



**THRU** the **BIBLE**

with *J. Vernon McGee*

# GENESIS

BIBLE COMPANION



PENTATEUCH

# READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the book of Genesis heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.



**Begin with prayer.** Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



**As you study, read the Bible passage first.** Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!



**If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to [TTB.org/Genesis](http://TTB.org/Genesis)** (or any book of the Bible).

The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.



**After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion.** Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.

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LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU  
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING....

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COLOSSIANS 3:16<sup>A</sup>

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LESSON 1</b>	FIRST THINGS FIRST .....1
<b>LESSON 2</b>	SOMETHING FROM NOTHING ..... 11
<b>LESSON 3</b>	WHEN IT ALL CHANGED ..... 22
<b>LESSON 4</b>	WHAT HAPPENED NEXT ..... 32
<b>LESSON 5</b>	IN THE DAYS OF NOAH..... 41
<b>LESSON 6</b>	A REVOLUTIONARY NEW BEGINNING.....50
<b>LESSON 7</b>	GOD CHOOSES HIS PEOPLE ..... 61
<b>LESSON 8</b>	AMEN ..... 71
<b>LESSON 9</b>	SODOM AND GOMORRAH ..... 81
<b>LESSON 10</b>	WHAT HAPPENED ON MOUNT MORIAH ..... 91
<b>LESSON 11</b>	ISAAC GETS A BRIDE ..... 103

<b>LESSON 12</b>	TWINS .....	112
<b>LESSON 13</b>	DECEIVED .....	122
<b>LESSON 14</b>	TIME TO GO .....	132
<b>LESSON 15</b>	TURNING POINT .....	143
<b>LESSON 16</b>	FULL CIRCLE.....	154
<b>LESSON 17</b>	BROTHERS AND FATHERS.....	161
<b>LESSON 18</b>	NOT FORGOTTEN.....	171
<b>LESSON 19</b>	DREAMS AND SURPRISES .....	182
<b>LESSON 20</b>	THE TEST .....	192
<b>LESSON 21</b>	I AM YOUR BROTHER .....	201
<b>LESSON 22</b>	BLESSINGS AND BENEDICTIONS .....	213

## LESSON 1

# FIRST THINGS FIRST



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 1:1**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 1 Intro**, **Genesis 1 Intro (cont.)**, **Genesis 1:1**, and **Genesis 1:2-25**

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The Bible is best studied in two ways: with a telescope or with a microscope. At first, you need to get the telescopic view to get the broad view. After that, study it with a microscope, to get the details. We will do both together.

First, the broad view. The book of Genesis is one of two key books of the Bible. Genesis opens the Old Testament and the Gospel of Matthew opens the New Testament. Understanding these two books is key to understanding the entire Bible as a whole.

Before you begin this study of Genesis, give it a good try to read the entire book (50 chapters) in one sitting. You'll appreciate having a bigger perspective.

## A CLOSER LOOK

Now, let's take a closer look. Genesis states many things for the first time: creation, man, woman, sin, Sabbath, marriage, family, labor, civilization, culture, murder, sacrifice, races, languages, redemption, and cities. You'll also notice certain repeated phrases like "these are the generations of" as you read about the families of early history. We're members of the human family that begins right here.

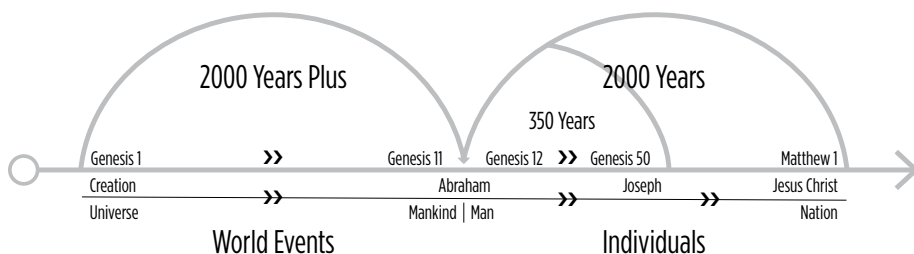
Genesis is also a book of biographies. We learn about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Pharaoh, and the eleven sons of Jacob besides Joseph. You'll discover God is continually blessing Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and those associated with them—Lot, Abimelech, Potiphar, the butler, and Pharaoh to name just a few.

In Genesis we'll find the first mention of covenants between God and mankind. We'll also witness frequent appearances of the Lord to the patriarchs, especially to Abraham. The altar is prominent in Genesis, as well as jealousy. We travel through Egypt more times in this book than anywhere else. The judgments upon sin are often mentioned here, as well as God obviously and providentially leading His people.

The Bible itself speaks to our hearts in Genesis in a way no other book does.

## MAJOR DIVISIONS OF GENESIS

If you had to divide the book of Genesis into two parts, where would you draw the line? Notice that the first 11 chapters constitute a whole, and beginning with chapter 12 through the remainder of the book, we find an altogether different section.



Here's how the two parts differ:

- Genesis 1-11 extends from creation to Abraham.
- Genesis 12-50 extends from Abraham through Joseph.

Genesis 1-11 deals with major *subjects*, subjects which still engage the minds of thoughtful people in our day: the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the Tower of Babel.

Genesis 12-50 deals with *personalities*: Abraham, the man of faith; Isaac, the beloved son; Jacob, the chosen and chastened son; and Joseph, his suffering and glory.

Genesis 1-11 cover a minimum of 2000 years—perhaps even several hundred thousand years. This first section can cover any time in the past that fits into any particular creation theory. Chances are that guess would come short of it even then.

Genesis 12-50 covers only 350 years. In fact, beginning with Genesis 12 and running all the way through the Old Testament and the New Testament, a total time span of only 2000 years is covered. Therefore, as far as *time* is concerned, you are halfway through the Bible when you cover the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

God must have had some definite purpose in giving this first section to us. It makes us wonder where He is putting the emphasis—on this first section or on the rest of the Bible? It's obvious He wants us to focus on the last part.

The first section has to do with the universe and with creation, but the last part deals with man, with nations, and with the person of Jesus Christ. God was more interested in Abraham than He was in the entire created universe. God is more interested in *you* and attaches more value to *you* than He does to the entire physical universe.

This concentration of time and events can be illustrated in the Gospel records, too. If you add up the chapters in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the sum is 89 chapters:

- Four chapters cover the first 30 years of the life of the Lord Jesus.
- 85 chapters cover the last three years of His life.
- 27 chapters cover the final eight *days* of His life.

Where is the Spirit of God placing the emphasis? Yes, on Jesus' final days. What are those days about? The death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the most important part of the Gospel record. God has given us the Gospels that we will believe that Christ died for our sins and that He was raised for our salvation. That is the all-important truth He wanted us to know and believe.

When we look at the first 11 chapters of Genesis, we need to see them for their intended purpose. Genesis is the "seed plot" of the Bible, and here we find the beginning, the source, the birth of everything. Genesis is just like the bud of a beautiful rose, and it opens out into the rest of the Bible. The truth here is in germ form.



