



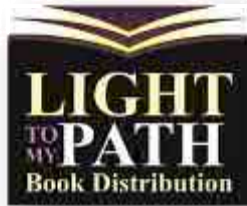
# GENESIS

A Devotional Look at Creation and the Early History  
of Israel as Recorded in the Book of Genesis

**F. WAYNE MAC LEOD**

# Genesis

*A Devotional Commentary  
on the Book of Genesis*



**F. Wayne Mac Leod**

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## Genesis

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Diane MacLeod, Suzanne St. Amour

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# **CHAPTER 1 -**

## **THE FIRST SIX DAYS**

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Read Genesis 1:1-31

Before it all began there was God. This is probably one of the most difficult things for the mortal mind to understand. God never had a beginning. He always existed. We cannot understand this because each of us has a birth and a death. God is eternal. There never was a time nor will there ever be a time when He does not exist.

There are things about God we simply cannot understand. I have met individuals who have told me they cannot accept certain things about God because they could not understand them. My response to them is simply this, "I am glad there are things about God I don't understand because if I could understand everything about Him, He would not be any bigger than my own mind. God is bigger than me and my understanding. I do not know how it is that God can have no beginning, but I realize that my mind is small compared to the mind of God. God's ways are beyond my ability to understand. I serve an eternal God who has always existed. He is a wonderful and powerful God.

Verse 1 tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. Everything we know today has its source in God. This tells me something else about Him. Not only is He an eternal God but He is also a creative and powerful God. Our telescopes and microscopes show us the vastness and complexity of the created universe. The God who created this universe is a powerful and creative God whose mind is vastly superior to ours. Consider for a moment the fact that you are sitting down reading this book. How is this possible? Consider the way your eyes are working. Consider how all your muscles are working together to hold this book and read it. Consider how your mind is making sense of the words on the page and applying them to real life. All this is possible because of our wonderful Creator God.

Notice that the earth, as it was initially created, is described in verse 2 as being formless and empty. It appears to be filled with water. Darkness was everywhere over the surface of the deep. "The deep" is likely a reference to the great ocean of water that covered everything. This formless, empty and dark mass was not complete. There was more work to be done before it took on the form we know today.

There is something else we need to understand about this formless and empty mass. While it was not complete, there was hope, for in verse 2 the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the waters. In the verses that follow we see what the Spirit of God was doing as He hovered over the surface of the formless mass called earth.

God spoke in verse 3 and said, "Let there be light." That was all it took. At the sound of His voice, light appeared. His words were sufficient to bring light into being. Notice in verse 4 that when God saw the light He was pleased. He

saw that it was good. The picture I get here is of a great artist looking over His work with deep satisfaction.

In verse 4 God separated the light from the darkness. He called the light "day" and the darkness He called "night." Remember that the sun had not been created as yet so a "day" was not as we know it today. Notice from verse 5, however, that the darkness and the light were divided in such a way that they brought evening and morning. This tells us that the earth as it existed then must have rotated so that part of it was in the dark while the other part was in the light. This change from dark to light was the measure of a full day. With the creation of light and darkness, the first day came to an end.

On the second day of creation God spoke and called for the waters to be separated by an "expanse" (verse 6). This expanse was the sky. We now have the waters on the earth and the sky above with a layer in between where life could be sustained. This brought the end of the second day.

On the third day God called for dry land to appear. Remember that at this point we only have water over the surface of the earth. When God spoke, dry land appeared on the surface of the earth (verse 10). The earth was taking the form we are familiar with today. On this day we have dry land separating the oceans and seas of the earth. We can only imagine what it would have been like to see creation taking shape.

The dry land, as it first appeared, was barren and empty. God then called for the dry land to produce vegetation. In particular, He called for seed-bearing plants and trees of various kinds to grow on the surface of the dry land (verse 11). The dry ground now began to produce vegetation. The



vegetation that grew on the earth produced seeds that would drop to the ground and continue to spread over the earth (verse 12). By the end of the third day the earth was producing vegetation.

On the fourth day God called for lights in the sky. Previous to this, the light and darkness on the earth did not come from the sun as we know it today. It was on the fourth day that God called the sun and the moon into being. Notice that the sun and the moon were to mark seasons, days and years (verse 14). Verse 16 tells us that God made two great lights. The greater light was to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night (verse 16). This is obviously a reference to the sun and the moon. With the rotation of the earth these two lights would bring day and night to the earth (verse 18). Notice again in verse 18 that when God looked at what He had created, He was pleased. Everything was exactly as He wanted. God took great delight in the work He was doing. By the end of the fourth day, the sun, the moon and the stars were in place in the sky giving light to the earth and marking the days and seasons.

On the fifth day God called for life in the sea and sky. Great sea creatures appeared in the oceans and birds began flying in the sky (verses 20-21). Notice in verse 21 that there were various kinds of birds and sea creatures. There is no room in this passage for the teaching of evolution. Life did not evolve from one life form to another. God created a wonderful variety of birds and fish. In verse 22 God commanded these creatures to be fruitful and increase on the earth. They were to fill the waters, the sky and the land. At the end of the fifth day there were birds in the air and fish in the sea.

On the sixth day God called out to the land and commanded it to produce various kinds of living creatures

(verse 24). An incredible variety of wild animals, livestock and insects appeared on the earth (verse 25). God again was very pleased with what He saw. All of His creation was perfect.

Finally on the sixth day God made man. Notice two things about the creation of man.

First, God created man in His image and likeness. This is what separated man from the rest of creation. Human beings alone were created in the image and likeness of God. Being created in the image and likeness of God does not refer to a physical nature. We were created like God in that we also have a spiritual nature. This means that human beings are able to communicate with God. We were created as spiritual beings, different from the animals in order that we might have a relationship with our Creator.

Second, God gave man charge over His creation. Man was given the responsibility to care for God's creation. He was to rule over the fish, the birds and the animals (verse 26).

Verse 27 tells us that God created both a male and a female. He blessed them and commanded them to fill the earth and rule over it.

We learn from verse 29 that God gave the seed-bearing plants for man and his wife to eat. Verse 30 tells us that God also gave the plants and trees of the earth to the animals as food. God had not yet given man, woman or the animals meat to eat. This would come later, but for now it appears that humans and animals were vegetarians and ate only plants. This meant that there was no bloodshed. No living animal was killed for food. This also would enable

these animals to multiply and fill the earth as the Lord God intended.

By the end of the sixth day man and women were created in the image of God and called to multiply and rule over the earth. They lived in harmony with the animals of the earth and ate the plants of the earth as their food. God looked at His creation and He saw that it was "very good." It was exactly as He intended it to be. It pleased Him very much.

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about God and His character?
- What encouragement do you find in the fact that God is bigger than you and you cannot possibly understand all His ways?
- What evidence do we have in this chapter that God took great delight in His creation? What do you think God feels when we do not take care of the creation in which He so delighted?
- How were man and woman created different from the animals?
- What does it mean to be created in the image and likeness of God? What privilege and obligation does this give us as human beings? Can we ever be satisfied outside of a spiritual relationship with God?
- How faithful have we been as rulers over the earth that God has entrusted to us?

For Prayer:

- Thank God for His wonderful creation. Take a moment to thank Him for something particular in nature.
- Thank God that He is bigger than you. Take a moment to worship Him as the great and mighty God.
- Thank the Lord God that He created you in His image with the ability to communicate with Him. Ask God to help you to draw closer to Him. Thank Him for the wonderful privilege He has given you to know Him.
- Ask God to help you demonstrate the reality of his image in your life.



## **CHAPTER 2 - EVE AND THE GARDEN OF EDEN**

---

Read Genesis 2:1-25

In six days God had created the world. He took great delight in His creation. By the seventh day all of His work was completed.

Notice that verse 2 tells us that God rested from all His work on the seventh day. The work of creation took place in six days but God's intention was that there be a cycle of seven days. The seventh day was set apart as a holy day, a day of quiet and rest. This day would be a day when His people would cease all their work to remember their Creator. This shows us that it was God's intention that His people experience a relationship with Him.

Verses 2-6 take us back in time. Here we are given more detail about the vegetation that covered the earth. As we have already seen in chapter 1, when the earth was first created there was no vegetation. From verse 5 we get the

impression that the earth was ready to produce this vegetation but it needed to be watered for the seeds to grow. Notice also that verse 5 tells us that there was no man to cultivate the soil so that these plants could grow. These plants would grow as they were cultivated and watered. To allow the plants to grow, the Lord created streams, brooks and rivers to cross the land and water the earth. It was also God's desire that men and woman play a role in cultivating the land to encourage its fruitfulness.

In verse 7 we see that God formed man "from the dust of the ground." When God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," man became a living being. Life came from the breath of God. We have no record of God breathing into the nostrils of the animals to give them life. By breathing into man, God did something special. He gave him not only the life of the animals around him but also spiritual life. Man would be different from the animals in that he would be able to have a special, personal relationship with God.

God placed man in a garden in the region of Eden (verse 8). We learn something about this garden in verses 9-14. There were all kinds of trees growing in this garden bearing good fruit. In the middle of the garden there were two special trees. The first tree was called the Tree of Life. The second was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (verse 9).

The garden was watered by a river that flowed from Eden. This was a large river that divided into four other rivers. The names of these rivers were the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris and the Euphrates (verses 11, 13-14). The Pishon wound through the land of Havilah which was rich in gold, resin and onyx stones (verse 11-12). The mention of the names of these rivers leads us to believe that the Garden

of Eden was located somewhere in the country that we know today as Iraq.

Verse 15 tells us that God gave man the responsibility to take care of the garden. I find it particularly interesting that in a perfect world there was still work to be done. The garden still needed to be cared for by the man. I believe that this tells us something about heaven. Even in heaven we will be given responsibilities and work to do.

Work and responsibilities gives us purpose in life. It is a wonderful thing to know that when God put us on this earth He did so for a purpose. He has a particular use for you. You were born for a reason and will find your greatest satisfaction in fulfilling God's purpose for your life.

This was not the only requirement God had for man in the Garden of Eden. We have already seen that the Lord placed two special trees in the middle of the garden. He told Adam that he could eat freely from all the trees of the garden except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (verse 16-17). He made it clear to Adam that if he ate from this tree he would die (verse 17).

We are left to wonder why God would put a tree in the garden that would kill the man. Does it surprise you that in a perfect world there was a tree so poisonous that if a person ate from it he would die? This tree had a very special purpose in the plan of God. God could have created man and kept him from sinning. Instead, God created him with the freedom to choose between good and evil. God could have forced man to love Him, but forced love is not really love at all. True love is offered freely. No relationship can flourish when it is forced. God offered Adam the opportunity to freely choose obedience. By placing the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden, God gave him



a free choice. Man's love and devotion to God would not be forced; it would be a conscious choice on his part.

The Lord Jesus offers us this choice today. He does not force us to make a decision for Him. We are faced each day with the choice of serving Him or walking away from Him. God wants us to make this choice from a heart that loves Him and is devoted to Him. Adam had the choice to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil or to obey God. This choice was a test of his love. The choice is before us today as well. Many of us are waiting for God to force us into obedience but forced obedience is not true obedience. God offers us the choice as He did to the first man. It is up to us to freely choose obedience.

Up to this point, everything that God created was good. Verse 18, however, tells us that there was something that was not good. In this verse God saw that it was not good for man to be alone. Adam did not find suitable companionship in the animals. What is striking in this passage is that while man was living in a perfect communion with his Creator, God still said that it was not good for him to be alone.

We should not assume from this that God was not sufficient for Adam and his needs. Adam's fellowship with God was wonderful and unhindered by sin. I am convinced that he found great satisfaction in communion with his creator but God still said it was not enough. God had created man with a need for human companionship. We can have wonderful and satisfying communion with God but we still need other human beings.

Man would never find any ultimate meaning and purpose in life apart from God. God however, in His wonderful cre-

ative purpose, designed human beings to be social creatures with a need for each other. He has chosen to give us gifts that complement each other. We will never become all that God wants us to be apart from each other. God uses our brothers and sisters to minister to us and challenge us in our relationship with him. Even though Adam lived in a perfect world in a perfect relationship with his God, he still needed human companionship. God determined that he would make a companion suitable for him (verse 18).

In verse 19 he brought all the animals he had formed to man to see what he would name them. Adam was introduced to all these animals but noticed that he himself had no companion suitable to his needs. This must have stirred up within Adam a sense of loneliness. It must have made him painfully aware of his own need.

There have been many times in my life when God has shown me my need. Often before God moves in power in our lives He will cause us to go through a valley to teach us our need. God showed Adam how much he needed companionship. As each of these animals passed in front of him with their mate, Adam may have seen for the first time that he didn't have a mate. His heart must have cried out to God for that companion. God will show us our need before He moves to fulfill that need.

Notice how God created woman. In verse 21 He caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. Taking one of Adam's ribs, God formed a companion suitable for him and brought her to the man. Notice that woman came from man. She owed her existence to God but also to man because God created her from his rib. Adam was aware of the fact that she had come from him. In verse 23 he said, "This is now

bone of my bones; and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man."

The important detail for us to remember here is that Adam was immediately aware that this woman was a companion suitable for him because she was just like him, "bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh." There was a connection between this man and woman that did not exist anywhere else. No animal or any other creation shared such an intimate connection.

Notice that this intimacy between man and woman was part of God's purpose from the beginning. Verse 24 tells us that a man would leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and they would become one flesh. Notice that this "one flesh" principle is in the context of marriage between a man and his wife. While there is an intimacy we can experience with other human beings, this one flesh principle is only found in marriage. The exclusive sexual, emotional and spiritual connection that is part of a committed marriage is what God intended for Adam and Eve and also for their offspring. The sexual relationship was created by God. Notice that verse 25 tells us that the man and his wife were both naked but felt no shame. They were created for each other. They were created to complement each other. Adam and his wife Eve would be companions in the deepest sense of the word for each other.

## For Consideration:

- Why do you suppose God created a day of rest? Do you follow this principle of a day of rest? Why is it difficult for us to take time to rest?
- In a perfect world man still had responsibility to cultivate and care for the garden. What comfort do you take from the fact that God has a purpose and plan for your life? What is that plan?
- Why did God give man the choice to disobey Him?
- What do we learn here in this account about our need of fellowship with other human beings? Can we truly become all that God intends us to become outside of fellowship with other believers?
- God revealed to Adam his need before He provided for that need. What need has God been revealing to you?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to take more time to reflect on Him, His work and His purposes. Ask Him to help you to learn to rest.
- Thank the Lord that He has given you a free will. Take a moment to consider if there are some choices you still need to make to live in obedience to Him and His purpose.
- Thank the Lord that He has a purpose for your life. Ask Him to help you to walk more fully in that purpose.
- Are you out of fellowship with a brother or sister in Christ? Take a moment to ask God to give you forgiveness and grace to be restored in your relationship.

- Thank the Lord for the way He has given you people who stand with you and bless you in your walk with Him.
- What needs has God been revealing to you? Ask God to help you to see what He is saying to you about your need. Thank Him that He is fully able to provide for those needs.

## CHAPTER 3 -

### THE FALL INTO SIN

---

Read Genesis 3:1-21

The first man and woman lived in a world that was free from sin and evil. God gave these first two human beings, however, the option to choose to live in obedience or to disobey and walk away from His blessing.

As we begin chapter 3 we are introduced to the serpent. There are two things we need to see about this serpent. Notice first that he was craftier than any of the wild animals the Lord had made. When we say that a person is crafty we mean that he or she is able to deceive by cunning and trickery.

Notice secondly that the serpent spoke to the woman. Again, there is something very strange about this. Animals certainly have their ways of communicating with each other but not in this way. In our day, no serpent has the ability to speak. In Revelation 12:9 and 20:2, however, we see what was behind the speaking of the serpent. Both of these passages describe Satan as a serpent. From this we can gather that Satan was behind the words of the serpent

that day. He was using the serpent to tempt the woman to disobey God.

Notice in verse 1 something about the temptation. Satan asked the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The first attempt of Satan is to cause the woman to question what God had said. It is significant that Satan's tactic is to call into question the word of God. He has not changed his tactics. Satan knows the importance of the word of God. Satan sows his seeds of doubt in human hearts. He will cause us to question if the Bible is really the Word of God. He has been very successful and many have rejected the Bible as God's authoritative Word for all times and cultures. Once we begin to question the Scriptures, Satan can lead us into any error.

In verse 2 we see that the woman was quite sure of what God had said. She clearly told the serpent (Satan) that God had given them permission to eat from all the trees of the garden but they were not to eat from the tree that was in the middle of the garden (Genesis 2:7) or even touch it. Notice the certainty of Eve in verses 3-4. She has no doubt in her mind about what the Lord had said and His purpose regarding the tree.

Having failed to cause the woman to doubt if God really gave this command, Satan then took his temptation to the next level. This time Satan boldly declares, "You will not surely die" (verse 4). Here he places himself clearly against God. He went as far as to tell the woman that God knew that if she ate from the tree "her eyes would be opened and she would become like Him knowing good and evil" (verse 5). It is true that Eve would know good and evil. There was, however, something very deceptive in what he was saying. He did not speak about the effects of knowing evil. This he kept hidden from her. Probably one of the

greatest tactics of Satan is to mix truth with deception. He puts enough truth in his temptations to give us to cause us to believe what he is saying.

Many people have been deceived by these half-truths of Satan. He speaks in religious language and mixes his temptations with elements of truth. This work of Satan is still evident in our day. Satan manipulates and twists truth to suit his own purpose.

Eve was deceived by these half-truths of Satan and she took the fruit of the tree and gave some also to Adam. By eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the eyes of the man and the woman would be opened as Satan said. There are, however, things we do not need our eyes opened to. Remember that the man and the woman lived in a world that was not affected by sin and evil. They knew nothing about disobedience and the curse of God on that disobedience. By eating of the forbidden tree, the woman's eyes would be opened to see evil, sin and the curse of God. This is something that God wanted to spare her from seeing. He wanted her to live under His blessing but Satan wanted to open her eyes to evil. Satan led her to believe that she was missing something by not knowing about evil and sin.

If you are a parent you will understand something of what is happening here. There are many terrible things in this world. As parents we want to shelter our children from these terrible things. We do this to protect them. Not all knowledge and experience is good for our children. Satan seems to be telling the woman that she was missing out by not having the knowledge and experience of evil. The reality of the matter, however, is that this knowledge and experience would only harm her.



In our day we are taught that all knowledge is good, but this is a lie of the enemy. There is knowledge that will harm us. Sometimes we need to turn our backs and refuse to listen to what is being said around us. There will be times when we need to stop listening to gossip or reading books that promote evil. Having an open mind does not imply that we need to take in things that will harm us, our relationship with God or our loved ones. Not all knowledge is healthy, wholesome and good.

The woman listened to Satan and was tempted by his words. She took a moment to look at the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. Notice what she discovered about this tree. She saw that the fruit looked delicious, that it was delightful to the eyes and that it gave her wisdom. Let's take a moment to examine this in more detail.

First, the fruit looked delicious and pleasing to the eye. Do you realize that sin can be pleasurable to the flesh and very attractive? I have heard people justify their sin by saying that it just felt right. We have a tendency to believe that if something looks good and feels good then it can't be wrong, but this is a lie of the enemy. What is sinful is not determined by looks or feeling but by the Word of God. It might feel good, but if God's Word says it is wrong then it is wrong. God's is the only measure of what is good and what is evil.

Notice also that the women saw that the fruit was able to impart wisdom. We have already touched on this. Eve was under the impression that all knowledge and experience was good. This is not the case. Some knowledge and experience is harmful. Filling our minds with sinful and evil philosophies, ideas and thoughts will not benefit us as believers. These things will only hurt us. Again we need to be

discerning as to what we take into our minds and hearts lest it affect us negatively.

Eve was tempted by Satan's cunning and crafty words. She took the fruit from the tree and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it too.

Verse 6 tells us that the woman gave the fruit to her husband who was with her. It is unclear if this means that the man was by her side while she was speaking to the serpent. We have no indication of this, as the entire conversation seems to be only between Satan and the woman. It may be that the passage is simply saying that she gave it to her husband with whom she had a relationship.

Notice what happened when they ate the forbidden fruit. In verse 7 we learn that their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. For the very first time they experienced shame. They had been together all this time and felt no shame. Innocence was gone. A deep sense of guilt filled them. This sense of guilt was such that they naturally felt a need to hide themselves from each other. Guilt brought a barrier between the man and his wife.

Not only did this guilt and shame affect the man and his wife but it created a deep barrier between them and their God. A dark and horrible cloud now covered their relationship with Him. What was so wonderful had become fearful. When the man and his wife heard God walking in the garden, they hid from Him among the trees. When God asked them why they did this, they told Him that they were afraid and ashamed (see verse 8-10).

When God asked if they had eaten from the forbidden tree, the man told God that his wife had given him fruit from the

tree and he ate it. Notice that Adam did not fully accept the blame. It is true that Eve gave him the fruit, but he had eaten it. How easy it is to justify our sin. We feel somehow that if we have a good reason then we are less guilty. This is not the case. Adam was as guilty of the sin of eating the forbidden fruit as Eve and would suffer the consequences of his actions.

While Adam shifts the blame to Eve, She in turn told God that she had been deceived by the serpent. It is true that she was deceived but she also knew the command of God and disobeyed. She was still guilty even if she had been tricked into eating the fruit.

Adam and Eve tried to explain their sin to God but they were still guilty and would suffer the consequences. You may have been tempted or deceived. You may have been in a weakened condition at the time, but the fact that you fell into sin made you guilty before God. Ultimately we can bring all the excuses we want to God but the sin remains and must be dealt with.

A radical change took place on the earth at that moment. The curse of God fell on the serpent, the man, his wife and on the land itself.

In verse 14 the Lord spoke to the serpent. He told him that because of what he had done, of all the creatures on the earth, he would be the most cursed. He would crawl on his belly and eat dust all the days of his life. This is not to say that the serpent only eats dust. By virtue of crawling in the dust the serpent would eat a significant amount of dirt. This was its curse for being an instrument of deception.

In verse 15 God addressed Satan, who was behind the voice of the serpent. He told Satan that he would make the

woman to be his enemy. The day was coming when a descendant of this woman would crush his head. That descendant would have his heel bruised in the process (verse 15). His work however, would destroy Satan and his power.

The Lord Jesus would be that offspring. He would crush Satan's head, completely defeating him. The defeat of Satan would not be without cost, however. Satan would be successful in bruising Jesus' heel by sending Him to the cross. While Jesus was bruised, He did crush Satan, rendering him powerless with no legal right over God's children. Christ's death would pay in full the demands of justice.

The attention now shifts to the woman. She, too, would suffer the consequences of her sin. Verse 16 notes two particular curses placed on her. The first of these curses was that the woman's pains would greatly increase in childbearing. To this point there was nothing that caused the woman pain. This would change for her now under the curse of sin. Her children would come into the world through great pain. This pain and suffering would now be part of something as wonderful as giving birth to a new child.

Also as a result of the fall into sin, verse 16 tells us that the woman's desire would be for her husband but he would rule over her. The woman's natural capacity for compassion would often go unrewarded. She would long for her husband and desire him but he would not always respond to her as she needed him to respond. Instead of responding in loving compassion toward the woman; man, who was also affected by sin, would now respond in arrogance and cruelty. Sin would bring a barrier between them. Sin

would hinder their relationship. The man would often misuse his authority and treat the woman harshly.

Man's capacity to be the leader that God intended him to be was affected by sin. Now instead of caring for his wife, Adam and his descendants would seek to dominate or control. Eve would suffer the consequences of sin by experiencing pain in childbearing and by being ruled over by a sinful husband who no longer could rule in a way that God originally intended.

God now focused on Adam. He, too, had been guilty of eating the fruit from the tree, and would suffer the consequences of sin. He was guilty of listening to his wife (verse 17). Because he chose to listen to his wife rather than God, the ground he had been called to work would be cursed. He would labour hard now to provide food for himself and his family. The ground he worked would produce thorns and thistles (verse 18). He would work the ground to get his food and in the end, he would die and return to the ground from which he was created (verse 19).

The introduction of sin into the world brought many changes. The earth now struggled to produce its fruit. For the first time there was pain and suffering. Relationships would be strained. Fear and shame filled the lives of this first couple and hindered their relationship with God. Instead of reaching out to God they hid from Him, fearful of His presence. This world was a very different world.

Verses 20-21 are very important in our understanding of God and His relationship with Adam and Eve. Notice that God made garments of animal skin for Adam and Eve and clothed them. An animal had to die to cover the shame of Adam and his wife.

What is of particular interest to me here is the heart of God in clothing Adam and Eve. He understood their shame. He knew how awkward it was for them to be naked and so He did something about it. There was no compelling reason for God to do this apart from love and compassion. He wanted to cover their shame. He still wants to do this for us today. He sent His only Son to die so that our shame could be covered. He is a God of tremendous compassion even for those who wander from Him.

As we conclude our brief examination of this passage we need to see one more effect of sin coming into the world. In verse 22 God, realizing that man and women now had the knowledge of good and evil, decided to block their way to the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life appeared to give life to Adam and Eve. Notice that this tree had the power to give eternal life. While we understand the tree had no power apart from God, it appears that it was the means God had chosen to renew and impart life to human beings. It is interesting to note that the book of Revelation speaks about this Tree of Life and its healing powers. Those who belong to Christ will one day be given the right to eat again from this tree and know the eternal life and healing it gives (see Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).

As part of their punishment, God banished Adam and Eve from the Tree of Life. This meant that they would not live on this earth forever but they would die. Adam and Eve's life on earth was limited. They would now face death. God in His grace barred the way to the Tree of Life from sinners thus limiting their evil.

Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life had been planted (verse 23). God

placed a cherub with a flaming sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life so that Adam and Eve or any other person would never be permitted to eat again from that tree until they would do so in the Kingdom of Heaven (verse 24).

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the kind of things Satan can use to accomplish his purposes?
- Why do you suppose Satan did not reveal himself personally to Eve but chose to disguise himself?
- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of the Word of God? What happens when we turn from that Word or distort its meaning?
- How did Satan misinterpret the Word of God to Eve? How does he seek to do this today?
- Is all knowledge good? What kind of knowledge is harmful?
- Can we ever really excuse sin? Can any excuse ever make us less guilty before God? What kind of excuses do we use today?
- What promise do we have in this chapter about the defeat of Satan?
- How was man's ability to be a leader affected by sin? How has your leadership personally been affected by sin?
- What do we learn here about the compassion of God toward sinners? What does this tell us about our attitude toward those who have fallen in sin?
- What is the Tree of Life? Why did God bar the way to this tree?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to respect and obey His Word. Thank Him that His Word has been given to us in written form.
- Ask God to help you to be more aware of the tactics of Satan. Ask Him to protect you from Satan's deceptions.
- Thank the Lord for the ministry of the Holy Spirit who helps us to correctly interpret the Word of God.
- Ask God to remove all excuses you have offered to justify your sin. Thank Him that He has compassion on the sinner.
- Ask God to help you to be the leader He has called you to be by keeping his Word always before you. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you turned from His way to doing things your own way.
- Ask God to give you more compassion and mercy for those who have fallen into sin.





## **CHAPTER 4 -**

### **THE FIRST MURDER**

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Read Genesis 4:1-26

We have the record in Genesis 4 of three sons born to Adam and Eve. The first child was named Cain. A special note in the New International Version of the Bible tells us that the name "Cain" sounds like the Hebrew word translated "brought forth" or "acquired." We can only imagine what it would have been like for Adam and Eve to see this very first miracle of human birth. Though "brought forth" with much pain, Cain was still a wonderful gift from God to Adam and Eve.

Notice in verse 1 that Eve recognized that she had brought forth this son "with the help of God." This may be an indication of the difficulty she felt in giving birth. She recognized that the Lord God gave her strength to give birth to this wonderful child. This phrase may also reveal to us that Eve knew that this child was truly a miracle of God. It was God who gave him life in the womb and made him grow. In this too, Eve saw the wonderful hand of God at work. While sin had entered the world, Eve still recognized God in the birth of her child.

What a wonderful picture we have here. Eve had disobeyed the Lord God. Her disobedience would have devastating consequences for the entire world. The curse of God fell on the earth. All of humanity would now be born sinners in need of a Saviour. Here in this verse we see that God had not abandoned Eve. She was given the gift of a wonderful child. Life was born inside her. This young child was a sign of God's favour on her despite her disobedience. There were consequences to pay for her sin, but God had not abandoned her.

Sometime later a second child was born to Adam and Eve. They named him Abel (verse 2). Cain and Abel chose different paths for their lives. Abel kept flocks while Cain worked the soil.

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that in the course of time both Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord God. Cain brought the fruit of the soil as his offering to the Lord while Abel brought the fat portions of the first born of his flock.

We are not told how these boys understood the concept of sacrifice and offering but both of them brought legitimate offerings to the Lord God. In Numbers 15:18-19 God gave the Israelites His regulations for offering the fruit of the land. In Leviticus 3:3 we read the regulations of God regarding the offering of the fat portions of the animal sacrifice.

What is striking in this passage is that God accepted the offering of Abel but rejected Cain's offering (verses 4-5). We are left wondering what it was about the offering of Cain that caused God to reject it. Hebrews 11:4 sheds some light on this for us when it says:

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

There are two important details in Hebrews 11:4. First, notice that the passage tells us that it was "by faith" that Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. Abel's offering was brought to the Lord "by faith." There are many ways we can come to God. We can come, like the Pharisees of the New Testament, to be noticed by people. Not everyone who comes to worship the Lord does so "by faith." To worship God "by faith" implies that the person who is worshiping truly believes in God. The person who worships by faith is one whose heart and mind is focused on the Lord and comes to Him with sincere motives. The person who comes by faith truly believes that God is present in worship. This person brings their offering with a heart filled with gratitude and thanksgiving. When Abel came to bring his offering, it was with a sincere heart of faith. This was not the case for Cain.

Notice second that Abel is described in Hebrews 11:4 as being a "righteous man." Abel came to God as one who lived as God required him to live. His motives, intentions, actions and attitudes were right with God.

God accepted the offering of Abel not because it was better than Cain's offering but because it was offered by a righteous man in faith. This teaches us something very important about worship. If we want our worship to be accepted, it must be offered from a sincere heart of faith through a life that is in tune with God and His ways.

We don't have to look very far to see the attitude of Cain's heart. Notice in verse 5 that when Cain saw that his offering was not received by God, he became very angry.

God knew the heart of Cain and spoke directly to him about this. In verse 6 he asked him why he was so angry. He told him that if he did what was right, he would be accepted (verse 7). God does not mention Cain's offering here. He told Cain that he would be accepted if he did what was right. In other words, God's problem was not with the offering but with Cain himself. God saw the attitude of Cain's heart and the anger that was in it and rejected his offering on that basis.

God went on to remind Cain that "sin was crouching at his door" (verse 7). God warned Cain about his attitude of anger and jealousy. He told him that Satan had his sights set on him and if Cain did not do something about it soon, that sin would master him. Cain had been warned. He now had a decision to make. Would he listen to God and master this sin, or would he allow the sinful attitude master him?

We are not told how much time passed between the warning of verse 7 and what happened in verse 8. During that time, however, a tremendous spiritual battle took place. Cain had heard God's voice but he also heard the voice of evil speaking inside him.

While Cain and Abel were in the field, Cain attacked his brother and killed him (verse 8). What took place at that instant was the result of this great spiritual battle in Cain's heart. Sin and evil had won and the result was the first murder in history.

The battle in Cain's heart was lost because Cain did not resist the voice of sin. He listened to Satan and his temptations. The more he listened, the harder it was for him to resist. The warnings of God grew fainter and eventually all he could hear was the screaming voice of evil telling him to lash out and destroy his brother. He gave into that voice and lashed out at his brother in anger.

None of this was hidden from God. In verse 9 God called Cain to give an account of his actions. "Where is your brother Abel?" God asked. It was not that God did not know where Abel was. He was asking Cain to confess what he had done. Notice that Cain refused to confess his sin. He told God he did not know where his brother was. He went as far as to excuse himself by saying that he was not responsible for his brother.

God told Cain, however, that his brother's blood cried out to him from the ground. It was like a great siren blaring out its noise for all to hear. It could not be hidden from God.

God reminded Cain that sin could not be hidden from him. He also told him in verse 11 that he would have to suffer the consequences of his action. From that point on, Cain would be under a curse and driven into exile from the land of his family (verse 11). According to verse 12, God further cursed the land he worked so it would no longer yield its crops. He would wander from one place to another trying to provide food for his family from a land that would not yield an abundance of crops.

Cain felt the sting of this discipline. In verse 13 he told the Lord that his punishment was greater than he could bear. Not only was he being driven from the land the Lord had given him and his family but he also feared that if anyone found him, they would kill him in revenge. We have in this

statement a glimpse of the new world that was the result of the fall into sin. Fear filled the heart and mind of Cain to the point that he was afraid for his very life. This was a world that was vastly different from the world his parents first knew.

In verse 15, however, we see the compassion and mercy of God on Cain the sinner. God promised that if anyone killed him, he or she would suffer vengeance seven times over. That is to say that God would severely punish those who killed Cain. This news would travel quickly throughout the land so that all who knew Cain would fear this vengeance of God and refrain from harming him.

Notice also in verse 15 that the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. We are not told what this mark was but we could assume it was some physical mark clearly noticeable on Cain's body. The news would spread about a man with this mark being protected by God. Now even those who had never met Cain would recognize him by this mark and fear to harm him. In all this we see the compassion and mercy of God on the life of a sinner. God still loves and protects him despite his terrible sin.

Cain was banished from the presence of the Lord and lived in the land of Nod to the east of Eden. Cain would live the rest of his life apart from the blessing of God. While protected by God, he would not live in His presence. He would be separated from the work of God in the life of his family. He knew God, he communicated with Him and grew up in a family that loved God but he would be forever separated from His presence. How sad this was but how true it is of so many people in our day.

Notice that Cain had a son by the name of Enoch (verse 17). He built a city and named it after this son. Cain experienced a measure of prosperity, but he was living apart from God.

Verses 18-24 trace the descendants of Cain. Cain's son Enoch had a son by the name of Irad. Irad's son was Mehujael. Mehujael's son was Methushael. Methushael's son was Lamech (verse 18).

Lamech had two wives, Adah and Zillah (verse 19). His wife Adah gave birth to a son by the name of Jabal. Jabal's descendants raised livestock (verse 20). His brother's name was Jubal. His descendants were musicians and played both the harp and the flute (verse 21).

Lamech's second wife Zillah gave him a son by the name of Tubal-Cain. He and his descendants forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Lamech's daughter was Naamah (verse 22).

All this tells us that Cain's descendants distinguished themselves as great farmers, musicians and craftsmen but they did not know or walk with the Lord.

Of particular note among Cain's descendants was a man by the name of Lamech, about five generations from Cain. Lamech had killed a man for wounding him. Speaking to his wives, Adah and Zillah, Lamech boasted, "If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times." This statement is important for a couple of reasons.



First, we see from this statement of Lamech that the curse of God on anyone who would harm Cain or his descendants was never forgotten. For five generations people remembered what God had said about Cain.

Notice also, however, the arrogance of Lamech in his statement. He said that God would only take a seven-fold vengeance on Cain but anyone who harmed him would suffer seventy times seven for their insult. This is not the attitude of a godly person. This is the attitude of a man who does not know God. We learn from this that the descendants of Cain, though prosperous, were wandering farther and farther from God. Cain's descendants were not godly descendants. They were separated from God and His ways.

In verse 25 we read that God gave Adam and Eve another son. They named this child Seth. Eve gave him the name because God had granted her another child to replace Abel, whom she had lost. The name Seth, sounds like the word "granted" in Hebrew. We can sense the hurt in Eve's heart as she reflects on the son she had lost.

When Seth grew up, he also had a son. He called him Enosh (verse 26). Notice something particular about Enosh and his descendants. They called on the name of the Lord. This is in direct contrast to the descendants of Cain who did not know God or call on Him. God drew close to the descendants of Seth. These descendants lived in the shadow of God's presence and blessing. God would work through them in a very special way.

In this one family we see two lines. The first is the line of Cain who, by refusing to master sin, led his descendants away from God and His presence. On the other hand, we now have the line of Seth whose descendants lived under

God's special blessing and presence. Cain's descendants distinguished themselves as great farmers, musicians and craftsmen but they did not know God. Seth's descendants, however, would call on the name of the Lord and through them God would unfold His great purpose for humanity. In whose line are you living today?

#### For Consideration:

- How did Adam and Eve's sin change the world they lived in?
- Why did God reject Cain's sacrifice? What was it about Abel's sacrifice that God accepted? What does this teach us about faith and the importance of obedience in worship?
- Describe the spiritual battle that took place in the mind and soul of Cain? What was the result of that spiritual battle?
- What was Cain's punishment? How does God show mercy and compassion to Cain even in punishing him? What does this teach us about dealing with our brothers and sisters who fall into sin?
- Compare the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth. How did Cain's descendants distinguish themselves? How did Seth's descendants distinguish themselves?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to worship Him in righteous living with an attitude of faith.
- What particular sin do you struggle with in your life? Ask God to give you grace to master that sin.

- Thank the Lord for the way He showed mercy and compassion on Cain even as He disciplined him. Ask God to give you grace to demonstrate mercy and compassion on those who have fallen into sin.
- Ask God to help you to live as the descendants of Seth, calling on the name of the Lord. Take a moment to pray for those who have followed the line of Cain. Ask God to draw them to Himself.

## **CHAPTER 5 -**

### **FROM ADAM TO NOAH**

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Read Genesis 5:1-32

In chapter 4 we traced the line of Adam through Cain. Here in chapter 5, we will trace Adam's line through his son Seth. It should be noted that the Lord God chose to work out His purposes through the line of Seth. Cain had turned his back on God by killing his brother Abel and was banished from His presence (Genesis 4:14). God's focus would be on the descendants of Seth who, according to Genesis 4:26, had begun to call on His name.

Adam's line begins in verse 1 with his creation by God in the Garden of Eden. We are reminded that he was created "in the likeness of God." We should not assume from this that God has a physical body like man. The likeness spoken of here has more to do with his spiritual nature. Man and woman were created by God as spiritual beings with an ability to communicate with God. According to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:19, these earthly and physical bodies of ours are the temples of the Holy Spirit. This clearly distinguishes us from the animals and all other creatures. Adam and Eve were created for communion with God. They had a capacity to love and know God that

no other creature in the Garden had. They would find their true purpose in life in fellowship with their Creator.

