteously? The story of Joseph doesn't answer how this will happen, but it does show us that God has the power to make it happen. It shows us that God is able to work even those things meant for evil for his good purposes. No one, not even those who are the recipients of the promise, can thwart God's sovereign will. God has promised to redeem his creation and to redeem a people for himself. How remains a mystery until Jesus takes on flesh, accomplishes righteousness through his perfect obedience to God the Father, and dies on the cross for our sin. But God's trustworthiness, grace, mercy, justice, and righteousness are all revealed to us in Genesis. We learn to trust him and his promises even when we don't understand them.

Genesis prepares us to recognize the seed of the woman, Jesus, when he comes to redeem a people for himself. We have a righteousness available to us, earned by Jesus and credited to us by faith. And while we await Jesus' return and the fullness of salvation, we look and see that our God has always been faithful.

As we finish Genesis, we are armed with a knowledge of God and his purposes. We see that we are able to trust him as he works out his plans for his creation. No matter the difficulties we face, we know that God is working all things according to his salvific purposes. And so we can face our difficulties – disappointments, broken relationships, disease and sickness, the loss of loved ones – and know that though these things may not be set right in our lifetime, Jesus is returning to set all things right. God has promised it, and he always keeps his promises, even if we don't understand all of his ways.

### Study Questions

1. How does it change your outlook on life to see that Scripture is God's revelation to us of himself and his purposes?
2. How does seeing God's promises in Genesis and how those have found their fulfillment in Jesus change how you approach difficulties in your life? How does knowing Jesus will return to set all things right change how you think about these things?
3. How does seeing yourself as a creation made by and for the Creator change how you live your life?

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### A Few Relevant Scriptures

- **Romans 8:26-30** – God is sovereign and is working things out according to his good plans and purposes. All this is for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.
- **Revelation 5:1-14** – Jesus is the one able to bring God's Kingdom
- **Revelation 22:1-5** – Jesus will set all things right

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