One of the best ways we can look at Genesis is according to the genealogies, the families.

<b>Genesis 1:1-2:6</b>	Generations of Heavens and Earth
<b>Genesis 2:7-6:8</b>	Generations of Adam
<b>Genesis 6:9-9:29</b>	Generations of Noah
<b>Genesis 10:1-11:9</b>	Generations of Sons of Noah
<b>Genesis 11:10-26</b>	Generations of Sons of Shem
<b>Genesis 11:27-25:11</b>	Generations of Terah
<b>Genesis 25:12-18</b>	Generations of Ishmael
<b>Genesis 25:19-35:29</b>	Generations of Isaac
<b>Genesis 36:1-37:1</b>	Generations of Esau
<b>Genesis 37:2-50:26</b>	Generations of Jacob

With that as our foundation, let's take a closer look at the book itself.

***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*** –Genesis 1:1

You have just read one of the most profound statements ever made. It has been challenged in every generation, yet it is all we have to describe actual creation, with the exception of the creation of man and animals that we'll study here in a minute.

Every generation would be wise to remember the statement the Lord made to Job. God asked him the question, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:4). In other words, God says to us, *"You talk about the origin of the universe, but you don't even know where you were when I laid the foundation of the earth!"*

Many theories circulate as to how the world began, but all of them can be boiled down into a two-fold classification: creation or speculation.

The theory of evolution is made up of many different theories. Some of the most reputable scientists of the past, as well as of the present, reject evolution. So we can't put down the theory of evolution as being a scientific statement like  $2 + 2 = 4$ . Much of it must be taken by speculation.



The creation account in Genesis 1 must also be accepted by faith. God made it that way—by *faith* is the only way in the world you can accept it. Hebrews 11:1-3 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

So the question remains, how did it get from nothing to something? The only way you can ever arrive at an answer is by faith or by speculation—and speculation is very unscientific. To be an evolutionist you have to take speculation also by *faith*. Sadly, a great many folks have accepted it as fact, but it's not.

God asks us to believe His majestic Word, which opens: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The psalmist invites us to consider *His* heavens, the work of *His* fingers, the moon and the stars, which *He* has ordained (see Psalm 8:3) and realize that “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).

The apostle Paul wrote about creation in Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” And the writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 11:3: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

God asks us to accept creation by faith. Yes, something out of nothing. Even science cannot explain it, but that's apparently how God did it.

While a great deal more can be said on these issues, a very important third question rises to the surface. People may ask *who* created the universe and *when* it was created, but the real question is *why* the universe was created. This gets right down to the nitty-gritty!

The Word of God tells us that this universe was created for God's own pleasure. He saw fit to create it; He delighted in it. Look closely at the worship scene in heaven as recorded in Revelation 4:11: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”

God created this universe because He wanted to. He did it for His own pleasure. You may not like the universe, but He does. The original creation sang that wonderful Creator's praise: "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). Isaiah's prophecy included this: "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him" (Isaiah 43:7). God created this universe for His own glory.

The Word of God also tells us that God created mankind in this universe for fellowship. He created us as free moral agents. He could have made us a bunch of robots to worship Him. He could have made mechanical people and pushed a button to make us bow down. But God didn't want that kind of worship from that kind of people. He wanted us to be free to choose Him and to love Him and to serve Him.

The world we live in is filled with unbelief, blasphemy, and hostility toward God. The greatest thing we can do as human beings is to publicly choose the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe in God the Father, Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth and to receive His Son, Jesus Christ, is the most glorious privilege we have. We hear a lot of talk about freedom of speech and of every other sort, but this poor crowd around us who talk so loudly of freedom don't know what freedom really is. We have real freedom when we choose Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Yes, one of the most majestic verses in the Bible is the first one right here: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This verse is the doorway through which you have to walk into the Bible. You have to believe that God is the Creator, "for he who comes to God must believe that He *is* ..." (Hebrews 11:6).

Let's look at this verse through the microscope:

"In the beginning" is a beginning that we cannot date. We can estimate it as thousands or billions of years—who knows how many? Certainly we *can't know*.

"God created." The word "create" is from the Hebrew word *bara*, which means to create out of nothing. This word records three acts of creation:

1. The creation of the heavens and the earth—something from nothing.
2. The creation of animal life of all kinds (1:20-21).
3. The creation of mankind "in His own image" (1:27).

Theistic evolution isn't the answer. It attempts to follow creation until the time of man, then considers Adam and Eve to be products of some evolutionary process. The theistic evolutionist considers the days in Genesis as long periods of time. But when God marked off the creative days with the words, "so the evening and the morning were the first day," He used the words to describe actual 24-hour days.

"God created the heavens and the earth." The earth is separated from the rest of creation. Why? Because it is mankind's hometown. The earth is where we are placed. We are God's creation—His creatures. As God's creatures, we owe it to Him to acknowledge Him as our Creator.

This is where the life of faith begins.

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**NEXT: When God said, "Let there be light ...."**

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## LESSON 1



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What does it tell us about how God has revealed Himself to the world that the story of the Bible begins with the story of families?
2. Of all the ways we think about God, sometimes we neglect to remember that God introduced Himself to the world as the Creator. How could focusing on God as the Creator of all things change our attitude toward the physical world and other people around us?
3. Why do you think it is significant to the writers of the Bible that, when God created everything, He did so out of nothing? What difference does it make?



7. Imagine you were going to go back and revise the book of Genesis.  
What, if anything, would you change about the way the book opens?

## LESSON 2

# SOMETHING FROM NOTHING



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 1–2**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 1:2-25**, **Genesis 1:26–2:3**, and **Genesis 2:4-25**

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***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*** –Genesis 1:1

To walk through the front door of the Bible, you have to believe that God is the Creator. “He who comes to God must believe that He is ...” (Hebrews 11:6).

Mankind has tried for centuries to put a date on when creation began, but we certainly don’t know; truth is, we can’t know. But we can believe that God created it. *Bara*, the Hebrew word for “create,” means “out of nothing.” God created something from nothing.

Evolution has never answered the question of how nothing becomes something. Perhaps they start with a little amoeba, because you’ve got to have something to start with. But the Bible starts with nothing. “God created.” There’s tremendous truth in that little statement.

When God tells us of creation, He singles out the earth from the rest of His handiwork. Why? Because this is our home, where He placed us. This true story of the Bible traces our interaction with our Creator.

What a marvelous story this is. In just the first two verses of Genesis 1, we cover all the principles of creation and physics of the universe.



In the beginning: that's about TIME.

The heavens: that's about SPACE.

The earth: that's about MATTER.

The Spirit of God: that's about FORCE.

Hovering over the face of the waters: that's about MOTION and SPIRIT.

In the first sentence of Genesis we learn that “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” In the second sentence we learn that “the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”

One view of creation that is not discussed much but holds weight suggests that between these two verses, a great catastrophe took place. Just look at this vast creation—something happened to it. It's not the beautiful creation God initially made it to be. Look at pictures of the moon—it's nothing but a wasteland. How did it get that way?