Notice also that God created both male and female and blessed them in verse 2. Again this tells us something about God's purpose. Not only did God create man and women with a spiritual capacity to know and enjoy Him but He also created them with the capacity to know and love each other as man and wife. We were created as spiritual beings but we were also created as social beings with a need for each other. The union between a man and his wife is from God and holy in nature.

Verses 6-32 trace the family line from Adam to Noah. Let me summarize these verses in the form of a chart:

<b>Father</b>	<b>Age at Son's Birth</b>	<b>Son's Name</b>	<b>Father's Age at Death</b>
Adam	130	Seth	930
Seth	105	Enosh	912
Enosh	90	Kenan	905
Kenan	70	Mahalalel	910
Mahalalel	65	Jared	895
Jared	162	Enoch	962
Enoch	65	Methuse- lah	Taken by God
Methuse- lah	187	Lamech	969
Lamech	182	Noah	777

Notice that verse 22 tells us that Enoch lived for 365 years and "was no more because God took him away" (verse 24). Hebrews 11:5 is helpful in our interpreting this verse. There we read concerning Enoch:

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

From this we understand that Enoch did not die. He lived for 365 years on this earth and God took him to be with Himself without experiencing death as we know it. His life was an exceptional life. In Jude 1:14-15 we read a prophecy of Enoch:

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

The prophecy reveals something of the frustration of Enoch with the evil and ungodly acts he was seeing in his day. He spoke out against this ungodliness.

Methuselah's son Lamech had a son by the name of Noah at the age of 182 years. Lamech called this son Noah because he said he would bring comfort from the labor and painful toil of their hands caused by the ground the Lord had cursed. The name Noah sounds like the Hebrew word for "comfort."

Verse 29 tells us something about the condition of the earth when Noah was born. Lamech's complaint was that the earth had been cursed by God and was not producing crops as it should. The inhabitants of the earth were feeling the curse of God on the land. It was only by hard labor and

painful toil that the earth would produce its crops. There is a connection between sin and the productivity of the land. This connection seems to flow through the Old Testament. The prophet Hosea spoke of this connection when he prophesied in Hosea 4:2-3:

There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.

According to Hosea, the land was mourning because of the cursing and bloodshed that filled it. Sin's curse on the land was such that it caused the land to mourn, and the animals, the birds and the fish to die. The world of Noah's day was filled with sin. The curse that came with that sin was devastating the land.

When Noah was 500 years old he had three sons. He named them Shem, Ham and Japheth (verse 32). God had a special purpose for this family and would use them to bring judgment upon the earth for its sin.

From the time of Adam to the time of Noah, apart from Enoch, there was no one in the line of Seth that particularly distinguished themselves as followers of God. The curse of sin on the land was such that men labored and toiled to cause the crops to grow. The problem of sin had not been overcome on the earth. The earth and its inhabitants groaned under its weight. Even the line through which God had chosen to work had fallen into sin. Through that line, however, Noah would be born. He would be the instrument of God to bring temporary comfort to this sin-cursed earth.

## For Consideration:

- What did it mean for Adam and Eve to be created in the likeness of God?
- What was the average lifespan of a human being during the period between Adam and Noah? Why was this shortened?
- How did Enoch distinguish himself at this time in history? What happened to him?
- What do we learn in this passage about the condition of the earth at the time of Noah? What does this tell us about the problem of sin?

## For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He created you in His image with the capacity to love and experience God.
- Thank the Lord for the example of Enoch who lived a godly life in a sin-filled earth. Ask God to help you to follow his example.
- Thank God that the sin problem was dealt with through the sacrifice of His only son on our behalf.





## CHAPTER 6 - NOAH'S ARK

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Read Genesis 6:1-22

At the time of Noah's birth, the earth had been cursed because of sin. Evidence of evil on the earth is seen in chapter 6.

In verses 1-2 we have a record of how the population began to increase on the earth. As the population increased, verse 2 tells us that the "sons of God" saw that the "daughters of men" were beautiful and they married any they chose. Let's take a moment to consider this statement.

The key to understanding these verses is in the interpretation of the phrases "sons of God" and "daughters of men." Some have interpreted "sons of God" to mean some angelic or demonic beings. There is a significant problem with this interpretation. The idea that angelic or demonic beings are sexual creatures is not found anywhere in Scripture. Even if sexual relations were possible between an angel or demon and a human being, surely those who did this would not be called "sons of God".

In the course of this study we have examined two lines in the human race. There was the line of Cain who had turned their backs on God. There was also the line of Seth that called on the name of God and worshiped Him. This distinction in the first few chapters of Genesis is important. Seth's descendants may very well represent the "sons of God." They were God's chosen people. On the other hand the "daughters of men" could likely represent the descendants of Cain who had chosen to live apart from God.

What we are seeing in this passage is that the descendants of Seth were marrying the descendants of Cain. Though they knew that these women did not follow the ways of God, they still chose to marry them because they were attracted to their beauty. This displeased the Lord.

We can see from this that it is the heart of God that believers find partners who love the Lord and desires to follow after Him. These descendants of Seth were compromising their faith by marrying the pagan daughters of Cain. The faith of Seth's descendants was weak and many were wandering from God and turning to the ungodly ways of Cain.

As God looked at this situation, He was grieved. Cain's descendants were under the curse of God for their disobedience. Now even Seth's descendants were marrying pagan women. We see the impact of sin on the earth. The human heart was easily lured away from God and His purpose. That day God said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever" (Genesis 6:3). God had been very patient with His creation. He had held back His judgment but the day was coming when He would punish evil.

While God is a very patient God, He is also just. The time will come when He will judge sin. Notice in verse 3 that part

of this judgment came in the form of a shorter lifespan. To this point men and women were living over 900 years. God shortened this to 120 years. God would not allow sinful human beings to continue living for 900 years.

In verse 4 we learn about a group of people known as the "Nephilim" (NIV) or "giants" in some versions. The word used here is a word that refers to a bully or tyrant. The Hebrew word comes from another word meaning to "divide", "fall away" or be "cast down". They were a people who had turned from God and His ways and lived an evil and rebellious life. These people may have come from the intermarriage between the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth. In other words, the result of marrying the pagan descendants of Cain was that the faith of Seth's descendants was compromised and the children that resulted were evil tyrants who lived a life of rebellion against God.

It should be noticed that the children born to this group of people were heroes and well respected in their day. We should not assume from this that being a hero and well respected was a good thing. Consider for a moment the men and women we lift up in our day- movie stars, sports stars and entertainers. Many of these are well respected individuals, but do not walk with God. The fact that these individuals were well respected heroes of the day says something about the condition of the land. The people of that day did not have God's priorities. They did not see things as God saw them. They lifted up men and women as heroes who were far from God. They lifted up the "fallen ones" admiring them and giving them a place of honour in their minds and hearts. I'm afraid that often we as believers can be guilty of the same sin. Again this tells us something about the spiritual condition of the earth. They lifted up

men and women, who did not serve or love God, and elevated them to a position of hero.

As God looked at the evil on the earth in the days of Noah, he saw that every "inclination of the thoughts" of his creation was "evil all the time" (verse 5). Again this shows us the extent of sin on the earth. It now affected every thought of men and women all the time. They were incapable of living outside of the influence of sin and evil. Their thoughts and actions were all influenced in one way or another by sin. What God had created was now filled with evil. His heart grieved that He had made human beings on the earth (verse 6). These human beings were made in God's image to have fellowship with God but they had wandered so far from His purpose that fellowship with their Creator was no longer possible.

Sin had devastating consequences on the earth. It broke fellowship with God, shortened the lifespan of men and women, twisted their thinking and cursed the land. God's heart was so grieved by what He saw that He decided to punish the earth and destroy those who had turned from Him.

Of all of the creations of God, there was only one man who found favour in the eyes of His Creator. This man was Noah. Verse 9 tells us that he was a righteous man who walked blamelessly among the people of his time. He walked with God in a generation that had turned their backs on God. God was pleased with Noah and decided to spare him and his family from the judgment that was about to fall on the earth.

In verse 13 God told Noah that He was going to put an end to all people on the earth because they had filled it with

violence. We can only imagine what Noah felt when he heard these words from God.

God told Noah to make an ark of cypress wood. He was to make it with rooms inside and coat it with a tar-like substance both inside and out to make it waterproof (verse 14). The ark was to be 450 feet long (140 meters), 75 feet wide (23 meters) and 45 feet high (13.5 meters). It was to have a roof to protect its occupants from rain and a door on the side (verse 16). It would have a lower, middle and upper deck (three floors).

God told Noah that He was going to bring great flood waters on the earth. The judgment of the earth would be severe. Only those who were in the ark would survive. This is a wonderful picture of the salvation the Lord Jesus would bring in the New Testament. Those who are in Christ and trust in His work, like the people in the ark, will be saved from the terrible wrath of God to come.

Notice in verses 19 and 20 that while the destruction of the earth would be complete, God asked Noah to bring into the ark a pair of all living creatures to keep them alive. He was also to take a supply of food with him for his family. It should be noted that it was not until after the flood that God gave the animals to human beings for food (see Genesis 9:2-3). Noah brought on the ark the fruit and vegetables he had gathered from the earth before the rain fell. Noah would also have had to bring the food the animals would require for the time they would be in the ark. This would have been a large undertaking but according to verse 22, Noah did exactly as God had commanded him.

We see in this chapter the effect of sin on the earth. God would destroy the earth and the inhabitants of the earth as a result of this sin. God is a just God who will deal with sin.

The sad reality of this chapter is that while God destroyed the earth in judgment, sin would survive the flood and continue to ravage the earth. The flood would limit sin for a time but it was not the final solution. Only Jesus could bring the final solution to sin.

#### For Consideration:

- How would you describe the state of faith on the earth in the days of Noah? How were the people of Noah's day compromising their faith?
- What do we learn about the patience of God with sinners in this passage?
- Who were the Nephilim or giants spoken of in this chapter? What does the fact that they were respected as heroes in their day tell us about the state of faith in the land? Is it possible for us to lift up and honour people who are far from God today? Give some examples.
- Would the judgment of the flood resolve the problem of sin? What does this story tell us about the need for a greater solution in the person of the Lord Jesus?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to live your spiritual life without compromise in a sinful world.
- Thank the Lord for His patience with His people despite their sin. Thank Him, however, that He will judge sin and evil.

- Ask the Lord to open the hearts of people in your community to their need before they too are judged by God.
- Thank the Lord that He provided a final solution to sin in the person of the Lord Jesus.





## **CHAPTER 7 -**

### **THE FLOOD**

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Read Genesis 7:1-8:22

In the previous chapter we saw that God told Noah to build an ark. Noah obeyed and stocked the ark with the food necessary for the journey they were about to undertake.

As we begin chapter 7, God commanded Noah to take his family into the ark. Notice in verse 1 that Noah was given this privilege because he and his family alone were righteous on the earth. We should understand from this that Noah worshiped God and sought to walk in His ways. God rewarded this faithfulness by protecting him and his family.

It is important to note that while the family line of Seth did seek the Lord initially, they too had wandered from God. As God judged the earth in those days, the only people left in the line of Seth that worshiped God was Noah and his family. This shows us just how much sin had impacted the earth.

According to Genesis 7:2-3, Noah was to take seven pairs of every kind of clean animal and bird into the ark. This

was to preserve their species on the earth. The assumption is that by this time Noah understood the difference between clean and unclean animals. There are two points we should make about this.

First, when God created the world everything was good. Now with the entrance of sin we see both unclean and clean animals. Second, this distinction between clean and unclean animals was being made well before God revealed these things to Moses and had him put them in writing. God had been communicating His will to His people even before the Law was given to Moses.

In Genesis 7:4 God told Noah and his family to go into the ark seven days before the rain began to fall on the earth. This rain would fall for forty days and nights, destroying every living creature outside the ark.

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came (7:6). At that time Noah and his wife, along with his sons and their wives, entered the ark to escape the devastation that would be caused by this flood (7:7). They also took pairs of clean and unclean animals and birds with them into the ark just as the Lord God had commanded (7:8-9). Within seven days, the flood waters came, just as the Lord had promised (7:10). It was the six hundredth year of Noah's life on the seventeenth day of the second month that the rain came (7:11).

Inside that ark, Noah, family, and the creatures were kept safe. They were preserved by God through this terrible judgment. According to Genesis 7:16, the Lord shut them in to keep them from the judgment that was falling on the earth. We can only imagine what Noah and his family were thinking as they remained in that ark. They alone had been spared from judgment. Perhaps they began to reflect on

their own lives and wondered why God would spare them. There would have been many mixed emotions in those days. On the one hand, they were saddened by the severe judgment of God on the earth and the tremendous loss of human and animal life. On the other hand, they were overwhelmed by the grace of God in protecting them.

This story ought to cause us to think. Why would God allow us to come to know His son Jesus and the salvation He offers while our friends and neighbours perish in sin? We, too, ought to be humbled and overwhelmed at the grace of God that would call us and protect us from judgment.

According to Genesis 7:17, for forty days the rain kept falling on the earth. The water level rose and lifted the ark up above the earth's surface where it would float (7:17-18). The water rose higher and higher covering the highest mountain with twenty feet (almost 7 meters) of water. The result was devastating. Genesis 7:21-22 tell us that every living thing that moved on the earth died. The only life remaining was found in the ark (7:23). The waters covered the earth for a hundred and fifty days. Never before had the earth seen such a terrible judgment of God.

After those days of judgment, God remembered Noah and his family and sent a wind to dry up the waters and restore the earth. By the seventeenth day of the seventh month (five months after the flood began) the ark settled down in the mountains of Ararat (8:4). By the first of the tenth month (four and a half month later) the tops of the other mountains were visible (8:5).

Forty days later Noah opened the window of the ark and sent out a raven. As long as it could not find a place to rest, the raven flew back and forth from the ark. When the raven stopped coming back, Noah then sent out a dove. The

dove could find no place to walk on the earth's surface so it returned to the ark (8:9).

There is some question as to why Noah would send out these two birds in particular. A raven is a bird that will eat the corpses of dead animals. Noah knew that the earth would be filled with such corpses and the raven would have plenty to eat. It would be content to remain on the earth with no vegetation as long as there were dead animals to eat. The dove would not feast on dead corpses but would look for fruit or berries. By sending out the dove, Noah could determine whether there was any vegetation on the earth. The raven did not return but the dove did. Noah knew that at this time the earth had not produced yet fruit and could not sustain him and his family.

After seven more days, Noah again sent the dove out. This time it returned in the evening with a freshly plucked olive leaf (8:11). By this Noah knew that the waters had receded and the trees were starting to bud.

After yet another seven days Noah again released the dove. This time it did not return to the ark. Noah knew then that the earth's surface had dried up sufficiently and there was enough vegetation for the dove to survive.

Almost 11 months after the flood began Noah removed the covering from the ark and was able to see the surface of the earth. He saw for himself that it was dry (8:13).

For two more months Noah and his family waited in the ark until the day God told Noah they could come out. On that day, Noah and his family left the ark with all the animals and birds. These creatures were set free to multiply and fill the earth (8:17-19).

One of the first things Noah did when he and his family left the ark was to build an altar to the Lord. There on that altar he offered a sacrifice to the Lord of some of all the clean animals and birds (8:20). These animals were offered as a sacrifice of thanksgiving for God's grace and protection over the past year on the ark. God was pleased with the sacrifices that were offered on that day.

In Genesis 8:21-22 God made a two-fold promise to Noah and his family. God promised first that He would never again curse the earth by destroying everything as He had done by this flood. Although people's hearts continued to be evil, God also promised to sustain the earth with a cycle of days and seasons.

Notice two important details in this promise of God. First, it tells us that God lifted the full weight of the curse on the ground and brought a certain measure of relief for Noah's descendants. Noah and his family would continue to live on this earth and it would yield a harvest to them.

The second detail we see is that while God's judgment was very severe on the earth, it did not rid the world of sin and evil. God knew that the inclinations of the heart of human-kind had not changed. Sin was still the problem it had always been. It would not be long before sin would again grow in the sinful soil of human hearts. The flood judged sin but it was not the answer to the problem of sin.

Despite this sin the heart of God was filled with compassion for humanity. God took no pleasure in judging His creation. He promised Noah's descendants that He would never again destroy all living creatures as he had done in this way.

We should not understand from this that God will never judge sin. We can be sure that He will judge sin and evil. The day is coming when this world will be completely destroyed by fire (see 2 Peter 3:10). Until that day of final judgment, however, the Lord exercises great patience. Sin again grows and increases on the earth. The Lord patiently waits for the last believer to enter the safety of His kingdom before He unleashes His final judgment and destroys sin forever.

#### For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have in these verses that God communicated His sacrificial and religious requirements to Noah? What did Noah know about the law of God and his requirements?
- How long were Noah and his family in the ark?
- What promises did God make to the people of Noah's day after the flood? Does this mean that God will no longer judge sin?
- Did the judgment of God by the flood deal with the problem of sin? What would it take for the sin problem to be dealt with on the earth?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He communicates His requirements to us through His Word.
- Are you assured of the salvation of the Lord today? Take a moment to thank the Lord that He rescued you from the consequences of sin. Thank Him for His forgiveness.
- Thank the Lord that while He is a God of infinite patience, He will still judge sin. Thank Him for the ministry of the Lord Jesus that completely solves the problem of sin in our lives.





# **CHAPTER 8 - THE WORLD IS REPOPULATED**

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Read Genesis 9:1-29

The waters of the flood had receded from the earth. Noah and his family left the ark and settled into a very different world. The only people on earth were the family of Noah. All human flesh had died in the flood. It was through Noah's descendants that the earth was repopulated. In verse 1 God blessed Noah and his family so that they would be fruitful and increase in number, filling the earth.

The human beings who lived before the flood had so grieved the heart of God that He sent the flood to destroy them. What would stop Noah's descendants from falling into the same sin? The flood did not deal with the problem of sin; it simply reduced the number of sinners. By blessing Noah's descendants, God is showing mercy toward a sinful human race.

The world into which Noah's descendants would return was not the same as it was before the flood. In verse 2 we

read that animals would now fear human beings. In Genesis 2:19 the Lord had brought all the animals to Adam to see what he would name them. These same animals came to Noah in the ark. Now, however, their attitude would change toward human beings. Though they had once lived peacefully together, they would now live as enemies.

In verse 2 God reaffirmed the domination of the human race over animals, birds and fish. We see in this the grace of God in giving the human race this domination. God was entrusting them with the care of the earth. This was both a privilege and awesome responsibility.

Notice also from verse 3 that God now gave the animals of the earth to the human race for food. Prior to this, only the vegetation of the earth was eaten as food.

God told Noah and his descendants in verse 4 that while they were permitted to eat meat, they were not to eat blood. Leviticus 17:14 tells us that there was a special reason for this:

Because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

By not allowing Noah and his descendants to eat blood, God was teaching them to respect life. While animals could now be killed and eaten for food, their blood was to be released back to the earth. That is to say, it was to be spilled on the ground.

In verse 5 God told Noah and his descendants that to take the life of another human being was a crime punishable by death. Human life was to be sacred before God. The fact that God needed to make this statement, shows us that sin was still a reality on the earth of Noah's day.

This was the world through which God would accomplish His purposes. God's kingdom is expanded by imperfect people in imperfect circumstances. The disciples Jesus chose were far from perfect. Each of them had their weaknesses. The saints of Scripture sometimes fell into serious sins. While we need to deal with sin in the body of Christ, we need to realize that often we will have to work with people who are less than perfect and in various stages of maturity. God would expand His kingdom in an imperfect world and He would use imperfect people to do this.

In verses 8-17 we read how God chose to enter a covenant agreement with Noah, and his descendants. God promised that never again would all life be cut off by the waters of a flood (verse 11). There would be floods on the earth but never would a flood cover the entire earth to destroy all living flesh as it had done in Noah's day.

God sealed this covenant with a sign. Just as a husband and wife seal their marriage vows by giving each other a ring or some other token of their promise to each other, so God gave humanity a special sign to remind them of His promise. God set a rainbow in the sky as a reminder of His promise not to destroy the earth again by flood waters. Whenever the rainbow appeared in the sky, God would remember His promise to the earth and its inhabitants (verses 14-17).

The rainbow reminds us of God's patience with sinners. Take a moment to consider the condition of this earth.

Consider the ways in which human beings have turned their backs on the Lord God and his Word. There are those who have shaken their fists at God in rebellion. Injustice and immorality are everywhere around us. This is a world filled with war, ungodliness and even hatred of God and His ways. We are seeing true believers persecuted and killed because of their stand for the truth. When we see that rainbow in the sky we are reminded of the great patience of God. The rainbow ought to stir up a heart of praise and thanksgiving in us for a God who is patient, loving and full of grace. It should cause us to recognize that we are grieving the heart of a holy and all-powerful God. The rainbow reminds us that there is still time to repent and be made right with God.

Verses 20-27 remind us that even Noah, the man who found favour with God before the flood, was affected by sin like everyone else. We read how Noah planted a vineyard. On a certain occasion, Noah was drinking wine from this vineyard and became drunk (verse 21). In his drunken state, Noah went into his tent and lay naked, exposing himself to those who walked in. While he was not in a clear state of mind when this happened, he was guilty of an indecent act.

Notice the response of Noah's sons to their father's drunken condition. His son Ham came into the tent and saw his father lying there naked. When he saw this he went out and told his two brothers outside what he had seen (verse 22). We need to understand that Ham had one of two options. The first was to immediately cover his father's nakedness and to keep the matter quiet. The second was to go out and tell others what he had seen, damaging his father's reputation and putting him to shame. Ham chose not only to leave his father in his shame but also to tell others what he had seen.

What do you do when you see someone fall into sin? How many believers have acted without compassion toward a fellow believer who fell into sin? How often have we gossiped and ruined the reputation of our brother or sister in Christ as Ham did?

Notice the response of Shem and Japheth when they heard of their father's condition. Together they took a garment, laid it across their shoulders and walking backward toward their father, covering his nakedness. By walking backward, they did not see their father's nakedness. They had no interest in seeing their father's drunken shame, nor did they want others to see Noah in this condition. Their concern was to get him through this time with the least amount of embarrassment and humiliation possible. In doing this, they showed great respect and compassion to their father in his weakness and failure.

We should have the attitude of Shem and Japheth. We need to make it our priority to help and minister to those who have fallen. We should make it our goal to help the fallen brother or sister to get through their problems with the least amount of embarrassment and shame. Shem and Japheth give us a clear example to follow. Even fallen saint need to be treated with respect and dignity.

When Noah awoke and found out what had happened he was angered by what Ham had done. That day he cursed Ham and his descendants, the Canaanites (verse 25). The day would come when the Israelites would take over the land of the Canaanite descendants of Ham. Under Joshua, God would conquer the Canaanites and settle His own people in their land.

Leviticus 18:2-3 tells us that Ham (the Canaanites), would walk away from God and follow sinful practices. In this passage God warned His people not to follow their ways:

Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.

As for Shem and Japheth, Noah blessed them for their compassion in his time of need. In verse 26 he told Shem that Canaan (Ham's descendants) would become his slaves. Noah told his son Japheth that God would extend his territory. He would not become as great as Shem but would live in his tents. This may imply a good relationship between the descendants of both Shem and Japheth. The descendants of Ham, however, would become slaves to Japheth and his descendants. God honoured Shem and Japheth for how they treated their father in his time of need.

Noah lived another 350 years after the flood before he died at the age of 950.

For Consideration:

- What changes took place on the earth after the flood? What evidence do we have that sin still was firmly rooted in the earth after the flood?
- What does this passage teach us about the importance of showing respect for human life? How can we show disrespect for human life?

- Should we expect perfection in the church today? How important is it that we learn to work with imperfections in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- What is the difference between imperfections and deliberate sin and rebellion?
- What does the rainbow teach us about God's grace and patience with sinners?
- What do Ham, Shem and Japheth teach us about how we need to deal with sin in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give your society a greater respect for human life.
- Ask God to help you to have greater patience as you work with people who do not meet your expectations. Thank the Lord for His patience with you in your shortcomings.
- Ask the Lord to show you how you can minister to brothers and sisters who have fallen in sin.





## CHAPTER 9 -

### FROM NOAH TO ABRAM

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Read Genesis 10:1-11:32

Genesis 10 and 11 form a bridge from Noah to Abram, the next significant Bible character. We begin with a list of the descendants of Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth.

#### *Japheth*

Japheth's descendants are the first to be listed in chapter 10. Verse 2 lists seven sons of Japheth; Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras. Chapter 10 only traces the line of two of these seven sons. Gomer's line is traced in verse 3 and Javan's descendants are listed in verse 4. Japheth's descendants spread each to a different region and developed their own language (verse 5).

#### *Ham*

Verse 6 names four sons of Ham. They are Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan.

Cush's descendants are traced in verse 7. His sons were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteca. Special mention is made Raamah and Cush. Raamah became the father of Sheba and Dedan (verse 7). Cush became the father of Nimrod (verse 8).

Nimrod would grow up to be a mighty warrior and a famous hunter (verses 8-9). He would build a mighty kingdom for himself and his descendants. The names of some of the great centers he established were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh (verse 10). He also went into the region of Assyria where he built other major cities such as Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen (verses 11-12). It should be noted that these nations Nimrod would establish, would become enemies of Israel.

Mizraim, the second of Ham's sons, would become the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Pathrusites, Casluhites and the Caphtorites. Of special note here are the Casluhites from whom the Philistines originated. These Philistines would also become a great enemy of God's people.

The final son of Ham mentioned is Canaan. He would become the father of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites and the Hamathites. It would be the territory of these Canaanites that God would eventually give over to the nation of Israel.

Remember that Noah cursed Ham because of how he had treated him when he was drunk with wine. In the list of Ham's descendants are found the worst of Israel's enemies. These nations would cause great problems for Israel but God would defeat them and give them into Israel's

hands. Ham's descendants would turn from God and no longer serve Him.

### *Shem*

Noah's son Shem is mentioned in verse 21. Five sons of Shem are listed in verse 22 (Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram).

Aram's line is traced in verse 23. Special note is made of Shem's son Arphaxad in verses 24-30. Arphaxad's grandson was a man by the name of Eber (verse 24). Eber had two sons. One was named Peleg and the other was Joktan (verse 25). Joktan's descendants are mentioned in verses 26-29.

We read in Genesis 10:32 that these descendants of Noah would spread out over the surface of the earth. Genesis 11 tells us how this spreading out took place.

In Genesis 11:1 we read that after the flood the whole earth had one language and they all settled on a plain called Shinar (verse 2). There in the Plain of Shinar Noah's descendants decided to build a great city. In that city they decided to build a tower that reached up into the heavens (verse 4). The reason for making this tower is stated clearly in Genesis 11:4. First, it was to make a name for themselves. They wanted people to see what great things they could do. They wanted people to notice them and be impressed. The second reason they decided to make this great tower was so that they would not be scattered over the surface of the earth. It is unclear how the building of the tower would keep people from spreading over the earth. It may be, in part, because this tower had a religious significance. It may have been built as a temple. Verse 4 makes it clear that tower was to reach up to the heavens.

If the tower was built as a temple, it would have united people under this common new religion. It would also show us how easily people were wandering from God and His purposes.

When God saw what was happening He was angered. Like the people who lived before the flood, these people had wandered into sin and rebellion against God. If left unpunished there would be no limit to the evil they would do on the earth (see verse 6). God decided to stop their evil plans. He determined to confound their languages so they would not understand each other (verse 7).

It is unclear how this happened. What is clear from the passage, however, is that people could not understand each other's speech. This resulted in a stoppage of the work. People were forced to find others with a common language. They moved out from Shinar to various places in the region and established their own communities. The region where this confusion of languages took place was called Babel which sounds like the Hebrew word for "confusion."

This incident shows us how easily our plans can be changed. In an instant the great plans of Noah's descendants were changed. God is in control of the events of history. He is able to defeat the purpose of human beings so that His greater purpose is accomplished.

The remainder of chapter 11 continues to trace the line of Shem down to a man by the name of Abram for whom God had a great purpose and plan.

Shem was 100 years old when he became the father of Arphaxad. He would live another 500 years and see other sons and daughters (verse 11). In the verses that follow

the descendants of Shem are traced. Notice particularly the age at which each of these descendants died:

<i>Name of Descendant</i>	<i>Age at Time of Death</i>
Shem	600
Arphaxad	403
Shelah	403
Eber	430
Peleg	209
Reu	207
Serug	200
Nahor	119

The lifespan of the descendants of Shem has radically decreased from 600 years to 119 in the space of eight generations. This is an indication of the effects of sin and the removal of the blessing of God because of sin.

Nahor had a son by the name of Terah. Terah would become the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran (verse 26). Terah's son Haran would give birth to a son by the name of Lot (verse 27). Haran died before his father (verse 28). Terah raised his grandson Lot.

Abram and Nahor, Terah's other two sons would both marry. Abram married Sarai and Nahor married a woman by the name of Milcah (verse 29). Sarai, Abram's wife could not have children (verse 30).

Terah took Abram, Sarai and his grandson Lot and moved from Ur where they were living. His intention was to travel to Canaan. Terah never arrived in Canaan, however. Instead, he settled with his family in the region of Haran where he would die at the age of 205.

These two chapters trace the family lines from Noah to Abram. God had a special purpose for Abram the descendant of Shem.

For Consideration:

- What great nations came from the descendants of Ham? How would Noah's prophecy about Ham in Genesis 9:24-25 find its fulfillment?
- Notice that from the same family, we see children who wander from God and others who seek after him. Does being born into a Christian family guarantee that you are a Christian?
- Why was God angry with those who were building a city and tower in the plain of Shinar? What warning should we take from this for our own society?
- How did God defeat the plans of those who were building the city and temple tower of Babel? Does God still interrupt our plans today?
- God's hand seemed to be particularly on the descendants of Shem. How has God's hand been on your family?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His sovereignty over the events of this life.
- If you have children, take a moment to pray that the Lord would bless each of your children and bring them to a place of commitment to Him.
- Ask God to forgive you for times when you were more interested in making a name for yourself than honoring and obeying God.

- Thank the Lord for the way His hand has been on you and your family.





## **CHAPTER 10 -**

### **ABRAM GOES TO EGYPT**

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Read Genesis 12:1-20

After the death of his brother, Abram left Ur with his father Terah for the region of Canaan. They travelled as far as Haran where they settled until Terah died (Genesis 11:31-32).

After the death of Terah, God commanded Abram and his family to leave Haran. We are not told how long Abram stayed in Haran. The fact that Abram was told to leave his people tells us that some who had left Ur with Terah remained in Haran. Abram's brother Nahor, for example, likely stayed in Haran with his family. This parting would have been difficult for Abram and Sarai. They were leaving not only the land they had settled in but their families as well.

Notice that God did not tell Abram where He wanted him to go. He would only reveal this to Abram when he began the journey. For now, Abram was to take the first step and pack his bags. Often in my life I have wanted to see the full picture before obeying. There is something in us that

needs to understand where we are going and how things are going to turn out. God does not give Abram the details of his plan here. In fact, God does not reveal any more to Abram than he needs to know. Abram was to trust God to lead as he obeyed.

While God does not reveal all the details of His purpose to Abram, He does reveal that obedience would bring blessing for him. In verse 2 God promised that He would make Abram and his wife Sarai into a great nation. Not only would God bless Abram and Sarai's descendants but He would also bless all who honoured and blessed them; and His curse would fall on anyone who cursed or dishonoured them. Even more astounding than these first two promises was the third promise of God; that all people on earth would be blessed through them (verse 3).

We can only imagine what Abram and Sarai felt when they heard this three-fold promise of God. They were two ordinary people. Why should God honour them in such a way? Abram had never distinguished himself in any way as a warrior or leader. Sarai was unable to have children. How could God use them? Why would He choose them?

God uses people as He pleases. His choice is not based on our ability. He chose to use Paul who was persecuting the church. He chose to use Jonah who only wanted to run away from His call. He chose Moses who told God he was not the man He was looking for. When God calls, however, He also equips. God would prepare Abram as He prepared Paul, Jonah and Moses.

In obedience to God, Abram, at the age of seventy-five, left Haran with his wife and nephew Lot (verse 4). Notice

in verse 5 that Abram, Sarai and Lot took all their possessions which likely included a number of servants and set out for the land of Canaan.

We are not told why they chose to go to Canaan. We do know, however, that Abram's father Terah had wanted to go to Canaan before he died in Haran (see Genesis 11:31). In any case, God was leading Abram as he travelled. Abram travelled as far as Shechem. There under a tree the Lord appeared to him again (verses 6-7). The Lord told Abram that He would give the land he was walking on to his offspring. This would have been somewhat difficult for Abram to understand as the Canaanites were already settled in the land. Abram does not seem to question the Lord's purpose. Instead, he built an altar and worshipped the God who had appeared to him and given him this promise.

While God appeared to Abram in Shechem, it was not His plan that Abram stay there. There is an important lesson in this. Often we have been blessed by God in a certain area of our lives? Our desire is to stay right where we are and never move from that place? Perhaps God has given you a successful ministry. Maybe God has revealed something to you about Himself. The temptation is for us to not want to move from that place. God blessed Abram at Shechem but He did not instruct him to stay there. We must never become so distracted by the blessing that we fail to hear God's voice telling us to move forward.

From Shechem, Abram travelled toward the hill country of the east. There in a region called Bethel, he pitched his tent (verse 8). There Abram once again built an altar to the Lord God. This shows us something about Abram. He was very conscious of God and had a heart of worship and thankfulness.

Abram did not settle in Bethel. God continued to lead him on to the south (verse 9). Not everything on that journey was easy for Abram. As he travelled, a great famine struck the land. Verse 10 tells us that this famine was very severe and forced Abram to seek refuge in the land of Egypt. It is hard to say what Abram was feeling in those days. God had promised him blessing but there was only famine. Finding food for his flocks was becoming difficult. Where was the blessing Abram was promised by God?

As we walk in obedience to the Lord there will be times of confusion. Sometimes the enemy will throw obstacles in our path. At times the Lord will allow obstacles to test and prepare us. There is some discussion about how Abram handled this famine. We have no record of him seeking the Lord about what to do or where to go. Did God really want Abram to go to Egypt for help in this time of need? We are not sure.

What is clear from verses 11-13 is that Abram was tempted at times to take matters into his own hands. As they came into the country of Egypt, Abram was afraid that when the Egyptians saw Sarai his wife, they would kill him to have her for themselves (verse 12). He felt that he needed to hide her identity to save his life. He told Sarai to say that she was his sister. The reasoning was this, if they thought Abram was Sarai's brother they would treat him well because of her. In this Abram did not trust the Lord but his own reasoning. Abram was not a perfect man. He needed to learn some important lessons about trusting the Lord.

When the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman they praised her to Pharaoh and she was taken from Abram and brought to Pharaoh's palace (verse 15).

There is something else we need to see about Abram. There was also a tendency for him to be self-centered. His concern in entering Egypt was to save his wealth. He was also concerned about his own life. What he does not seem to be overly concerned about here is what would happen to Sarai his wife if she was taken by Pharaoh into his harem. This, too, was something God needed to work on in the life of Abram. Abram needed to learn to trust in God but he also needed to learn to die to himself and his self-centeredness.

Pharaoh believed that Sarai was Abram's sister and treated Abram well because of her. Abram was given sheep, cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants, maidservants and camels. He became richer by means of this great deception (verse 16).

While Abram was becoming richer, the Lord was cursing the Egyptians. God inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai (verse 17). While Abram did not protect Sarai, God did. He would not leave her in the hands of the Pharaoh of Egypt. He had another plan for Abram and his wife Sarai. He had promised that through them He would build a great nation. This could not happen if Sarai was the concubine of Pharaoh.

As Pharaoh considered what was happening to him and his household, he realized that it was since he had bought Sarai into his harem that this curse had fallen on him. He soon discovered that Sarai and Abram were married. Pharaoh confronted Abram about this, gave Sarai back to him and told him to leave his country (verses 19-20).

We can only imagine what took place between Sarai and Abram after these events. How would Sarai have felt about Abram allowing her to be taken by another man to save his

life? Despite this detour, God protected both Abram and Sarai and used the time in Egypt to teach them some valuable lessons. God had a plan for their lives and He would protect and keep them until that purpose was completed. Abram had his faults, but he was the man God had chosen.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn about stepping out even when we don't have all the details? Have you ever refused to step out in obedience because you did not know the outcome? Give an example.
- Why do you suppose God chose to bless Abram?
- Is it possible to be so distracted by our blessing that we fail to be obedient?
- Do you think Abram was right in going to Egypt? Why or why not?
- What personal faults did Abram need to deal with in his life? What things has God revealed to you about yourself?
- What do we learn here about how God uses circumstances we face in life to teach us? What lessons do you think Abram and Sarai learned in Egypt?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to obey even when you can't see what is ahead of you?
- Thank the Lord for the way He had chosen to use and bless you despite your shortcomings.

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you any personal short-coming in your life. Ask Him for strength and grace to deal with these things
- Ask God to open your eyes to the lessons He wants to teach you in the various circumstances you face in life.





## **CHAPTER 11 -**

### **ABRAM AND LOT SEPARATE**

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Read Genesis 13:1-18

Abram and Sarai had been in Egypt where Sarai had been taken into Pharaoh's harem. God protected Sarai at that time but cursed Pharaoh's household. When Pharaoh discovered that Sarai was Abram's wife, he gave her back and told them to leave his country.

During his time in Egypt, Abram had been given many gifts by Pharaoh. When he left Egypt, with his wife and nephew Lot, he took everything with him (verse 1). Verse 2 tells us that Abram was a very wealthy man in livestock, silver and gold.

From Egypt, Abram and his family travelled through the Negev and on to Bethel (see Genesis 12:8-11). In Bethel, he built an altar and again called on the name of the Lord (verse 4). In Egypt, Abram had lied and deceived Pharaoh. He had accumulated great wealth from Pharaoh because of this deception. He had disrespected his wife by allowing her to become part of Pharaoh's harem. Now in Bethel he

called out to the Lord God again. God has a way of bringing us back to the right path. God would not let Abram go

Notice from verses 5-6 that the wealth of Abram and Lot was so great that the land would not support them both. Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen began to quarrel among themselves (verse 7). Verse 7 tells us that the Canaanites were also living in the land at the time. There was not enough land for all the animals to graze.

Something needed to be done about this. In verse 8, Abram addressed the problem with Lot, his nephew. "Let's not have any quarrelling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers," he told him. Abram suggested to Lot that they separate. "Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left," he told him in verse 9. In saying this Abram is recognising that it was time for Lot to be given his independence. From this point onward, Abram and Lot would no longer live together. They would have two separate lives.

Lot liked the idea of having his independence. Verse 10 tells us that he looked up and saw that the Jordan plain was well watered and looked like a garden. Lot liked the land and chose it for himself (verse 11). Lot and Abram parted company with Lot moving all his livestock to the rich plain of Jordan.

While the land of the Jordan plain was very fertile, it was also a very wicked place. Lot would pitch his tent in the region of Sodom (verse 12). The men of the city were wicked men who according to verse 13 "sinned greatly against the Lord." Lot must have known something about the sinfulness of that region. In choosing this region he was walking away from the Lord. In making this decision

to live in Sodom, Lot would place his family in a very evil environment. They would pay a high price for this decision.

How important it is for us to take spiritual matters into consideration in the decisions we make. It is easy for us to make decisions like Lot. His concern was for the prosperity of his family: not for their spiritual walk.

After these events, the Lord spoke again to Abram (verse 14). He told him to lift up his eyes and look to the north, south, east and west. "All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever," God told him (verse 15). Lot may have taken what appeared to be the best land but God was not in it. Abram had God's blessing and that would make all the difference.

In verse 16, God promised to increase Abram's descendants so that they would be like the dust of the earth, no one would be able to count them. God invited Abram to walk throughout the length and breadth of the land for it was going to be his (verse 17).

Abram would never see the day when the land was given to his descendants, but by faith he looked forward to it. Notice the response of Abram to the promise of God. In verse 18, he moved to Hebron where he built an altar to the Lord God. He did this in thanksgiving to God for His promise.

The separation of Abram and Lot is significant. God's wanted to bless Abram and his family. Lot's path would take him in a different direction. God separated Lot from Abram's family so that His plan would be unhindered. There are things God needs to separate us from before accomplishing His purpose in us.

Abram had to be brought to a place where God could unfold His purpose in his life. His wife needed to be returned to him by Pharaoh. He needed to get out of Egypt and return to the land God had promised him. Lot and his servants needed to be separated from Abram. God was working in the life of Abram. He was separating him from all the distractions and obstacles that hindered His purpose. God will do the same in us if we open ourselves up to Him.

#### For Consideration:

- What obstacles were there in Abram's life that stood in the way of God's plan? What obstacles are there in your life that stand in the way of God's plan?
- How does God bring Abram back in line with his plan?
- Lot chose to live in the richness of Jordan's plain without regard for the spiritual climate of that region. How important is it to consider the spiritual impact of the decisions we make? How have your decisions in the past affected your spiritual life and that of your family?

#### For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to bring you back into line with His ways when you wander.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any obstacles in your life that hinder His plan. Ask Him to remove them.
- Ask God to help you to take into account the spiritual impact of every decision you make.

## CHAPTER 12 -

### ABRAM GOES TO WAR

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Read Genesis 14:1-24

As we begin chapter 14 of Genesis, we catch a glimpse of the political situation in Abram's world. Notice how kings formed alliances to strengthen themselves against their common enemies. We read how the kings of Shinar, Elasar, Elam and Goiim joined forces and went to war against the kings of Sodom, of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber Zeboiim and Bela (verse 2).

For twelve years the nations of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Ziboiim and Bela had been held in subjection to King Kedorlaomer of Elam. Finally in the thirteenth year, they formed this alliance and rebelled against his authority (verse 4). This may have been, in part, the reason why King Kedorlaomer also reinforced his forces by making an alliance himself.

Verse 3 tells us that the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Ziboiim and Bela gathered their forces together at the Valley of Siddim ready to do battle with Kadorlaomer and his forces. Kadorlaomer's army was powerful. Verses 5-7

tell us that his forces had already defeated the Rephaites, Zuzites, Emmites, Horites and the Amalekites. When the king of Sodom and the other four nations rebelled against Kadorlaomar and his forces, they were taking a big risk.

When the battle took place, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were overpowered by Kadorlaomar's greater army and fled into the Valley of Siddim (verse 10). This valley was filled with tar pits. As they fled through the valley, some of their men fell into these tar pits. Others fled into the hills. They had no chance against the more powerful force of Kadorlaomar.

Kadorlaomar and his men looted the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, taking their food supplies (verse 11). Kadorlaomar's forces also carried off Lot and his possessions.

Someone who escaped from the city of Sodom fled to Abram and told him what had happened (verse 13). When Abram heard this, he determined to do all he could to help his nephew. He called his 318 trained men and went in pursuit of Kedorlaomer (verse 14). During the night, Abram divided his force of 318 men and attacked. God gave him victory and Kadorlaomar's force fled from Abram (verse 15). Abram recovered Lot and returned the goods that had been taken from Sodom (verse 16).

Consider what Abram did that day. Consider the sinfulness of Sodom. Genesis 13:13 tells us that the men of Sodom were wicked people who sinned greatly against the Lord. Certainly what had happened to them was, in part, a judgment of God for their sin. Consider also Lot and his decision to take his family and live in this sinful city. Lot's decision was not a godly one. Abram could have said: "They deserved what they got," but he didn't.

Some time ago I heard a story of a young unmarried girl from a Christian family who came home one day and announced that she was pregnant. The parents reacted very strongly against this announcement and told her that their home was a Christian home and that she was no longer welcome in it. For years their relationship with their daughter was strained. Abram watched as Lot made this bad decision to live in the city of Sodom. Lot ended up in his situation because he made that bad decision. What do we do when someone around us finds themselves in trouble because of a bad decision they have made?

Abram shows us clearly what we are to do. Abram took his 318 men and risked everything to get his nephew back. In Matthew 18:12, Jesus told the story of a sheep that left the fold and wandered off by itself. Listen to what Jesus tells His disciples about the response of the shepherd to that one sheep:

What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?

Abram risked everything that day to restore Lot. This was not time to say: "I told you so." It was not the time to judge or condemn. Lot was in trouble and Abram was going to do everything he could to help him. All he had was 318 men against a powerful army, but Abram chose to die trying rather than do nothing. Has someone you love wandered away? Abram is an example for us to follow. He would not rest until he had done all he could to restore his nephew. God blessed that effort and gave Abram victory.



As Abram was returning from his defeat of Kedorlaomer, he was met by the king of Sodom (verse 17) and Melchizedek, king of Salem (verse 18). Let's consider the conversation between Abram and Melchizedek.

Melchizedek was the king of Salem. Most commentators agree that this is an abbreviation of the word Jerusalem which at this point did not belong to the people of God. Notice also, in verse 18 that Melchizedek was not only king but he was also a priest of God Most High. It is difficult to know how much Melchizedek's understood of the Most High God or how he functioned as a priest. This may show us that God was working not only in Abram's line but also in other places as well revealing His purposes.

When Melchizedek met Abram, he brought out bread and wine. Abram and his men were likely very tired and hungry from their battle. This meal would have been welcomed. Notice also that Melchizedek blessed Abram in the name of God Most High, Creator of the heaven and the earth (verse 19). He also gave praise to the Lord God of Abram who had given him such wonderful victory over his enemy (verse 20). Abram responded to this hospitality by offering Melchizedek a tenth of everything he had. Abram offers to King Melchizedek, a fellow believer, this gift as a sign of gratitude for his hospitality and blessing.

The second person who met Abram as he returned from battle was the king of Sodom. He told Abram to return his people and keep the goods for himself and his men (verse 21). Abram refused to take these goods because of an oath he had made to the Lord God, likely prior to entering the battle (verse 22). Abram had sworn an oath to God that he would keep nothing belonging to Sodom lest they say that they had made him rich (verse 23). We are left wondering whether Abram had learned a lesson from his time

in Egypt where he had received many gifts from Pharaoh because of his deceit (see Genesis 12:11-16). Abram wanted God to be his source of blessing. He wanted everyone to know that what he had received was not by his own efforts but as a result of the hand of God on his life. In this way, God would receive the honour. Abram returned everything to the king of Sodom. All he asked for was what his men had eaten and a share for his men (verse 24).

#### For Consideration:

- What is Abram's response to Lot's capture? What does this teach us about how to deal with people who have wandered or fallen?
- Abram took a great risk in going after Lot. What risk are you willing to take to restore someone today?
- What was Abram's motivation in restoring Lot? Was he interested in gaining any profit himself?
- Abram vowed not to take any profit from this battle lest people say that he was enriched by anyone other than God? How has God provided for you? While all things come from God, is it possible for people to have more than God wants them to have?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to show the compassion of Abram toward those who have fallen.
- Thank the Lord for the way He willingly laid down His life to restore you.
- Ask God to help you to trust Him rather than seek your own interests.



# **CHAPTER 13 -**

## **GOD MAKES A**

### **COVENANT WITH ABRAM**

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Read Genesis 15:1-21

Abram had rescued his nephew Lot from the hands of King Kedorlaomer. We are left wondering what Abram thought about defeating this coalition of four kings with only 318 men. Maybe now that he began to think about what he had just done, he wondered what the implications might be. Would this mighty force return? Would they seek revenge for this humiliating defeat? We are not sure what Abram was thinking at that time. What we do know, however, is that the Lord God appeared to Abram in a vision with a very special encouragement for him at that time. "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward" (verse 1).

What a blessing those words would have been to Abram. There was, however, one thing that perplexed Abram. He and Sarai had not been able to have any children. Abram thought about this great promise of God to bless him, but wondered where all this blessing was going to end up.

Who would receive this blessing of God when he died? He had no son to whom he could pass on this great inheritance (verse 2). The person to inherit his estate was one of his servants, a man by the name of Eliezer of Damascus (verses 2-3).

That day, the Lord God reassured Abram that Eliezer of Damascus would not be his heir. God told him that he would have a son to inherit these great blessings promised to him (verse 4). God led Abram outside and told him to look up at the stars of the heavens and count them. This was an impossible task. God then told Abram that his descendants would be like the stars in the heavens. They would be so numerous that they could not be counted (verse 5). This was an incredible promise to a man who had no children. Somehow, however, faith was stirred up in Abram and he believed what God told him that day. God saw that faith in him and was pleased (verse 6).

Notice also, in verse 7, that God told Abram that his people would have a land of their own. To this point, Abram was living in a land that was not his. The day was coming when the land on which he then walked would be given over to his descendants.

The thought that his descendants would own this land was difficult for Abram to imagine. In verse 8, he said: "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" This question is quite surprising in light of the events that had just taken place. In the last chapter, Abram defeated a coalition of four mighty kings with just 318 men. Here, however, he needs confirmation from God that this promise of land would really take place.

I find it quite amazing to see that Abram, the man of God is still human and wrestles to understand how God can do

what He promises. As human beings, our understanding is limited. We have no way of understanding the mind of God. This is where faith comes into play. We can't understand God, but we don't have to understand Him to believe what He says. We can step out in obedience even when we don't understand. This is what separates people of faith from everyone else. People of faith don't need to understand everything, they just trust what God says.

God does not explain to Abram how He was going to accomplish this promise. Instead, He asked him to do something which seems quite strange to us. In verse 9, God told Abram to bring a heifer, a goat and a ram to Him. Each of these animals was to be three years old. He was also to bring a dove and a young pigeon. Abram obeyed and brought the animals.

God instructed Abram to cut the animals in two, arranging the halves opposite each other. He did not cut the birds, however. The carcasses remained on the ground until the sun began to set. The birds of prey swooped down to eat this flesh but Abram drove them away (verse 11).

By sunset, Abram was getting tired and fell into a deep sleep. As he slept, a "thick and dreadful" darkness came over him. We are not told what this darkness was but it was after this darkness fell that the Lord God again spoke to Abram.

One day Moses asked God to show him His glory (Exodus 33:18). God told him that no one could see His face and live. God did, however, hide Moses in a cleft of a rock and covered him with His hand when He passed by so that Moses could see a small portion of His glory (see Exodus 33:18-21). It is possible that this thick darkness was to hide

the glory of God when He came to confirm His promise to Abram that day.

God spoke to Abram in his sleep. As he slept, God revealed to him what the future would hold for him and his family. He told Abram that he and his descendants would be strangers in a country that was not their own (verse 13). The day would come when they would be enslaved and mistreated. This would last for a period of four hundred years. This prophecy was fulfilled when the people of God went down to Egypt in the days of Joseph. They would remain in Egypt as slaves for four hundred years.

God promised Abram that after four hundred years, He would punish the nation that had enslaved them (Egypt) and Abram's family would be released from their bondage. God also promised that when they left this land, they would leave with great possessions. The book of Exodus speaks of how Israel plundered the Egyptians when they left (Exodus 3:22).

Abram would die in peace, as an old man (verse 15). He would not see this trouble in Egypt.

God told Abram that four generations would pass before his descendants would come back to the land of Canaan where he was currently living. Notice that God told Abram that the sin of the Amorites currently living in the land had not yet reached its full measure. The day was coming, however, when God would no longer tolerate their sin and would judge them by giving their land over to Abram's descendants.

That night when the sun was set and darkness had fallen, Abram saw what appeared to be a smoking firepot and a blazing torch between the animal carcasses (verse 17). As

the firepot and torch stood between the divided carcasses, Abram heard the Lord God's promise to him. God promised to give the land from the river of Egypt (Nile) to the Euphrates River to his descendants.

It is important for us to understand the symbolism of the pot and torch that appeared in the middle of the carcasses. The animals Abram brought to the Lord that day had to die. Their carcasses were divided up and placed opposite each other. The presence of the Lord appeared in the fire pot and the torch. As the Lord God stood in the midst of these carcasses He was making a solemn vow on His life that He would fulfil His promise. In reality He was saying to Abram, "May I be like these carcasses if I do not fulfil my promise to you today."

God gave Abram a glimpse into the future. He showed him that while this promise would not be fulfilled in Abram's lifetime, it would certainly be fulfilled. Things would first get worse for Abram's family but God would set them free and give them what He had promised to Abram. The events of Israel's captivity in Egypt were prophesied long before they happened and were all part of God's overall plan. Don't lose hope. Things may not look good right now but God's purpose will surely be accomplished.



## For Consideration:

- Does Abram understand how God will fulfil His purposes? Can we ever really understand God's ways?
- What role did faith play in Abram's life in this chapter?
- What does this passage teach us about how seriously God takes keeping His promises?
- Can you trust God today? Are you willing to step out in faith even when you don't understand what He is doing?
- Have you ever wondered why when God promises to bless, things seem to get worse? What do we learn in this chapter about God's promises?

## For Prayer:

- Thank God that His ways are higher than our ways and that while we may not understand Him, He is able to do far more than we could ever imagine.
- Ask God to increase your faith and confidence in Him and His promises.
- Thank the Lord that the trials of this life will not hinder His promises of faithfulness to us as His people.

## CHAPTER 14 - HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

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Read Genesis 16:1-16

In the last chapter, God promised Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens. He would leave his inheritance to his very own child. As time went by Sarai still had not conceived. Abram was about 85 or 86 years of age at this time (Genesis 16:16). It would not be for another fourteen or fifteen years that God would fulfill His promise to Abram (see Genesis 17:17).

Not having any children was difficult for Sarai, who likely felt ashamed and abandoned by God. While Abram believed God's promise to give him a son, Sarai had a hard time believing that the curse she was under would ever be broken. She had given up hope.

Sarai had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. Sarai decided to give Hagar to Abram. It was her intention that Abram have a child with her servant. The child born to Sarai's servant would become Sarai's legal child and heir

to the family estate. This appears to be a custom in those days.

Notice, in verse 2, that Sarai blamed God for her barrenness. She felt God had turned His back on her. She believed it was up to her to do something about Abram's need for an heir. She took matters into her own hands, not waiting for God to fulfil His promise. Abram agreed to Sarai's proposal.

Ten years after returning from Egypt, Abram took Sarai's servant Hagar and slept with her (verse 3). Hagar became pregnant as a result of this relationship.

Verse 4 tells us that when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress Sarai. There was likely a certain amount of jealousy between the two women. Hagar saw herself as more than a servant now, she was Abram's wife, just like Sarai. More than that, however, she was giving him an heir, something Sarai could not do.

The tension between Hagar and Sarai became so frustrating for Sarai that she went to Abram and exploding in frustration said to him in verse 5:

You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.

In response Abram handed Hagar over to Sarai to do as she pleased. With Abram's permission, Sarai mistreated Hagar. Sarai's abusive treatment of Hagar was so intense that Hagar felt compelled to flee Abram's household?

Notice what is happening in this passage. Sarai did not believe God's promise. Taking things into her own hands only made things worse. She finds herself now filled with anger and bitterness. Hagar is forced to flee for her safety. Abram does nothing to stop this mistreatment of Hagar. He does nothing to help Sarai in her frustration and faith struggle. This is a struggling family. It is the family, however, that God had chosen to bless.

The attention shifts to Hagar. In verse 7, we find her in the desert. She had nowhere to go. She was expecting a child and felt abandoned by God and her family. She sat alone beside a spring in the desert with nowhere to go wondering what would happen to her and her child.

It was in that desert that God met Hagar. He asked her where she had come from and where she was going. Hagar told Him that she was running from Sarai (verse 8).

The angel of the Lord told her to go back to her mistress and submit to her (verse 9). This would not have been easy for Hagar. She had serious concerns about going back to Sarai and likely feared for her life and the life of the child in her womb.

Sometimes God asks us to do things that are very difficult. While these things are difficult, there is a purpose in them. To reassure Hagar, the angel of the Lord made several promises to her in verses 10-12.

In verse 10, he promised to increase her descendants so that they would be too numerous to count. Hagar was not Jewish, she was an Egyptian servant, yet God still chose to bless her.

The angel told Hagar in verse 11 that the child born to her would be a son. She was to give him the name Ishmael, meaning "God hears." This would be a reminder to her that God had heard her in her misery and abandonment.

The son born to Hagar would be a wild man. He would fight against everyone and make many enemies. He would live in hostility toward his brothers (verse 12). In this case, Ishmael's brothers would be the descendants of Abram through Sarai, the Israelites. We are left wondering whether Hagar found any secret comfort in the fact that this son would cause problems for any descendant of Sarai.

Hagar was touched by this encounter with the Lord God of Abram. As an Egyptian, she would have had her own faith but this encounter with the God of Abram was a very special moment for her. She called Him, "The God who sees me" (verse 13). The spring of water where she met the Lord was called Beer Lahai Roi, which literally means, "well of the Living One who sees me."

In obedience to the word of the Lord, Hagar returned to Sarai. She bore a son and named him Ishmael as the Lord had told her (verse 15). Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael (verse 16).

Ishmael would be blessed by God but he was not the child that God promised Abram and Sarai. That child was yet to be born.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about God's timing? Does He work according to our time schedule?
- Have you ever been tempted to take matters into your own hands rather than trust God and wait for His timing? Explain.
- Describe the condition of Abram's family with regards to the tension that existed between Sarai and Hagar. What is Abram's response to this as spiritual leader? How should he have responded?
- What encouragement do you find in the fact that God saw Hagar in the desert and reached out to her in her need?
- God asked Hagar to return to what she saw as a very difficult situation. She was willing to return and trust Him to care for her. Are you willing to trust the Lord in what He is calling you to do today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you greater patience to wait on Him and His timing.
- Take a moment to pray for your family. Pray particularly for any issues your family may be wrestling with today.
- Thank the Lord that He knows our frustrations and pain. Thank Him that He meets us in those situations like He did Hagar.
- Ask the Lord for grace to do whatever He asks you to do even if it is difficult.



## CHAPTER 15 - CIRCUMCISION

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Read Genesis 17:1-27

Many years had passed since God had promised a son to Abram and Sarai. Abram was now ninety-nine years of age. In verses 1 and 2, God told Abram that He was now going to fulfil this promise to him.

Notice in verse 1 that God describes himself as "God Almighty". That is to say, He is the God for whom nothing is impossible. Abram must have wondered how God was going to accomplish His promise to him. From a human point of view, things looked pretty hopeless. Even in her younger years, Sarai could not have children. It seemed impossible now that she was an old woman but God was an almighty God.

Notice also in verse 1 that God asked Abram to walk before Him and be blameless. God was going to fulfil His promise to Abram but this would require that he live and walk in His ways. With the promise came an obligation.



In these verses, God confirmed His promise to Abram. Many years had passed and there was no clear evidence of the fulfilment of God's promise. Abram was touched by this reassurance and in verse 3 how he fell face down before God and worshipped.

That day God reminded Abram that He would make him a father of many nations. As a sign of this promise, God changed his name from Abram to Abraham. Abram means "exalted father." The name Abraham, however, means "father of many." From this point on Abram would be known as Abraham, the father of many.

God told Abraham in verse 6 that many nations and kings would come from his descendants. He promised that His covenant with him would be from generation to generation as an everlasting covenant to all of his descendants. God promised the God of his descendants.

We can only imagine what Abraham felt as God shared His plan for him that day. Who was he that he and his descendants should receive such wonderful promises from God? Abraham's heart must have been overwhelmed with gratitude and thanksgiving. He must have been humbled to think that God would honour him and his descendants in this way. In verse 8, God reminded Abraham that He would give the whole land of Canaan to his descendants.

In light of this great promise, God expected that Abraham and his descendants keep His covenant (verse 9). God asked Abraham to symbolise this relationship by circumcising every male child in their midst (verses 10-11). This physical sign would show that they belonged to the Lord God. Every male among them was to be circumcised at the age of eight days. This included those who were born as descendants of Abraham and foreigners who served in

their midst. Even those who were not Abraham's descendants were to be circumcised because they lived among the people of God (verses 13-14).

There was not to be any uncircumcised males living among the people of God whether they be descendants of Abraham or not. An uncircumcised male was to be cut off from the people of God and banished from the land (verse 14). Every man who lived with the people of God was to submit to this requirement whether they were Jews or foreigners. God's requirements were clear in this regard.

God also spoke to Abraham about his wife Sarai. He told him that she would no longer be called Sarai but Sarah. Both names seem to mean "princess" but by changing her name God was preparing her for a new period in her life.

God reminded Abraham again that He would give Sarah a son and bless her so that she become a mother of many nations. Kings would come from her line. Hearing this, Abraham fell face down. As he did, however, he laughed to himself saying, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" (verse 17). Abraham did not understand how God could accomplish His promise in this way. Physically Sarah was too old to give birth to a child.

In verse 18, Abraham dared to make a suggestion to God. "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" he told God. Abraham would have been quite content to let Ishmael be his heir. This made more sense to him that expecting that his wife could ever give birth to a child in her old age. God was willing to bless Ishmael, but He had a greater purpose for Abraham and Sarah. God wanted Sarah's offspring to be the heir of Abraham's wealth and promises. In verse 19 God made it clear to Abraham that

he would have a son by the name of Isaac through Sarah. This child would be the promised heir.

God would bless Ishmael (verse 20). Ishmael would be fruitful and increase in number. He would be the father of twelve rulers and become a great nation. Having said this, however, God reminded Abraham that He would not establish his covenant with Ishmael but through Sarah's son who would be born within the year (verse 21).

There is an important lesson for us in this story. Abraham would have been content with God's blessing on Ishmael. He didn't really expect God to give him a son through Sarah. That seemed so impossible. At the very beginning of this chapter, however, God introduced Himself as God Almighty. There was nothing impossible with Him. As I reflect on this, I wonder how often I have been content with something far less than the will of God. How often have I not had faith to believe that God could do the impossible. How often have I been content with something much smaller than what God really wanted to give?

Abraham believed God in a general way but had problems believing the specifics of that promise. He worshipped God for His promise to give him a son but laughed when God told him that the son would be through Sarah. Again, Abraham seemed to limit God and His power.

Despite his trouble believing the specifics of the promise, Abraham wasted no time in circumcising his son Ishmael and those born in his household. He also circumcised every foreign servants he had purchased (verse 27). Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, Ishmael was thirteen years old (verse 24). While he could not understand God's promise, he chose to be obedient to what God had clearly commanded. There will be times like

this in our lives as well. We will not always understand God's ways, but we must learn to walk in obedience even when the way before us is not clear.

#### For Consideration:

- Have you ever been in a place where you needed God to confirm His promises to you? What does it say about God when He would take the time to confirm a word He had already given to Abraham?
- Males living in Israel were circumcised whether they were descendants of Abraham or foreigners hired to work as servants. Even Ishmael, who was not a child of the covenant God made with Abraham and Isaac, was to be circumcised. Does God expect even unbelievers to follow His law?
- What do we learn about Abraham's unbelief and his limiting God's power? Have you ever been guilty of limiting God? Explain.

#### For Prayer:

- Thank God for the way He confirms His purposes to us over and over again. Thank Him for His many promises. Thank Him that He understands our weakness and lack of faith.
- Thank the Lord that He reached down and touched your life personally, and for His blessings on your life.
- Take a moment to examine your society. Does your society follow the law of God? Pray that God

would work in the lives and hearts of even unbelievers so that they respect His law for the good of your society.

- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have limited Him and His purposes in your mind. Ask Him to increase your faith and confidence in Him and His purposes.

# **CHAPTER 16 -**

## **ABRAHAM RECEIVES**

### **VISITORS**

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Read Genesis 18:1-33

As we begin chapter 18, we see the Lord appearing to Abraham while he was near the great trees of Mamre sitting in the entrance of his tent. The Lord appeared to Abraham in a strange way. Verse 2 tells us that when Abraham looked up, he saw three men standing nearby. We are not told the identity of these men but they may have been angels sent to communicate God's will.

When Abraham saw these men, he rushed to them. Bowing to the ground; he asked them to come to his house to be refreshed. Hospitality was an important part of Abraham's culture.

The men accepted Abraham's offer and told Sarah to make some bread for his visitors (verse 6). He then ran to the herd and selected a choice calf and gave it to his servant to prepare (verse 7). Bringing some curds, milk and the

calf that had been prepared; Abraham then set a meal before his guests (verse 8).

As they engaged in conversation the visitors asked Abraham: "Where is your wife Sarah?" (verse 9). When Abraham told them she was in the tent, the Lord spoke through these men and told Abraham that by this time the next year Sarah would have a son."

Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent. When she heard what the men said, she laughed to herself saying: "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" (verse 12). Sarah did not believe the word of the Lord through these men.

God knew what Sarah was thinking. Speaking to Abraham, he asked (likely through the men): "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' (verse 13). God reminded Abraham that nothing was too hard for Him. Despite Sarah's unbelief, God promised to return and give Sarah a child.

Notice that God's blessing of Sarah had nothing to do with how much faith she had. While faith is important, God is not bound by our lack of faith. It is true that we often miss out on blessing because of our unbelief but God can work whether we have faith or not.

When God asked about Sarah's laughter, she was afraid. It is not clear why she was afraid. Maybe she did not want to have people think she did not believe God could do the impossible. Perhaps she feared being judged by God for her unbelief. While the exact reason for Sarah's fear is unclear, Sarah felt compelled to hide that unbelief and so she lied and said: "I did not laugh" (verse 15).

Sarah could not hide her laughter from God. God exposed her unbelief that day: "Yes, you did laugh" (verse 15). We can only imagine what it was like for Sarah not only to be confronted that day with her unbelief but also her dishonesty. In the months that followed, as Sarah carried her child, she would have been constantly reminded that God had been gracious to her, despite her unbelief.

After these events, the men got up to leave. What Abraham did not know was that they were on their way to Sodom (where his nephew Lot and his family lived) to announce a judgment from God because of its wickedness. As the men left, God asked, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (verse 17).

What God was about to do to Sodom really did not affect His plan for Abraham. Abraham would become a great nation and all the nations on the earth would be blessed through him (verse 18). God had chosen him and his seed to raise a family that would walk in His ways and do what was just and right. Abraham would be protected from the evil that was to fall on Sodom. God did not need to tell Abraham what He was going to do to that city. In verse 20, however, God decided to tell Abraham His plans. This reveals to us something about God and His relationship with Abraham.

That day, God told Abraham that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was so great that He was going to judge them (verse 20-21). As Abraham's visitors left for Sodom, Abraham remained in the presence of God. His heart was burdened by the news he had heard. "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" he asked God (verse 23). "What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?" (verse 24). The Lord



heard Abraham's prayer and agreed that if fifty righteous people could be found in the city it would be spared for their sake (verse 26).

Abraham pressed God yet further continuing to plead for God to spare the city if godly people were found there. Finally, God agreed that even for the sake of ten righteous people, He would spare the entire city of Sodom.

As we reflect on this prayer of Abraham for Sodom and his family, notice the role of the righteous in the city. It was because of the righteous that the city would be spared. We are left wondering what would happen to our cities were it not for the righteous people in them who seek God and His purposes.

Notice the heart cry of Abraham for this evil city and his family that lived there. Do we have this kind of burden to pray for cities and people who are lost in their sin?

God was willing to listen to Abraham. While we know that Sodom would ultimately be destroyed, we see that God was willing to listen to Abraham's request for mercy. This ought to give us courage to persevere as we intercede for our cities and countries.

As we began this chapter, we saw the unbelief of Sarah in God's ability to give her a child. She lied to the men of God about laughing at the prophetic word they brought. God blessed her despite her unbelief. As we conclude this chapter we see the unbelief of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who live in sin and rebellion against God. For their sin they would be destroyed. Sarah found grace in her unbelief; Sodom was destroyed.

The difference between Sarah and Sodom has to do with God's grace. The unbelief and lies of Sarah came from the same kind of heart that was evident in Sodom. Her heart was sinful and her words and attitudes revealed that unbelieving heart. Sarah was blessed despite her unbelief because God was gracious to her.

How we need to thank the Lord today that He is a forgiving God. We must thank Him more particularly, however, that He chose to forgive us in particular and use us despite our weaknesses and lack of faith.

For Consideration:

- Notice the hospitality of Abraham in this chapter. Do you show hospitality to those in need around you?
- Why was Sarah blessed despite her unbelief and dishonesty while Sodom was destroyed? What does this tell us about God's grace in our own lives?
- Is God limited by our unbelief? Does our unbelief affect God's ability to work in human lives?
- God revealed His plan for Sodom to Abraham. What does this show us about God and the kind of relationship He wants with His people?
- What do we learn about Abraham's burden for his family and the city of Sodom? What is your burden for the lost?

## For Prayer:

- Thank God for His willingness to forgive you and bless you despite your sin and unbelief.
- Ask God to give you a greater heart of compassion for those who are lost in sin. Take a moment to pray as Abraham did for someone who does not know Him.
- Ask God to help you to live a godly life before those you come in contact with this week.
- Ask the Lord to give you more faith to believe that He can and will do the impossible through you.

## CHAPTER 17 -

### LOT ESCAPES SODOM

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Read Genesis 19:1-38

The angels that had come to announce the birth of a son to Sarah left Abraham and went directly to Sodom to warn this city of God's judgment. Abraham had asked God not to destroy Sodom if He could find ten righteous people, but those ten people could not be found. We catch a glimpse in this chapter of the moral condition of the city of Sodom.

When the angels arrived in Sodom, Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city (verse 1). It should be noted that leaders of the city often sat at the gate of the city to discuss important business matters. It is possible that Lot had become a city leader.

When Lot saw the men entering the city, he got up and went out to meet them. He bowed with his face to the ground as a sign of respect and invited the men to come to his house to refresh themselves (verse 2).

The three angels initially refused his offer saying that they would spend the night in the square (verse 2). Lot insisted

that they come to his home instead. Notice in verse 3 that Lot insisted so strongly that they finally accepted his offer. Knowing something about the city, Lot likely knew that the city square was not a safe place for these men to stay.

When the visitors arrived at his house, Lot had a meal prepared for them and they ate. As the evening progressed, the men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house. Verse 4 tells us that they came from every part of the city. Having surrounded the house, they called out to Lot in verse 5:

Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.

This shows us the moral climate in the city of Sodom. These men did not know that the men who were in Lot's house were angels of God come to announce their doom.

What is even more striking than the men's request, is Lot's response. In verse 6, Lot went outside to meet with them and shut the door behind him. He pleaded with the men not to do such a wicked thing (verse 7). Instead of violating his guests, he offered them his two virgin daughters. He told them that he would send them out and they could do whatever they wanted with them (verse 8). What kind of father would offer his young daughters to an angry mob of men to rape and abuse all night? Again this shows us where Lot was spiritually and morally. Even Lot had been seriously affected by the moral decline of Sodom.

The men would have nothing to do with Lot's offer. "Get out of our way," they insisted. They accused him of playing the judge and threatened to treat him worse than his visitors. With that, they pushed forward and attempted to break down his door to get at his guests (verse 9). Lot's guests reached out and brought him in the house, closing

the door behind him (verse 10). They also struck the men with blindness so they could not find the door. Lot was not right with God, but he was protected. It is quite likely that God honoured Lot because of his relationship to Abraham and because of Abraham's prayer.

That day, the angels told Lot the reason they had come to the city. They had come to destroy it because of its sin. They told Lot to gather his family and get them out of the city immediately (verse 12).

Lot took their warning seriously. He immediately spoke to his sons-in-law who were pledged to marry his daughters. He told them to hurry and get out of the city because God was about to destroy it. His sons-in-law thought he was joking and did not take him seriously (verse 14). They did not leave the city.

As the day was coming to a close, the angels urged Lot to hurry. "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished," they told him in verse 15. Lot hesitated. We are not told the reason for this hesitation. He had come there because the land was prosperous. In just a short while, Lot would lose his home, his cattle, his sons-in-law and everything he had accumulated over the last years. When the angels saw that he hesitated, they grabbed him, his wife and his two daughters by the hands and led them out of the city to safety. So strong was the attraction of the city that, were it not for these angels literally dragging them out, Lot, his wife and two daughters would have perished under the judgment of God.

As soon as Lot and his family were safely out of the city, one of the angels told them to flee for their lives. He told

them not to look back or stop anywhere until they had arrived in the mountains (verse 17).

Lot was afraid that he might not make it as far as the mountains before the judgment of God fell. In verse 20, he pleaded with the angels to let him flee to a small town called Zoar that was closer. There he and his family could find shelter. The angel agreed not to destroy that little town and granted permission for Lot to flee there with his family.

Notice in verse 22 that the angel told Lot to flee quickly to the town because he could not do anything until he and his family were in safety. It was the intent of God that Lot and his family be spared.

Verse 23 tells us that by the time Lot had reached Zoar the sun had risen over the land. God then rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 24). Both cities and everything in them were destroyed. All living creatures perished as did the vegetation. There was nothing left (verse 25).

As they were fleeing, Lot's wife looked back toward the city of Sodom and became a pillar of salt. It is uncertain how this happened. My concern here is not so much with how this happened as it is with why Lot's wife was struck and the lesson it teaches us.

We need to understand that the angel who sent Lot and his family on their way told them clearly in verse 17 that they were to flee without looking back. By looking back, Lot's wife disobeyed this clear command of the angel. Personally, however, I believe that the sin of Lot's wife was not just a sin of curiosity to see what was happening. I believe there was something deeper than this taking place. I believe Lot's wife was looking back not with curiosity but

with longing. She looked back as one who wanted to return. She didn't want to leave everything behind. She longed to be back in Sodom. It was for this reason that she was struck by God. God had set her free. He had taken her out of the city and spared her life but she turned back with longing eyes. In doing so, she despised what God had done for her. In turning to Sodom, she turned her back on the grace of God and for this she perished.

What a sad picture is painted for us here. Is this not a picture we see all too often in our day as well? How often have we turned our back on God and His grace? How often have we resented or complained about what He has done or allowed in our lives? Those of us who know the salvation of the Lord must set our minds to look to Christ and never turn back. Yet how often have we, who have been saved from sin, turned back to look longingly at it again. What an insult this is to Christ who laid down his life for us to set us free from sin's penalty and consequences.

In the early morning, when Abraham got up, he went out to look in the direction of Sodom. As he looked toward the plain, he saw a dense smoke rising from the land like the smoke of a great furnace (verse 28). Abraham understood that God had not found ten righteous people in the city. What Abraham did not know, however, was that God had spared his nephew (verse 29).

Lot and his two daughters were afraid to stay in the city of Zoar so they left and went up to the mountains where the angels had originally told them to go. They found a cave and settled there (verse 30). We can only imagine what life was like for Lot and his two daughters in that cave. They had lost everything but their lives. Lot had lost his wife. The two girls had lost their future husbands. That cave must have been a place of grieving for them. It was also a place



of tremendous confusion. They began to wonder what the future had in store for them.

One day the two girls were speaking to each other about their future. They realized that their father was getting old and there was no man they could marry (verse 31). In order to continue the family line, they decided to get their father drunk and sleep with him (verse 32).

That night, the older daughter had sexual relations with her father. Lot was unaware of what had happened (verse 33). The next night they did the same thing and the younger daughter slept with her father. Again Lot was not aware of what he had done (verse 35). Both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father (verse 36).

The son born to the older daughter was named Moab and became the father of the Moabites. One of the most famous Moabite women of the Bible was Ruth. David would become one of her descendants. Ultimately, the Lord Jesus would be born through this line.

The son born to the younger daughter was named Ben-Ammi. He would become the father of the Ammonites (verse 38).

From these two daughters of Lot, two great nations would be born. Neither of these nations would claim the God of Abraham as their God. When God's people took over the land of the Canaanites, God had a special command for them regarding the Moabites and the Ammonites. In Deuteronomy 2:16-19, we read:

Now when the last of these fighting men among the people had died, the LORD said to me, "Today you

are to pass by the region of Moab at Ar. When you come to the Ammonites, do not harass them or provoke them to war, for I will not give you possession of any land belonging to the Ammonites. I have given it as a possession to the descendants of Lot.

Years later, God still remembered Abraham's prayer for his nephew and his descendants. He commanded His people not to harass them or take their land. In this we not only see the power of prayer but the wonderful grace of God to bless sinful Lot and his daughters.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we find in Genesis 19 of the sin of Sodom? Were Lot, his wife and his daughters affected by this sin? Explain.
- Notice Lot's hesitation to leave the city. What would you hesitate to leave behind for the Lord?
- What was the sin of Lot's wife that brought such a severe judgment from God?
- How did God answer Abraham's prayer for Lot and his descendants?