“The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.” “Without form” is the Hebrew word *tohu*, meaning a ruin, vacancy; “void” is the translated *bohu*, meaning “emptiness.” God is clearly absent from the scene.

We get a clue about God's intention in Isaiah 45:18: “For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other.’”

God says He didn't create the universe formless and void. God created this universe a cosmos, not a chaos. He didn't create it void, but it *became void*. Something happened that took it from habitable to inhabitable.

Our current study and exploration of space has so far revealed that we live in a universe in which only the earth is habitable for human beings. Genesis could be telling us that this earth *became* without form and void, that it was just as uninhabitable as the moon before the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

So what was this great catastrophe that happened before Adam and Eve? Likely it was connected with the fall of Lucifer, son of the morning, who became Satan, as we know him today. That rebellion could have been a factor, but God hasn't given us the details. The truth is, He gives us very, very few details about creation in Genesis.

God does tell us that His Spirit “hovered” or “brooded” on the face of the water. A mother hen broods over her chicks. This is the first time we hear of God doing this, but with a careful eye, you’ll see it throughout the Bible. God re-creates! He comes into a scene and He begins again. He takes what He already made, perhaps eons before, and recreates it. This is precisely what He does for us.

God created life and put it on the earth. Then He created us, and that’s the focus of the story we now will explore. He left out of the Genesis record so much about the creation of the universe we’d love to know. But this is all the information He gave us. He could have filled in details, but He didn’t.

He does tell us more detail about one act of His creation: when He created us. This is our story and He wants us to know about our origin, as if He is saying, “Pay attention to your *own* creation and don’t speculate about the creation of the universe.”

Hebrews 11:3 says: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

The world we live in was made out of things which didn’t *exist* before. The creation was made *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. We can’t explain it and neither can any manmade system. We must take it by faith.

Here is what He tells us about how He made the universe.

#### **DAY ONE**—Light (1:3-5)

The first time we are told that God spoke, He said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

Ten times in Genesis 1 we find “let there be ....” They are the ten commandments of creation. The first divine decalogue.

“God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.” This was a 24-hour day.

#### **DAY TWO**—Air Spaces (1:6-8)

Next, God spoke into place the firmament—the air spaces. He divided the waters from the waters; water above us and water beneath us. He called the firmament, “heaven.” This is the first deck where the clouds form and where birds fly. (The second heaven is where stars are suspended and the third heaven is where God dwells.)

**DAY THREE**—Dry land and plant life (1:9-13)

First the waters above were separated from the waters beneath. He calls this dry land, earth. The forming of the plant life completed the third day.

**DAY FOUR**—Sun, moon, stars appear (1:14-19)

Did you notice the order of these verses? There was light and darkness before He created the sun and the moon. Now the sun ruled the day and the moon governed the night. Then, almost as an aside, Genesis says, “He made the stars also,” almost as an afterthought. Have you seen the photographs coming in from the scientific telescopes? The star systems are awesome and amazing—a pretty big job to create. But not for God. John Wesley said, “God created the heavens and the earth and didn’t even half try.”

**DAY FIVE**—Animal life (1:20-23)

Now God makes one of each creature and more develops from each one, “according to their kind.” The word “kind” describes first a species then every descent within a group (i.e. not just one horse but every animal in the horse family). “And God saw that it was good.”

**DAY SIX**—Fertility of animal life (1:24-25) and creation of man and woman (1:26-31)

Then God—busy making out of the earth every “living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind”—says it’s all good.

God then separates plant life and animal life from mankind, and He says, “Let Us make man in Our image.” Now it gets personal to us. You remember When God created mankind, the word *bara* describes that process of creating something out of nothing. When God created man, He created something new.

***So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. -v. 27***

Let’s explore one of the great statements of the Word of God, “in His own image.” God, who is the essentially-personal Being, gives mankind an immortal soul and a true personality. Man has a self-consciousness, the power of free choice—he can make his own decisions and has a distinct moral responsibility. We are in His image, and it sets us apart from the rest of creation. Though we don’t have the details of how we were created, we do know that God created us. We are His crowning jewel of creation.

God the Creator then blesses us, and tells us to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. He repeats that command when He creates the woman. He names them Adam and Eve and tells them to “replenish” (κ JV) the earth, implying that this earth had been inhabited before by other creatures. Whatever the creatures were, they had disappeared before we were created.

God also tells them to “subdue” the earth. Adam was created to be more than a glorified gardener of the Garden of Eden; God gave him authority and responsibility. He was created to rule this earth. Perhaps Adam could control the weather just as we control the air-conditioning in our homes. He *ruled* this earth. When the Lord Jesus walked this earth, He had control over nature. He said to a storm, “Be still.” He could feed a multitude with five loaves and two fishes. Perhaps Adam could have done all of that before his sinful fall. At the Fall, he lost the dominion God had given him.

***Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. -v. 31***

The Holy Spirit inspired great truths in Genesis 1, and now He will elaborate on some details.

We’ve been told about six days of creation in summary form in Genesis 1. Now God comes back around and enlarges on important details in Genesis 2.

FYI: The Bible does this in other places, too. In Deuteronomy, Moses explains the Law after they’ve experienced it in their 40 years in the wilderness. Deuteronomy doesn’t just repeat the Law, it explains it. The four Gospels do this, too. Each explain many of the same events from the life and ministry of Jesus, but from a different perspective.

We’ll notice this throughout the Word of God and now here in Genesis 2.

## THE SABBATH

Don’t miss the importance of the Sabbath Day. Genesis 2 begins by saying when God finished creating the heavens and earth, He rested. Was He tired after a big week of work? No, that’s not why He rested.

When God finished His sixth day of work, He looked at it and concluded it was very good and complete. There was nothing else to do on it. How often can we say that about our work? Hardly ever. But God did. At the end of six days of work, He rested the seventh day because it was complete.

That's a great spiritual truth! We're told in Hebrews 4 that God invites us into His rest. In that word, we enter into His Sabbath, His perfect redemption. Because Jesus died for us on the cross, He can offer us a complete redemption that gives us "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). We don't have to lift a finger to be saved; Jesus did it all.

## CREATION-RESTORATION

In Genesis 1 we learn that all of creation was here long before mankind was on the earth. First, God prepared a home for the people He would make and now He is getting it ready to move us into that place He prepared for us.

From nothing, God created the inorganic. Then He created life to fill the spaces. First, organic plant life and then animal life. Mankind came next in creation, without any natural transition. Evolution can't bridge the gap that brings us to the appearance of mankind on earth. The earth, therefore, was prepared for the coming of man.

Next, God tells us that He physically took us out of the dust of the ground. How interesting that our bodies are made up of about 16 chemical elements—the same that are in dirt. But man is more than dirt because we are more than physical. Yes, from dust we are created and to the dust we will return, but our spirit will go to God. God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." God gave man physical life and then spiritual life. God brought mankind into a marvelous relationship with his Creator. This is what separates us from all other creatures in God's universe.