For Prayer:

- What evidence of sin do you see in your society today? Take a moment to pray that God would break this sin.
- Ask the Lord to help you not to look back but to move forward in His promise and blessing.

- Ask the Lord to remove the attraction of sin from your heart. Ask Him to forgive you for times when you have been tempted to look back like Lot's wife.

## **CHAPTER 18 -**

### **SARAH AND ABIMELECH**

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Read Genesis 20:1-18

After the events that took place in Sodom, Abraham moved to the south into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. He also stayed for some time in the town of Gerar (verse 1).

Notice in verse 2 that in Gerar, Abraham told King Abimelech that Sarah was his sister. Abraham's concern was to protect himself and his belongings. If the kings in that region found out that she was his wife, they would likely kill him and take her. If on the other hand, they believed she was his sister, Abraham would be treated well for her sake.

There are three things we need to see about Abraham in this. First, we see that he is willing to allow his wife to be taken by another man to protect himself and his property.

Second, we see the lack of confidence and trust in the Lord his God. He felt compelled to take matters into his own hands to protect what God had given him. Abraham was a great man of God but he still struggled in his faith.

Finally, notice that Abraham struggled to learn lessons from the past. He had already been through a similar situation in Genesis 12, when he told the king of Egypt that Sarah was his sister. God cursed Pharaoh and Abraham was forced to leave the country. Abraham now does the same thing with King Abimelech.

Abraham's decision to tell people that Sarah was his sister produced the same results in Gerar as it did in Egypt. King Abimelech took Sarah from Abraham and brought her into his harem.

It should be noted that while Abraham came up with this plan, Sarah went along with it. We have no record of her telling Abimelech that she was Abraham's wife. She was not innocent in this matter either.

What is striking about this story is that while Abraham and Sarah both seem to lack faith and confidence in the Lord, they are still protected by God. God had a purpose for Abraham and Sarah and despite their failures, He would fulfill His purpose in them. How wonderful it is to know that our failures will not ultimately hinder the work of a sovereign God. This is not an excuse to sin, but it is a comfort to know that God is bigger than our shortcomings.

While Sarah was with Abimelech, God came to him in a dream one night (verse 3). "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman," God told him. These would have been shocking words for Abimelech. Abraham had lied to him about Sarah. Abimelech had taken Sarah honestly. He did not know that she was Abraham's wife.

The words of God may be surprising to us as well. God tells a man, who was unaware of the fact that he was sinning, that he was as good as dead. Being unaware of his sin did not make him innocent. You can be guilty before God and not know it. You can be guilty before God and still have noble intents. This was Abimelech's situation. The lesson here is very powerful.

There are many people in this world who are under the judgment of God but do not know it. They do not understand that they are sinners, separated from a holy God. They live their lives in ignorance, unaware of their destiny without God. You don't have to know you are a sinner to be one. You don't have to be acting in wilful rebellion to be separated from God and under His judgment. Many people, under God's judgment, are good living people who are trying their best to do what is right. Like Abimelech they are unaware that judgment is quickly approaching.

Notice the response of Abimelech to these shocking words of God?

Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands (verses 4-5).

Abimelech pleaded with God on the basis that he did not know he had sinned and had acted with a clear conscience.

God knew that Abimelech had acted without knowing he was doing wrong and had, in fact, kept him from touching Sarah (see verse 6). While God had kept Abimelech from touching Sarah, he was still living under his judgment. In verse 7, God told him that if he did not return Sarah to

Abraham, both he and all his family would die. Here was a man who had acted without knowledge that he was doing wrong. He had not even slept with Sarah but he was still under the judgment of God and needed to make things right.

God told Abimelech in his dream that he was to have Abraham pray for him so that this judgment would be removed from his family (verse 7). When Abimelech woke, he called his officials and told them about his dream (verse 8). The result was that they were very much afraid. Abimelech called Abraham into his presence and asked him why he had deceived them. "You have done things to me that should not be done," he told him (verse 9). Abimelech demanded to know why Abraham had put his whole nation at risk by lying to him about his wife (verse 10).

Do you realize that believers can be responsible for the judgment of unbelievers? Abraham's lie caused Abimelech to take Sarah into his harem, resulting in the judgment of God on the whole nation. Jonah the prophet ran away from God's call to go to Nineveh. He boarded a ship filled with unbelieving sailors and fled to Tarshish. God sent a storm and the boat risked sinking. The sailors were terrified as they realised that their lives were at stake. All this was because Jonah, the man of God, had turned his back on God. A whole boat load of sailors was under the judgment of God because of Jonah's rebellion. By our actions and attitudes we can bring God's judgment not only on ourselves but on those around us.

Notice Abraham's response to Abimelech. "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife'" (verse 11). He placed the blame on the ungodliness of the town of Gerar and its king. In saying this, however, he may have failed to realize that

he was showing these unbelievers that he did not believe his God was big enough to take care of him and his family.

Not only does Abraham blame the ungodliness of the people for his actions but he also justified those actions in verse 12 by saying that Sarah was really his half-sister. While there was an element of truth in what Abraham told Abimelech, his words were still designed to mislead. In verse 13, Abraham told Abimelech that by telling people that she was his sister, Sarah was protecting him from harm and demonstrating her love for him.

In his response to Abimelech's question, Abraham spoke of the ungodliness of the city, justified his actions and told Abimelech of the incredible devotion of his wife to him. Nowhere here, however, do we see Abraham admit to wrongdoing. A whole nation was under the judgment of God because of Abraham's deception, but he does not seem to find it in his heart to admit that he did anything wrong.

While Abraham did not seem to admit to any wrong, this was not the case for Abimelech. Abimelech brought sheep, cattle, and male and female servants to Abraham. He also returned Sarah to him unharmed (verse 14). He told Abraham that he could live in any part of his land he wanted (verse 15). In verse 16, he spoke directly to Sarah and told her that he was giving her "brother" a thousand shekels of silver (about 25 pounds or 11.4 kilograms) to cover his offense against her. Abimelech recognised his sin and made a public apology to Sarah before his whole nation. He made this apology despite the fact that he had not even touched Sarah.

A comparison of Abraham's attitude and the attitude of Abimelech is striking. Abraham was guilty of deception and



allowed his wife to be taken by another man. When confronted with his sin, he sought to justify his actions. Abimelech acted with a clear conscience, not knowing that he had taken another man's wife. Despite the fact he had not even touched her, he made a public apology to Sarah, restored her to her husband unharmed, paid Abraham one thousand talents of silver as well as sheep, cattle and servants and gave him permission to live in whatever part of his land he desired. Abimelech seemed to understand something about sin and judgment that even the great patriarch Abraham did not understand.

That day Abraham prayed to God for Abimelech and God healed his wife and his slave girls so that they could have children again (verse 17). We are left wondering how long Sarah had been in Abimelech's possession that it would become obvious that his wife and slave girls could no longer have children.

#### For Consideration:

- Abraham did not seem to learn from his past failure in Egypt and repeated the same deception. Have you ever repeated the sins of the past? Why is it so difficult to learn from our past mistakes?
- What do we learn about the character of Abraham and his walk with God in this chapter?
- We're God's purposes for Abraham defeated by his shortcomings and failures?
- Is it possible to sin with a clear conscience? What is the only way we can know what is sinful?

- Compare Abimelech's response to sin with Abraham's response. What is the difference? How do you respond when confronted with your sin?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to learn from your past sins and failures.
- Thank the Lord that while you have often failed him, He has kept and protected you.
- Ask God to help you to guard your words, actions and attitudes so that you do not cause others to fall into sin.
- Ask God to give you grace to accept when you are wrong.



## **CHAPTER 19 -**

### **DIFFERENT PATHS FOR**

### **ISAAC AND ISHMAEL**

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Read Genesis 21:1-34

After many years, God fulfilled His promise to Sarah and gave her a son. Sarah became pregnant in her old age and bore a son to Abraham (verse 2). Abraham called him Isaac, just as the Lord had told him. It is interesting to note that the name Isaac means "he laughs." This name would likely remind both Abraham and Sarah of how they responded to the news that they would have a son in their old age. The name also refers to the fact that, in their old age, they would be given cause to laugh and rejoice at the power of God that brought life from a barren womb.

When Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him as God commanded. At this time Abraham was one hundred years old (verse 5).

Sarah's response to this miracle birth was to wonder at God and His mighty deeds. "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me,"

she said. This young child brought her great joy in her old age. Everyone rejoiced with her at such a wonderful miracle of God in her life. "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?" she said (verse 7).

While there was tremendous joy over the birth of Isaac for Sarah, this birth also brought with it some significant problems. When Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham, Sarah mistreated her to a point where Hagar ran away. That old jealousy was put aside for a time but never really forgotten. It would now resurface with the birth of Isaac.

On the day that Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast; possibly to celebrate this milestone in his son's life (verse 8). As the family gathered for the celebration, Sarah noticed that Ishmael was mocking Isaac (verse 9). Abraham was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born (Genesis 16:16). He was one hundred years old when Isaac was born. This means that Ishmael would have been about 14 years old at this time. Sarah took this matter very seriously and was upset with Ishmael for mocking Isaac.

In response to this incident Sarah approached Abraham and told him to get rid of Hagar and her son Ishmael. "That slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac," she told him (verse 10).

Notice that Sarah called Hagar, "that slave woman". This is an indication of how she felt about Hagar. Sarah was likely a very beautiful woman. At least two kings had taken her into their harem. While Sarah was very beautiful on the outside, there was a serious blemish in her life. Inside, she was filled with doubt and bitter jealousy. How important it is that we deal with the inner ugliness in our lives. This bitter spirit of Sarah toward Hagar had been in her since

the birth of Ishmael. It was a spirit over which she had not yet had victory.

Abraham was distressed by the jealousy and hatred he saw in his wife. What particularly distressed him was the fact that she was speaking about his son Ishmael and his mother, whom Abraham loved (verse 11).

God knew the hurt Abraham was feeling but He had a purpose in all this. In verse 12, God told him not to be distressed about the boy and his mother. He was to listen to Sarah and send Hagar and her son away. God promised that His blessing would be on Ishmael and Hagar as they left (verse 13).

While Sarah's attitude is not excused here, God used her angry and bitter words to accomplish a greater purpose. God is not limited to using only those whose attitudes and actions are right. While Sarah would have to answer to God for her bitter and angry spirit, God would still use it to accomplish a greater purpose.

Early the next morning, Abraham took food and water, gave it to Hagar and sent her and his son Ishmael away (verse 14). Leaving Abraham, she wandered into the desert of Beersheba. As Hagar wandered in the desert, the water she brought with her was used up. With no more water, Hagar put her son under a bush and went a small distance away so she would not hear his sobbing and see him die (verse 16). We can only imagine how difficult this must have been for Hagar. She saw her fourteen year old boy literally dying before her eyes and could do nothing about it. As Hagar sat there alone in the desert, she began to weep. She had lost her home. She didn't know where to go. Her son was dying and it would only be a matter of time before she too was dead.

God heard Ishmael cry and responded. That day God met Hagar in her misery. He told her not to be afraid and promised to raise up a great nation from this young child (verse 18).

As Hagar sat there, God opened her eyes to see a well of water before her (verse 19). We are left with the impression that this well had been there all the time but Hagar had simply not been able to see it. In his sovereignty, God brought Hagar to this very place. When she saw the well, she went and filled up a skin with water and gave it to Ishmael to drink.

Verse 20 tells us that God was with Ishmael as he grew up in the desert. He became an archer. Hagar would eventually find a wife for Ishmael. Notice in verse 21 that Hagar, who was Egyptian, found a wife for him from her own people.

In this we see how God blessed Ishmael and Hagar. He cared for them in the desert and provided a wife for Ishmael. Hagar now would see her son's offspring and remember the promise of the God of Abraham to bless him and make him a great nation.

The focus of chapter 21 changes in verse 22. We read about an agreement between Abimelech and Abraham. It should be remembered that Abimelech, king of Gerar gave Abraham permission to live in his territory (see Genesis 20:14-15). This was the king who had taken Sarah into his harem in chapter 20.

Abimelech saw how God was blessing Abraham (verse 22). He may have been afraid of what might happen when Abraham became more powerful. Abimelech asked Abraham to swear that he would not deal falsely with him, his

children or his descendants (verse 23). It should be noted that Abimelech knew Abraham as one who did not always tell the truth. Abraham had lied to him about his relationship with Sarah. This lie brought the judgment of God on Abimelech's family. Here in verse 23, King Abimelech now asked Abraham to promise that he would not deal falsely with him anymore. He asked him to agree to maintain friendly and honest relations with him and his descendants.

Abimelech reminded Abraham of how he had shown kindness to him all the time he had been in his land (verse 23). He asked Abraham to show him and his descendants that same kindness as God blessed them and caused them to grow in number and strength. Abraham swore to do this (verse 24).

While Abraham agreed that Abimelech had shown him compassion, he told him about a well of water that the King's servants had seized from him (verse 25). Abimelech assured Abraham that he had not heard about this problem. In verse 27, Abraham brought sheep and cattle to Abimelech and the two men made a treaty. Abraham set apart seven lambs from his flock (verse 28). When Abimelech asked him what this meant, Abraham asked him to accept these lambs as a witness that he had dug the well. By this means, an agreement was sealed between the two men and the matter of ownership was made official. The place where the two men swore this agreement was called Beersheba. Beersheba means "well of seven," or "well of the oath". After making this treaty, Abimelech and his commander returned home (verse 32). Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called on the name of the Lord. Obviously this was a special moment for Abraham.



According to verse 24, Abraham would stay in this land for a long time. The hand of God was on Abraham. God had promised to bless him and make him a great nation but for the moment he did not have a land of his own. He lived as a stranger in someone else's land. God had fulfilled His promise to give him a son. When the time was right God would also fulfil His promise to give him a land.

#### For Consideration:

- What does the name "Isaac" mean? What significance did that name have for Abraham and Sarah?
- What do we learn in this passage about Sarah's inner character?
- How did God use Sarah's jealousy and bitterness to accomplish His purposes?
- How did God reveal Himself to Hagar and Ishmael in the desert? Has God ever revealed Himself to you in a difficult time in your life? Explain.
- What was Abraham's testimony before Abimelech? How do people see you personally?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you your inner life. Ask Him to reveal any anger, bitterness or jealousy that needs to be overcome.
- Thank the Lord that He is bigger than our sin and shortcomings and that He blesses us despite our failures.
- Are you facing a difficult struggle in your life? Thank the Lord that He is willing to meet you in your struggle just as he met with Hagar and Ishmael.





## **CHAPTER 20 -**

### **ABRAHAM IS TESTED**

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Read Genesis 22:1-24

Time has now passed and Isaac has grown older. While we are not told how old Isaac was at this time, there are several hints given in the passage, He is now old enough to walk and carry a load on his back. When Abraham went to make a sacrifice, he put the wood on Isaac's back for him to carry (verse 6). Isaac was also old enough to reason. We see in verse 7, that when they were going to make their offering Isaac asked his father about the lamb. He had seen a number of sacrifices before and noticed that they did not have a lamb for this particular sacrifice. It appears that Isaac was a young boy at this time.

Genesis 22 begins by telling us that God tested Abraham. The word used for test in this passage could be translated by the words prove. It is important that we take a moment to examine this. To prove is to verify the dependability or purity of an object. To do this, the object is put under stress to be sure that it will work as it is intended to work. This is what God is doing with Abraham.

While God already knows what the results of these tests will be, He often tests us for our own good. The result of each test shows us many things about ourselves. It is God's desire that we see our weaknesses and be challenged and motivated to do even better for Him.

The test that God gave Abraham was not going to be an easy one. God told him to take his son Isaac, his only son, to the region of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.

Notice that the Lord said, in verse 2, that Isaac was Abraham's only son. While Ishmael was also Abraham's son, God had told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. This was a very difficult thing for Abraham to do but he willingly obeyed the Lord. Abraham's son Ishmael was no longer with him and Abraham may never have seen him again. Isaac was all he had left.

Notice also in verse 2 that God knew Abraham loved Isaac. "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love," God told him. What God was asking Abraham to do would be very painful for him because of his love for his only son.

God called Abraham to go to the region of Moriah where he was to offer his only son as a sacrifice on a mountain that He would show him. 2 Chronicles 3:1 sheds some important light on the location of Mount Moriah:

Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.

Mount Moriah according to 2 Chronicles 3:1 is in Jerusalem, where the temple of Solomon would be built.

Notice finally that Isaac was to be offered as a burnt offering. There were many different types of offerings and sacrifices in the Old Testament. A burnt offering, however, was a sacrifice made for sin.

The picture is very similar to what the Lord Jesus would do for us. The Father would take His only beloved son, the Lord Jesus, and send Him to a mountain in Jerusalem where He would lay Him on a cross and sacrifice Him as an offering for sin. The story of Abraham and Isaac is in reality a picture of the work of the Lord Jesus. This helps us to understand the reason why God would make such a request of Abraham. Through his action God was proclaiming to the world that the day would come when a sacrifice of an only son would be made on the mountain of Jerusalem for the sin of the world.

It was early in the morning that Abraham saddled his donkey. He took Isaac and two servants with him. After cutting enough wood for a burnt offering, they set out for the region of Moriah (verse 3). The journey took them about three days. On the third day Abraham saw the mountain at a distance (verse 4). He told his servants to remain with the donkey and he and Isaac would go to the mountain to worship God and come back to them (verse 5).

Notice that Abraham told his servant that they would worship God and come back. Abraham uses the plural here. He had confidence that both he and his son would return from the mountain. The writer to the Hebrews commends Abraham for this faith in Hebrews 11:19 when he says:

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

He knew that God was asking him to take Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice but he also knew that God had promised descendants through this same son. He believed that God could raise him from the dead and give him those descendants.

This belief of Abraham in the resurrection of his son is important. Abraham was taking his son to be sacrificed but he knew that this was not the end. He went up into the mountains knowing that his God was bigger than death and that his son would be raised. Is this not how Jesus went to the cross? He knew that death could not hold him?

Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on his son Isaac's back and he carried the fire and the knife to the mountain. Again we cannot miss the picture of an only son carrying the wood on which he would be sacrificed up into the mountain. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus did for us when He carried His own cross to Calvary.

As they travelled into the mountains, Isaac spoke to his father in verse 7 and said, "Father? ...the fire and wood are here ...but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Never before had a human been sacrificed on an altar for the Lord God of Israel. Unlike the Lord Jesus, Isaac did not know that he was to be the sacrifice. "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham told him.

Abraham's response to Isaac's question is interesting. It is hard to know from this response what Abraham believed.

Many commentators feel that Abraham was speaking prophetically when he said these words. Those who believe this feel that Abraham's comment about God providing a lamb was a direct reference to the Lord Jesus who would come as a sacrificial lamb for our sins. It may also be that Abraham simply believed God would help them find a lamb to replace Isaac on the altar.

When they reached the place where God wanted them to make the sacrifice, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. He then tied his son and laid him on top of the wood (verse 9). Taking his knife in hand, he stretched out his hand to kill his son (verse 10).

We need to understand that in his heart Abraham had already killed his son. Even before he raised the knife, Abraham had made up his mind to be obedient. Verse 12 makes this quite clear when God says:

Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.

God saw the attitude of Abraham's heart and saw that he had given his only son to him in his heart.

Before Abraham could bring down the knife, an angel of the Lord stopped him. The angel told him not to lay hands on the boy. Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. This was the provision of God for the sacrifice. Abraham took the ram and laid it on the altar as a sacrifice in the place of his son (verse 13). Abraham would call the name of that place, "The LORD will Provide" (verse 14).



After the sacrifice, the angel of the Lord called out again to Abraham from heaven (verse 15). God told Abraham that because he had not hesitated to offer his only son, He would bless him and make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. God promised that his descendants would overcome their enemies (verse 17) and through their offspring all nations on the earth would be blessed (verse 18). The willingness of Isaac to sacrifice his son brought blessing to the world. In a similar way, the willingness of the Father to sacrifice His son Jesus would bring the blessing to the entire world through the forgiveness of sin.

Abraham returned to his servants with his son. Together they set off for Beersheba where Abraham and his family would stay (verse 19).

Sometime after these events, Abraham received news about his brother who was living far from him at this time. The messenger told him that his brother Nahor's wife Milcah had given him eight sons. The names of these sons are recorded for us in verses 21-22. Nahor also had four more sons through his concubine Reumah (verse 24).

Of special note is the reference to a daughter born to Nahor's son Bethuel in verse 23. That daughter's name was Rebekah. Bethuel's daughter Rebekah would eventually become Isaac's wife. Through this couple, God would fulfil his promise to Abraham.

## For Consideration:

- What is the purpose of God's testing in our lives? Have you ever been tested? What did it reveal to you about yourself and about God?
- What does this story teach us about the Lord Jesus and what He did for us on the cross?
- What example does Abraham give us concerning obedience at all costs?
- Notice that there was blessing in Abraham's obedience to God. Does God always bless obedience?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to accept His testing in your life. Ask Him to help you to learn the lessons He wants you to learn through the tests He sends your way.
- Thank the Lord for what He did for you on the cross.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be willing to obey Him no matter the cost.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the blessings He had given you. Be specific.



## CHAPTER 21 -

### THE DEATH OF SARAH

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Read Genesis 23:1-20

Sarah lived to be one hundred and twenty-seven years of age. God gave her a number of years with her only son Isaac. When Sarah died, Isaac had not yet taken a wife. She would never meet the woman through whom the promises of God would be fulfilled. In some ways, Sarah could have been a real comfort and encouragement to Isaac's wife Rebekah. Genesis 25:21 tells us that Rebekah was also unable to have children.

Sarah died at Kiriath Arba (Hebron) in the land of Canaan. Her death was a source of grief for Abraham and he wept over her (verse 2). After the days of mourning were over, Abraham rose, went to speak with the Hittites and asked them to sell him a piece of property to use as a burial site (verse 4). Remember that Abraham was living in a land that he did not own. He had no property to bury his wife. The response of the Hittites shows us something of the reputation Abraham had among them. In verse 6, they said:

Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead.

Notice that they call him "sir." This was a mark of respect. They obviously looked up to Abraham as a mighty leader. Notice also that they considered him to be a mighty prince. They saw the clear blessing of God on his life. Not one of them would hesitate to give him the choicest of tombs. Abraham was respected and honoured by the Hittites. Touched by this gesture and the dignity with which they treated him, Abraham bowed down before the Hittite leaders, showing them his gratitude for their kindness in his time of need (verse 7).

Abraham requested a particular plot of land. The land belonged to a man by the name of Ephron, the son of Zoar (verse 8). Abraham was particularly interested in the cave that was on his property in Machpelah (verse 9).

Notice, in verse 9, that while the Hittites offered the land to him, he wanted to pay the full asking price for it. Abraham was not asking for any favours from the Hittites. He would pay whatever the property cost.

There is an important principle for us to understand. Abraham could have played on the fact that the Hittites respected him. They would have been willing to give him a piece of land simply out of respect for him. Abraham refused to take advantage of the Hittites, and demanded to pay the full asking price if Ephron was willing to sell it.

Christians have expectations of each other. Believers can sometimes expect favours or even demand favours of each other. This has often been the source of great conflict. Many years ago I met a Christian accountant who told

me that he had stopped working for Christian organizations simply because too many of them were expecting him to offer his services freely as a token of his love for Christ. Abraham knew that a sure way of destroying a good relationship was to take advantage of the hospitality and kindness of his Hittite hosts.

The owner of the cave, Ephron the Hittite, was sitting among the people gathered before Abraham that day. In verse 11, he offered to give Abraham the cave and the piece of land he requested. Abraham told him he would pay the full price for it (verse 12-13). Before the leaders at the gate of the city, Ephron told Abraham the value of the property he wanted to buy (verse 15). Abraham agreed to the price and weighed out four hundred shekels of silver (verse 16). This agreement was witnessed by the leaders and the title to the property given to Abraham (verses 17-18).

This transaction was a legal transaction witnessed by the community leaders. There would be no question as to the ownership of the property and those present witnessed the fairness of the deal. Both parties in the agreement went away happy.

It was in this cave that Abraham buried his wife Sarah (verse 19). This small piece of property was just the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to give Abraham the whole land of Canaan.

## For Consideration:

- Abraham had no land of his own but lived in a land belonging to someone else. How is this like the believer? Where is our true home?
- What reputation did Abraham have among the Hittites? What is your reputation before unbelievers?
- Abraham was not willing to take advantage of the kindness of the Hittites. What problems can result from believers taking advantage of each other today?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while we wander in this life as strangers we have the promise of a future home in heaven.
- Ask God to help you to maintain a good relationship with your friends and neighbours as Abraham did with the Hittites.

## **CHAPTER 22 -**

### **ABRAHAM FINDS**

### **A WIFE FOR ISAAC**

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Read Genesis 24:1-67

Sarah had just died. Abraham was now an old man. He did not know how many years he had left on this earth. His biggest concern, at this point, was to see that his son Isaac found the right wife. Abraham did not want Isaac marry a Canaanite woman. God had promised great things through Isaac and his descendants. Abraham wanted both his son and his wife to be in a right relationship with God so that His promises would not be hindered in any way.

With these things in mind, Abraham called his chief servant to him. Asking his servant to put his hand under his thigh (as was the custom), he made him swear by the Lord God of heaven and earth that he would not get a wife for his son from the pagan Canaanites living in the area (verse 3). He made him also swear that he would go back to the country where Abraham's relatives lived to find a wife for his son (verse 4).



The symbolism of placing the hand under the thigh is a difficult one to understand. It is generally believed that the hand was placed here because it was situated close to Abraham's reproductive organ. The hand was placed here because this was the organ that had been circumcised and through which God would fulfill his promises to give Abraham many descendants. By placing his hand here, the servant was in reality remembering that the promise he made related to the future generations of Abraham and to the covenantal promises made to all those who were circumcised.

Abraham's servant had some questions about this task Abraham had just given him. "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I take your son back to the country you came from?" he asked Abraham in verse 5. The servant seemed to understand that Abraham did not want his son to marry an unbelieving Canaanite. He also knew that it would not be easy to find a woman who was willing to leave her country to marry a man she had never met. Abraham's servant wanted to know if he should bring Isaac to the land of his fathers in the event that he could not find a girl willing to move.

Abraham's response is very important. "Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said (verse 6). Abraham is quite clear about this. God had promised to give the land of the Canaanites to his descendants. Isaac was to live in the land of the Canaanites because one day all this land would belong to him and his children. Abraham was confident that God would send his angel to prepare the way and find a wife for Isaac.

God had told Abraham that four generations would pass before he and his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (see Genesis 15:13-16). While it would not be for

some time that his descendants would inherit this land, it was important for Abraham that his people live in the land awaiting the fulfilment of the promise. Abraham wanted his descendants to live always in anticipation of the fact that the day was coming when they would inherit the land. He wanted them to set their roots down in the land as they waited in faith for God's promise to be fulfilled. He did not want to see his people scattered and unready to receive what God had promised. We must always be moving in the direction of the promise of God. Abraham told his servant that if the woman did not want to come back to the land of Canaan, he would be released from the oath he was making to Abraham at that moment (verse 8). By no means was the servant to take Isaac away from the land God had promised to him and his descendants. Abraham's servant agreed to the conditions of his promise and swore an oath to his master (verse 9).

The servant did not waste any time in setting out. He took ten of Abraham's camels and loaded them with all kinds of goods from his master and made his way to the town where Abraham's brother Nahor lived (verse 10).

When he arrived, he had his camels knelt down to rest near a well outside the town. It was at this time that the women of the community began to come to the well to draw water and bring it back to their homes (verse 11).

The problem the servant had was to find the right wife for Isaac. How was he to make such an important decision? Because he was a man of God, he believed that God would lead him to the right woman. As he waited beside the well, he prayed to the Lord for direction. Abraham's servant gives us all an important example to follow. He challenges us to seek God rather than trust our own reason.

Abraham's servant asked God for a sign. He prayed that God would give his journey success by showing kindness to Abraham in giving him the right wife for his son (verse 12). He asked God to bring Isaac's future wife to him at the well and to confirm that she was the right woman through a question he would ask her. He would ask the girl for something to drink. If she not only gave him something to drink but also gave all ten of his camels something to drink, then he would know that this was the woman God had chosen for Isaac. We can only imagine how much water ten thirsty camels would drink after a long journey. The test was not only designed to confirm God's choice of wife for Isaac but it also shows us something about the girl herself. It shows us something of her compassion, hospitality and that she was a hard worker.

Even before he had finished praying, a young girl by the name of Rebekah came out with a jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel the son of Abraham's brother Nahor (verse 15). She was a very beautiful girl and a virgin (verse 16). She had come to the well to fill her jar.

When Abraham's servant saw her, he hurried over to meet her and asked her for some water from her jar (verse 17). Rebekah willingly gave him water to drink (verse 18). When she noticed his camels, she also told him that she would draw water for them as well. Notice in verse 19 that she told him that she would draw water for his camels until they had finished drinking. The servant stood by watching Rebekah running back and forth from the well to the trough where the camels drank their fill of water. All this time he watched without saying a word to see if this was the answer to his prayer (verse 21).

When the camels had finished drinking, Abraham's servant took out a gold nose ring (weighing about one fifth of

an ounce or 5.5 grams) and two gold bracelets (weighing 4 ounces or 110 grams). He then asked Rebekah whose daughter she was and whether there was room in her house for him to stay for the night (verse 23).

Rebekah told him that she was the daughter of Bethuel who was the son of Nahor (verse 24). This news confirmed to Abraham's servant that God had certainly led him to the right person. Rebekah told the servant that they would offer hospitality to him and they also had plenty of straw for his camels to eat (verse 25). When the servant heard these things, his heart was overwhelmed. He bowed down to the ground in worship of the Lord God who had given him success (verses 26-27).

Rebekah ran home to tell her parents about the servant she had met at the well (verse 28). In response, Rebekah's brother Laban ran out to meet him and bring him back to their home for the night.

Straw and fodder was brought for his camels and the servants brought water and washed the servant's feet, as was the custom (verse 32). Food was then set out for him to eat (verse 33). Abraham's servant told his hosts, however, that he would not eat until he had explained the reason for his journey. As the men gathered to listen, he told them that he was Abraham's servant (verse 34). He told how God had richly blessed Abraham with great wealth in sheep, cattle, silver, gold, servants, camels and donkeys (verse 35). He also shared with them how Abraham's wife Sarah had given birth to a son in her old age. That son would inherit everything Abraham owned (verse 36).

As he continued his story, the servant explained how Abraham had made him swear that he would find a wife for his

son from his own relatives (verse 37-38). The only condition to this was that the woman must be willing to come back with him to the land God had promised Abraham and his descendants (verses 39-41).

Abraham's servant went on to tell his hosts about his prayer when he arrived at the well of water. He told them how Rebekah had come out to the well and gave him and his camels water just as he had prayed (verses 42-46).

When he had finished his story, the servant asked his hosts if they would give Rebekah in marriage to Isaac (verse 49). When Bethuel, Rebekah's father and Laban, her brother heard the story, they recognized that this was the Lord's doing (verse 50). They willingly gave Rebekah to the servant to be Isaac's wife (verse 51).

When Abraham's servant heard this he bowed down again to worship the Lord God (verse 52). He then took out gold and silver jewellery and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother. Only after these things had taken place, did the servant sit down and eat a meal with the other men. The meal was a great celebration of what God had done and the engagement of Rebekah to Isaac.

When the servant got up the next morning he asked to be sent on his way. He did not want to delay in returning home with Rebekah. Her brother and mother asked that the girl be given ten more days with them. Abraham's servant, however, did not want to be detained. He wanted to return to his master as soon as possible (verse 56).

The family decided to let Rebekah make the decision (verse 57). When they asked her if she was willing to go, she told them she would (verse 58). With that, they sent

Rebekah on her way. They also provided her with a servant to care for her (verse 59).

As Rebekah left them, they blessed her saying:

Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies. (verse 60)

Isaac was out one evening meditating in the field when he looked up and saw camels approaching (verse 63). At the same time Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac at a distance. Getting down from her camel, she asked the servant who he was. When Abraham's servant told her who he was, she immediately covered herself with her veil expressing modesty, and submission (verse 65),

The servant told Isaac all that had happened and how God had led him on the way. Isaac married Rebekah. He loved her and was comforted through her after the death of his mother (verse 67).

God was very much in control of the circumstances of this story. He clearly led Abraham's servant to the right woman for Isaac. It is also clear from this story that Abraham and his servant put their complete confidence in God and His leading. As they did, they also committed themselves to be uncompromising in regards to what they understood to be the purpose of God for their lives and the life of their nation. This combination of trust in God and commitment to His purpose without compromise brought victory. We would do well to walk in their steps.

## For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about trusting the leading of the Lord and not our own reason? How important is it that we seek the Lord in the decisions we make?
- Notice the number of times the servant of Abraham bowed down and worshipped God for leading and directing him. Do you have an attitude of worship and thanksgiving to God for His leading in your life?
- What does the willingness of Rebekah to water Abraham's camels tell us about her as an individual?
- Abraham's servant was not willing to be delayed in completing the mission his master had given him. Have you ever been distracted in doing the work God has called you to do?

## For Prayer:

- Do you have a believing marriage partner? Take a moment to pray that God would keep you united in your commitment to honour God.
- Thank God for his promises. Ask Him to help you to be always living in anticipation of their fulfilment.
- Ask God to stir up in you a heart of worship and gratitude for all He has done for you.
- Ask God to remove the distractions that keep you from doing everything He has called you to do.

## **CHAPTER 23 -**

### **ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS**

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Read Genesis 25:1-34

After the death of Sarah, Abraham remarried. Verse 1 tells us that he took a wife by the name of Keturah. Keturah had six sons (Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah). The chapter briefly traces the line of only two of these sons of Abraham.

In verse 3, we read how Jokshan, Abraham's son became the father of Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites and the Lemmites. Abraham's other son Midian had five sons whose names are recorded in verse 4.

While Abraham left everything he had to Isaac, he did leave gifts to his other children. Notice, however, in verse 6, that he chose to send them away from his son Isaac. Abraham knew that the promises of God would be fulfilled through Isaac and wanted to make sure that nothing would compromise that promise.



Abraham died at 175 years of age (verses 7-8). Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave he had purchased as a burial plot for Sarah, his wife (verses 9-10). After the death of Abraham, God's blessing fell on his son Isaac. God's hand was on Isaac as it had been on his father Abraham.

Before tracing the story of Isaac, verses 12-18 focus our attention to Ishmael, Abraham's son through his Egyptian servant Hagar. Ishmael had also been sent away when he was about fourteen years of age. His mother Hagar found an Egyptian wife for him.

Ishmael had twelve sons. This was in fulfillment of the promise that God had made to his mother Hagar in Genesis 17:20.

The names of the twelve sons of Ishmael are recorded in verses 13-15. Notice in verse 16 that these sons would become tribal rulers and have their own settlements and camps.

Ishmael would live a hundred and thirty-seven years (verse 17). His descendants would settle near the border of Egypt (verse 18). They would always live with hostility in their heart toward their Israelite brothers. This too was in fulfillment of the promise of God to Hagar, Ishmael's mother in Genesis 16:12

He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.

Attention shifts back to Isaac. We are told that the blessing of God was on Isaac's life but his wife Rebekah, was not

able to have children. It was not until Isaac prayed about this that Rebekah was able to conceive.

It is significant that Isaac prayed to God about this. The promises of God hung on this prayer. Isaac, I am sure, wrestled with God over this matter and his prayer released the blessing of God. There are times when God wants us to have victory, but for that victory to become a reality, we need to persevere, pray and trust without giving up. Maybe you are in that situation right now. You know that God has called you for a purpose but you are not seeing that purpose being fulfilled. The challenge for us in this passage is to seek God and pray without losing hope. God will be true to His promises as He was with Isaac and Rebekah.

Rebekah conceived in answer to Isaac's prayer and verse 22 tells us that God gave her twins. From the very beginning, there was something strange about these twins. They "jostled with each other within her." In other words, they seemed to be fighting each other even in their mother's womb. Rebekah was perplexed at this and brought the matter to the Lord, asking Him what was happening.

The Lord told her that two nations were growing inside her womb. One would be stronger than the other but the older one would serve the younger (verse 23). There seems to be a spiritual battle raging in the life of these two boys even before they were born.

The twins that were born to Rebekah and Isaac were very different. The first-born came out red and hairy. They named him Esau meaning "hairy" (verse 26). The second child came out of the womb grasping the heel of his brother. They called him Jacob literally meaning "he grasps the heel."

Notice, in verse 26, that Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to these sons. Verse 20 tells us that Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah. This means that they were married for twenty years before being able to have a child.

Esau and Jacob were very different in character. Esau was the outdoors type and became a skilful hunter. Jacob, on the other hand, was a quiet man who preferred to stay at home (verse 27). Isaac preferred Esau to Jacob because he shared with him a love for the taste of wild game animals. Rebekah, however, particularly loved Jacob (verse 28).

One day when Esau was out hunting, Jacob was at home cooking some stew. Esau came home from the hunt very hungry and asked Jacob for some of the stew he was making. Notice that the stew had a reddish color. Verse 30 tells us that the descendants of Esau would be called the Edomites. The word "Edom" literally means "red."

Jacob demanded that Esau sell him his birthright in exchange for the stew (verse 31). As the firstborn child, Esau had special rights. He would inherit a special portion of his father's possessions. Jacob obviously had given this matter thought prior to this and now acted on this by demanding that Esau give him these rights in exchange for the food in his pot.

Esau was so hungry at that time that he really didn't care what happened to his birthright. "I am about to die," he said to his brother. "What good is the birthright to me?" (verse 32). Before giving his brother anything to eat, Jacob made Esau swear to give him his rights as the firstborn child (verses 33-34).

Jacob took advantage of his brother Esau in a moment of weakness. Esau despised his right and sold it for some stew. In this, however, the promise of God to Rebekah that the older would serve the younger would be fulfilled (Genesis 25:23). The blessing passed on from Abraham to Isaac would now be passed on to his son Jacob.

Note here something of the character of Jacob. He was willing to take advantage of his brother in a time of need. He was not a perfect man. He would become known as a deceiver but he was still the one through whom God's blessing would flow to the ends of the earth.

For Consideration:

- How many sons did Abraham have altogether through Sarah, Hagar and Keturah his three wives? Of all those sons how many did God choose to carry out His promises to Abraham. Does being born in a godly family mean that you will be a godly person?
- How many years were Isaac and Rebekah married without having a child? What was it that broke this curse and allowed Rebekah to conceive?
- Who were the descendants of Esau? How did they receive their name?
- How did God bring His promises to pass in Jacob? What encouragement do you find in the fact that the Lord can even use the sinfulness of human beings to accomplish His purpose?
- What does this passage teach us about the power of prayer?

## For Prayer

- Thank the Lord for the way He placed His hand on you and brought you to Himself.
- Thank the Lord that he keeps His promises. What are some promises you can claim from God today?
- Are you waiting for God to fulfill His promise in you? Ask Him to give you patience as you wait on Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to use you even though you have often failed Him.
- Thank the Lord for how He answers prayers. Are there things you need to be praying more faithfully for today?

## CHAPTER 24 -

### ISAAC'S WELLS

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Read Genesis 26:1-34

As we begin chapter 26, we discover that there was a famine in the land. This famine is compared to the famine in the days of Abraham (Genesis 12:10). When the famine came on the land in Abraham's day, he took his family to Egypt. Isaac went down to Gerar in the land of the Philistines. King Abimelech was king at that time. We should not confuse this man with King Abimelech whom Abraham met many years prior to this event. This King Abimelech was likely a son or grandson who carried the same name as the king Abraham met.

The Lord appeared to Isaac and told him not to go down to Egypt but to live where he would tell him (verse 2). In this time of famine, Isaac was not to trust in his own reason. Instead, he was to wait on the Lord and follow His leading. God told Isaac to stay in the land of the Philistines (verse 3). He promised to bless him. That day, God reconfirmed the promise he had made to Abraham. He told Isaac, as He had told his father, that He would give him descendants "as numerous as the stars in the sky" and they would possess the land they were wandering in now

as strangers (verse 4). In obedience to the Lord God, Isaac settled in the region of Gerar.

In verse 7, the men in Gerar asked Isaac about his wife Rebekah. Isaac feared for his life, thinking that if he told them she was his wife, they would kill him and take her. Like his father before him, Isaac lied to them and told them Rebekah was his sister (verse 7).

Isaac repeated his father's error. He had likely heard what his father had done in a similar situation and took that as his model. How important it is for us as parents and role models to demonstrate godly behaviour in all that we do. We do not know who will take our example as a model for their own lives.

One day, however, King Abimelech looked down from his window and saw Isaac caressing Rebekah. He understood from this that she was not his sister but his wife (verse 8). Seeing this, Abimelech confronted him with his lie (verse 9). He demanded to know why he had been dishonest with him and his men. Isaac told him that he feared for his life. Abimelech reminded Isaac that one of his men could have taken his wife and slept with her. This would have brought the wrath of God on them as a people.

If Isaac took his father as an example, it is likely that Abimelech did likewise. In Abraham's day, God brought a curse on the entire royal family when Sarah was taken into their household. Abimelech had likely heard the story and took his warning from what had happened. Isaac followed his father's sin. Abimelech learned from his father's sin.

That day King Abimelech gave orders that if anyone molested Isaac's wife Rebekah, he would be put to death.

This was God's way of protecting Rebekah. It would be through her that the promised of God would be fulfilled.

What is striking about this story is that it was a pagan king who confronted Isaac, the child of promise, with his sin. Just because we are children of God doesn't mean that we always do what is right. Sometimes believers need to be corrected. Often that correction and rebuke comes from unbelievers who are watching what we are doing.

Notice that after Isaac was confronted with his sin and the matter resolved, the blessing of God came to him. Verse 12 tells us that Isaac planted crops in the land and that very same year he harvested one hundred times what he planted. God also blessed him with many flocks, herds and servants. He became so wealthy that the people of the region began to envy him (verse 14).

Out of jealousy and envy, the Philistines filled up the wells that Abraham's servants had dug many years ago when they were living in the region (verse 15). To avoid further conflict, Abimelech told Isaac to move away from him (verse 16). Isaac agreed and moved his family and livestock to the Valley of Gerar (verse 17). While this incident seems tragic, it may have been God's way of separating His people from the pagan Philistines.

In the Valley of Gerar, Isaac reopened some other wells the Philistines had filled up after his father Abraham had died (verse 18). They also dug new wells and discovered fresh water (verse 19). God's blessing seemed to follow Isaac.

When the herdsmen of Gerar discovered that Isaac had opened the wells and had discovered fresh water they began to quarrel with him; claiming that the water belonged



to them (verse 20). The dispute was so severe that the well of fresh water that had caused this quarrel was called Esek meaning "dispute."

Because of the dispute over water and the wells, Isaac's servants moved again and dug another well. The Philistines also quarrelled with them about this. This second well they called Sitnah meaning "opposition."

Because of the opposition and quarrelling, Isaac was forced to move from one place to another. In verse 22, we read that he moved from the well of Sitnah to another location and again dug a well. This time there was no quarrelling or opposition so he named the well Rehoboth meaning "room," because the Lord had finally given them room to stay.

Notice how Isaac recognized that it was the Lord who had given him this place to stay. The way the Lord led was through the hostility and jealousy of the Philistines. God simply closed every door and allowed the Philistines to oppose him until Isaac was where He wanted him to be. Sometimes the closed doors and trials we face are in reality part of the leading of the Lord. Understanding this will help us to be more accepting of what the Lord allows to come into our life.

In verse 23, we see that Isaac moved to Beersheba. It was here in Beersheba that the Lord told Isaac not to be afraid because He would be with him and bless him. His family would continue to increase in the land. These words would have been a source of encouragement to Isaac. There had been so much quarrelling and opposition to his stay in the land of the Philistines. He likely wondered when the filling of wells and quarrelling would escalate into something more serious. He was likely afraid for his life and the lives

of his family members. God met him in his concern and comforted him in his time of need.

In response, Isaac built an altar to worship and thank the Lord God. He also pitched his tent there and dug a well, obviously deciding to remain in the region for some time (verse 25).

While Isaac was in Beersheba, Abimelech came to visit with his personal adviser and military commander. Somewhat concerned, Isaac asked, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?" Abimelech told him that he had noticed how his God had blessed him abundantly. He told him he had come to make a treaty of peace (verses 28-29).

Abimelech had a certain fear of God in his heart. He did not want Isaac to be his enemy. He knew that Isaac's God was powerful. The fact that Abimelech, a powerful king of that day, would see Isaac as a potential threat shows us something of the blessing of God on his life.

Isaac prepared a feast for the men and they ate a meal together (verse 30). He offered them his hospitality that night and early the next morning the men swore an oath of peace to each other before Isaac sent them away (verse 31).

It was that same day that Isaac's servants came to him with the news that they had found a source of water (verse 32). They called that well Shibah meaning "oath." This well would be a reminder of the oath that had been made that day between Isaac and Abimelech.

Verses 34-35 speak briefly about Isaac's son Esau and the path his life took him. When he was forty years old, he married a woman by the name of Judith, the daughter of a Hittite. He also married Basemath, the daughter of Elon, also a Hittite. Both of these wives were a source of grief for Isaac and Rebekah (verse 35).

What is important for us to note here is that while Isaac was the son of promise, his life was not always easy. He did not have a land of his own. He wandered from place to place. The people of the region did not like him and were jealous of his wealth. They quarrelled with him and made his life difficult. As parents they also watched their son Esau marry pagan wives. The promise would not come easily, but God continued to remind Isaac that he would be faithful to His word. In the meantime, Isaac persevered through the struggles and continued to trust in the Lord. Are you facing difficulties and trials in your life? Have you, like Isaac, been going from one trial to another? God has not abandoned you. His promise remains.

#### For Consideration:

- During the famine, the Lord appeared to Isaac and told him to wait on Him and go where He would lead him. Was the leading of the Lord always easy for Isaac? What does this tell us about the way God leads us today?
- What difficulty are you facing today? Have you ever felt tempted to not wait on the Lord's leading? Have you ever doubted the Lord and His purpose when things were difficult?

- How does Isaac follow His father's example in regards to his wife Rebekah? What does this tell us about the importance of being a good role model?
- God protected Rebekah even when Isaac had lied about her. Have you ever made a bad decision? Will God protect and keep us even when we fail?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to trust in His leading and not in your own wisdom and strength. Ask Him to forgive you for times when you rushed ahead of Him.
- Ask God to help you to be a good role model for those around you.
- Ask God for faith and perseverance when people oppose what God is doing in you.
- Thank the Lord that He keeps us and protects us even when we make foolish mistakes.



## **CHAPTER 25 -**

### **ISAAC BLESSES HIS SONS**

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Read Genesis 27:1-46

Isaac was now an old man. While his mind seemed to be fairly clear, he appeared to have lost some of his other senses, in particular, his sight. Isaac knew that his time of death was nearing. Before he died, however, Isaac wanted to bless his sons.

We do not always appreciate the significance of blessings in the Scripture. In those days, the blessing of a father was taken very seriously. It was understood that the blessing of a father would determine, to some extent, the future of the son. God Himself took these blessings seriously and in this particular situation, He overruled so that the words of Isaac reflected His purpose for his sons.

On this occasion, Isaac called for his son Esau. When Esau arrived, he asked him to get some wild game and prepare it for him to eat. When he had eaten, he would give him his blessing.

Rebekah was present when Isaac made this request. After Esau left with his bow and arrows to find some wild game for his father, Rebekah ran to Jacob. She told him that she had overheard Isaac telling Esau that he was going to bless him (verse 6).

Deciding to take advantage of the situation, Rebekah told Jacob to bring her two choice goats from the flock. She would prepare these for Isaac. She told Jacob that he was to bring this meat to his father, pretending to be Esau so he could receive his brother's blessing (verse 10).

There are several points I want to make about Rebekah and her plan. First, Rebekah's plan shows that she lacked respect for her husband and his leadership. She was willing to deceive him. She took advantage of his old age, blindness and inability to taste food. Her concern was not for him and his wishes but for herself.

The second point I want to make has to do with Rebekah's respect for her son Esau. It is true that Jacob would receive the blame for stealing his brother's blessing, but the reality of the matter is that he would not have done so if it were not for his mother's evil intentions. It was Rebekah's idea to steal the blessing from Esau. This again shows us something about her as a mother. She was willing to steal her son's blessing to suit her own desires.

Finally, consider the example that Rebekah was giving to her son Jacob. She taught him how to steal and deceive. She also destroyed the already fragile relationship he had with his brother Esau and put his life at risk.

Notice in verse 11, how Jacob protests his mother's plan. Jacob could not imagine how this plan could work. Esau was a hairy man and he had smooth skin. If his father

touched him, he would discover that he was trying to deceive him and curse him instead (verse 12). Rebekah was willing to take that chance. "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say," she told Jacob in verse 13.

Spurred on by his mother's evil plan, Jacob went to the flock and returned with the two goats (verse 14). Rebekah prepared them and took Esau's best clothes and put them on Jacob (verse 15). She covered his hands with goatskins so that if Isaac touched Jacob, he would think that he was touching Esau. She also put skins on his neck (verse 16). Rebekah gave the food to Jacob and he went to see his father (verses 17-18).

When Jacob arrived at his father's tent he called out to him. When his father asked who it was he said:

I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing (Genesis 27:19).

Isaac was surprised that his son Esau was able to find the game and prepare it so quickly. This raised his suspicions. Isaac, pretending to be his brother, replied: "The LORD your God gave me success." (verse 20). Isaac was still suspicious and asked his son to approach so he could touch him (verse 21).

Jacob approached. Isaac felt his skin. "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau," he said (verse 22). Still suspicious, he asked Jacob outright in verse 24: "Are you really my son Esau?" "I am," Jacob lied, adding to the deception.



Being reassured, Isaac then asked his son to bring him the game so he could eat and bless him (verse 25). When Isaac finished eating he asked his son to kiss him (verse 26). When Jacob did, Isaac smelled his clothes. This was his final test assuring him that the son before him was really Esau. The smell of Esau's clothes convinced Isaac. "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed," he said in verse 27.

Being convinced that the person before him was Esau, Isaac proceeded to bless him. In verse 28, he blessed him with heaven's dew, earth's riches and abundance of grain and new wine. In other words, he blessed him with riches and prosperity. In verse 29, he also blessed him with peace and power over nations. "May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you." Notice also in verse 29 that Isaac told Jacob that he would be lord over his brothers and they would bow down to him. Isaac then cursed anyone who would curse his son and blessed anyone who would bless him. Jacob left his father's presence with a blessing of prosperity and power over his brother and over entire nations.

Jacob had scarcely left when his brother Esau returned from hunting to prepare a meal for his father (verse 30). After preparing the meat, Esau went to see his father (verse 31).

Hearing the voice of his son, Isaac asked him who he was. "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau," he replied. When Isaac heard the voice of his son all his suspicions came to the surface and he realized what had happened (verse 33). He told Esau that he had just given his blessing to his brother and it could not be taken from him.

Notice the response of Isaac to the discovery that he had given Esau's blessing to Jacob in verse 33. He "trembled violently." Isaac may have been angry at the deception of his son. Jacob had shown great disrespect for his father. We are left to wonder what this did to Jacob's relationship with his father. Certainly it put a barrier between them.

Esau's reaction to this news was to "burst out with a loud and bitter cry" (verse 34). He too was deeply hurt. His blessing had been stolen from him through the deception of his brother Jacob. "Bless me—me too, my father!" he cried in verse 35.

Isaac knew that the blessing could not be taken away from Jacob. "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing," he told his son in verse 35.

Esau's bitterness can be seen in what he said about his brother in verse 36:

Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!

The name Jacob means "deceiver." Jacob's action also created a serious barrier between him and his brother.

Esau pleaded with his father to give him a blessing (verse 36). Isaac told his son Esau that he had made Jacob lord over him and blessed him with great prosperity (verse 37).

When his son continued to weep and plead for a blessing, Isaac finally gave him one. He told Esau that his dwelling would be away from the earth's riches and the dew of heaven. In other words, his life would be difficult and he

would struggle to provide for his needs (verse 39). He would have to live by the sword and would serve his brother (verse 40). The day would come, however, when he would throw off this yoke and be freed from his oppression.

Esau's life would be difficult. All the blessing would go to his brother Jacob. This was more than Esau could bear. In verse 41, he made a promise that when his father died he would kill Jacob. Notice that Esau's concern was for his father and not for his mother. He does not feel the need to wait until his mother died to kill his brother. It did not seem to concern him that his mother would see the death of her favourite son. This may be an indication that Esau had lost respect for his mother through this incident.

When Rebekah heard of Esau's intent to kill Jacob, she knew that Jacob could not stay in the land. She told him to flee to her brother Laban in Haran and stay there until the anger in the family had subsided (verses 43-44). She would send for him when it was safe to return (verse 45).

Notice Rebekah's words in verse 45. "Why should I lose both of you in one day?" This tells us that she believed that she had already lost her son Esau. This may indicate that after this event, Esau turned his back on his mother. Her actions and those of Jacob had ripped the family apart.

In order to get Isaac's permission to send Jacob to her brother, Rebekah told him that her life would not be worth living if her son Jacob took a wife from the pagan Hittite women around them. She asked him to give his permission to send Jacob to her brother to find a wife. In reality, she was trying to find a way to protect her son from his brother. She also seems to be covering her own sin and deception. Isaac, likely angry with his son and realizing the

severity of the hatred between Jacob and Esau would give his permission for Jacob to leave.

You can't read this chapter without seeing how the deception of Rebekah destroyed the entire family. Her lack of respect for her husband and son Esau would have a lasting impact on their lives and the lives of the generations to come. It shows us how easy it is for a husband and wife to drift apart. Rebekah did not consider the consequences of her actions. She knew what she wanted and did everything she could to get it, ignoring the consequences.

While the individuals in this story acted sinfully, God was able to take the mess they made and accomplish His purposes through it. He would give Jacob a wife and bless him in the land of his exile. Through this broken family, God would accomplish His wonderful purposes for the world.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the importance of blessing and cursing in the Old Testament? Do you believe that blessings and curses uttered today have an impact on our lives?
- How does Rebekah show disrespect for her husband in his weakness? Do you respect your husband or wife? Is it possible for us to lose respect for each other in marriage?
- How does Jacob show disrespect for his father and his brother? Have you been guilty of showing disrespect for someone in your life? What would God have you do about this?

- Jacob and Rebekah acted without consideration of the consequences of their actions. What did their actions do to the family?
- God used a broken family to accomplish His wonderful purposes for the world. What encouragement does this bring you today? What does this tell us about the kind of people God can use?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for any lack of respect you may have shown to your husband or wife.
- Jacob seems to act on the advice of his mother. Have you ever encouraged someone else to sin? Ask God to forgive you for any bad examples or counsel you may have given to someone else.
- Are there people in your life you have deceived or failed to respect? Confess this to the Lord and ask Him to give you grace to make things right.
- Thank the Lord that He can use us even when we have failed Him. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have given up on people that God wants to use.

## **CHAPTER 26 -**

### **GOD SPEAKS TO JACOB**

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Read Genesis 28:1-22

Telling Isaac that she was disgusted with the women of the region, Rebekah sought his blessing on sending their son Jacob to Paddan Aram to find a wife among her brother's relatives. Calling Jacob to his side, Isaac granted him his blessing before he left.

In verse 1, we read that Isaac commanded Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman. Instead, he was to take a wife from the home of his mother's brother Laban in Paddan Aram. God was going to destroy the Canaanites and give their land to His people. It should also be noted that the religion of the Canaanites was often a source of temptation for the people of God. Foreign wives tempted God's people to turn from Him. Isaac challenged his son to separate himself from these foreigners and walk with the Lord.

Isaac also prayed that God would bless Jacob with many descendants and asked that the blessing given to his father Abraham would be passed on to him (verses 3-4). Notice that Isaac associated Jacob's blessing with Abraham.

Isaac realized that while Jacob had deceived him for this blessing, it was, in reality, the will of God that Jacob's line not Esau's see the fulfillment of the blessing God promised Abraham. Having received his father's blessing, Jacob went on his way to Paddan Aram (verse 5).

When Esau heard how much the Canaanite women displeased his parents, he decided to marry Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son. Some see this as an act of rebellion but this is not necessarily the case. Isaac told Jacob to take a wife from among his uncle's daughters on his mother's side. Esau chooses to do the same by taking a wife from among his uncle Ishmael's daughters, on his father's side. It could be that he did this to gain the favour of his parents at a very difficult time in his life.

Jacob left his home in Beersheba and set out for his uncle's home in the region of Haran (verse 10). He traveled for some time and decided to stay the night at a certain location. Taking a stone, he put it under his head as a pillow and fell asleep (verse 11).

As he slept, Jacob dreamed he saw a stairway or ladder that went from the earth to heaven. He saw the angels of God ascending and descending the ladder (moving from heaven and earth). Above the ladder or stairway he saw the Lord God. The Lord spoke from heaven to Jacob.

God introduced Himself as the God of his father Abraham and Isaac. In verse 13, the Lord promised Jacob that He would give him the land on which he was sleeping.

God also promised that He would increase his descendants. They would spread out to the north, south, east and west and fill the land. Their number would be like the dust of the earth. They would be too numerous to count (verse

14). Jacob's descendants would be a blessing to all the people of the earth. From this faulty man God would form the nation of Israel. Through his nation the Messiah would come to rescue us from sin. He was a vital link in the purpose of God for the world.

Finally, God promised that He would watch over Jacob and his descendants wherever they went. Though he was going into exile at the moment, the Lord promised that Jacob would return to the land of his fathers (verse 15).

We can only imagine how encouraging this would have been to Jacob. The circumstances under which he was leaving his homeland were difficult. He had deceived his father and stolen his brother's blessing. His brother had vowed to kill him. What questions were going through Jacob's mind as he left for Paddan Aram? Did he feel discouraged? Was he living under the shame of what he had done? Did he wonder what was ahead for him now in this strange land?

God met with Jacob in his confusion. God spoke to Jacob and promised rich blessings. Jacob was unworthy. He was a deceiver. He had done much wrong, but God had not abandoned him. There in his dream, Jacob not only heard the voice of God but saw the angels of God moving back and forth from heaven bringing blessing and support to him.

As unworthy as he was, God was still going to bless him. As unworthy as he was, God still delighted in him. God had commissioned the angels of heaven to watch over him. They moved back and forth from heaven to earth watching over Jacob and caring for his needs. These angels watch over us as well. God knows our confusion and meets us in our unworthiness. While often we fail Him and wander from



His ways, He pursues us, forgives us and uses us to accomplish His purpose.

When Jacob woke from his sleep, he realized that God had met him. His heart was filled with fear and awe as he considered the fact that God had been present in that place. "This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven," he said in verse 17.

Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone he had used as a pillow, set it up on a pillar and poured oil over it to consecrate it (verse 18). This would serve as a reminder to him of God's presence and promise in that place.

Jacob called that place Bethel, which literally means, "house of God." That day he vowed that if God would watch over him as he had promised, so that he returned safely to this land, then the pillar he had set up would become a house of God. He would also give Him one tenth of all he had. Jacob fulfilled this vow in Genesis 35:3.

We cannot underestimate this encounter with God. Here at Bethel, Jacob had a personal encounter with the God of Abraham. If he was to be the leader God wanted him to be that personal encounter was vital. He heard first hand that day from God. God personally spoke His promises to Jacob. He heard from God Himself. This would have been a life changing experience. Jacob would leave that place with a promise in his heart and a commitment to a very real and personal God. Every Christian leader needs to experience such a God.

For Consideration:

- God accomplished His purpose despite the deception of Jacob. He did not give up on him even when he failed. What comfort do you take from the fact that God is able to turn even our failures and shortcomings into good?
- Why did God not want His people to marry the Canaanite women? How important is it that we find a partner who loves the Lord?
- Jacob had a vision of the angels moving back and forth from heaven on his behalf. Do you believe that the angels of God do the same for us today?
- God met Jacob at a time when he was fleeing for his life because of deceit and disrespect. Does God abandon His children when they fall? What comfort does this give you in your situation today?

#### For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to bless us even when we are unworthy of His blessing.
- Thank the Lord for the way His angels protect us at His command.
- Thank the Lord that He does not abandon us when we fail Him.
- Thank the Lord that He can even use our failures to accomplish good in our lives.



## **CHAPTER 27 -**

### **JACOB MARRIES**

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Read Genesis 29:1-35

Jacob was on his way to the region of Haran where his uncle Laban lived. God met him on the way and promised to bless him and his descendants. Jacob arrived at a place where he saw a well in a field with three flocks of sheep laying nearby. There was a large stone over the mouth of the well.

Obviously water was scarce and this well was the only one in the region. Shepherds of various flocks used this well. These shepherds had obviously agreed together to the use and care of it. The large and heavy stone may have been placed over the well to protect it from others who would steal the water which was in short supply. Verse 3 tells us that only when all the flocks had gathered, the shepherds would roll the stone from the well to water their sheep. As soon as the sheep had been watered, this heavy stone was lifted back onto the mouth.

When Jacob arrived at the well, he met the shepherds who had gathered their flocks for watering. Jacob questioned

the shepherds about where they had come from and if they knew Laban, his uncle (verse 4). The shepherds told him that they were from Haran and knew Laban.

When Jacob asked how Laban was doing, the shepherds told him that he was well and that his daughter Rachel was coming that day to the well with sheep (verse 6). Jacob did not know the custom of the shepherds to wait until all the flocks had arrived before watering their sheep. As he spoke with the shepherds, the sun was high in the sky. He asked them why they were not watering their sheep and getting them back to pasture (verse 7). The shepherds explained to Jacob that it was their practice only to water their sheep when all the flocks had gathered (verse 8). As they spoke, Rachel arrived with her father's sheep (verse 9).

When Jacob saw Rachel, he went over to the well, rolled the stone away and watered her sheep. There is no indication in this verse that the shepherds helped him. This stone was obviously very heavy and if Jacob rolled it away himself this would have been noticed by the shepherds. By watering Rachel's sheep, Jacob was identifying particularly with her. It was his way of introducing himself to her.

Verse 11 tells us that as Jacob watered Rachel's sheep, he began to weep aloud. The experience of meeting Rachel and arriving at his mother's homeland was an emotional one for Jacob. Going over to Rachel, he kissed her and told her that he was a relative (verse 12). Hearing this, Rachel ran and told her father Laban that his sister's son had arrived in the land.

When Laban heard this, he hurried out to meet Jacob. Embracing and kissing him, he asked him to stay at his home (verses 13-14). After Jacob had been there a month, Laban offered him a job. Jacob agreed to work for Laban for

seven years if he would give Rachel to him as his wife (verse 18). Laban agreed (verse 19).

Verses 16-17 tell us that Rachel was Laban's younger daughter. Her older daughter was Leah. Verse 17 tells us that Leah had "weak" eyes (New International Version). The word used to describe Leah's eyes literally means "tender." Some see here a reference to the fact that her eyes were very beautiful. While Leah may have had beautiful eyes, Rachel was beautiful all over. Jacob was attracted to Rachel and her beauty.

Jacob served seven years to get Rachel as his wife. His love for her was so strong, however, that these seven years seemed like only a few days. He felt she was worth every minute he had to work for her.

When the seven years were over, Jacob asked Laban for Rachel's hand in marriage (verse 21). Laban gave a great feast and invited the people of the region to join in the marriage celebration (verse 22).

When evening came, Laban gave Leah and her servant Zilpah to Jacob instead of Rachel. Jacob slept with Leah that night thinking she was Rachel. It was only in the morning that Laban's deception was discovered.

Jacob was angry with Laban and asked him why he had deceived him (verse 25). Laban told him that it was not their custom to marry the younger daughter before the older (verse 26), and proposed that Jacob finish the traditional bridal week with Leah and then he would give him Rachel as well. Laban's requirement, however, was that Jacob work another seven years to pay for Rachel (verse 27). After the bridal week was over, Laban gave Rachel and Bilhah her servant to Jacob (verses 28-29). Jacob

would work seven more years to cover his debt to Laban for Rachel (verse 30).

Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (verse 30). Despite the deception, God still expected Jacob to love and care for Leah and her needs. In fact, verse 31 tells us that God took special note of the fact that Leah was not loved. He opened Leah's womb and closed Rachel's so she could not have children. There are two important lessons here for us.

First, God has a tender heart toward those who are cast aside. He feels their hurt and desires to meet them in their need. God blessed Leah with a fruitful womb. For a woman at that time, the ability to bear children was a clear sign of God's blessing. God was showing Leah that He saw her and was concerned about her need for the love of her husband.

The second important lesson here is that God expects us to make the best of the situations we find ourselves in. It is true that Jacob had been deceived, but this did not remove his obligation toward Leah. Maybe you say, "I really didn't know what my wife was going to be like when I married her." God still expected Jacob to love Leah, even though he had been tricked into marrying her. There are many situations in life that we don't like. Sometimes things happen to us that we don't plan. What does God expect of us when these things happen? He expects us to make the best of those situations and trust Him.

Notice, in verse 32, that Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben. There was a very special reason why Leah gave her son this name. The name Reuben sounds like the Hebrew word for "he has seen my misery." Verse 32 tells us that Leah named her

son Reuben because she believed that the Lord God had seen the misery she experienced from not being loved. Her great desire now was that through this son, her husband Jacob would learn to love her (verse 32). We can feel Leah's pain here. She was experiencing great misery from her lack of love.

Leah gave birth to a second son by the name of Simeon. The name Simeon means "one who hears." She named him Simeon because she believed God had heard she was not loved and had given her this son to comfort her. Obviously, Reuben, the first son she gave Jacob, had not changed his heart toward her, and still her husband did not love her. God had heard that she was not loved and comforted her with this second child.

In verse 34, Leah bore a third son to Jacob. She named him Levi. This name sounds like the Hebrew word for "attached." Leah named him Levi saying: "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Once again we see evidence of Leah's deep desire. She longs that her husband would be "attached" to her. She is hoping that by giving him a third son, she would somehow win his heart.

The fourth son born to Leah was Judah. The name Judah sounds like the Hebrew for "praise." Whether Jacob loved her or not, Leah finally realized that the Lord God had not abandoned her. His hand of blessing was on her and for this she would thank and praise Him.

Ultimately this is where we all need to come. Leah's husband, Jacob, had been a big disappointment to her. She did not feel loved or respected. For years now she longed for his attention and affection but could not find it. His eyes



were for another. Through this time, Leah knew the blessing of God. She saw God give her four children. She knew that God saw her in her pain. While things did not change in her husband, she was able finally to give praise to the Lord for His goodness.

This world is filled with disappointments. People deceive and disappoint us. In the midst of these disappointments however, the hand of the Lord is powerfully at work. He calls us to trust Him and look to Him in these times. He will give us strength to accept the things we cannot change. If we open our eyes, we will see His great blessings even in the midst of our trials and sufferings. This was Leah's experience.

#### For Consideration:

- Have you ever been disappointed by people? What comfort do you find in the fact that God saw Leah's pain and suffering?
- Leah experienced tremendous blessing in the midst of her pain. God blessed her with four children. What blessings has the Lord been giving you in your suffering?
- We learn in this chapter that God expects us to make the best of the situations we find ourselves in. Have you been making the best of your situation?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to see His blessing in the midst of your trials.

- Ask God to teach you how to make the best of your present situation.
- Thank the Lord that He sees your pain and knows everything about it.
- Ask the Lord to help you to trust Him more in the trials that have come your way.



## **CHAPTER 28 -**

### **UNMERITED BLESSING**

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Read Genesis 30:1-24

One of the amazing things about the Lord God is that He uses ordinary people to accomplish His glorious plan. The people God uses are far from perfect. Even great saints have their faults. This becomes very clear in the story of Jacob and his family.

We have seen that Jacob was deceived on his wedding day. His father-in-law gave him his older daughter Leah instead of Rachel as his wife. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. God saw that Leah was unloved and blessed her with four sons.

When Rachel saw that she was not able to bear children, she became jealous of her sister Leah. Her struggle with being childless, especially when her sister had already given birth to four children, was too much for Rachel to carry. Notice in verse 1, how she blames Jacob for her problem. "Give me children, or I'll die!" she told him.

Obviously, the problem was not with Jacob. He had already fathered four children with Leah. How easy it is, in our pain, to put the blame on someone else. Rachel doesn't know where to turn. In her frustration, she lashes out at her husband.

What is particularly interesting in this passage is that Rachel does not turn to God in her time of need. She blames her husband and demands that he give her a child. Notice in verse 2 how Jacob became angry with Rachel. "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" he told her. Notice that Jacob turns Rachel's attention to God. He reminded her that God alone was able to give her a child.

Rachel did not seem to listen to Jacob's reminder. Instead of turning to God, Rachel took matters into her own hands, deciding to give her servant Bilhah to Jacob so she could have a child through her. The child born to Bilhah and Jacob would belong to Rachel. Jacob agreed to Rachel's arrangement. Maybe he wanted to please her. Maybe he saw her grief and jealousy and this was the easiest way to settle things between them.

Bilhah bore a son for Jacob and Rachel. Rachel named him Dan. The name Dan means "he has vindicated." The word vindicate is a strong word. In reality, what Rachel was saying was that God had taken up her cause and brought justice. She saw herself in a battle with her sister. The name of her son was the result of her intense jealousy against her sister who had already given Jacob four children.

In verses 7-8 we see that Bilhah bore Jacob a second son by the name of Naphtali. The name Naphtali means "my struggle." Rachel gave him this name because she said, "I

have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won" (verse 8). The bitterness between Rachel and Leah is very clear here.

Leah was quite involved in this battle with her sister as well. Because she had stopped bearing children herself, Leah gave her servant Zilpah to Jacob as a wife (verse 9) so that she could have children through her.

Jacob is in the middle of this tremendous conflict between his wives. Neither Rachel nor Leah seem to have the ability now to leave their situation in the hands of the Lord. They are engaged in an all-out battle with each other, with Jacob caught in the middle.

Jacob does not seem to do anything to stop this battle. He took Leah's servant Zilpah and slept with her. She gave birth to a son, Gad (verse 10). There is some debate over the meaning of the word Gad. The word comes from a Hebrew word meaning to "invade" or to "overcome." The King James Version tells us that she named her son Gad because she said a troop was coming. Other translations interpret the word to mean "good fortune." Imagine a city under siege. As the inhabitants of that city consider what to do, the news of friendly soldiers coming to their rescue spreads throughout the city. This is good news. Things are finally turning their way. This is the sense of what Leah is feeling now. She has been feeling under attack by her sister but now, through the birth of Gad, things were finally going her way.

In verse 12, Leah's servant Zilpah gave birth to a second son. Leah named him Asher. The name Asher means "happy." What is striking about this name is the reason why Leah was happy. "The women will call me happy," she said. The focus is not on her child. Her concern is how

other women would think of her. Because she had so many children, she believed that other women would look on her as being blessed by God.

The battle between Rachel and Leah soon spread to their children. During the wheat harvest, Leah's oldest son Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants. He brought these plants home to his mother. It was commonly believed at that time that if a woman ate the root of the mandrake plant it would help her to become pregnant.

Reuben was Leah's oldest child. We are not sure how old he was at this time. Leah now had six sons. This would have meant that Reuben was at least six years old, if not older. We need to ask ourselves an important question here. Why did Reuben bring these mandrake plants back to his mother? Did he believe that this plant could help his mother have another child? If so, was he aware of the tremendous battle that was taking place between his mother and Rachel? Was he trying to help his mother become pregnant? If so, we have evidence that the battle between Rachel and Leah is now affecting their children.

When Rachel heard that Reuben had given his mother the mandrake plants, she asked Leah for some (verse 14). Leah responds:

Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband?  
Will you take my son's mandrakes too? (verse 15)

Leah accused Rachel of taking away her husband. She blames his lack of love for her on her sister. Rachel told Leah, however, that she would agree to have Jacob sleep with her that night if she would give her the plants. Leah agreed. It is very likely that Leah would have taken some

of the mandrake plant herself and hoped that this would result in a pregnancy that night.

When Jacob came in from the field that evening, Leah went out to meet him. She told him what had happened and how she had "hired" him with Reuben's mandrakes (verse 16). Jacob slept with Leah that night.

Notice that verse 17 tells us that "God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant." This is very striking in light of how Leah was thinking. Leah believed that the mandrakes would make her pregnant. The truth of the matter, however, was that it was God who made her pregnant. God listened to Leah and opened her womb.

Notice in verse 18 that Leah named her son Issachar. Issachar means "reward." Leah believed that God was rewarding her for giving her servant Zilpah to Jacob. Leah believed that because God blessed her she must have done something right. This was simply not the case. She gave her servant Zilpah to Jacob out of jealousy. Rather than trust the Lord to provide her with a child, Leah took matters into her own hands.

Have you ever met individuals who think this way? They believe that because God blessed them they must have done something right. In reality, they are saying that God agrees with their sinful ways and His blessing on their lives is a proof of this. The reality is that God blesses us simply because He loves us. There have been times when I have not agreed with what my children were doing but I have not stopped caring for them. It may be possible for my children to think that because I still care for them, I must be agreeing with what they are doing, but this is simply not the case. God gives life to even the worst sinner. He does not abandon us when we turn from Him. This does not



mean that He agrees with our ways. Leah's assumption was that because God gave her a son, He must be rewarding her for her jealous actions. God blessed her because He loved her not because He agreed with her actions.

In verse 19, Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. She named this sixth son Zebulun. The name Zebulun means "honour." Again notice the focus in verse 20. Leah named her son Zebulun (honour) not because her son would be honoured but because she would be honoured. She believed that because she had given Jacob six sons, he would now finally treat her with honour as his wife. This shows us again Leah's focus is on herself.

Sometime later, Leah gave birth to a daughter. This daughter was called Dinah. In Genesis 34, we read how Dinah was raped by Shechem, the Hivite, causing her brothers to massacre the inhabitants of the entire city.

God also remembered Rachel. In verses 22-23, He opened her womb and gave her another son. She named this son Joseph. Joseph means "may he add." Rachel named Joseph this saying, "May the LORD add to me another son."

Is it not striking that Rachel would name her son Joseph. Instead of being content with the son God had given her, she longs for another. Like Leah, her focus does not seem to be on God and being content with what He gave. Instead she seems to be caught up in this constant battle with her sister.

Consider Jacob's family for a moment. His twelve sons would become the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob was a respected man in Israel yet his family was a mess. His wives seemed to be constantly fighting each

other. They show a lack of faith and trust in God. The children born to Jacob bore names that testified to the jealousy, anger and bitterness of Jacob's wives and his inability to resolve the conflict. The nation of Israel and its twelve tribes was born through conflict. While Jacob's family situation left much to be desired, there is one thing above all else that is absolutely sure. His family was blessed by God. They did not deserve or merit this blessing. However, despite their shortcomings and failures, they were the object of God's tremendous love and attention. As God's people we, too, are the object of that great love.

For Consideration:

- Describe the relationship between Jacob's wives. What would it have been like to live in this household?
- Notice how Rachel blamed Jacob for not giving her a child. Have you ever blamed other people for your own shortcomings and sin? Explain.
- Jacob's wives seemed to take matters into their own hands by trusting their servants and the maids to give them children. They did not seem to be able to keep their focus on God. Do you have a problem trusting God?
- Jacob's children bore the scars of the conflict between their mothers in the names that were given to them. How do our children bear the scars of our shortcomings and sins?
- Leah believed God blessed her because she did good. Why does God bless us?

For Prayer:

- Are you in a relationship that is strained? Ask God to help you to make the best of that relationship.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart and forgive you for the times you have blamed other people for your own problems.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to bless us even when we do not deserve that blessing.
- Thank the Lord for the way He has used you despite your shortcomings and failures.
- Take a moment to pray for your family. Ask God to heal your hurts and increase love and acceptance in your family.

## **CHAPTER 29 -**

### **JACOB BECOMES WEALTHY**

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Read Genesis 30:25-43

In the previous section of chapter 30, we caught a glimpse of Jacob's family life and the battle that was taking place between his wives. As we move into the final section of this chapter, we see that God continued to bless Jacob and his family despite their many shortcomings.

Jacob's family was becoming quite large. He had now been in Haran for a number of years. It was after the birth of Joseph that Jacob decided it was time to leave Laban and return to the land of his mother and father. Jacob knew that God had promised him the land of Canaan. His future was not in Haran.