## THE GARDEN OF EDEN

The Garden of Eden, where God placed Adam and Eve, was originally tucked in the fertile Tigris-Euphrates Valley. God then put Adam in the garden to have dominion over it; the forces of nature responded at his beck and call.

What a beautiful place it must have been. Watering this fertile garden and flowing out of its center were four rivers—the Nile, the Pison, the Tigris, and the Euphrates.

The Lord God made “every tree grow” that is lovely to look at and good for food. We don’t know much about the two important trees, the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” because God has removed them from the scene after Adam and Eve sinned.

Likely, this area will someday become the very center of the earth again.

## **“IT IS NOT GOOD THAT MAN SHOULD BE ALONE”**

God gave Adam the authority and responsibility to tend the garden. He was busy with the jobs God gave him to do, first to name all the animals. But while Adam observed the animal kingdom, he realized he was alone. No one was like him. He needed a partner, someone to be with him. “A helper” is how this partner is described—a counterpart, the other half of him. Marriage is God’s intention for both man and woman.

So, once Adam recognized his need, God met it. He made Adam fall into a deep sleep and God surgically removed one of Adam’s ribs. And from his side, God made a woman and brought her to Adam.

It has been said that the woman wasn’t taken from Adam’s head to be his superior or from his foot to be his inferior, but He took her from his side to be equal with him, to be along with him. That is her purpose: to be the other half of man.

She must have been beautiful to Adam. He recognizes that she is a match for him, and she was made from him. Bone taken from his bone, and flesh from his flesh. Adam calls her a “woman” because she was taken out of man. In Hebrew, the word for “man” is *ish* and the word for “woman” is *ishshah*. She is the other part of man and is to partner with him. God intended man to take the lead—He created him first—and He created woman to follow. The man is the aggressor and she is the responder.

Isn’t it interesting that God never said that a wife should love her husband—instead He says she is to respond to him. His love prompts her love. If a man says his wife is cold, that’s a dead giveaway he’s not the kind of husband he needs to be. When he is, she will respond, because he has loved her first.

The story of creation of woman for man is one of the Bible’s most beautiful stories. Imagine that moment when God introduced Adam to his wife. They were both naked, and were not ashamed. Although the Scriptures don’t say,

they may have been clothed with some kind of glory light. Here is the jewel of God's creation. Nothing is more precious to Him than these two people. God has given this union to creation, this gift of marriage.

In these first two chapters of the Bible we learn who we are and why we're here. We learn how we were created, where we were placed, our responsibilities, our need for other people. This is our creation story.

The great message of this chapter surrounds our relationship with God. We can worship Him, have fellowship with Him, serve Him out of loyalty, administer authority as given by Him, and enjoy a rich social life from Him and for Him. We were created by God and for His good pleasure.

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**NEXT: The moment that changed everything.**

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## LESSON 2



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What additional details do you wish God had given us about creation? Why do you think He left out those details?
2. The idea that God is not only a Creator, but also a Re-creator, can be very encouraging. Is there something in your life that needs to be recreated by God? How can the power of God work a recreation in your life?
3. What does it tell us about God that the entirety of His creative act is simply speaking things into existence?

4. Sometimes the problems and difficulties we are facing can make our lives seem so complex, but when you read the creation story you realize God has created an entire world full of complexity. How can realizing this change our thinking about our own problems and how impossible they may feel?
5. What does it tell us about humanity that God waited to create the first man and woman until after all of His other creative efforts were done? Are there any ways the creation of man and woman were unique from God's other creative acts?
6. It's awesome to think we were made in God's image, but it should also make us consider carefully our actions towards other people. How should viewing everyone we come into contact with as a fellow image bearer of God change the way we act toward and interact with other people? Is there anyone in your life you might respond to differently if you took this view?

7. Imagine you were sitting beside the author of Genesis as he began writing this book. What suggestions would you make in how the story was written? Would there be anything you would add or subtract?

## LESSON 3

# WHEN IT ALL CHANGED



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 3**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 3:1-13** and **Genesis 3:14-4:5**

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Some consider Genesis 3 to be the most important chapter of the Bible. Just think, if you read Genesis 1 and 2, but omit chapter 3, and then read chapters 4-11, you will be so confused. *What happened?* Everybody was innocent and perfect. Adam and Eve had fellowship with God and with each other. But when you read Genesis 4-11, all you find is jealousy, anger, murder, lying, wickedness, corruption, rebellion, and judgment. What happened in Genesis 3?

Great question. In Genesis 3:

- We discover God's explanation of what messed man up.
- We learn about our enemy, the devil, and his subtle devices.
- We see how powerless we are to live righteously without God's help.
- We discover why we run from God and hide our shame.
- We see how God treats a guilty sinner.
- We first hear about God's plan to provide for our greatest need.
- We realize for the first time why we need a mediator between us and God.

## WHY DID GOD ALLOW MAN TO BE TEMPTED TO SIN?

If we go back to Genesis 1 and 2, we learn that man was created innocent, but not righteous. *Righteousness is innocence that has been maintained in the presence of temptation.* Temptation will either develop you or destroy you. The Garden of Eden was not a hothouse, and man was not a hothouse plant. Character is developed in the face of temptation. God created man to be responsible—to glorify, to obey, to serve, and to be subject to His authority.

God doesn't make random rules. When He told man not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was for his good. Rules have consequences if not obeyed. God said the consequence of eating of this tree was that they would die. There were plenty of other trees which bore fruit; they could eat of any and all of them. Adam was responsible—able to respond in either obedience or consequence.

It was not God's original intention for man to die, but with privilege always comes responsibility. Adam, who is given a free will, now is tested to see if he will obey God.

## WHERE DID THE SERPENT COME FROM?

How did he get into the Garden of Eden? We don't know; we're just told he was there. The serpent was not a slithering scary snake we think of today; it was a creature with tremendous ability that Satan used.

Satan, embodied in the serpent, approaches Eve and they talk about the fruit growing on the trees. She tells the serpent about God's rule about not eating (and she adds, "or touching") the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden.

First, you have to wonder why the serpent approach Eve and not Adam. Adam was the one God told not to eat of that tree; Eve got the info second-hand. Maybe she was more inquisitive than Adam or was made to be more compassionate and sympathetic. Nonetheless, Satan knew what he was doing. With a strategic subtlety, he asked her about the trees and introduced doubt into Eve's mind about God. She responds with, *"We can eat of any tree in the garden except that one. If we do, we will die."*

Now Satan had her. He says, in effect, *"You certainly won't die. Why, that is absolutely impossible!"* He questioned God's love and goodness and implied, *"If God is so good, why did He give you this restriction?"* The serpent

implies that God is not righteous when he says, “You will not surely die.” And he questions the holiness of God by saying, “*You’re going to be gods yourselves.*” “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5).