In verse 25, he approached Laban and asked for permission to take his family and return to his homeland. Laban did not want to lose Jacob and his daughters. Jacob had worked hard for him all these years. Notice in verse 27 that Laban had discovered through divination (magic arts) that he had been blessed because of Jacob's presence. Laban

did not want to lose that blessing. How much blessing does our presence bring to those around us?

Because he did not want to lose Jacob, Laban offered to pay him whatever he would ask to stay and work with him (verse 28). Thinking about this for a moment, Jacob came up with a plan.

In verse 29, Jacob reminded Laban of how he had taken care of his livestock. When Jacob arrived in the land, Laban only had a small herd. Under Jacob's care, the herd had increased greatly. God increased Laban's wealth because of Jacob. Jacob told Laban that he now needed to do something for himself and his own family (verse 30).

Jacob asked for permission to go through Laban's flocks and take any ram that was speckled, spotted or any sheep that was dark coloured (verse 32). These he would keep for himself. Jacob told Laban that any goat or sheep that was not speckled, spotted or dark in color would be considered stolen (verse 33). Laban agreed. As most of the sheep and goats would have been single-coloured, this request would not likely have been a hardship to Laban. This did, however, give Jacob his own flock. Up to that point he had only cared for Laban's herd. Now he would also have to care for his own. This was the first step in gaining independence from Laban.

That day, Jacob went through Laban's herd and removed all the goats that were speckled or spotted and all the dark-coloured lambs. He gave his sons charge over these animals and put a three-day's journey between his speckled and spotted flock and Laban's single-coloured flock. Jacob's sons took care of the family's new herd while he continued to tend Laban's flocks.

While tending the flock of Laban, Jacob took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and peeled them in such a way that he left white stripes running down the length of the branch (verse 37). He placed these branches in the watering troughs so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the animals were in heat they mated in front of these branches. The young born to them were speckled, streaked or spotted (verse 39). Jacob would set them apart for himself. It is uncertain what benefit these branches had in producing an offspring that was born with streaks and spots. It is interesting to note, however, in Genesis 31:9-12 that Jacob had a dream about God giving him speckled sheep in repayment for all the hardship Laban had caused him:

In breeding season, I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.'

What is clear is that the Lord blessed and gave these animals to Jacob. It is possible that the Lord also told Jacob to put these branches in the water as a means of fulfilling his promise to him.

Notice, in verse 41, that whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the streaked branches in front of them (verse 41). He did not do this for the weaker females (verse 42). The result was that the stronger animals mated and produced a strong offspring that was spotted and speckled. It was by this means that Jacob herd

increased in size. Verse 43 tells us that Jacob became "exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks."

While Jacob wanted to leave Laban, God had not finished what He wanted to do in him. As Jacob waited for the right time, the Lord prepared him by providing him with great wealth in sheep and livestock. Sometimes what appears to be a delay or obstacle is in reality the Lord's way of protecting us or preparing us for the next step He wants us to take.

For Consideration:

- Do you believe Jacob was being deceptive in this passage? Did he increase in wealth because of his own evil scheming or did God bless him with this wealth?
- What do we learn about God's timing? How does God prepare Jacob for leaving Laban in this passage?
- Have you ever had to wait on God's timing? How did God use that time to prepare or better equip you for what was ahead?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He sees the evil done to us and will reward our faithfulness in His time.
- Ask the Lord to help you to wait on His timing in your life.
- Thank the Lord that His timing is perfect. Ask Him to help you to trust Him as you wait on Him.

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His blessings in your life.





## **CHAPTER 30 -**

### **CONFLICT BETWEEN**

### **LABAN AND JACOB**

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Read Genesis 31:1-55

Over the course of time, God blessed Jacob with tremendous wealth. This did not go unnoticed. The time came when Laban's sons began to complain about how Jacob was gaining wealth at Laban's expense (verse 1). Jacob also noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was changing (verse 2). It may be that Laban felt Jacob was taking advantage of him. This increasing tension would have made it more difficult for Jacob to stay in the land.

It was at this time that the Lord God spoke to Jacob and told him to return to the land of his fathers (verse 3). God promised Jacob that he would be with him as he went. Notice that God led Jacob not only by speaking to him but also through the circumstances that he was facing. The bitterness of Laban and his sons toward Jacob was also part of the Lord's way of showing Jacob that it was now time for him to leave the region.

Jacob spoke to his wives about a move. He told his wives that Laban's attitude toward him had changed. He reminded them that while Laban's attitude was changing, the God of his fathers had never forsaken him. Jacob had worked hard for their father but Laban had changed his wages ten times. Despite Laban's efforts to cheat him, God continued to bless him so that his flocks increased in number (verses 8-9).

Jacob told his wives about a dream he had in which the Lord spoke to him. He saw the flocks in breeding season. The streaked, speckled and spotted male goats were mating with the flock. In the dream, an angel of the Lord told Jacob that he had seen what Laban had done to him (verse 12). Jacob understood the Lord to be telling him that his spotted herd would increase in number because of how Laban had cheated him. God would repay him for his faithful service to Laban.

God also reminded Jacob of a vow he had made in Bethel when he first came to the land of Haran. There in Bethel, Jacob had a vision of a ladder going up to heaven with angels ascending and descending. Jacob promised God that if he prospered on his journey, he would build an altar on that spot and worship him (see Genesis 28:11-22). God told him that it was now time for him to leave and fulfill that vow (verse 13).

When Rachel and Leah recognized that what Jacob said was true they expressed their agreement with Jacob about leaving.

Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. Surely all the wealth that God

took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you (verses 14-16).

Rachel and Leah realized that there was now a distance between their father and themselves. Not only had he been cheating them, but he had also been treating them as foreigners. They felt no particular attachment to the land of Laban. They were ready to leave with Jacob.

Notice that God is preparing the way for Jacob to leave. Prior to this, Jacob and his family were not ready. His family did not have sufficient wealth to sustain them on such a journey. His wives were not ready to leave nor was Laban ready to let them go. As Jacob waited on God's timing, God prepared the way. Now everything was in place. Jacob put his children and wives on camels and drove his livestock ahead of him. He packed up the goods he had accumulated and set out for the land of Canaan (verse 18).

Notice in verse 19 that before leaving, Rachel stole her father's household gods. This shows us something important. It shows us that Laban and his family worshipped other gods. They were not devoted to the Lord God of Abraham. It also shows us that Rachel herself honoured the gods of her father Laban. Obviously, she stole these gods because she wanted them with her on the journey and in her new home.

Verse 20 tells us that when Jacob and his family left, they did so secretly without telling Laban. They crossed the Euphrates River and headed in the direction of the hill country of Gilead (verse 21). Not until three days later did Laban discover that Jacob and his family had left the region (verse 22). After seven days of pursuit, Laban caught up with Jacob in Gilead (verse 23). It is unclear what Laban's

intentions were at this point but as he pursued Jacob, the Lord God appeared to him in a dream and warned him about speaking either good or bad about Jacob and his family (verse 24). This may be an indication that Laban was very angry with Jacob and his daughters.

When Laban met Jacob he asked him why he had deceived him by taking his daughters like captives in war (verse 26). He seems to be accusing Jacob of taking his daughters from him by force. He told him that he should have told him that they were leaving so that he could have sent them off with joy and singing (verse 27). He accused him of doing a very foolish thing (verse 28).

Laban reminded Jacob that he had the power to harm him but God has warned him about doing or saying anything good or bad to Jacob. It is hard to say what Laban would have done had God not warned him in that dream. Laban had enough respect for God that he was unwilling to harm Jacob. He did accuse him, however, of stealing his household gods (verse 30).

Jacob responded by telling Laban that they had left in secret because they were afraid that he would take his daughters from him by force. With regards to his household gods, Jacob knew nothing. He challenged Laban to search out his camp to see if they had taken anything that belonged to him. Jacob did not know that Rachel had taken these gods (verse 32).

Laban searched Jacob's tent, Leah's tent and the tents of their two servants but found nothing (verse 33). When he entered Rachel's tent, he found her sitting on a camel's saddle. Unknown to him, Rachel had hid the idols inside the saddle. When her father searched everywhere else,

Rachel told him that she was having her monthly period and could not stand up (verse 35). In those days anything a woman on her monthly period sat on was considered unclean (see Leviticus 15:20).

Laban was unwilling to search the saddle because of what Rachel had told him. He would certainly not have expected that Rachel would have defiled the household gods in this way, so he left the tent.

When Laban returned empty-handed, Jacob was angry with him. He asked him in the presence of his relatives what his crime was that he would hunt him down like a criminal (verse 36). He then asked Laban to produce any evidence that he had stolen from him (verse 37).

Jacob reminded Laban that had been with him for twenty years (verse 38). During that time, his sheep had been well cared for. Jacob reminded Laban of how he had also worked fourteen years for his wives and another six years for his flock. During that time, Laban had changed his wages ten times (verse 41). If God had not been with him, Jacob would have been sent away empty-handed (verse 42).

Laban justified his actions by telling Jacob that the women were his daughters and their children were his grandchildren. Even the flocks were his flocks. He claimed that everything Jacob had belonged to him. In saying this, he did not seem to recognize that Jacob had worked hard to pay for these wives and flocks.

Laban told Jacob in verse 43 that there was nothing he could do about taking these women, children and flocks back. He may be referring to the dream he had warning

him not to touch Jacob. Laban realized that God had taken all these things from him and given them to Jacob.

Laban proposed that the two men make a covenant (verse 44). Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. He told his relatives to gather stones and pile them in a heap. When they had done this, they sat down by the heap and had a meal together (verse 46). Laban called that place Jegar Sahadutha which, in the Aramaic language, means "witness heap." Jacob called it Galeed, which in the Hebrew language means the same thing (verse 47). The place where they piled the stones was also called Mizpah meaning "watchtower" because Laban had told them that the Lord God would watch over them when they were apart from each other (verse 49).

That day, Laban told Jacob that the pile of stones was a witness between them (verse 48). The Lord God would judge Jacob if he mistreated his daughters or took any other wife besides them (verse 50). Laban expected that Jacob would dedicate his life to caring for his daughters alone.

That pillar was a witness between them. They promised never to pass this pillar with intent to harm each other. Jacob then offered a sacrifice to the Lord God and, in a gesture of good friendship, invited his relatives to eat and spend the night with them (verse 54).

In the morning, Laban rose, kissed his grandchildren and daughters, blessed them and returned to his home (verse 55). With this, Jacob and his family were officially released to go the land of Canaan where God would establish them and make of them a great nation.

## For Consideration:

- Consider the jealousy that arose in the hearts of Laban's sons. Have you ever felt jealous because God chose to bless someone else?
- \*What do we learn about God's timing? What evidence do we have that it was time for Jacob and his family to leave? How important is it that we wait on God's timing in our lives?
- Consider the example of Jacob who worked hard even when he was unappreciated. Have you ever felt unappreciated and taken advantage of? What does Jacob's example teach you?
- Consider Rachel. What do we learn about her faith in this chapter? What do we learn about her honesty? What does this tell us about her as a person?
- God's blessing was on Jacob despite the fact that Rachel had brought stolen, pagan gods into His camp. What does this tell us about God's patience and mercy?

## For Prayer:

- Have you ever found yourself being jealous of God's blessing in the lives of other people? Ask him to forgive you and help you to rejoice in what he is doing in their lives.
- Ask God to help you to be willing to wait on Him and his timing in your life and ministry.
- Ask God to give you more of Jacob's character that was willing to work hard even when unappreciated. Thank God that He sees your faithfulness even when others don't.



- Thank God that He still blesses us when we have fallen short of his standards.

## **CHAPTER 31 - JACOB ARRIVES IN THE LAND**

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Read Genesis 32:1-33:20

Jacob, in obedience to the word of the Lord, left Laban and set out for his homeland. God promised to be with him. It should be remembered that when Jacob left his homeland about twenty years prior to this, his brother Esau had vowed to kill him for stealing his blessing. This was on Jacob's mind as he returned.

As Jacob began his journey, verse 1 of chapter 32 tells us that the angels of God met him. This encounter so touched Jacob that he decided to name the place of the encounter, Mahanaim which literally means "two camps." He named it this because he said, "This is the camp of God." Many years prior to this encounter with the angels of God, Jacob had a vision where he saw angels of God ascending and descending a ladder to heaven. God showed him through that vision that angels would watch over him. We see the fulfillment of God's promise here in verse 2. The visitation

of these angels would have been a real encouragement to Jacob after his encounter with Laban in the last chapter.

Knowing the presence of God was with him, Jacob sent his messengers ahead to meet his brother Esau and let him know of his arrival. This was a bold move on Jacob's part in light of Esau's vow to kill him (see Genesis 27:41).

Jacob instructed his servants in Genesis 32:4-5 to tell Esau that he had been staying with Laban these past years. God had prospered him with cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats, and servants. He was now informing Esau of his presence in the hopes that he would find favour in his sight. God had called Jacob to return to his homeland. If he was to obey the Lord, however, and remain in this land, he was going to have to make things right with his brother. Returning to Canaan was not without its risk. God had promised to protect him, however, and he trusted this promise as he sought to make things right with his brother.

Perhaps you have found yourself in a similar situation. Before you can do what God has called you to do, you need to deal with your sins. This is what God is asking Jacob to do here. He had stolen his brother's blessing by deceit. Now he is facing the person he has offended and seeking reconciliation.

When Jacob's messengers returned, they told him that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred soldiers (Genesis 32:6). This news troubled Jacob. He believed the worst. Why would Esau take four hundred soldiers to meet him? Was he going to fulfill his vow to kill him? Genesis 32:7 tells us that Jacob felt great fear and distress at this news.

Believing that Esau was coming to him with hostile intent, Jacob divided his family into two groups. He did the same with his flocks, herds and camels. Jacob's intention was to protect his family. If Esau attacked one group the other could flee to save their lives (32:8).

Notice that Jacob also prayed. This says something about his relationship with God. It would have been easy for Jacob to take matters into his own hands without seeking God. Many men and women before and after him have done just that. Jacob, however, knew that he needed God. Notice his prayer in Genesis 32:9-12.

Jacob began his prayer by reminding God that He had called him to this land. Not only had God called him, but He had also promised to make him prosper. Jacob claimed those promises and held God accountable to His word.

Notice also that Jacob recognized his unworthiness of the kindness and faithfulness of God. When he crossed the Jordan River and went to live with Laban, he had nothing but his staff. God had blessed him and given him great wealth. He recognized God's wonderful grace and mercy in his life. He knew he didn't deserve any of God's blessings. Despite his unworthiness, Jacob still called out to God. He reminded God of His promise to make his descendants as numerous as the sand of the sea (32:12).

This prayer is important in what it shows us about the mercy and compassion of God to unworthy sinners. Jacob was unworthy. He had deceived his brother and was the cause of his brother's intense anger against him. He had stolen his blessing and birthright. At the same time, however, Jacob knew God's call on his life. Here in this prayer, he has the courage to seek God's mercy to fulfill his calling.

Who among us has not been in this situation? Though unworthy of God's mercy, we have been called of God to be His instruments in this world. May we have the courage to ask for strength and blessing to fulfill that calling.

That night Jacob sought the Lord God and His favour. The next day he selected a gift for his brother. Jacob set apart 200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 female camels with their young, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys and 10 male donkeys (32:14-15). His gift showed that he knew he was guilty and was sincerely trying to make things right.

Jacob sent his servants ahead with instructions. He told them to leave a space between the herds (32:16). He told the servant in the lead that when he met Esau and was asked about the animals, he was to tell him that they belonged to Jacob but were being sent to Esau as a gift (32:17-18). He was also to tell Esau that Jacob was coming behind.

Jacob then instructed the second and third servants to say the same thing. His intention was to pacify Esau with his gifts in the hope that he would be received favourably (32:20).

As his servants traveled to meet Esau with his gift, Jacob himself spent the night in the camp (32:21). That night Jacob got up, took his two wives and their servants as well as his eleven sons and sent them across the Jabbok ford. He also had their possessions sent over. Jacob remained alone on the other side of the stream.

Genesis 32:24 tells us that a man wrestled with Jacob until daybreak. The man could not overpower Jacob, but in the

course of wrestling with him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip and hurt it (32:25).

Though hurt, Jacob continued to wrestle. At one point, the man cried out, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." Jacob refused to let him go, however, insisting that he bless him before he left (32:26).

The man asked Jacob his name. Jacob told him. He then told Jacob that his name from that time forward would be Israel because he had struggled with God and with men and had overcome (32:28). The name Israel literally means "struggles with God." This would prove to be true of the nation that would come from Jacob.

When Jacob asked the man his name, the man did not tell him, saying, "Why do you ask my name?" Instead, the man blessed Jacob and left.

Jacob realized that he had been wrestling with an angel of God. He called the name of that place Peniel meaning "face of God" because he said, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

When the sun rose that morning, Jacob was limping from the wound in the hip (32:31). From that point onward the Israelites would refuse to eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip as a reminder of what had happened to Israel (Jacob) (32:32).

On a basic level this is a picture of Jacob's struggle with God. Notice in this passage that Jacob was trying to solve his problem with his brother by paying him with sheep and cattle. He also arranged his family so that they could escape if Esau attacked. From a human perspective this

made sense. The reality of the matter, however, was that God had promised to protect him and make him a great nation. Jacob still took matters into his own hands and struggled to believe what God had promised.

The passage tells us that Jacob overcame God. How is it possible to overcome God? Notice that the angel simply touched Jacob's hip and hurt him. This shows us how easy it would have been for God to defeat Jacob. This was not his intent, however. God wanted Jacob to win this battle. It was never the intention of the angel to defeat Jacob. He wanted to give Jacob victory. He wanted Jacob to overcome the hindrances that kept him from taking the next step in God's plan. By wrestling with God in these things, Jacob was being strengthened and prepared for what was ahead.

Finally, notice that the real battle Jacob fought was a spiritual one. His battle was ultimately not with his brother but with God in prayer. Victory would not come for him in human strength and wisdom but rather in submission to God and His purposes.

We see the result of this wrestling with God in chapter 33. Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his army of four hundred men (33:1). He divided his children among Leah, Rachel and their servants. He put the servants with their children in the front of the line, Leah and her children were next and finally Rachel and Joseph were in the rear (33:2). This seems to show us something about his relationship with his wives. Rachel was the most protected. If Esau decided to attack, she would have had the greatest opportunity to escape. Jacob went ahead of his wives to meet his brother. As he approached Esau, Jacob bowed down to the ground seven times (33:3). This was an act of

humility that showed his respect and submission to his brother.

When Esau saw Jacob, he ran to meet him and embraced him, throwing his arms around him, kissing him and weeping (33:4). In Jacob's mind this must have been a clear answer to his prayers and wrestling with God.

When Esau looked up and saw the women and children coming toward him, he asked Jacob about them. Jacob told him that they were the children God had given to him. Notice in Genesis 33:5 that Jacob called himself Esau's servant.

Each of the maidservants came with their children and bowed down to Esau as a sign of respect. Leah then approached with her children and bowed. Finally Rachel did the same (33:7). The whole family is careful to show Esau great respect.

Esau then asked about the animals he had met on the way. Jacob told him that they were intended as a gift to him in order that he might find favour in his eyes. Esau told him that he did not have need of these animals and offered to give them back to Jacob (33:9). Jacob refused to take them back, however. He told Esau that seeing his face was like seeing the face of God now that he had received him favourably. In other words, Esau's response to him was a work of God. He saw the hand of God in how Esau had received him. That alone was worth the cost of all these animals. Hearing this, Esau accepted the gift (33:11).

Esau offered to accompany Jacob and his family to their home. Jacob was unwilling to accept his offer saying that the children were young and unable to handle the long journey. He also needed to care for his animals because



some of them were nursing their young. He could not drive them hard lest they die. He told Esau to go ahead and he would move at a slower pace. He told Esau that he would meet him in Seir (33:14). When Esau left with his men, however, Jacob set out for Succoth.

In Succoth, Jacob built a place for himself and shelters for his livestock. The name Succoth, literally means "shelters." He would eventually camp within sight of the city of Shechem. He bought a piece of property for a hundred pieces of silver in that region and there he would settle with his family (33:19). Setting up an altar there on the land he named it El Elohe Israel which means "mighty is the God of Israel." This was in recognition of God's wonderful blessing and protection as he returned to the land of Canaan.

#### For Consideration:

- Jacob, while called of God to return to his homeland, needed first to deal with a broken relationship with his brother. Are there things that you need to deal with before you can fulfill God's purpose for your life?
- Notice in these chapters how the Lord God used His angels to encourage and strengthen Jacob in his time of need. Does God strengthen and protect us by means of his angels today?
- The battle for Jacob was not so much with his brother as it was in prayer with God. How important is prayer in your ministry and personal life?

- Have you ever felt unworthy of God's blessing? Jacob, though unworthy, still received God's blessing. What does this tell us about God's mercy?
- Have you been content with too little in your spiritual life? What does Jacob's wrestling with God teach us about seeking God for victory over what appears to be impossible?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you courage to face sins in your life that hinder you from accomplishing the ministry He has for you.
- Thank the Lord that, while you are unworthy of His tender mercies, He is willing to shower them on you anyway.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have been unwilling to wrestle more blessing in your life and ministry.
- When Jacob's journey was finally over, he built an altar to worship the Lord. What do you have to thank the Lord for today? Take a moment to consider the blessings God has given you. Take a moment to thank Him for those blessings.



## **CHAPTER 32 -**

### **JACOB'S DAUGHTER**

### **DINAH IS RAPED**

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Read Genesis 34:1-31

Jacob had a daughter through his wife Leah. Her name was Dinah (Genesis 30:21). In verse 1, we read that Dinah went out to visit the women of the land (verse 1). We are not told why Dinah wanted to visit the women of the land. It may be that like any young person of our day, she was looking for friends and acceptance.

One day, a young man by the name of Shechem saw her. He was the son of Hamor the Hivite ruler. Shechem raped Dinah (verse 2). Shechem was attracted to Dinah and he loved her. He decided that he wanted to marry her so he spoke to his father about getting her as his wife (verse 4).

We are not told how much time has passed between when Shechem raped Dinah and his approaching his father to have her as his wife. We understand from verse 26, however, that after being raped by Shechem, Dinah was kept at his home and did not return to her family. Verse 3 tells

us that Shechem spoke tenderly to her; obviously seeking to calm her pain and win her heart.

Hamor, Shechem's father came to visit Jacob. He told him the news and asked for him to give Dinah to his son as his wife. Jacob delayed his decision until his sons returned from working in the field (verse 5). When they returned Hamor was speaking with Jacob. When they heard what had happened to their sister, they were filled with grief and fury (verse 7).

Hamor understood their anger and tried to calm them by telling them that Shechem loved Dinah and wanted to marry her (verse 8). He proposed that they intermarry with his people and take their women for their wives (verse 9). He told them that they could live in the land, trade in it and buy property (verse 10).

Shechem was also present on that occasion. He pleaded with Jacob to let him have Dinah as his wife. He told him that he would give him anything he asked for her to be his wife (verses 11-12).

The Lord God had already told His people that they were not to intermarry with the Canaanites lest they tempt them and draw them away from Him and His purposes. Notice in verse 13, that Jacob's sons spoke to Shechem about his request. They told Shechem that, according to their custom and culture, it was a disgrace to give their sister to an uncircumcised man (verse 14). They could only allow Dinah to marry him if he and all his men consent to be circumcised just like them (verse 15). If he did not comply with this requirement, they would take their sister and go (verse 17). What Shechem did not see was the evil purposes of Jacob's sons to destroy him and his people.

The proposal seemed good to Shechem (verse 18). He lost no time returning to his land to speak with the men of his city (verse 19). Notice that Shechem was quite willing to submit to circumcision because "he was delighted with Jacob's daughter." This is important. There are a number of reasons why people will join a church or be baptized. Shechem did not submit to circumcision out of devotion to the God of Israel, he did so to gain a wife. The same is true today. People will join a church or submit to Christian baptism sometimes because of what they can get out of it for themselves.

According to verse 20, Hamor and his son Shechem went to the city gate to speak to the townsmen. The city gate was where the leaders of the town met to discuss matters pertaining to the city. Hamor and Shechem reminded the men of the city that there was plenty of land for both nations. They also told them they could marry with the daughters of Israel and that their livestock and property would become theirs. All they needed to do was to be circumcised. There was much to gain for Hamor's people. Jacob and his sons were very wealthy. Hamor's people saw how much they could benefit by joining with Israel and agreed to be circumcised (verse 24).

Three days later, when all the men were still in pain and healing from their wounds, Simeon and Levi took their swords and attacked the city. They killed every male including Hamor and Shechem and took Dinah and brought her back home (verse 26). Before returning home, Simeon and Levi stripped the dead bodies and looted the city (verse 27). They also took the flocks, herds and donkeys that belonged to the people of Shechem and carried them off with their women and children (verses 28-29). The entire city was wiped out through the deception of Jacob's sons.

Jacob was angry when he heard what Simeon and Levi had done. He told them in verse 30:

You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.

Jacob now feared for his life because of what his sons had done. He feared that the surrounding cities would hear what had happened and join forces to attack them. Jacob's sons, however, were unrepentant. They insisted that Shechem had no right to treat their sister like a prostitute.

We see the deception of Jacob's sons in this passage. Notice also, however, that Jacob's sons do not seek God in this matter of Dinah's rape. They act out of revenge, anger and bitterness of heart. They justify their actions by saying that Shechem had mistreated their sister. Their own actions, however, were no better than the crime committed by Shechem. The men of the city were massacred by Simeon and Levi. There was no forgiveness extended by God's people, only anger, legalism and self-righteous justification of the slaughter of an entire city.

We live in a sinful world. Terrible things happen even to believers and their children. The question we need to ask ourselves in this passage is what will we do when evil happens to us? Will we turn to the Lord God and trust Him to act on our behalf? Or will we respond in bitterness with an unforgiving attitude? Countless believers today are living with an unforgiving and angry spirit because of something that has happened to them or their family. As in the case of Jacob's sons, their attitude, and the words and actions it produces, often does more damage than the hurt that

gave birth to it in the first place. For the rape of their sister, an entire city was slaughtered. We are left to wonder whose sin was greater before God, Shechem or Jacob's sons.

Unless we are careful to surrender our attitudes to God and submit to Him, we too can become guilty of sin. There is probably no greater testimony to the world than the testimony of a believer who responds with a Christ-like attitude when unjustly treated or wounded. May God teach us the lesson of this chapter and give us grace to respond with a Christ-like attitude when evil happens to us.

#### For Consideration:

- Consider how Dinah was tempted to go to the unbelieving women of the surrounding nations. Have you ever found yourself tempted by the world in this way?
- Consider how Jacob's sons deceived Shechem and Hamor. Deception was a character trait of Jacob. How much of our character traits are passed on to our children? Do you see yourself in your children or those around you?
- What was the response of Jacob's sons to the news about their sister? What should have been their response? Have you ever been hurt by someone? What was your response?
- The sin of God's people may have been as bad as the sin committed against them yet they justified their actions. It is possible that our reaction to an offense is worse than the sin committed against us?



- Can believers try to excuse their sin by claiming it was for a just cause?
- Shechem and Hamor were more than willing to submit to circumcision in order to gain wealth for themselves. Why do people become “believers” today?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray for the youth of your region who like Dinah are tempted by the attractions of the unbelieving world. Ask God to protect them.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be a godly example for your children to follow.
- Ask the Lord God to examine your heart and show you any wrong attitude you might have toward those who have hurt or offended you.
- Ask God to forgive you for justifying your sin like Simeon and Levi in this passage.

## **CHAPTER 33 -**

### **THE FAMILY GOD USED**

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Read Genesis 35:1-29

In chapter 34, we saw how Simeon and Levi had massacred the inhabitants of Shechem after their sister Dinah had been raped. This action caused their father Jacob to become very fearful of staying in the region. Speaking to his sons in Genesis 34:30 he said:

You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.

It was in this context that the Lord God spoke to Jacob and told him to leave the region and settle in Bethel. Bethel was the place where Jacob had met God when he was fleeing from his brother Esau (see Genesis 28:10-17). It was here that he saw a vision of a ladder to heaven with the angels of God moving from heaven to earth. Jacob promised God that, if He gave him success on his journey, he would build an altar for Him in that place.

Notice that in preparation for this move to Bethel, Jacob told his family to get rid of the foreign gods they had with them and purify themselves (verse 2). For Jacob, Bethel was a very sacred place. God had met him there in a powerful way. The Lord God he met there had blessed him abundantly. Out of respect for God, Jacob requests that his family deal with their sin.

While it was right for Jacob to deal with the sins in his family as he prepared to go to Bethel, these sins should have been dealt with long before this. The fact that Jacob asks his family to get rid of their gods shows us that he knew about them but had done nothing about it until that day.

In response to Jacob's request, the family gave all their foreign gods and the rings they had in their ears to him (verse 4). The reference here to the rings in their ears is significant. The mention of the rings in this context implies that had some religious significance. Because they were brought at the same time as the gods, these rings may have been part of a pagan superstition. It is striking to see this practice in Jacob's family. Their trust is not completely in the Lord God but also in their pagan gods. Their faith in God is compromised. Jacob's family listened to him however, and surrendered their pagan religious objects. Jacob took these articles and buried them under an oak tree in Shechem.

Notice the result of dealing with these foreign gods (verse 5). As they set out for Bethel, the terror of God fell on all the towns around them so that no one pursued them. Remember that Simeon and Levi had massacred the inhabitants of Shechem. The people of that region would have been very angry about this and eager to seek revenge. God protected them, however, and terror filled the minds

and hearts of the people in that region. Jacob and his family arrived safely in Bethel under the protection and blessing of God (verse 6).

The grace of the Lord God is powerfully evident in these verses. Jacob was a deceiver. Simeon and Levi had massacred the inhabitants of Shechem. Rachel had stolen her father's household idols. There is clear evidence that the family was worshipping foreign gods. Despite these facts, God continued to bless Jacob and his family. He kept him from the wrath of his brother Esau. Now He protected them from the anger of the inhabitants of the land after Simeon and Levi's bloody rampage. Jacob did not deserve this wonderful mercy of God yet God blessed him anyway. When Jacob and his family arrived in Bethel, Jacob fulfilled his promise to the Lord and built an altar to Him (verse 7).

While in the region of Bethel, Deborah, Jacob's mother's nurse, died. She was buried under an oak tree in Bethel. They named that tree Allon Bacuth which means, "Tree of Weeping."

In verse 9, the Lord God again appeared to Jacob and blessed him. Notice in verses 10-12 the promises of God to Jacob.

God begins in verse 10 by telling Jacob that his name would be called Israel. The name Jacob means "he grasps the heel." The name Israel means "he struggles with God."

God promised Jacob that He would increase his number and make of him a great nation (verse 11). Kings would be born in his line. God also promised to give him the land He had sworn to give his grandfather Abraham (verse 12). While God had already made these promises to Jacob (Israel) he reminds him of them once again.

Jacob built a stone pillar in Bethel. He poured a drink offering and oil over the pillar to dedicate it to the Lord (verse 14). The place where God met Jacob was locally known as Luz (verse 6) but Jacob called it Bethel meaning "house of God."

Jacob and his family moved from the region of Bethel. When they were in the region of Ephrath (later called Bethlehem) Rachel died while giving birth to a son. Before she died Rachel named her son Ben-Oni. This name means "son of my trouble," a reference to how much trouble Rachel had in giving him birth. Jacob renamed him Benjamin, however, meaning "son of my right hand," a name signifying his father's particular favour toward him (verse 18). Rachel was buried in Ephrath (Bethlehem) where Jacob erected a pillar over her tomb to honour her (verses 19-20).

From Bethlehem, Jacob and his family moved to Migdal Eder (verse 21). While living in that region, Reuben slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine (verse 22). Commenting on 1 Kings 2:22, The New International Bible Study Notes says:

Possession of the royal harem was widely regarded as signifying the right of succession to the throne.

(Notes on 1 Kings 2:22, NIV Study Bible Notes, Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan, 2004)

Reuben was Jacob's firstborn through his wife Leah. By sleeping with his father's concubine, it appears that Reuben was making a statement to his family. He was claiming his right as the first born child. His actions however, turned against him. In 1 Chronicles 5:1 we read:

The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright.

For sleeping with his father's concubine, Reuben would lose his status as firstborn. This status would be given to Joseph's sons.

Altogether Jacob had twelve sons. Leah gave him six sons. Rachel, his favourite wife gave him two sons. The other children were born to Leah and Rachel's maid servants. Jacob would bury his 180 year old father Isaac in Mamre. Jacob's large family and Isaac's old age at death were clear indications of the blessing of God on this family.

In this chapter, we see how God reaffirmed His promise to bless Jacob and make a great nation from him. Jacob's family was far from perfect. Jacob was a liar and a deceiver. His wife Rachel was a thief and idol worshipper. Leah and Rachel lived with constant bitterness and jealousy toward each other. Simeon and Levi were self-righteous murderers. Reuben was an adulterer who slept with his own father's concubine. The family worshipped foreign gods. Despite these horrible realities, God chose to use them and blessed them. The chapter speaks about the patience and mercy of God in dealing with men and women who so easily wandered from Him.

For Consideration:

- What sins do we know about in the family of Jacob? What should we understand from the fact that God blessed this family?
- God called Jacob to meet with Him in Bethel. This caused Jacob to deal with the sins in his family. Why do you suppose Jacob did not deal with these sins before this? What particular sins do you need to deal with?
- God renewed His promises to Jacob in this chapter. What promises of God mean a lot to you today?
- Are the blessings of God merited? Does God bless us because we deserve His blessings? Why does God bless us?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to ask God to show you anything in your life that does not bring Him glory.
- Ask God to give you victory over a particular sin in your life. Ask Him to give you victory so that you can walk in truth and godliness.
- What promises of God have been particularly meaningful to you? Thank the Lord that though we have often failed Him, He continues to bless us.

## CHAPTER 34 -

### ESAU'S FAMILY

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Read Genesis 36:1-43

We have seen over the course of the last few chapters how the Lord God blessed Jacob and his family despite their many shortcomings. In chapter 36, we read about Esau, his family and the land the Lord had given him.

Chapter 36 begins with an account of the wives of Esau. Notice that he is also referred to here by the name Edom. Genesis 25:30 tells us why Esau received this name. On one occasion after coming home from a hunt, Esau was very hungry. Seeing that his brother Jacob had a pot of stew, Esau said:

He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

Jacob agreed to give him the stew in exchange for his birthright. The name Edom means "red." The stew Jacob gave his brother in exchange for his birthright was red in



color. Because of the significance of this event in his life, Esau was also called Edom or "Red."

While Jacob went to his mother's family in Haran to find a wife, Esau took wives from among the Canaanite women of the region. Esau had three wives. His first wife was named Adah (verse 2). His second wife was Oholibamah. Esau's third wife was Bathmath the daughter of Ishmael, his uncle (verse 3). These three wives gave Esau five sons (Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam and Korah).

It is interesting to note in verse 6 that Esau took his family and moved some distance away from his brother Jacob, who was now living in the same region. We are told that the reason for this was because their possessions were too great to remain together. The land was not big enough to support the livestock of both brothers (verse 7). This tells us that Esau was also very rich. God had also blessed him. Esau would become the father of the people known as the Edomites who lived in the country of Seir (verse 9).

Verses 10-14 trace the line of Esau through his sons Eliphaz and Reuel. We see from this list of names that the Lord had blessed Esau with five sons and at least ten grandsons. These sons were a blessing from God and assured that his family line would continue for generations to come.

Verses 15-19 list the names of Esau's descendants who were chiefs among their people. Notice in these verses that Esau's sons would be respected leaders in their community. These verses tell us that Esau's descendants would become important and respected men of leadership and influence among their people.

In verse 20, the attention shifts to the people who were living with them in the land. The land of Seir got its name

from Seir the Horite who lived in the region. Seir had seven sons whose names are listed in verses 20-21. All of Seir's sons were chiefs.

Seir's son Lotan had two sons (Hori and Homam). Notice in verse 22 that special mention is made of Lotan's sister. Her name was Timna. It is interesting to note that in verse 12, Esau's son Eliphaz had a concubine by the name of Timna through whom he had a child. It is possible that Eliphaz took Lotan's sister as a concubine. If this is the case, we see the connection between Esau and Seir.

Seir's line through his children Shobal and Zibeon is traced in verses 23-28. One descendant by the name of Anah was noted for discovering a hot spring in the desert when he was grazing his father's donkeys (verse 24). Anah had a daughter by the name of Oholibamah. Verse 2 tells us that one of Esau's wives was Oholibamah the daughter of Anah.

From this we understand that the descendants of Seir and Esau's descendants lived together in the land and intermarried. Esau and Jacob had taken two very different paths. Esau lived among the people of Seir, adopting their ways and taking their daughters as their wives. Jacob, on the other hand, followed the Lord God of his fathers.

Various kings reigned in the region of Edom. This was prior to God giving the land over to Israel. Verses 32-39 mention the succession of kings who ruled in that region:

Name of King	Residence/Origin	Reign Ended By
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Bela	Dinhabah	Death
Jobab	Bozrah	Death
Husham	Tamanites	Death
Hadad	Avith	Death
Samlah	Masrekah	Death
Shaul	Rehoboth	Death
Baal-Hanan	-	Death
Hadad	Pau	-

Hadad was married to a woman by the name of Mehetabel the daughter of Matred obviously a person of significance at that time (verse 39).

Chapter 36 concludes with a list of eleven names of Esau's descendants who were chiefs in Edom at this time. Esau's descendants were a people of influence but they intermarried with the people of Seir and walked away from the God of their fathers.

The two children of Isaac followed different paths. We have seen this in our own families. One child chooses to walk with God and follow His ways; the other is content to live apart from God. Esau, with all his blessing, is missing one very important thing in his life, a relationship with God. His family lived a normal life and experienced prosperity in the land the Lord had given them. They were well respected and had many important leaders in their family, but they did not know or follow the God of Israel.

Jacob's family was called to live an extraordinary life under the direction of God. Are you like Esau, content to live your life in the world with no concern for God? Or are you like Jacob, unworthy but willing to enter a relationship with your Creator and be His instrument to expand His kingdom in this world?