The serpent very subtly contradicts God, and he substitutes his word for God’s Word. He plants doubt in Eve’s heart that God isn’t good. This kind of doubt leads to disobedience—every time.

When the serpent tells Eve about the tree, he appeals to her full nature.

First he ignites her flesh—“the tree was good for food.”

Then, he caters to her mind—“it was pleasant to the eyes.”

Finally, he focuses on her heart—“and a tree desirable to make one wise.”

This was his exact strategy when tempting the Lord Jesus in the wilderness (see Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4).

First, he said to the Lord, “Make these stones into bread”—this was the appeal to the flesh, as the tree was good for food.

Then Satan showed the Lord the kingdoms of the world and offered them to Him—that was an appeal to the mind, as the tree was pleasant to the eyes.

Finally he said, “Cast Yourself down from the temple”—this was an appeal to the religious side of man, as the tree was to be desired to make one wise.

Satan uses the same tactics with us today—because they work. We all seem to fall for the same line. First John 2:16 affirms this strategy, “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” Jesus said these sins of the flesh come out of the heart of man, way down deep. This is where Satan is making his appeal. This is how he reaches into our lives to lead us astray.

And he succeeded with Adam and Eve. They were told they would know good and evil—and they did. Genesis 3:7 says their eyes were opened—now they had a conscience. Before this, they were innocent, ignorant of evil. Now they had a guilt complex.

“And they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.” Interesting that God tells us the type of tree they used to make themselves an apron. These fig leaves concealed but

didn't cover. Likewise, Adam and Eve didn't confess; they just tried to cover up their sin. They weren't ready to admit their guilt. By the way—there's really no new style in fig leaves. People do the same today with religion. We go through exercises and rituals, we join churches, and become very religious. But not until we confess our guilt can our relationship with God begin. Funny, another mention of the fig tree in Matthew 21 shows Jesus cursing one. He denounced empty religion right after that, or any attempt to merely cover over sin. Coincidence?

In this first temptation, Satan wanted to come between man's soul and God. He wanted to wean man away from God, to win man over to himself, and to become his god instead. The temptations of the flesh we deal with today wouldn't have appealed to Adam. He wasn't tempted to steal or lie or covet, but he was vulnerable to doubt God.

Notice Satan's method. First, Eve saw that the tree was good for food; second, it was pleasant to the eye; and third, it was to be desired to make one wise. Satan works from the outside to the inside, from without to within.

On the other hand, God begins with our heart. Religion is something that you rub on the outside, but God doesn't begin with religion. He offers us Jesus Christ instead. Christianity is not a religion; Christianity is Christ. Jesus said, "*You must be born again*" (see John 3:3).

When Adam and Eve heard God's voice seeking them in the garden, they hid from Him. Religion will *separate* you from God. Our first couple is lost, and God is seeking them—not them seeking God.

When God finds them and asks why they hid from Him, Adam explains why they were afraid. But instead of confessing his sin, Adam blames Eve for passing him the fruit God told them not to eat. Then Eve does the same—instead of confessing, she blames the serpent.

Can you imagine God's grief at this scene? These beautiful creatures He made have turned away from Him and now He must judge them.

First, God deals with the serpent. This creature was different here at the beginning of the story, not the slithering creature we think of today. Now God pronounces judgment on it and also upon Satan, which has had a tremendous effect upon us. Genesis 3:15 explains the first glimmer of hope we have that Someone is coming to save us. "And I will put enmity between [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."



This hope, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. It says “*her* Seed,” which is a suggestion to Jesus being born of a virgin. This hope in Christ would be a long-continued struggle between good and evil, but the ultimate victory will be in Him. We follow this theme through the rest of the Bible. Every person must face temptation and must win their battle. Before Jesus Christ came, the victory was through obedience in faith. After Christ came, we are to identify ourselves with Him through faith. When we say we are saved, it means we are *in Christ*.

In these beginning pages of Genesis, we see three orders of creation: angels, man, and animals. Animals were given no choice, but man and angels were given a choice to follow God. In this decision to go their own way, Adam and Eve made a choice against God and now they are held responsible.

But God went looking for them. Interestingly, people write about searching for God, but that’s not the way God tells it. Let’s tell it like it is: Salvation is *God’s* search for man. Man ran away from Him, and God called out to him, “Where are you?”—the promise of the coming of the Savior.

God’s search for man is pictured all the way through Scripture:

Romans 3:11—“... there is none who seeks after God.”

John 15:16—The Lord Jesus said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you ....”

1 John 4:19—And we can say with John, “We love Him because He first loved us.”

God seeks us out to offer us salvation, but first, there’s a long struggle that will take place.

**THE WOMAN IS JUDGED:** Because of her decision against God, the woman is judged. Genesis 3:16 says she can’t bring a child into the world without sorrow. The very thing that brings joy into our lives and continues the human family has to come through sorrow.

**THE MAN IS JUDGED:** As promised, because they ate of the tree, now death comes to mankind. Adam didn’t die physically that day he ate—he survived another 900 years. But he died *spiritually* the moment he disobeyed; he was separated from God. That is the reason he ran away from God. What is death? Physical death is a separation of the person—the spirit, the soul, from the body. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” Whether we are saved or lost, we will ultimately answer to God.

## REDEMPTION INTRODUCED

Of course, Adam and Eve couldn't stay in the garden now. God looked at their fig leaves and said, *"That will never do."* So in a picture that reminds us of sacrifice, God killed two animals and took their skins and covered them. When Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, they looked back on a bloody sacrifice. They saw just what God told Moses to put on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies: two cherubim looking down on the blood—and that was the way to God.

The hardest thing in the world is for us to take our rightful position before God. We must come by a sacrifice. Salvation comes when we take our proper place as sinners before God. Our only acceptable covering comes through the bloody death of our Lord Jesus Christ. His substitute satisfies God's wrath. We must have adequate covering to approach God. We can't come to God on the basis of our good works, but we must come as a sinner with a Savior.

Why did God make them leave the garden? For their protection. God didn't want Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of life and live forever in their sin. So He evicted them and placed cherubim and a flaming sword at the entrance. This wasn't a roadblock. The way of life was kept open for man to come to God. But now that way is not through the tree of life but through the promise and sacrifice of a Savior.

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**NEXT:** If you've ever doubted the goodness of God ...

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## LESSON 3



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why didn't God prevent Adam and Eve from being tempted?
2. What strategies did Satan use when tempting Eve that he can use in your life? Which of these strategies are you most susceptible to?
3. What does it tell us about human nature that Eve succumbed to the serpent's subtlety?



7. If you could go back in time and warn Adam and Eve not to be deceived by the serpent, do you think they would listen? Why or why not?

SALVATION IS  
GOD'S SEARCH FOR MAN.  
MAN RAN AWAY FROM HIM, AND

*God called out to him,*

**"WHERE ARE YOU?"—**

*the promise of the  
coming of the Savior.*



**THRU**the**BIBLE**

## LESSON 4

# WHAT HAPPENED NEXT



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 4–5**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 3:14–4:5**, **Genesis 4:6–5:22**, and **Genesis 5:23–6:13**

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In Genesis 3 we learned about the *root* of sin. In Genesis 4 we see now the *fruit* of sin—what happened next as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin.

When the first couple doubted if God was good and didn’t believe His instructions, they turned away from Him and brought on themselves (and everyone who followed) God’s judgment. We have the same kind of nature as Adam and Eve. That’s made pretty obvious by the story of their oldest sons.

## CAIN AND ABEL

Adam and Eve didn’t think the struggle with sin was going to be long. When Cain was born, Eve must have said, *“I have gotten the man from the Lord. God said the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent—and here he is!”*

But Cain wasn’t the one. In fact, he was a murderer, not a savior. It would be a long time before the Savior would come. For thousands of years the struggle has been going on between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.



Cain grew up to farm and his brother, Abel, was a shepherd. As they had been taught by the Lord, they both brought an offering to an appointed place to worship God.

But there was a difference between the two offerings. Hebrews 11:4 says, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

God had given them instruction and Abel believed it by faith. Cain didn’t. He may have brought the Lord the best of his beautiful, delicious fruit, but he didn’t bring it by faith—he came on his own merit.

Cain’s offering denied there was a problem between God and man. We are still prone to think that today, pretending that all is well within our hearts. Some say we’re good at the core. But we’re not, and we know it. Our sin separates us from God and each other. And Cain, and so many after him, refused to recognize that.

Cain also felt he could offer his best work to God on its own merit and that would be acceptable. But Titus 3:5 explains how God saves us: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

This wasn’t a character difference between the brothers; they also had the same heredity and environment. The difference was in their hearts.

Think about how we come to God today. We realize we are sinners, that all have sinned and no one is better than anyone else. If we want to come to God, we need a sacrifice, i.e. someone to take our place and to die for us (see Romans 3:25).

Others refuse to deal with God on His terms, and insist on making their own deals with Him. But this righteousness amounts to nothing because God doesn’t accept it (see Romans 4:25). They think that by joining a church or doing something noble they make themselves acceptable to God. But God’s righteousness can only come to us through Jesus Christ because it has to be a *perfect* righteousness.

Jesus took our place; He was the One who sacrificed Himself. He became sin for us, who knew no sin, that we would be made the righteousness of God in Him (read 2 Corinthians 5:21). We have no righteousness of our own, but can only come to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Abel's righteousness was faith in a sacrifice that looked forward to Jesus' sacrifice.

Cain and Abel came together to worship God, but Abel's offering was accepted because he brought it by faith. God didn't recognize Cain's offering because he brought it to impress God on his own merit.

As you would expect, that made Cain angry. He was so angry in fact, that he was going to take it out on his brother. Behind every premeditated murder there is always anger. Behind anger, there is jealousy. Behind jealousy, there is pride. Spiritual pride says any sin is justified (see James 1:15). Cain's wounded pride led to jealousy, which led to anger, which led to murder.

Cain didn't realize how vulnerable to sin he was. God tells him that "sin lies at the door" like a wild beast crouching, waiting to pounce on him the moment he stepped out. For that reason Cain needed a sacrifice that would be acceptable to God for sin, a sacrifice that pointed to Christ.

## FIRST MURDER

And God saw it all. He saw the brothers talking in the field and he saw Cain kill Abel and bury his body. When God asks Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain shoots back a mouthy answer. *"What? Am I his babysitter?"*

In his attempt to cover up his action, Cain disrespects both his brother and God. But as Matthew 10:26 tells us, there's no such thing as secret sin. It's better to deal with your sin now before entering God's presence someday. He already knows about them—you might as well tell Him.

Cain tries to act as if he was innocent and covers his sin with a brash attitude, but God knows. He tells Cain, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground." Hebrews 12:24 tells us that Abel's blood spoke of a murder. Jesus' blood speaks of our salvation.

How interesting that God says the ground itself is impacted by Cain's sin. That which was once fertile will not be as strong. He'll farm the land, but it will no longer give its best. It takes great effort and ingenuity for us to make this earth produce in abundance. Certainly the blood of Abel cries out from the very ground itself.

God also tells Cain that he would never be at peace again—he would be a fugitive and a homeless wanderer the rest of his days. Cain cried that this punishment is more than he could bear. But the truth is, he didn't have to

bear it. He could have just turned to God, confessed his sin, and cast himself on God's mercy. It was too great for him to bear, but God was providing a Savior for him if he would only turn to Him.

Cain cried that he would be hidden from God's face, and of course, in his sin that's exactly what happened. He worried that people would want to kill him.

But God protects Cain. He intentionally harbors a murderer, a criminal. God put a mark on him that protected him from others. Then Cain moves out from God, and establishes a civilization that is completely away from God's presence. A truly godless civilization.

Cain settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. He and his wife had a son named Enoch and they built a city. This is where city life began and how a civilization grew who knew nothing about how to walk in God's ways. Cain's descendants included people skilled in various trades like music, tent-making, animal husbandry, and metalworking. But with Cain as their example, things weren't going to go well for them. We don't learn much more about Cain's lineage; it drops off the biblical record.

Adam and Eve, however, had another son named Seth. Seth's family began to sincerely worship God, marking a new beginning for those who wanted to follow God's path. Now we see people call on the name of the Lord.

## WALKING THROUGH A GRAVEYARD

God wasn't joking when He told Adam that the day they ate of the fruit, they would surely die. Well, here's proof that God's Word is true. In Genesis 5, the phrase, "and he died" repeats, reflecting the consequences of the Fall, just as God predicted.

"This is the book of the genealogy of Adam," the chapter begins. This strange expression occurs again only in the beginning of the New Testament, with this is "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ." There are these two books, as we are already seeing, with two lines, two seeds, that contend against each other. The struggle is going to be long between the line of Satan and the line of Jesus Christ. The line we are following now is the line through Seth, and it is through this line that Christ will ultimately come.

"And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." When Adam was 130 years old, how many years had he lived on the earth? When God created Adam, did He

create him 30 years old or 14 or 45? Anything we guess would be speculation. God could have created him at any age. (This question is similar to questions about the age of the earth. When tests reveal that certain rocks are billions of years old, maybe when God created them, they were immediately aged to be three billion years old.) The important note is that when Adam had been here 130 years, he and Eve had a son “in *his* own likeness.” Adam was made in the likeness of God, but his son was born in *his* likeness.

Adam lived 800 years more during which he had many sons and daughters. And when Adam was 930 years old, he died.

Now we start our walk through the graveyard.

In Genesis 5:8 we read that Seth died. His son Enosh lived long, then he died. Enosh had a son, Cainan, and then Enos died. Then Cainan, then Mahalalel, and they died. Then another son named Jared—and you guessed it, then he died.

But before Jared died, he had a son named Enoch. And here’s where the story gets really interesting.