For Consideration:

- How did Esau become known as Edom? What foolish decisions have followed you in life?
- What evidence is there in this passage of God's blessing in the life of Esau and his family? Does God only bless those who love and follow Him?
- Esau and his family seem content with the things of this world. Do you know individuals who are like this?
- Notice in this chapter that the descendants of Esau are included with the descendants of Seir as if they were one family. How are you and your family different from other families who do not know God or follow His ways?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the fact that His blessing rests not only on the believer but also on those who do not know Him.
- Ask the Lord to minister to those you know who are content to live a life without God?
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He has opened your eyes to spiritual things. Ask Him to help you to walk more fully with Him.



## CHAPTER 35 -

### JOSEPH SOLD INTO SLAVERY

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Read Genesis 37:1-36

We have examined the jealousy between Leah and Rachel, Jacob's wives. That same friction existed between their children. Jacob seemed to encourage this by showing favouritism toward Rachel's children, Joseph and Benjamin. This caused the other brothers to resent Joseph in particular.

As we begin the story of Joseph, he is a young man of seventeen years of age. On one occasion, he was tending his father's flocks with his brothers. Verse 2 leads us to believe that something happened while they were tending their flocks. Joseph went home to his father and brought a "bad report" to him about his brothers. As you can imagine, his brothers did not appreciate this, and held this against him. The day would come when they would take their revenge.

From verse 3 we see that Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons. As a sign of his special love for Joseph, Jacob made a richly ornamented coat for him. This

caused Joseph's brothers to become very jealous. They could not speak a kind word to him (verse 4).

Jacob did not seem to show much wisdom in his relationship with his sons. He openly showed his affection for Joseph which stirred up his son's jealousy of Joseph. Joseph also seemed to delight in telling his father stories about his brother's evil deeds.

In verse 5 Joseph had a dream. When he told his brother's this dream, they hated him all the more. Joseph told his brothers that in his dream, they were binding sheaves of grain in the field. Joseph's sheaf of grain stood up straight. His brother's sheaves all bowed down to his.

We can well imagine the response of his brothers to this dream. "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" they said, in verse 8. They could not imagine bowing down to him.

Some things are better left unsaid. It is true that the Lord gave Joseph this dream and that it would come to pass. Sharing this dream with his brothers, however, was only inviting their hatred. It is possible to speak the truth but not have wisdom in when to share it or with whom to share it. Joseph may have needed greater discernment here.

Joseph had another dream in verse 9. Again he told this dream to his brothers. Surely, he must have seen their response when he shared his first dream with them. This does not keep him from sharing this second dream, however.

In this second dream, Joseph saw the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him (verse 9). When Joseph

told his father about the dream, he rebuked him saying: "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

Jacob saw the sun and moon to refer to him and his wife. The eleven stars represented his eleven sons. While Joseph's brothers became very jealous, Jacob kept this dream in his mind (verse 11). Obviously, he wondered what God was telling Joseph and how it would come to pass.

It is in the context of this hatred and jealousy that Jacob sent his son Joseph to visit his brothers who were tending the sheep near Shechem (verses 12-13). Jacob wanted to know how his sons were doing and sent Joseph to bring him back a report.

Joseph went first to Shechem, then on to Dothan where he found his brothers tending their sheep. When his brothers saw Joseph from a distance, they were not happy to see him. Their first reaction was to kill him (verse 18). Notice their words in verse 19. "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. Obviously they had remembered his dreams. These dreams were a source of great bitterness for them. They decided to throw him into a cistern and say that a wild animal had devoured him (verse 20). "Then we'll see what comes of his dreams," they said.

Somehow, Joseph's brothers believed that they could change the course of Joseph's life. They believed that they could destroy the purpose of God as revealed in his dreams. They had no way of knowing that what they were doing would only make that dream come true.



When Reuben, the oldest brother, heard what they were planning to do, he tried to save Joseph. He persuaded them not to kill Joseph (verse 21). It was Reuben's intention to rescue Joseph and take him back to his father (verse 22).

When Joseph arrived and greeted his brothers, they stripped him of the robe his father had given him and threw him in a pit (verse 24). Verse 24 tells us that this pit had no water in it.

Notice the hand of God on Joseph's life. God used Reuben to convince his brothers not to kill him. Joseph likely did not see God's protection here. All he saw was the hatred of his brothers. He likely expected to die. He certainly did not see that what was happening to him was going to be fulfillment of the dreams God had given him. God's ways are often strange to our eyes.

As Joseph's brothers sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from the region of Gilead on their way to Egypt to sell their goods (verse 25). When Judah saw this caravan, he had an idea. He suggested that they sell Joseph as a slave (verse 26). He reminded them that there was no profit in killing Joseph. By selling him, they would avoid the guilt of killing him and make a profit for themselves (verse 27). His brothers thought this was a good idea and agreed to sell Joseph for twenty shekels of silver (verse 28). The Ishmaelite traders took Joseph to Egypt.

Again it is important that we see the hand of God in what happened that day. It was the purpose of God that Joseph go to Egypt. Neither Joseph nor his brothers had any idea that God was working in this situation to accomplish His purposes. Again we see that the ways of God are often

strange to us. God used the anger and jealousy of Joseph's brothers to place Joseph where He wanted him to be.

Obviously, Reuben was not with his brothers when they made the decision to sell Joseph as a slave. When he returned to the pit and saw that he was not there, he was grief-stricken. Verse 29 tells us that he tore his clothes in a sign of mourning and went back to his brothers to express his deep grief over what had happened.

Joseph's brothers needed a story to tell their father when they returned home. They decided to slaughter a goat and dip the robe in the blood (verse 31). They took Joseph's bloody robe back to their father and told him that they had found it (verse 32). When Jacob recognized the robe, he assumed that a ferocious animal had attacked and devoured his son (verse 33). He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth to mourn Joseph. His grief lasted many days (verse 34). His sons and daughters sought to comfort him but he refused their comfort telling them that he would go to his grave mourning his son (verse 35). We are left wondering how this made his brothers feel when they saw the hurt they had caused their father.

As for Joseph, he was brought to Egypt and sold to a man by the name of Potiphar, a captain of the guard, one of Pharaoh's officials (verse 36). Joseph could not have known at this point the things God was going to do through him in this foreign land.

For Consideration:

- How do Jacob and Joseph stir up the hatred and jealousy in the other members of the family? Could they have done things differently? What does this teach us about our need of wisdom in dealing with people?
- Is it always right to express the truth God has given us? Is there a time to say nothing?
- What do we learn about jealousy in this passage? Where did the jealousy of Joseph's brothers lead them?
- How is God's protection and leading of Joseph evident in this chapter?
- What do we learn here about how God works? What people and circumstances does God use in this chapter to accomplish His purpose?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you wisdom to know when to speak and when to hold your tongue.
- Ask God to show you if there are things you are doing that cause problems for other people in your life. Ask Him for the wisdom and strength to make the necessary changes.
- Thank the Lord for His protection and leading in your life.
- Thank the Lord that He can use everything that happens to you for His glory and your good. Ask Him to help you to learn how to rest more fully in Him and your present situation.

## CHAPTER 36 -

### JUDAH AND TAMAR

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Read Genesis 38:1-30

After Joseph was sold into slavery, his brother Judah left his brothers and went to stay with Hirah from Adullam (verse 1). While he was there he met the daughter of a man named Shua and married her (verse 2). Verses 3-5 tell us that Judah had three sons with Shua's daughter (Er, Onan and Shelah).

In the course of time, Judah found a wife for his first son Er. Her name was Tamar (verse 6). Er was an evil son and verse 7 tells us that the Lord struck him so that he died.

When Judah saw that his son Er had died without an offspring, he gave Er's wife to his second son Onan (verse 8). This was common practice in Old Testament times. In fact, the Law of Moses required a brother to produce an offspring for his deceased brother in the event that he died without a child.

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside

the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. (Deuteronomy 25:5-6)

The idea here was that the brother would give his sister-in-law a child for his dead brother. The child born from that union would carry the name of the brother who had died and would inherit his possessions. This law ensured that the dead brother's family would not be wiped out.

Onan understood that the child born to him through this union would not belong to him. When he slept with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to prevent Tamar from becoming pregnant. In doing this, Onan disrespected his brother and disregarded the clear teaching of the Law of God. God was angry with him for this and struck him so that he, too, died (verse 10).

Judah's first two sons would have no descendants. Obviously this grieved Judah. The family line risked ending with him. The only son left to him was his youngest.

It would fall on Shelah to give Tamar a child for his brother. Judah, however, was afraid to give Shelah to Tamar fearing that he too might die (verse 11). He decided instead to send Tamar back to her father's house. He told her that his son Shelah was too young to give her a child and that she was to wait at her father's house until his son Shelah was old enough. Verse 11 leads us to believe, however, that it was not likely Judah's intent to give Shelah to Tamar at all. Verse 14 tells us that Tamar eventually understood this when, even after Shelah had grown up, Judah still had not given him to her.

A long time passed and eventually Judah's wife died (verse 12). After recovering from his grief, Judah went to visit the men who were shearing his sheep in Timnah. He took his friend Hirah with him.

Tamar heard that Judah had come to Timnah to shear his sheep (verse 13). When she learned this, she disguised herself and sat down at the Enaim entrance located on the road to Timnah (verse 14). When Judah passed the entrance, he noticed Tamar sitting there and believed her to be a prostitute because she had covered her face. He did not recognize her.

Thinking Tamar was a prostitute Judah approached and requested she sleep with him. Tamar asked him what he would give her to sleep with him. Judah promised to send her a young goat from his flock (verse 17). Tamar asked for Judah's seal and staff as a guarantee that he would give her the goat he promised (verse 18). The seal was likely worn around the neck on a cord and used to sign official documents. Judah agreed to give her these objects until he could get the young goat to her. With the arrangement settled, Judah slept with Tamar. She became pregnant through her father-in-law (verse 18).

True to his word, Judah sent a young goat through his friend to Tamar in order to get his seal and staff back. When his friend arrived at the entrance to the city he could not find her (verse 20). He asked some of the men who lived there where he could find the shrine prostitute who stood by the road. They told him that there was no such prostitute (verse 21).

Judah's friend returned and told Judah what he had discovered (verse 22). Judah decided to let her keep his seal

and staff. He did not want to embarrass himself by questioning further. He consoled himself by saying that he had sent the young goat to her but could not find her (verse 23).

Three months later, it was reported to Judah that his daughter-in-law Tamar had been guilty of prostitution and was now pregnant (verse 24). In anger, Judah decided to have her burned to death for her sin.

When Tamar was brought out to be punished, she showed Judah the seal and the staff and told him that she was pregnant by the man who owned them (verse 25). Judah immediately recognized them and knew that he was the father of her child. "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah," he said (verse 26). He decided to let her live.

Tamar would give birth to twins. As she was giving birth, one of the twins put out his hand. The midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it around his wrist to show that he was the firstborn. The child, however, drew back his hand and his brother came out first. When the midwife saw this she said "So this is how you have broken out!" (verse 29). It was for this reason that he was called Perez which literally means "breaking out." His brother was called Zerah meaning "scarlet" because of the thread tied around his wrist. It should be noted that Matthew 1:3 lists Perez in the line of our Lord Jesus.

What is striking here in this passage is to see how God's people were ignoring the law of God. Both of Judah's sons were guilty before God. Judah, himself, refused to obey the Law of God regarding Tamar. It is also shocking to see him actually go to a prostitute. This is not behaviour we would expect from a man God had chosen. Again we see

the kind of people God used. They were certainly not perfect but they were chosen. Notice also, that Judah's sons died at the hands of the Lord for their sins. God, in his mercy, however, spared Judah though he was as guilty as his sons.

#### For Consideration:

- Consider God's judgment of Er and Onan and His mercy toward Judah and Tamar. Does God's mercy toward some mean that He is unfair?
- Consider the selfishness, deceit and immorality of the individuals in this chapter. Consider also that the son of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar were ancestors of the Lord Jesus. What does this tell us about God's willingness to associate with sinners?
- Judah's reaction to finding out that Tamar was pregnant was to have her burned to death yet his own sins were worse. How easy is to be quick to judge the sins of others and fail to see our own?

#### For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God who shows mercy and kindness toward those who are unworthy. Thank Him for mercy in your life.
- Are there any hidden sins in your life? Take a moment to confess those sins and ask God to give you grace to overcome them.
- Ask God to make you less judgmental toward others.



- Thank the Lord that He is willing to forgive us as sinners. Thank Him for using you despite your unworthiness.

## **CHAPTER 37 -**

### **JOSEPH IS**

### **FALSELY ACCUSED**

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Read Genesis 39:1-23

God's ways are often different from ours. Sometimes what we consider to be a terrible injustice or tragedy is used by God for our good. God does not abandon us in our time of need. Even when things seem to be going wrong, God is there guiding and blessing. We see this clearly in the story of Joseph in Genesis 39.

Joseph had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He was taken by the Ishmaelite traders into Egypt and sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials (verse 1).

Consider for a moment what it would have been like for Joseph in those days. There would have been many questions on his mind. Why had God allowed his brothers to sell him into slavery? Why was he taken from his homeland? What future did he have in this foreign country? Would he ever see his family again? Notice that verse 2

makes it very clear, however, that the Lord God was with Joseph. This is very important.

Notice also from verse 2 that, not only was God with Joseph, but that Joseph prospered in all that he did. In his time of trouble, Joseph became a powerful witness to the blessing and grace of God. As Joseph served in Potiphar's household, the presence of God was evident in his life. His master took note of this. Potiphar placed great confidence in Joseph, entrusting him with everything he had. He knew he could trust him. He knew that, in Joseph's hands, everything would be well.

What kind of a witness are you when you find yourself in a bad situation in life? When you find yourself in trouble and things around you seem to be falling apart, do people see what they saw in Joseph? Do they see the presence of God in you? Do they see you as a person who trusts God with his or her circumstances? Do they see someone who is faithful to his or her God despite the trouble and trials?

Verse 5 tells us that from the time Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his household the Lord blessed him. We are not told how the blessing of God was evident in Potiphar's household. What is clear, however, is that Joseph served his master faithfully and the Lord abundantly blessed these efforts.

Joseph was a slave in Potiphar's house. He had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He did not choose to work for Potiphar. Potiphar bought him and owned him. This did not seem to affect Joseph's attitude. Though his circumstances were less than ideal, Joseph committed himself to make the most of his situation. He served his master with all his heart and did everything he could to prosper him and his household. What kind of example

have you been in your workplace? Maybe your boss has not always been fair. Maybe your work conditions are less than ideal. Joseph is an example for us to follow. He served with all his heart. He trusted God in his situation and sought to honour God in what he did for Potiphar.

Notice how Potiphar trusted Joseph completely. In verse 6, we read that he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Joseph was given complete charge of his household. Potiphar came to see in him an individual in whom he could have complete confidence. Again we see how Joseph was a powerful witness to the Lord his God.

In verses 6 and 7, Joseph's character is put to the test. Joseph was handsome and well-built. This is something that Potiphar's wife took notice of. Over time, she began to desire him. On one occasion, she asked him to go to bed with her (verse 7). Joseph refused (verse 8).

Notice in verse 9 that Joseph refused to sleep with his master's wife for two reasons. First, he did this out of respect for his master. "My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife," he told Potiphar's wife. Joseph honoured his master in this. Second, Joseph refused to sleep with his master's wife out of respect for God. "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" he told her. Joseph knew that by sleeping with his master's wife, he would not only be disrespecting his earthly master but sinning against God.

Potiphar's wife spoke with him "day after day" but Joseph continued to resist her temptations. This shows us something about his strength of character. When many other men would have fallen, Joseph remained faithful to his master and his God.

One day, Joseph was in the house, attending to his duties. Verse 11 tells us that none of the household servants were in the house at the time. We are not told why none of the servants were in the house. We are left to wonder if this was planned. Potiphar's wife approached Joseph and grabbed him by the coat insisting that he sleep with her. Joseph slipped out of his coat, left it behind, and ran out of the house (verse 12).

Notice that Joseph did not stick around to speak with her or convince her that this was not a good idea. Verse 12 tells us that he literally ran out of the house. He knew his weakness as a man. He knew he could fall into temptation. He decided that the best course of action was to get out of that situation as soon as possible. The longer he stayed, the more likely he was to fall. He left his responsibilities and his coat and fled.

When Potiphar's wife saw that Joseph would have nothing to do with her, she became very angry. She called her servants into the house and told them that Joseph tried to sleep with her (verse 14). She told them that she had screamed for help and so Joseph ran away leaving his coat behind (verse 15). She left Joseph's coat beside her until her husband came home (verse 16). When he came home, she told him the same lie (verses 17-18).

Potiphar was angry when he heard his wife's story (verse 19). He threw Joseph into prison. Notice that the prison where Joseph was kept was where the king's prisoners were confined (verse 20). Those kept in this prison would have been guilty of serious crimes. It may have been a high security prison.

God's presence did not leave Joseph when he was in prison. God showed him kindness and granted him favour

in the eyes of the prison warden. The prison warden would eventually put Joseph in charge of those who were held in the prison. He was given complete responsibility for all that was done in the prison (verse 22). The warden trusted Joseph completely, and like Potiphar, did not concern himself with anything he had given Joseph to do.

Notice that while the circumstances were less than favourable, Joseph continued to trust the Lord and did all he could to make the most of his situation. He did not become bitter. Instead, he worked hard to be a blessing wherever he was. God blessed this and gave him success in all he undertook.

#### For Consideration:

- Have you ever been unjustly treated? What was your response? What do you learn from Joseph?
- What kind of example have you been in your present work situation?
- What do people see in you when you are going through a difficult time? Joseph was sold as a slave and thrown into prison for a crime he did not commit. What was his attitude? Do you have a similar attitude in difficult situations?
- Are you doing the work God has given you to do with all your heart? Are there attitudes that need to change?
- What do we learn from Joseph in this passage about dealing with temptations?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have failed to accept the situations He has allowed to come your way. Ask Him to help you learn how to make the most of what He gives you in life.
- Ask God to give you a Christ-like attitude in the trials and difficulties you face in life.
- Ask God to give you the strength of Joseph to resist temptations that come your way.
- Ask God to open your eyes to see His presence and blessing in times of trial. Thank Him that He never leaves us.

# **CHAPTER 38 -**

## **JOSEPH, THE**

### **INTERPRETER OF DREAMS**

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Read Genesis 40:1-41:57

Joseph had been put in prison for a crime he had not committed. There in prison, however, Joseph was given a position of great responsibility and God blessed all he undertook. Joseph was a gifted administrator though his working conditions were less than ideal. He began as a slave to Potiphar and now served as an administrator in a prison. What is important to note is that Joseph used the gift God had given him wherever he was. He used his gift to bring glory to God in even the most difficult of situations. Unknown to Joseph, God was preparing him for greater things.

In Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable about a man who left his property in the hands of his servants and went away on a trip. When he returned, the master spoke to one of his faithful servants and said:



Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!

Certainly this was true in the life of Joseph. He had been faithful as a servant in Potiphar's house even when tempted by his wife. He had also proven faithful in the prison, though unjustly accused. Now it was time for God to give him greater responsibility.

As we begin chapter 40, we see that the king's cupbearer and the baker had offended him (verse 1). We are not told the nature of this offence but Pharaoh was so angry with them that he threw them into prison (verses 2-3). The captain of the guard assigned these two prisoners to Joseph (verse 4). It is interesting to note that, according to Genesis 37:36, Potiphar was the captain of the guard. Could it be that he still put confidence in Joseph and his abilities?

In the course of time, the two prisoners assigned to Joseph each had a dream on the same night (40:5). When Joseph came to see them the next morning, he saw that they were not themselves (40:6). When he asked them what was wrong they told him that they had both had dreams that night. They believed that these dreams were intended to communicate something to them but had no one to interpret them (40:8). Joseph reminded the men that all interpretations belonged to God. He asked them to tell him their dreams (40:9).

The cupbearer began first and told Joseph his dream. In his dream he saw a vine. The vine had three branches. It budded and blossomed and soon great clusters of grapes ripened on it. The cupbearer saw, in his dream, that he had

the king's cup in his hand. He squeezed the grapes into Pharaoh's cup and gave it to the king.

God gave Joseph the interpretation of this dream. In Genesis 40:12-13, he explained that the three branches represented three days. He told the cupbearer that within three days Pharaoh would restore him to his position. He would again serve Pharaoh his wine.

Joseph was so confident of this interpretation that he asked the cupbearer to remember him before Pharaoh when he got out (40:14). He told the cupbearer that he had been forcibly taken away from his homeland and thrown into the prison for a crime he had not committed (40:15)

When the baker heard that Joseph had interpreted the cupbearer's dream, he told Joseph his own dream. In his dream, he had three baskets of bread on his head. He noticed that the top basket had all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh but the birds were eating them out of the basket as he carried it on his head.

Again the Lord gave Joseph the interpretation of the baker's dream. Joseph told the baker that the three baskets represented three days. Within three days Pharaoh would behead the baker and hang him from a tree where the birds would eat away his flesh.

Three days from that date was Pharaoh's birthday. When his birthday arrived, Pharaoh gave a great feast for all his officials. He restored the chief cupbearer to his position but hanged the chief baker just as Joseph had said. Genesis 40:23 tells us, however, that the chief cupbearer forgot Joseph.

Two years would pass and Pharaoh, himself, had a dream. In his dream, he was standing by the Nile River. As he watched, seven fat cows came out of the river and grazed among the reeds. After this seven more cows came out of the river. These cows were ugly and skinny. They ate the seven fat cows that were already grazing by the river. Pharaoh woke from this dream.

Pharaoh fell asleep again and had a second dream. In this second dream, he saw seven heads of grain. These heads were very healthy. Seven more heads of grain sprouted up from the ground. These grains, however, were thin and scorched by the wind. These thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy heads. Again Pharaoh woke from his sleep.

These dreams troubled Pharaoh. In the morning, he called for his magicians and wise men. He told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them (41:8).

The cupbearer, who has personal access to Pharaoh, heard what was happening and remembered how Joseph had interpreted his dream. He told Pharaoh about Joseph and his ability (41:9-13).

Pharaoh decided to call for Joseph. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, Joseph appeared before Pharaoh (41:14). Pharaoh told Joseph that he had heard that he could interpret dreams. Joseph corrected Pharaoh and told him that he could not interpret any dream. Only God could interpret dreams. He assured Pharaoh that God would give him the interpretation he needed (41:16).

It is important that we note that Joseph has a clear sense of his need of God. How easy it is to take credit for the gifts

God gives us. We quickly assume that God needs us rather than us needing God. Joseph had no such deception. He knew the source of his strength and wisdom and gave God the glory.

In Genesis 41:17-24 Pharaoh told Joseph both of his dreams. He also told him how none of his magicians or wise men could interpret them. God gave Joseph the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph told him that both dreams had the same interpretation and that God was telling Pharaoh what He was about to do (41:25).

Joseph explained that the seven good cows and the seven good heads of grain represented seven good years. The seven ugly cows and the seven worthless heads of grain represented seven years of famine (41:26-27). God was telling Pharaoh that there would be seven years of abundance in Egypt followed by seven years of terrible famine that would ravage the land (41:30). The famine of those seven years would be so severe that the years of abundance would no longer be remembered. Joseph told the Pharaoh that the Lord gave him this dream in two forms to show him that He had firmly decided to do this thing to Egypt (41:32).

Notice in verse 33 that Joseph went on to advise Pharaoh on what he needed to do. He suggested that he find a wise man and put him in charge of the land. He was also to appoint commissioners over the land to take one fifth of the harvest of Egypt during those seven good years and store it in preparation for the years of famine (41:33-36).

Pharaoh listened to Joseph's advice and it seemed good to him. He decided, therefore, to appoint Joseph to take care of these matters. He recognized the spirit of God in him (41:38) and did not see anyone more qualified for the

job (41:39). He placed him in charge of his palace and required that everyone submit to his orders. He would become second in command after Pharaoh himself (41:40). Pharaoh then gave Joseph his signet ring, dressed him in fine linen robes and put a gold chain around his neck (41:42). Joseph would ride in a chariot as his second-in-command and men would ride ahead of him shouting, "Make way!" Pharaoh told Joseph that, while he was still in command, no one could do anything without Joseph's approval (41:44). Joseph's name was changed that day to Zaphenath- Paneah and Pharaoh gave him a wife by the name of Asenath.

The time had come for Joseph to be honoured. In an instant, he moved from the prison to the king's palace. He had been faithful to God in the difficult times, now God gave him a position of real authority in the land. Joseph was thirty years of age when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt (41:46). Genesis 41:47-48 tells us that during those years of plenty Joseph collected food and stored it up. The amount of food stored was so great that they stopped keeping records (41:49).

God blessed Joseph with two sons through his wife Asenath during those years of plenty. Joseph's firstborn was called Manasseh. The name Manasseh sounds like the Hebrew word for "forget." Joseph called his son by this name because he said God had made him forget his trouble and his father's household. This shows us what was on Joseph's mind over those years. Joseph never forgot his trouble and the fact that he was a stranger in the land of Egypt. While he served God faithfully as a slave and as a prisoner, he never forgot his past and the injustice done to him. He did not, however, let this hinder his service of God. He was faithful despite the fact that he did not understand

God's purpose and still felt the pain of being separated from his family and homeland.

Joseph named his second son Ephraim which literally means "twice fruitful." Genesis 41:52 tells us that he gave his son this name because God had made him fruitful in the land of his suffering. Again this shows us that all the prosperity of Egypt did not ease Joseph's suffering. Egypt is described as the land of Joseph's suffering. His heart was with his family in Canaan. He missed his family and desired to be with them, but it was not the purpose of God for him at that time.

What is important for us to note is that we can be faithful to God and still feel pain in our heart. Joseph missed his family and his homeland but that would not keep him from being faithful to his God in the land of his exile. Faithfulness to God will sometimes come at great cost. We may miss our loved ones. We may have questions about why God has put us in a certain place. Joseph had questions and pains but he still was faithful to the Lord and God blessed him for that.

As Joseph had predicted, the seven years of famine struck Egypt (41:53-54). The surrounding nations suffered tremendously because they had not made provision for these years. Egypt, however, had food for these years because of the wisdom God had given to Joseph.

When the people of the land began to feel the effects of the famine, they came to Pharaoh and asked him for food. Pharaoh told them to speak to Joseph and do what he told them. He had complete confidence in Joseph's ability at this most trying time. Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians. People from other countries also came to Egypt to buy grain. The wisdom God gave

Joseph would not only save Egypt but people of many nations from certain death.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn from Joseph about being faithful in less than ideal situations? Have you been faithful where God has placed you?
- Notice how Joseph gives credit to God for interpreting dreams. Do you give credit to God for the gifts He has given you?
- Joseph remained in prison for two years after interpreting the cupbearers dream. God's timing is not the same as ours. What does this teach us about the need of patience and trust? Have you been patient? Has waiting on God caused you to lose your trust in Him?
- What was the source of Joseph's strength and wisdom according to Pharaoh in Genesis 41:38-39? Do people see this same thing in you today?
- While Joseph was faithful to God as a slave, a prisoner and a leader in the land of his exile, he still missed his family. Does faithfulness to God mean that we will always be happy with our situation in life?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to be faithful in whatever situation He places you. Ask Him to help you to honour Him in your present situation.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have failed to give Him glory in your life and ministry. Ask Him

to forgive you for times you have taken the credit for yourself.

- Ask God to give you greater patience and confidence to wait on His timing in your life.
- Ask God to help you to be always conscious of the source of your strength. Ask Him to give you grace to wait on Him, trust Him and obey Him.
- Thank the Lord that while circumstances are not always ideal, He promises to be with us.





## **CHAPTER 39 -**

### **JOSEPH MEETS**

### **HIS BROTHERS**

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Read Genesis 42:1-38

The famine that struck Egypt during the days of Joseph also affected the surrounding nations. When it was discovered that there was food in Egypt, people from different nations came to Joseph to buy food. In the land of Canaan, Joseph's family also suffered. When Joseph's father Jacob learned that there was food in Egypt he decided to send his sons to buy grain (verses 1-2). Jacob, however, did not send his son Benjamin with the other ten brothers because he was afraid that harm might come to him (verse 4).

When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt, they bowed down to Joseph as the governor of the land. They did not recognize him as their brother, nor would they have ever expected that he would be in such a position. It should be noted that this bowing down was in partial fulfillment of Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:7.

While his brothers did not recognize Joseph, Joseph recognized them. Verse 7 tells us that he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.

We are left wondering at Joseph's behaviour. Why would he not reveal his true identity to his brothers? Why would he speak harshly to them? The passage does not tell us why.

In the course of this study, we have seen Joseph to be a man of incredible character who made the most of his situations. When sold into slavery, he served Potiphar with all his heart. When falsely accused, he served in the prison and gained the respect and admiration of the officials. Joseph does not seem to be an individual who held a grudge. He trusted God in everything. Knowing this about Joseph, we can assume that his speaking harshly to his brothers was not out of anger. He had seen the hand of God in his life in Egypt. He remembered the dream he had where God showed him that his brothers would one day bow down to him. Joseph knew he was in the will and purpose of God. Speaking harshly to his brothers, therefore, had to be for another reason.

Joseph was not ready to reveal his identity to his brothers. He likely had many unanswered questions in his mind about what had happened to him and why they had sold him into slavery. He also was not sure where he stood with his brothers. Did they still hate him? Were they sorry for what they had done to him? Had they changed? These were obviously questions in his mind. Joseph likely knew that if he revealed his true identity, he might never find the answers to those questions.

Notice in verse 9 that Joseph accused his brothers of being spies. This accusation gave Joseph the opening he

needed to question them about their family and their motives. When accused of being spies, his brothers immediately told Joseph that they were honest men who had come to Egypt with the simple intention of buying food (verses 10-11). When Joseph insisted that they were spies, his brothers opened up even more and told him that they were from a family of twelve brothers. All brothers had one father. They told him that their youngest brother had stayed with their father in Canaan. They also told him that they had a brother who "was no more" (referring to Joseph).

Their words gave Joseph much information. It showed him that his father was still alive and that his younger brother Benjamin was well. His family was still living in Canaan.

Joseph continued to insist that his brothers were spies and demanded that they prove what they were telling him by bringing their younger brother to see him (verse 15). He would allow one of them to return to Canaan to get the youngest brother while the rest of them were held in custody (verses 15-16). With those words he put his brothers in custody for three days.

Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery. He had been taken from his homeland by force and left to wonder how his father would have responded to the news of his disappearance. For three days, Joseph's brothers were left to wonder whether they would ever return to their homeland. They were given time to consider what it would be like to taken from their families by force; never to see their children, their wives or their father again. They were also left to wonder how their disappearance would affect their father.

All too often we fail to see the consequences of our sin on others. From time to time, the Lord opens our eyes to see the impact of our actions. This is what is happening in this passage. Joseph puts his brothers in a situation where they are forced to see what they had done to him.

When three days were up, Joseph returned to his brothers. He told them that instead of keeping them all in prison, he would only keep one of them. The rest were to return home with grain to feed their families (verse 19). He told them, however, that if they did not bring the youngest brother to him, they would die (verse 20). In saying this, Joseph did two things. First, he placed the life of the brother who remained in prison in their hands. These brothers had sold Joseph as a slave to Egypt. Would they do this again with the brother who remained in prison or would they do everything in their power to bring him home? Second, by holding one of them prisoner, Joseph guaranteed that his brothers would return.

When the brothers heard Joseph's proposal, they began to speak among themselves. Notice the direction of their conversation in verse 21.

Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us.

Joseph's brothers connected their present situation with what they had done to Joseph in selling him into slavery. They believed God was judging them for what they had done. The three days in custody had given them plenty of time to think and God was convicting them of their sin.

In verse 22, Reuben reminded them how he had told them not to sin against Joseph but they would not listen. He told them that they now had to answer to God for their actions. For years this sin had been hidden. Now it was time for it to surface and be dealt with. They could not move forward until this matter had been confessed and brought into the open.

Maybe you find yourself in a similar situation. Maybe there are hidden sins that have never been confessed. There are times when God will bring those sins to mind and bring circumstances into your life to convict you of those sins. He does this so that you can have victory over those sins. While the story here is about Joseph, we miss the point if we fail to see what God is doing in the lives of Joseph's brothers. God is preparing the entire nation for the next step in their history, but before they could take that next step they needed to deal with this terrible hidden secret.

Joseph was present when his brothers spoke among themselves. To this point, Joseph had not spoken to them in his own language. He had used an interpreter in all his conversations with them. His brothers did not realize that Joseph could understand everything they were saying (verse 23).

When Joseph heard his brothers he was deeply touched. Emotions began to well up inside him and he knew he was going to cry. To conceal his identity, Joseph ran away and found a place to weep. He understood the pain his brothers were feeling and felt deeply for them. When Joseph finally returned, he had Simeon taken and bound before their eyes. He would be the one who would remain in Egypt while his brothers returned to Canaan.

In verse 25, Joseph gave orders to his servants to fill his brother's bags with grain. He also told them to put each man's money back in their bags and to give them provisions for their journey home. We should not see any deception on Joseph's part in this. Joseph did not want to take money from his brothers to feed his own family. He also did all he could to provide for their comfort on their return home. This is an act of kindness on his part toward his brothers who had sold him into slavery.

On their return trip, Joseph's brothers stopped for the night. One of them opened his sack of grain to get some feed for his donkey and discovered his money in the bag (verse 27). The news of the money in the bag hit the rest of the brothers hard. "What is this that God has done to us?" they replied. They likely believed that if Joseph discovered that they had taken their money home, the life of their brother Simeon would be at stake and they would be seen as spies.

When they returned home, they told their father Jacob what had happened (verse 29). They told him how the man who was over Egypt had spoken harshly to them and treated them as spies (verse 30). When they explained that they were a family of twelve sons whose youngest had remained home with their father, the man insisted that they prove the truth of their words by bringing their youngest brother to see him. To see that they did so, he kept Simeon in prison until they returned. Only when they had proved themselves would he give them permission to trade with him (verse 34). Notice that while God had been dealing with the brothers about their sin of selling Joseph into slavery, they made no mention of this to their father. The sin remains a secret.

As the brothers were emptying their sacks of grain each one of them discovered their money hidden in the sacks. When they saw this, they were afraid (verse 35). Jacob believed he would never see his son Simeon again and accused his brother of depriving him of his children: "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!" he said in verse 37.

Reuben realized Jacob's hesitation to let Benjamin go with them to Egypt. He also realized that the only way they could survive as a family was to return to Egypt. He told his father that he could put both of his sons to death if he did not bring Benjamin back to him (verse 37). Jacob would have nothing to do with this, however. He could not bear the thought of losing Benjamin. He told them that if harm ever came to Benjamin, he would go to his grave in sorrow (verse 38). What Jacob did not realize was that by entrusting his son Benjamin into the hands of God, Joseph would also be returned to him.

Probably the biggest challenge of this chapter is to look beyond Joseph and his actions to see what God is doing. God is preparing his people for something better. He is bringing conviction and awareness of sin so that Jacob and his sons can be given victory and experience God's provision and blessing in that next stage of their lives as a people.

For Consideration:

- How does Joseph's dream come true in this passage?



- Do you think Joseph was being mean to his brothers in this passage? What evidence is there of Joseph's compassion and kindness toward his brothers?
- How did God use the actions of Joseph to bring conviction to the hearts of his brothers?
- Has God ever opened your eyes to see the implications of your sin? Explain.
- Are there sins in your life that God has been speaking to you about? What are they?
- God speaks to Joseph's brothers about their sin. They could not move forward to the next stage of God's plan for their lives until they had dealt with their sins against Joseph. Do our sins hold us back in our spiritual lives?
- Notice Jacob's unwillingness to let go of Benjamin. Are there things in your life that you are not willing to trust God with today?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to love those who have mistreated you.
- Thank the Lord for the way He convicts you of sin. Ask Him to give you grace to repent of the sins He brings to your mind.
- Take a moment to pray that God would heal those you have hurt by your sins.
- Ask God to reveal to you any sin that keeps you from moving forward in His purpose and plan for your life.
- Ask God to give you grace to surrender everything to Him. Take a moment to place those things you treasure most in life into his hands. Thank Him that He will take care of these things.

## **CHAPTER 40 -**

### **JOSEPH'S FAMILY**

### **RETURNS TO EGYPT**

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Read Genesis 43:1-44:34

Joseph's family had returned from Egypt with provisions. As the famine continued to ravage the land, their provisions again ran low. When all the grain had been eaten, Jacob (Israel) told his sons to return to Egypt to buy more (43:2).

It is interesting to note that the brothers did not return immediately to get their brother Simeon who was in prison in Egypt. They waited until all their provisions were exhausted. This may have been because of their father's refusal to allow Benjamin to go with them. It may also have been because of the length of the journey. For whatever reason, Simeon remained in an Egyptian prison cell during this time, waiting for them to return.

Judah reminded his father that Joseph had warned that if they returned without their youngest brother they would be considered to be spies. Judah told his father that they

would only go to Egypt if he sent Benjamin along with them. They knew that they risked their lives returning without Benjamin.

Judah's words troubled Jacob. "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?" he asked in verse 6. The brothers told their father that the man they had seen in Egypt questioned them very closely about their family. They answered him honestly. They had no way of knowing that he would ask for Benjamin (43:7).

Judah told his father that if he sent Benjamin with them he would be personally responsible for his younger brother. If anything happened to him, he would bear the blame for the rest of his life (43:9). He reminded his father that they could have already been to Egypt and back twice had he not delayed them by refusing to allow Benjamin to go (43:10). It appears that Judah is quite frustrated with his father in this matter.

When Israel (Jacob) realized that he really had no choice, he gave them permission to take Benjamin. He also sent some of the best products of the land as gifts for the man they had spoken to in Egypt. They took balm, honey, spices, myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. Israel instructed his sons to take double the amount of silver because they needed to pay for the grain they had received previously when their money was found in their sacks (43:12). He encouraged them to return to him as soon as possible. His prayer was that God would give them mercy before the man they had met in Egypt so that he would let Benjamin come back to him. Joseph's brothers did as their father had told them and without delay set out for Egypt (43:15).

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he instructed his servants to prepare dinner because his brothers were to eat with him at noon (43:16). The brothers were then taken to Joseph's house.

Joseph's brothers were frightened when they were asked to come to Joseph's house. They believed he was going to make them slaves because they had returned to Canaan without paying for their provisions (43:18). When they arrived at the house, they spoke to the steward who received them. They explained how they had discovered the money in their bags. They told him that they had come to pay the money they owed (43:21-22). Joseph's servant told them not to worry about the money saying: "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver" (43:23). We can only imagine the confusion the brothers were feeling at that time. As they were recovering from the news that Joseph had received their money, the steward brought Simeon out to them.