Enoch lived 65 years and had Methuselah. And then did Enoch die? No! He didn’t die. Here’s a very bright spot in a dark chapter. In the long line of people living and dying, one man, Enoch, was said to be removed from the earth. Genesis 5:24 says, “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”

Enoch “walked with God.” What a remarkable statement. Only two men are said to have walked with God—Enoch and then in Genesis 6, we learn that Noah walked with God. Enoch also makes the rare list of two men who didn’t die. (The other is Elijah.)

Enoch didn’t die but “God took him”—he was “translated.” When you translate a word, you take it from one language and put it into another language without changing its meaning. Enoch was removed from this earth; he got rid of the old body he had and was made into a new person—yet he was the same person, just as the translated word has to be the same. Enoch was taken to heaven.

We read that Enoch lived 65 years when Methuselah was born, and after that he walked with God. These were moving into Noah’s lifetime, so we know they were godless and evil. When that little boy Methuselah was born, Enoch’s walk was changed. Babies will do that.

These great truths in Genesis are relevant to us. And this is the picture of what's to come when our days are like Noah's days, dark and evil. But God watches over us. He will also remove us before He judges the earth.

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**NEXT: God's grace and Noah's flood—it will surprise you.**

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## LESSON 4



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. At the core of Adam and Eve plunging the world into sin was disbelief in the goodness of God. Do you ever have the same struggle? What are some things in your life that cause you to question God's goodness?
2. Does it surprise you to see two brothers who grew up in the same household be so different? How could they have ended up so differently?
3. Cain brought God a sacrifice of the best he had to offer. What does Cain's attitude about his sacrifice tell us about his attitude toward God? What are some things in our lives that show our attitudes toward God today?

4. What was God trying to correct in Cain's thinking by warning him that sin was lying in wait for him?
5. What does it tell us about human nature and the way sin impacts us that Cain constantly tried to deny the truth of what God knew?
6. Enoch walked with God. How can the description of his life by an intentional and repetitive action help us understand a life that pleases God?

7. Imagine getting the opportunity to have a conversation with someone in Adam and Eve's family. Who would you choose? What would you want to know about their experiences?



## LESSON 5

# IN THE DAYS OF NOAH



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 6–8**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 5:23–6:13**, **Genesis 6:14–7:24**, and **Genesis 7:23–8:22**

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And life goes on—until it doesn't. Generation after generation followed Seth and Cain's lines, and eventually they intermarried until they forgot God. People then grew increasingly wicked.

When God looked at His creation, He was grieved. Humanity was out of control. All that people thought about was evil. Every imagination was *only* evil, continually. It broke God's heart, and He was sorry He had created the human race in the first place.

Yet in spite of His grief, God still strived with mankind. He still tried to woo them back to Himself.

Among the population of this day were "giants." These people were not supernatural beings or monstrosities, they were simply outstanding individuals. Conjecture has explored many possibilities for who they were, saying that they are perhaps angels or demons. But humanity has a tremendous capacity. We are fearfully and wonderfully made—that is a great truth we have lost sight of. But we also must not think we are greater than we are. We all suffer from an awful fall into sin and are hopelessly depraved.

The sons of God are the godly line who have come down from Adam through Seth, and the daughters of men belong to the line of Cain. And they intermarried until the entire line was totally corrupted.

That's when God grieved man's sin. He changed His mind about keeping His creation and thought it best just to destroy everything.

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). This is one of the greatest lines in all the Bible, and it tells us God changed His mind. He won't destroy everything, He will save Noah. Why? Because he was "a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God." But there's something else. The faith chapter of Hebrews tells us that Noah believed God:

***By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*** –Hebrews 11:7

God told Noah that because man had turned from God's purposes, He was going to destroy it all. No doubt Noah, a citizen of that culture, understood firsthand what God meant. God then gave him instructions on building the ark. It took faith for Noah to prepare an ark on dry land when it had never even rained. But Noah believed God—he acted in faith. If the rains didn't come, he would have been the laughingstock of the community. He likely was that for 120 years, but Noah still believed God.

## WHY WAS A FLOOD NECESSARY?

1. Mankind had been promised a Redeemer, a coming Savior to the earth. He should have been looking for that Redeemer. Instead, he turned from God. God had provided a sacrifice for Adam and Eve, with a promise of a Savior to come. Their boys, Cain and Abel, stand as representatives of the two ways to relate to God. One is saved by believing God's Word, the other is self-righteous and going his own way. Now a whole generation has followed in Cain's footsteps.
2. They should have known judgment was coming. In that day, people lived so long that the lives of Adam and Methuselah (Noah's grandfather) bridged the entire gap from the Creation to the Flood. They certainly communicated God's message to the generations. Enoch preached during this time (see Jude 1:14-15). Noah also preached a message of rescue and redemption as he was building the ark. When

Enoch disappeared, that should have alerted people to God at work in human affairs. And when Methuselah died, they should have known the Flood was coming. (His name means “when he is dead it shall be sent.”)

3. God said His Spirit would not always strive with man. The Spirit of God was drawing men to Him, but finally, when mankind totally rejects God, the Flood came in judgment on the earth. The entire human family turned from God. Only a few believed Him—Noah and his family. One man still trusted God—by faith, Noah.

## LIKE IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

When the Lord taught about the earth’s end times from the Mount of Olives, He said, “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37). He describes the state of the culture when He will come to establish His Kingdom, after the Rapture, as being like what it was like in Noah’s day.

First, there will be a tremendous population increase, with people living over the entire earth. Also, during the Great Tribulation, the Holy Spirit will no longer restrain evil. God will still be reaching out to man, but they will despise and reject Him. Finally, the world in that future day will be faced with the fallout from the Rapture. Where did so many people go?

All these details will signal an impending judgment. God gave people plenty of opportunities to turn back to Him in Noah’s day and will again in the future.

## BUILD A LIFEBOAT

Now with a plan for judgment in place, God gave Noah instructions on how to build this ark, literally, “a lifeboat.” This same word described the little boat made of bulrushes and pitch that Moses’ family crafted to save their baby brother as they floated him down river.

Noah’s ark was to be made of the almost indestructible gopher wood. He was to waterproof it with pitch. He wasn’t trying to build an ocean-going ship to withstand colossal waves. He only needed to create a place to wait out the storm, a place for life—animal life and his family’s lives—to stay over quite a long time.

The ark was quite sizable—450 feet long, comparable to the size of a battleship. God told him to build rooms for the animals, with the idea of “nests” over four decks. A cubit-high window went all the way around the top for ventilation.

The ark had only one door, and that is important. Jesus said, “I am the way” and “I am the door to the sheepfold,” and He is the only door to the ark.

## GATHER THE ANIMALS

God then instructed Noah to bring pairs of every living thing into the ark. He didn't have to go after these animals, they came to him, possibly drawn by the impending danger. Additionally, Noah was to gather food for both his family and the animals. Up to the time of the Flood, apparently both men and animals were not carnivorous—flesh-eating. It took a lot of hay in the ark to feed those animals.