Joseph's servant gave them water to wash their feet and provided food for their donkeys (43:24). He also informed them that they were to eat with Joseph at noon. Again the confusion must have been very great in their minds. As they prepared, the brothers brought out their gifts to present to Joseph (43:25). When Joseph arrived at his house for the noon meal, the brothers presented him with their gifts and bowed down to the ground before him, once again fulfilling Joseph's dream.

Joseph asked his brothers how they were. He also asked them about their father and whether he was still alive (43:27). They answered his questions and again honoured him by bowing down. The fact that Joseph had remembered what they had told him about their family may have

touched them. The fact that they had been invited to his home for a meal was obviously perplexing.

When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin, he asked them if he was their youngest brother. When they told him he was, he said: "God be gracious to you, my son" (43:29). Joseph was so moved by the sight of his brother that he knew he was going to cry. Not wanting to do this in front of his brothers, he hurried out of the room to find a private place to weep (43:30).

When Joseph had washed his face, he returned and asked that the food be served (43:31). Joseph ate by himself and the brothers were given another table. It was the custom of that day that Egyptians did not eat with Hebrews (43:32). Joseph's brothers were seated at the table before him in order of their age, from the oldest to the youngest. This astonished the brothers who wondered how he would know their ages (43:33). When the portions were served, Benjamin was given five times more than the rest of the brothers but all of them feasted freely (43:34).

It is unclear why Joseph gave Benjamin five times more food than his brothers. It is possible that he wanted to see their reaction. They had hated him because he had been treated with special favour by his father. Joseph knew that his father had been treating Benjamin especially well. Did he want to see if the brothers would respond negatively toward Benjamin being treated in this way? Remember that Joseph was speaking through an interpreter. They did not know he understood them. Joseph would be able to listen to their words as he sat at his table. They would likely have been quite willing to speak freely believing that he could not understand them. This way Joseph would see if there had been any change in their attitude.

When the meal was over, Joseph ordered his servants to fill his brother's sacks with as much food as they could carry (44:1). They were also to return each man's money to him by putting it in the mouth of their sacks. Joseph also instructed his men to put his personal silver cup in the bag of the youngest (44:2). The servants did as Joseph commanded. In the morning the men were sent on their way home.

Joseph's brothers had not gone far from the city when Joseph told his steward to go after them. He told him that when he caught up to them he was to ask them why they had repaid the good done to them by taking Joseph's cup used for his magic divination (44:5).

It should be noted that Joseph never used this cup for divination. He sought the Lord God of Israel in all he did. Joseph speaks of this so as to hide his true identity and give special value to this cup.

The steward did as Joseph requested and caught up with his brothers. The brothers could not believe they had been accused of such a crime. They reminded him how they had even brought back the money they owed Joseph from the first time they bought grain (44:8). They suggested that Joseph's steward search their bags. If he found the cup in any of their bags, then the person in whose bag he found the cup would die and the rest would become Joseph's slaves (44:9). Joseph's steward agreed to this proposal except that they would all be free to return home except the person in whose bag the cup was found. That person alone would become Joseph's slave (44:10).

When the bags were lowered to the ground the steward searched them from the oldest brother to the youngest. Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack (44:12). When

the brother's saw this they tore their clothes in mourning, loaded their donkeys and returned to the city (44:13).

Joseph was still in his house when the brothers returned to the city. They approached him and threw themselves at his feet (44:14). Joseph asked them what they had done. He told them that he had the power to find out these things by magic arts (44:15). They told him that they were innocent but there was no way of proving that innocence. They surrendered themselves into his hands (44:16).

Joseph told them that he only wanted the one in whose sack the cup had been found. He alone would become his slave. The others were to return to their father (44:17).

Joseph's brothers found themselves in a very interesting situation. Once again they were in a place where they could see their father's favourite son delivered into slavery. What would they do this time? Would they do the same thing to Benjamin as they had done to Joseph? Would they walk away and leave Benjamin as a slave or would they do everything they could to protect him from the same fate as their brother Joseph? Joseph must have been very interested in seeing what their response would be.

It was Judah who spoke out. He reminded Joseph how Israel, their father specially loved Benjamin (44:20). Judah explained to Joseph how difficult it was for their father to let Benjamin go. Their father's love for this boy was such that he would die if they did not return with him (44:22). Judah reminded Joseph that the only reason their father let Benjamin go with them was because Joseph had told them that unless their younger brother came with them, they would not see his face (44:23-26). Judah pleaded with Joseph to let Benjamin return to his father explaining that

he had personally guaranteed the boy's safety. He suggested that Joseph take him as his slave in place of Benjamin (44:33).

Joseph's brothers were being tested. We can be sure that Joseph was closely watching their response. It is important, however, that we do not focus too much on Joseph here. Joseph is merely an instrument in the hands of God. What is important is what God is doing in the lives of his brothers.

God has been testing Joseph's brothers. They were being convicted of the sin of selling Joseph into slavery. They were now in a situation where they could repeat their sin and save their lives at the cost of Benjamin or they could do the right thing and fight for his life. They chose to do the right thing.

#### For Consideration:

- Consider the difficulty Israel had in letting go of Benjamin even to save the rest of his family. Are there things that you find difficult to let go?
- How do you suppose Joseph's brothers felt about Joseph's hospitality? What does his hospitality and generosity toward his brothers teach us about his attitude toward them even though they had sold him into slavery? Do you show kindness toward those who have hurt you?
- Do you feel that Joseph's brothers had victory over their jealousy? Is there any evidence in this passage that they had changed in their attitude?



## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to let go of anything that you are holding too tightly.
- Thank the Lord that he blesses us even when we do not deserve that blessing.
- Joseph's brothers were confused about what was taking place, but God was working things out in a very special way to accomplish His purpose. Thank the Lord that He is Lord over all our circumstances. Thank Him that He will work all things out for our good and His glory.
- Are you going through some spiritual testing in your life now? Ask the Lord to give you grace to make the right decisions so that you will be strengthened through these times.

# **CHAPTER 41 -**

## **JOSEPH REVEALS**

### **HIS IDENTITY**

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Read Genesis 45:1-28

When his brothers departed on their return voyage to Canaan, Joseph sent his servant to question why they had stolen his silver cup. When the bags were searched, the cup was found in Benjamin's bag. The brothers returned to Egypt. They were very upset about the matter, especially when they discovered that Benjamin would be taken as a slave. Judah took up Benjamin's defence and pleaded with Joseph to allow him to take the place of his younger brother so that his father would not go down to the grave in sorrow.

All this discussion deeply touched Joseph. Verse 1 tells us that he could no longer control his emotions. Verse 2 tells us that Joseph wept so loudly that the household of Pharaoh heard him. He told all his attendants to leave the room and Joseph was left alone with his brothers. When everyone had left, Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

"I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" he asked in verse 3.

Joseph had prospered greatly in Egypt but he still felt the pain of separation from his family. As he wept that day, years of pain expressed themselves. There were also tears of joy. Joseph was back with his brothers. He knew God had been preparing him for this moment. He knew that the hand of God was in these events and he was overwhelmed that God would choose to use him to accomplish His purposes.

Joseph's brothers were unable to answer him. They were filled with fear as a result of his revelation. They knew what they had done to him. They remembered how they had sold him as a slave. They remembered how they could not speak anything good to him when he was with them (Genesis 37:4). They also knew the power Joseph had in Egypt. He had the authority to deal harshly with them and repay them for all the evil they had done to him. Verse 3 tells us that they were terrified at his presence.

Joseph understood their fear and told them to come closer (verse 4). When they had done so, he reminded them of how they had sold him into slavery into Egypt. Joseph told his brothers not to be distressed or angry with themselves for selling him. God had allowed this to happen so that many lives could be saved.

Joseph went on to explain that the famine they were experiencing would last another five years (verse 6). God had sent him ahead to save their lives (verse 7). He made it clear to his brothers that God had sent him to Egypt. God had also blessed him and given him a position of honour and authority in the land so he could deliver his nation in this time of need (verse 8).

There are several things we need to see in these verses. Notice that Joseph shows no bitterness toward his brothers. It is true that they had done something terrible to him. They had acted out of hatred and jealousy, but how could Joseph be angry and bitter with his brothers when God used the situation to accomplish such a wonderful purpose in his life?

Perhaps you have suffered at the hands of other people. Their actions may have deeply hurt you. God, however, is able to use all that happens to accomplish good. When you are tempted to become bitter about your circumstances, ask the Lord to show you what He has accomplished in your life through them. Instead of becoming bitter, let your heart be filled with thanksgiving to God for what He is doing in you and through you.

Notice, also, that God went before Joseph. He prepared the individuals he would meet and gave him his place of authority. God provided Joseph with all he needed to be the deliverer He had called him to be. When God calls; He also equips. His methods may seem strange to us but He knows what He is doing. As we surrender to His working, we will see His purposes fulfilled in our lives.

In verse 9, Joseph told his brothers to hurry back to their father and tell him that God had made him lord of all Egypt. They were to invite him to return to Egypt with them. He told his brothers that they could live in the region of Goshen with their children, flocks and herds. He reminded them that there would be another five years of famine. If they stayed in Canaan they would become destitute and needy (verse 11). Joseph urged them to hurry (verse 13). When Joseph had finished speaking he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept (verse 14). He also

kissed each of his brothers (verse 15). They then spoke with each other freely.

Pharaoh heard about the arrival of Joseph's brothers in Egypt (verse 16). When he heard this he told Joseph to load his animals and return to Canaan to bring his father and family back to Egypt. He promised to give them the best of his land. We see from this how deeply Pharaoh respected Joseph. While the rest of the world suffered terribly from this famine, Pharaoh was prospering because of Joseph's administration.

Pharaoh offered some of his own carts to carry Joseph's family back from Canaan. He told Joseph and his family that the very best of Egypt would be his (verse 20). We can only imagine the response of Joseph's brothers at this news. How unworthy they must have felt. They had acted very sinfully in selling Joseph into slavery and deceiving their father. Now God was blessing them with the best of the land of Egypt. This is a real picture of God's grace. He delights in blessing us even when we are undeserving of that blessing.

Joseph gave his brothers some of Pharaoh's carts and provided them with all they needed for the journey (verse 21). He also gave each of them new clothing. Benjamin, however, received three hundred shekels of silver (seven and a half pounds or 3.5 kilograms) and five sets of clothes (verse 22). According to verse 23, Joseph sent ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread to his father (verse 23).

Notice in verse 24 that Joseph sent his brothers off telling them not to quarrel on the way. This is significant. Seeing Joseph again would have stirred up some memories of

what they had done. It would be easy for them to begin to blame each other for what had happened that day. Joseph knew this would happen. He challenged them to move beyond the past. They could not change what had happened. They could not be healed of the past if they kept blaming each other and bringing these things to the surface. Listen to what Micah tells us about how the Lord God deals with our sin.

You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)

When you hurl something into the depths of the sea you never expect to see it again. This is how God deals with our sin. He casts it far away and remembers it no more. Jeremiah confirms this when he says:

No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)

If God chooses to forget our sin, we too should be willing to forget the sins done to us and the sins from which God has forgiven us. Joseph had forgiven his brothers. The problem now, however, was that his brothers needed to forgive themselves and each other. Joseph's brothers had been confronted with their sin. This sin needed to be exposed if they were going to live in harmony with Joseph in Egypt. Having exposed the sin however, it was now important that they learn to accept forgiveness. By accusing each other and holding this sin against each other, Joseph's brothers would not experience the forgiveness and

healing they needed. Once we deal with sin, we must walk away from it and resist the temptation to bring it up again. If God hurls it into the depths of the sea we must leave it there.

When Joseph's brothers arrived in Canaan they told him that Joseph was still alive. They explained that he was a ruler in Egypt. Jacob, however, refused to believe them (verse 26). When they told him what Joseph had said and showed him the carts and the gifts sent back to him, Jacob took courage (verse 27). He was convinced that Joseph was alive and decided to go with them to Egypt to see his son before he died (verse 28).

#### For Consideration:

- How did Joseph's brothers feel about confronting the one they had offended? Is it ever really easy to confront those we have hurt or offended?
- Do you think that Joseph completely forgave his brothers for their sin against him? Are there people you need to forgive in your life?
- Joseph saw how God used the terrible deeds of his brothers to accomplish good in his life. How has God used bad things that happened to you for good?
- How do you think Joseph's brothers felt as they watched Joseph provide them with an abundance of provisions for their journey? How do you treat those who have offended you?
- Have you ever been tempted to bring up past sins against a brother or sister?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you courage to face those you have offended in order to make things right.
- Ask the Lord to give you courage to forgive those who have offended you and never bring these sins up again.
- Thank the Lord that while you have not always been worthy of His forgiveness, He still showers you with His blessings.





## CHAPTER 42 -

### ISRAEL SETTLES IN EGYPT

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Read Genesis 46:1-34

Joseph's brothers returned from Egypt with news about Joseph. When Joseph's father, Israel, heard that Joseph was still alive, he decided to move to Egypt so he could see his son before he died.

Israel packed his belongings and began the trip to Egypt. On his way, he stopped at Beersheba. There in Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the Lord. It is uncertain why he chose this location to worship God. We do know that Abraham had worshipped in Beersheba (see Genesis 21:33) as had Israel's father Isaac (see Genesis 26:23-25). While we may not know the reason why he chose Beersheba, Israel did have real cause to worship and praise the Lord. His son Joseph, whom he thought was dead, was alive.

While in Beersheba, the Lord God spoke to Israel. In verse 3, God reminded him that He was the God of his father

Isaac. He also told Israel not to be afraid to go to Egypt because He would make him into a great nation. God promised that Israel's own son Joseph would be there at his side when he died (verse 4). There are three important details we need to understand here.

First, notice that God had chosen to hide the fact that Joseph was alive from his father. This is the first record we have of God speaking to Israel about his son. He told him that Joseph would be with him when he died. Why did God not reveal to Israel that Joseph was alive prior to this? He obviously saw the tremendous grief he had suffered thinking that his son was dead. There are some things God chooses to hide from us. God allowed him to go through this period of mourning. Joseph was not the only one being tested. God was also working in the life of Israel his father.

Would Israel willingly have let his son Joseph go to Egypt? Joseph was his favourite son. He would not have wanted him to leave his side. God took his son from him to accomplish His purposes. This hurt Israel greatly. In order for the nation to be saved, Israel's son had to be sacrificed. He did not do this willingly. God took him without Israel's approval. There are times when we too will have to make such sacrifices.

The second point we need to make here is that Israel's heart was likely concerned about the land he was leaving behind as he traveled to Egypt. God had promised this land to him and his fathers. Before Israel could inherit the land God had promised him however, he needed to be willing to give it up. If it were up to him, he likely would not have abandoned the land God had promised his ancestors. Sometimes it seems like we are moving backwards and losing territory but God's ways are very different. What is important is that we trust Him and walk in obedience.

Finally, notice that God promised Israel that He would make his family into a great nation in the land of Egypt and send them back to the land He had promised his fathers. We know that Egypt would be a very difficult place for God's people. Through this, however, God would do a powerful work. He would use His people's struggles to strengthen and increase their number. When they left Egypt they would be ready to become the nation God expected them to be. Many of us would prefer to be trained by God without having to go through suffering and trials. These trials, however, are God's way of preparing us for greater service. God promised to be with Israel in Egypt. He promised also to shape them through this time into a great nation. We need to learn to trust God in our struggles, for He will certainly use them for our good and His glory.

With God's words of encouragement ringing in his ears, Israel left Beersheba taking his family and all their livestock with him to the land of Egypt (verses 5-7).

Verses 8-27 record the names of those who went with Israel to Egypt. The names of those who went into Egypt are listed according to their mothers. There were sixty-six people who left Canaan to go to Egypt. In these verses there are, however, seventy names mentioned. To get the number 66 we need to realize that the list of names mentioned in this chapter includes two sons who had died in Canaan (verse 12) and two of Joseph's sons who were already in Egypt (verse 20).

As they were approaching the land of Egypt, Israel sent his son Judah ahead to get direction for the land of Goshen. Joseph had his chariot prepared and went out to meet his father (verse 29). Israel threw his arms around Joseph and wept for a long time. This encounter was obviously a very

emotional one. In verse 30, he told Joseph that he was now ready to die since he had seen his son alive. The idea seems to be that now that he had seen Joseph, Israel could die in peace. Obviously he had been tormented by the fact that his son had been taken from him.

Joseph told his brothers that he would go to Pharaoh and speak to him about their arrival (verse 31). He would mention the fact that they were shepherds and had brought their livestock with them. He told them that when they met Pharaoh and he asked them about their occupation, they were to tell him that they tended livestock. Pharaoh would then give them permission to settle in the land of Goshen. Joseph understood the culture of Egypt. He knew that shepherds were seen to be insignificant and detestable in the eyes of the Egyptians. Joseph knew that when Pharaoh discovered his brothers were shepherds, he would settle them in the rural region of Goshen where they would be away from the city.

When God's people came to Egypt they were separated from the rest of the Egyptian population. They were considered to be the low caste of society and people would not have associated with them. All this was in the plan of God. He did not want His people mixing with the Egyptian population. Had they been given homes with the rest of the population, the temptation would have been to follow their ways and intermarry with them. God had promised to make Israel's family into a great nation. If this was going to happen, they could not be weakened by intermarrying with the Egyptians and adopting their culture. They were separated from Egyptian society so they could become the people God wanted them to become.

## For Consideration:

- What do you think it was like for Israel (Jacob) to lose his son Joseph? Do you think he would have voluntarily surrendered his son to God to go to Egypt? What sacrifices has God called you to make?
- What do you think it would have been like for Israel to leave the land God had promised his fathers? Have you ever had to trust the Lord at a time when things didn't make sense to you? Explain.
- Israel and his family were separated from the rest of Egyptian society when they arrived. As shepherds, people would not have readily associated with them. How did this work out for good? How would God use this to strengthen His people?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to be willing to surrender all you have to Him for His use.
- Thank the Lord that while his ways are very different from ours, He knows what He is doing and will work out all things according to His purpose and our good.
- Take a moment to consider some of the struggles you are facing in life. Thank the Lord that He can use those struggles to accomplish His plan.



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## **CHAPTER 43 - PROSPERITY IN EGYPT**

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Read Genesis 47:1-31

Joseph's family had arrived in Egypt at his invitation. After the initial greetings, Joseph decided to inform Pharaoh that his family was now in the land with everything they owned. Joseph took five of his brothers with him to present them to Pharaoh (verse 2).

Pharaoh questioned Joseph's brothers about their occupation. They responded just as Joseph had told them to respond (see Genesis 46:33-34). They told Pharaoh that they were shepherds as their fathers had been (verse 3). They explained that they had come to live in the land because the famine was very severe in the land of Canaan and their flocks had no pasture land. They asked permission from Pharaoh to settle in the land of Goshen (verse 4).

Pharaoh gave Joseph's family permission to live in the land of Goshen. He even told Joseph that if there were



among his brothers any with special ability he was to put them in charge of his own livestock (verse 6). Pharaoh's respect for Joseph was so high that he was willing to give him the best of his land and entrust his own livestock into the hands of his brothers.

Joseph then presented his father to Pharaoh. Notice in verse 7 that Jacob blessed Pharaoh. It should be remembered that the blessings of these men of God were taken very seriously. This was more than a simple greeting and thank-you to Pharaoh. Jacob was in reality praying for the blessing of God to fall on this powerful ruler.

When Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was, Jacob responded by telling him that he was one hundred and thirty years old. Notice in verse 9, that he told Pharaoh that his years were few and not equal to the years of his fathers before him. In Genesis 6:3 we read that because God was angry with His people He told them that their lifespan would be reduced to one hundred and twenty years.

Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."

Jacob had already reached one hundred and thirty years. Even at this age he was able to make the long journey to Egypt. Jacob would live to be one hundred and forty-seven years old before he died. Pharaoh may very well have understood Jacob's long life to be a sign of God's rich blessing on him.

Joseph would settle his family in the land of Goshen. Joseph also provided his family with all the food and provisions they needed (verse 12). As the famine ravaged the

land of Canaan, God provided abundantly for His people in Egypt

Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine. During this time, Joseph continued to sell grain. The money he made selling grain was brought to Pharaoh's palace (verse 14). Pharaoh became richer and richer.

Eventually, the Egyptians had no more money. When all their money was gone, Joseph told the people that he would sell them food in exchange for their livestock (verse 16). They brought horses, sheep, goats, cattle and donkeys to Joseph and exchanged them for food.

The following year, however, all their livestock was gone. They had nothing left but their bodies and their land to exchange for food (verse 18). The people again pleaded with Joseph to buy them and their land in exchange for food (verse 19). Joseph agreed and bought their land for Pharaoh. The whole land of Egypt from one end to another was reduced to servitude. All belonged to Pharaoh and they served his cause in exchange for food (verse 21). Only the land belonging to the priests did not belong to Pharaoh (verse 22).

When the people had nothing left, Joseph then gave them seeds to plant on the land where they were living. They would plant their seeds and give back one-fifth of all the crops the land produced to Pharaoh. They could keep four-fifths for their own needs (verses 23-24). The people readily agreed to this and thanked Joseph for saving their lives (verse 25). A law was passed in Egypt that a fifth of all the produce of the land belonged to Pharaoh (verse 26).

While the people of Egypt were suffering tremendously, verse 27 tells us that the Israelites were "fruitful and increased greatly in number." God richly blessed His people in the midst of this terrible famine. All around people were being reduced to slavery and poverty but God's people were being blessed and growing in wealth and number. God's favour rested on them. Jacob would live seventeen years in the land of Egypt. He lived to be one hundred and forty-seven years old.

Notice in verse 29 that when it was time for Jacob to die, he called for Joseph. He made him promise not to bury him in the land of Egypt. Instead, he asked that his body be taken and buried with his fathers in the land of Canaan (verses 29-30). Joseph promised to do this.

The desire of Jacob to be buried in Canaan shows us that while he was being blessed in Egypt he knew that God had promised him and his fathers the land of Canaan. He knew that the day was coming when his people would leave Egypt and settle in Canaan.

Jacob and his descendants saw evidence of the blessing of God on their lives in Egypt. It would be easy for them to become so settled in this blessing that they forgot the promise of God for their nation in the land of Canaan. We can become so comfortable in our blessing that we forget the call of God on our life. Jacob never forgot the promise of God for his family. He refused to be buried in Egypt because he knew, by faith, that the land God had promised his family was the land of Canaan. Though he did not see the fulfillment of this promise in his life, he still believed God.

When Joseph promised his father that he would not bury him in the land of Egypt, Jacob leaned on the top of his

staff and worshipped God (verse 31). The fact that he had to lean on the top of his staff to worship shows us that his physical strength was diminishing.

I only wish that I had been there that day to hear Jacob worship his Lord. What was the subject of his worship? We can only imagine. Did he praise the Lord for the way He had provided for them in Egypt? Did He thank the Lord in faith for the land of Canaan that would one day be theirs? Did he praise God for His long and prosperous life? We simply do not know. What we do know, however, is that Jacob's heart was filled with praise to God as his earthly life was coming to an end. May this be our attitude in both life and death as well.

For Consideration:

- Pharaoh received Joseph's family into Egypt. What does this tell us about the confidence and feelings of Pharaoh toward Joseph?
- Compare what was happening in Egypt with what was happening in Goshen where the people of God were living. What evidence is there of the blessing of God on the lives of His people?
- Jacob prospered in Egypt. What is the danger of prosperity? How can prosperity distract us from the call of God on our life?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to make you a person others can trust.

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the richness of His blessing in your life. Name some particular blessings.
- Ask God to help you not to be distracted by the things of this world. Ask Him to show you His plan for your life and help you to walk in it.

## **CHAPTER 44 -**

### **JACOB BLESSES HIS SONS**

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Read Genesis 48:1-49:33

Jacob was now an old man and his health was failing. When news came to Joseph that his father was sick, he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim to see him (48:1). Jacob rallied his strength and sat up on his bed to see his son and grandsons.

Knowing that his time of death was fast approaching, he reminded Joseph of how the Lord God had appeared to him in Canaan and blessed him. He told him how God promised to make him fruitful and increase his descendants. He also told him that He would give him the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession for him and his descendants. In telling Joseph this, he was reminding him that Egypt was not their permanent home and that the purposes of God would be fulfilled in the land of Canaan. It was important to Jacob that Joseph keep this in his mind. It is all too easy to become comfortable where we are. Jacob did not want his descendants to remain in Egypt forever. It was the plan of God to give them their own land.

In Genesis 48:5, Jacob told Joseph that the two sons born to him in Egypt would be his sons. This meant that Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph's sons, would have all the rights and privileges of Jacob's sons. For this reason we do not have a tribe of Joseph. His two sons would take Joseph's place.

By doing this, Jacob was assuring that there would be no division in the family. It would have been easy, on his death, for Jacob's sons to push Joseph and his sons aside. By adopting Manasseh and Ephraim as his own, Jacob was officially accepting them into his family. They were not Egyptians, they would be known as Israelites and sons of Jacob.

Jacob asked that Joseph's sons be brought to him so he could bless them (48:9). Joseph brought his two sons and Jacob kissed and hugged them (48:10). This was a very emotional time for Jacob. Notice in Genesis 48:11 that he told Joseph that he had never expected to see his face again but God had allowed him now to see Joseph's children. Joseph bowed down with his face to the ground before his father in a sign of respect and admiration (48:12).

Genesis 48:13 tells us that Joseph took his two sons and placed them before his father to receive their blessing. Because Ephraim was the younger, he was placed on the left and his elder brother Manasseh was placed on the right.

When Jacob stretched out his hand to bless Joseph's sons, he took his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head though he was the younger (48:14). He then crossed his arms and put his left hand on Manasseh the older son. Jacob then blessed Joseph calling on the God who had been his shepherd and the Angel of God who had delivered him on many occasions. He asked that they would be called

after the names of his fathers and that God would greatly increase their number on the earth (48:14-16)

When Joseph saw that his father had placed his right hand on Ephraim, the younger, he took hold of his father's hand to move it to Manasseh's head. He explained that Manasseh was the firstborn child and requested that he put his right hand on his head instead of Ephraim (48:18).

Jacob told his son Joseph that he understood that Manasseh was the older son. His descendants would be great and numerous. Ephraim, his younger brother, however, would be greater. Jacob told his son Joseph that the blessing of these two sons would be so great that their brothers would pronounce blessing by saying: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh" (48:20).

When he had finished blessing Joseph's sons, Jacob gave Joseph a piece of land that he had taken from the Amorites with his sword and bow (48:22). The word Jacob used here is the Hebrew word "shekem" which means shoulder or ridge. This has led commentators to wonder if the piece of land that was given to Joseph was the region of Shechem which his sons had taken by force after their sister Dinah had been raped (see Genesis 34).

After speaking personally to Joseph and blessing his two sons, Jacob then called for the rest of his sons. He wanted to speak to them concerning what would happen to them in the days to come (49:1).

The first son he spoke to was Reuben (49:3-4). As the firstborn son, Reuben occupied a place of special honour. He was the first sign of God's blessing on Jacob's life, a sign of his strength, honour and power. A child born in



those days was an indication of God's blessing on the life of the mother and father.

Notice, however, that Jacob described Reuben as being as turbulent as the waters. He told him that he would not excel because he had defiled his father's bed (49:4). We have a record of this event in Genesis 35:2 where Reuben slept with his father's wife Bilhah. He would live with the consequences of this for the rest of his life.

The next sons Jacob spoke to were Simeon and Levi (49:5-7). He described them as men whose swords were "weapons of violence." He did not advise anyone to listen to their counsel because they had killed men in their anger and hamstringed their oxen. This is likely a reference to what Simeon and Levi did to the inhabitants of Shechem after their sister Dinah was raped (Genesis 34). Jacob cursed their fierce and cruel anger. They would be scattered as a people among the nations.

Jacob's words to Judah were more positive (49:8-12). Judah's brothers would praise him. His hand would be around the neck of his enemy. In other words, God would give him victory over his enemies. He would have a place of prominence among his brothers who would bow down to pay their respect to him (verse 8). Jacob described Judah as a great lion. There is a sense of power in these words. Judah's enemies would not want to rouse his anger (verse 9). Judah would be a great leader among his brothers. Verse 10 tells us that the ruler's sceptre and staff would not depart from Judah until it came to the one to whom it belonged.

Judah's blessing is very important. We are told that Judah would be a ruler among his people until that leadership was passed on to the one to whom it rightfully belonged.

Out of Judah would come the great king David who would be one of the greatest kings the nation would ever know. There was, however, one who would come from this tribe who was even greater than David. The Lord Jesus would come as a descendant of this line to be king forever. The prophecy is that the Messiah would be born from the tribe of Judah. This was the greatest honour any tribe could have.

Jacob told Judah that he would become rich and prosperous. Wine and fruit would be so abundant for Judah that they would even tie their donkeys and colts to the vine and branches of the fruit trees and let them eat freely. They would wash their clothes in wine and the juice of the grape (verse 11). Judah's eyes would be darkened from the abundance of wine he drank and his teeth whitened by the abundance of milk (verse 12).

Jacob told his son Zebulun next that he would live by the seashore and become a haven for ships. His border would extend to the region of Sidon (49:13).

Issachar is described as a "raw-boned donkey lying down between two saddlebags." The word translated "raw-boned" in the New International Version can also mean strong. Notice that while Issachar was strong, he had to carry a burden. His burden, however, was willingly accepted and he made the best of his situation. Verse 15 tells us that when he saw how pleasant his resting place was, he would willingly shoulder the burden he had to bear and submit to forced labour. Things would not be easy for Issachar but he would make the best of his situation.

Jacob told his son Dan that he would provide justice for his people. He is compared to a serpent on the roadside that bites the horse's heels so that the horse rose up and threw

off its rider (verse 17). Dan would be small but powerful. Jacob cries out for deliverance from God in verse 18. In doing so he shows Dan that his strength was not in himself but in the Lord God of his fathers.

Jacob prophesied that the day would come when Gad would be attacked by a band of raiders but he would attack at their heels. The fact that Gad is attacking at the heels of his enemy shows that they are running from him. Gad would be victorious.

Asher would enjoy rich food fit for a king (49:20). He would also provide others with food fit for a king. He would prosper and have not only sufficient for himself but also to share with others.

Naphtali is pictured as a doe set free, which bore beautiful fawns (49:21). It appears from this that they would live a quiet and peaceful life and multiply as a tribe.

Jacob addressed his son Joseph in Genesis 49:22-26. Joseph was a fruitful vine whose branches climbed over walls. Archers attacked and shot at him with hostility but he remained steady and unharmed. This is likely a reference to what Joseph's brothers had done to him in selling him into slavery. Joseph remained unharmed because the Lord God was with him to help and bless him with blessings from heaven above, from the earth below and blessings from the breast and the womb (verses 24-25). Joseph was a prince among his brothers. Jacob told him that the great blessings of his fathers would come to him (verse 26).

Finally, Jacob spoke to his youngest son Benjamin. Benjamin was like a wolf going out in the morning to devour his prey. He would return to divide his plunder. Benjamin

would be powerful and his tribe blessed with the provision of God.

Speaking to all of his sons, Jacob told them that when he died, they were not to bury him in Egypt. He wanted his body to be buried in the cave which Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hittite (49:30). It was on that plot of land that Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried. Jacob's father and mother Isaac and Rebekah were buried there as well as Jacob's wife Leah. (49:31). Having blessed all his sons and explained his last wishes, Jacob lay back down in his bed and died (49:33).

For Consideration:

- On different occasions in these two chapters we see Jacob speaking about Canaan as the land God had promised him and his descendants. Egypt was only a temporary dwelling place for Israel. How easy is it for us to become so focused on the things of this earth that we fail to live with our eyes on heaven?
- Jacob adopted Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Why was this important? How did this guarantee that Joseph's sons, although they were born in Egypt, would be considered part of the nation of Israel?
- What do we learn in this section about Jacob's prophetic ability? How does he use this God given ability to comfort, strengthen and encourage his sons? Is this gift still needed today?
- Notice how Reuben, Simeon and Levi bore the guilt and consequences of their sin. Does forgiveness

mean that we never have to bear the consequences of our sin?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to see this earth as your temporary home. Ask Him to help you to set your eyes on heaven and live with heaven as your goal.
- Ask God to remove the distractions in your life that keep you from His purpose.
- Thank the Lord for how He knows your future and that nothing takes Him by surprise.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the sins of your past. Ask Him to heal those you have hurt by your sins and give you grace to live with the consequences of your actions.

## **CHAPTER 45 -**

### **THE DEATH OF JOSEPH**

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Read Genesis 50: 1-26

When Joseph heard that his father had died he threw himself on him, kissed him and wept over him (verse 1). He then directed his physicians to prepare his father's body and to embalm him, as was the Egyptian custom. It should be noted that Joseph had promised to bury his father in the land of Canaan. The time required to get permission for this and to make the trip meant that the body had to be preserved in some way. Verse 3 tells us that the embalming process took a full forty days but the Egyptians mourned for Joseph's father seventy days. This shows us something of what they felt toward Joseph as a powerful leader in Egypt.

When the seventy days of mourning for Jacob were over, Joseph approached Pharaoh's court and asked permission to leave Egypt for the purposes of burying his father. He told them that his father had made him swear that he would bury him in a tomb he had dug in Canaan (verse 5).

Joseph promised Pharaoh that he would bury his father and return to his responsibilities in Egypt. Pharaoh granted him permission.

It is interesting to note that Joseph's time in Egypt had not come to an end. He would return to Canaan with his family to bury his father but he would not stay there. While it was the will of God that his family return to Canaan, this was not the time. Timing is of utmost importance in our walk with the Lord. It is possible to be at the right place but at the wrong time. We can also speak the right words at that wrong time. Joseph knew that the Lord wanted his family in Canaan but he also understood that this was not the Lord's time. Joseph had not finished the work God had given him in Egypt.

About two and a half months after Jacob's death, Joseph left Egypt accompanied by Pharaoh's officials, the dignitaries and his brothers. They left their children and their flocks in Goshen (verse 8). Verse 9 tells us that a large company of people went with chariots and horsemen. Jacob would be buried with great ceremony.

When they reached the threshing floor of Atad near Jordan, they spent seven days in mourning for Jacob weeping "loudly and bitterly" (verse 10). When the Canaanites who lived in the region saw and heard what was happening, they took note and said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning." The place would be called Abel Mizraim meaning "mourning of the Egyptians."

Jacob was buried in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre. Abraham had bought this property from Ephron the Hittite (verse 13). When they had buried Jacob, Joseph and all who had accompanied him returned to Egypt (verse 14).

After the death of their father, Joseph's brothers began to fear what Joseph might do to them. As long as their father was alive, they felt sure that Joseph would not do anything to them. Now that Jacob was dead, they feared that Joseph would seek revenge for what they had done to him in selling him into slavery (verse 15). They decided to tell Joseph that their father had left them with instructions before he died. They told him that their father had asked him to forgive his brothers for their sin toward him. They asked Joseph to forgive them. To the best of our knowledge this was the first time Joseph's brothers actually sought his forgiveness.

The sin of Joseph's brothers had been unresolved for many years. As long as their father was alive they felt protected, but their relationship with Joseph was strained. They feared him because he had the power to harm them. When God took their father and their protection was gone, they stood face to face with Joseph. This frightened them. They weren't sure where they stood with him. Maybe you have found yourself in a similar situation. It is quite easy to hide behind our busyness or other people and not deal with the problems we have between us. Husbands and wives occupy their time with their schedules. Christian workers can keep busy with their service. All the while there are conflicts that have never been resolved. How important it is for us to deal with the issues that separate us. God was doing a deeper work in the lives of Joseph's brothers. He stripped away their protection so that they would be forced to deal with their sin.

When Joseph heard their words, his heart was broken. He wept in their presence. Notice in verse 18 that Joseph's brothers cast themselves down before him telling him that they were his slaves. They recognized that they had hurt



him deeply. They deserved to be punished for their crime against him.

Joseph held no grudge against his brothers. He told them not to be afraid (verse 19). He realized that they had intended to harm him by selling him into Egypt. He does not diminish their sin. Joseph also recognized, however, that God had accomplished great good in the situation. Many lives had been saved because of what had happened to Joseph. Joseph reassured his brothers that he would continue to provide for them and their families (verse 21).

God is able to take the evil done to us and use it for good. This does not mean that He is the author of sin. Nor does it mean that those who sin against us are being led by God to do what they do. We will all have to give an account of our actions. As parents we are often required to fix what our children have broken. We can also use the failures of our children to teach them lessons for their own good. This is what God does. He uses our failures to teach us lessons. How often has he fixed what we have broken or cleaned up our messes? This does not excuse our sin. It is comforting to know, however, that God is bigger than our failures and sins.

Joseph lived to be one hundred and ten years old (verse 22). He would see the third generation of Ephraim's children. He would hold his great grandchild, the grandson of Manasseh on his knee (verse 23). The day approached, however, when Joseph knew he was going to die. He told his brothers that while he was going to die, God would come to their aid. He also told them that God would take them out of Egypt to the land of Canaan which He had promised to their fathers (verse 24). He asked his family to swear to him that they would take his bones from Egypt when they left (verse 25). Joseph was embalmed and

placed in a coffin in Egypt waiting the day when his bones would leave and be planted in the soil of Canaan.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about Jacob's funeral? What does this teach us about how much Egypt respected Joseph and what he had done for them?
- What does this passage teach us about the importance of waiting on God's timing? Have you ever been tempted to run ahead of God?
- Joseph's brothers hid behind their father but did not deal with the barriers between themselves and Joseph. Have you been hiding behind something today and not dealing with the real issues between you and another person?
- What do we learn in this passage about how God can use whatever happens to us to accomplish His purpose? Do you trust the Lord in the things that have happened in your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be more like Joseph, a godly example in the midst of suffering and loss.
- Ask God to open your eyes to see how He has used the things that have happened to you for your good and His glory.
- Ask God to forgive you for running ahead of Him. Ask Him to give you more patience to wait on His timing in your life.
- Take a moment to examine your relationships with others. Ask God to reveal any relationships that

need to be healed. Ask Him for wisdom to know how to make things right.

- Thank the Lord that He is able to use whatever happens to us for our good and His glory.

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