God told Noah to gather two of every kind of animal, male and female, to preserve their survival on the renewed earth. If they were unclean animals, then two, but if a clean animal, they gathered by sevens. This was looking forward to when they got out of the ark and would offer clean animals as sacrifices.

## GOD INVITES NOAH ONBOARD

With his construction work done, God then invites a faithful Noah and his family onboard. Hebrews 11:7 says, “By faith Noah ... prepared an ark ....” This is the reason God saved him and deals so graciously with this family in this horrible time of judgment. The truth is, He would have saved anyone who turned to Him. The Lord is a redeemer, inviting us to come to Him for rest (see Matthew 11:28).

Then the Lord shut him in. God shut the door. For seven days the world could have knocked at the door of the ark, and frankly, they could have come in—God would have saved them. All they had to do was to believe God. But nobody did.

## THEN THE RAIN CAME

On the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the second month of Noah's 600<sup>th</sup> year, the Flood begins. The “fountains of the great deep” and the “windows of heaven” open, leading to a deluge that lasts 40 days and 40 nights. The floodwaters rise, lifting the ark above the earth, and all terrestrial life outside the ark is destroyed. It was a tremendous catastrophe, with a great amount of historical and geological evidence.

Every living thing was destroyed. Only Noah and his family survived.

For the next 150 days, the waters covered the earth.

## THE WATERS RECEDE

“Then God remembered Noah” (Genesis 8:1). What a lovely statement. God didn’t forget this little raft floating on the earth now covered over completely in water. God caused a wind to blow over the earth, easing the floodwaters. After 150 days of rising waters, the waters decrease for 261 days, and the ark comes to rest on the mountains of Ararat on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. A few months later, they saw the tops of the mountains. A month after that, Noah opened the window.

This is now the beginning of the end of the Flood.

Noah and his family had now been on the ark for over a year. Finally, it’s time to see if their journey was almost over. Noah first becomes a bird-watcher. He sends out two birds, a raven and a dove.

The raven, an unclean bird, feeds on flesh. He had plenty to eat from the carcasses of dead animals floating around after the Flood. He didn’t return to the ark because he was having a wonderful feast.

But the dove, a clean bird, kept coming back. A few days later, Noah sent her out again and it brought back in its beak a little bit of greenery, an olive leaf, so Noah knew that the waters had receded from the ground. After another week, he sent the dove out again, and she didn’t return. He took this as a sign that the judgment was over and that peace had returned to the earth.

Of course, Noah and his family are still sinners and sinners had provoked the Flood as a judgment from God in the first place. Not too much will change in man’s relationship with God in this new space.

## WHAT KIND OF BIRD ARE YOU?

All great truths of the Bible can be found in Genesis. Even in this story of the two birds. The Bible teaches that even the believer has two natures, an old and a new nature (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). The clean and the unclean, the old and the new, are together. Romans 7:18 talks about the struggle between our two natures.

The raven went out into a judged world, but he found a feast in the dead carcass because that’s what he lives on. The old nature is like that raven—it feasts on the things of the world.

The dove went out into a judged world, but she found no rest, no satisfaction, and she returned to the ark. The dove represents the redeemed nature that God has made new. She knows we are in the world, but we shouldn't fall in love with it. We are only to love the lost and get the Word of God to them. She found rest only in the ark, and that ark sets forth Christ, if you please.

If you are a child of God, you have both natures—but are you a raven or a dove? Do you love the things of God or the world?

## A NEW DAY ON PLANET EARTH

After a total of 371 days, the Flood was over. Noah and his family leave the ark, build an altar to the Lord, and from every clean animal and bird made a sacrifice as a burnt offering to the Lord. This offering speaks of the person of Jesus Christ and was offered on the basis of acceptance before God and of praise to God in His recognition. Without doubt, this was one of the things that caused God to be pleased with Noah.

God smelled the sweet fragrance of Noah's sacrifice and said, *"I will never again curse the ground because of people or kill off everything living as I've just done."* That was God's covenant, or promise, with Noah. For as long as the earth lasts, planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never stop.

Great lessons emerge from the Flood. First, God provided a refuge for mankind, but everyone refused His shelter. For 120 years, Noah invited them to safety, but no one came. Mankind's rebellion required the Flood. No one repented and came back to God.

Now as this man Noah comes out from the ark, he stands as the head of the human race again—the same position Adam had. It is said that we are all related to Adam, but we are closer kin than that: We are all related in Noah. In one sense, Noah is the father of all of us today.

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**NEXT: How many languages do you speak?**

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## LESSON 5



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. In what ways does the world in which Noah lived sound like the world today? In what ways does it sound different?
2. How was Noah able to live such a righteous life when surrounded by such evil and wickedness? What lessons can we learn from his life about living in our own world?
3. Does God's destruction of His own creation in the Flood surprise you? Does it fit with what we know about the rest of God's character?





7. What does it tell us about humanity that, after the Flood, it took no time at all for humanity to go right back to its wicked ways?

## LESSON 6

# A REVOLUTIONARY NEW BEGINNING



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 9–11**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](http://TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 9**, **Genesis 10:1–11:3**, and **Genesis 11:4–32**

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The world is now a different place. Before the Flood, the human conscience set the rules of culture. But now mankind is to govern himself.

God blessed Noah and his sons and gave them a new directive to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. They were to fill it back up again.

Noah and his family were the only people on the planet. Imagine how weird that must have felt. Something changed in their relationship with the animals, too. Before the Flood, the animals were tame; they didn't fear people. Now the animals fear and dread man. That said, God made man responsible for the good treatment of animals.

At this same time, God gives Noah's family permission to eat animals. Evidently, until now people had eaten only plants. Now humanity received the power of life and death over the animal kingdom ("I have given you all things"), but the animals must be killed in a merciful way rather than prolonging their suffering.

This new covenant that God laid down for Noah and all who come after him also gives governments the right of capital punishment for man's protection. Since every person is created in the image of God, whoever takes a person's

life, their life should be taken, too, emphasizing the sanctity of all human life. This is one reason that murder is so serious. A person extinguishes a revelation of God—which God takes very personally.

God wraps up these new directives in a covenant, a promise to Noah and his seed after him, the whole human race. God also includes every living creature—the birds and beasts of the earth—everything that came out of the ark. We know from the New Testament book of Romans that the whole creation is groaning in this present age but also hear about a future day when the lion and the lamb will lie down together and not hurt or destroy each other (see Isaiah 11:6). This covenant God makes now is with all His creatures from the ark to the time of His Kingdom on earth, yet future.

His promise is that never again will everything living be destroyed by a flood. The next time His judgment of the earth will be by fire (see 2 Peter 3).

## **GOD'S BOW IN THE SKY**

As a visible symbol of this promise, God put a rainbow in the sky. When He sees it, He will remember His covenant. Notice, the rainbow was a sign for God to remember—He will see it and remember the promise He made to Noah and every living creature on the earth. (Other visible signs in the Bible are the Passover feast, the brazen serpent, Gideon's fleece, and in our day, baptism and the Lord's Supper.)

God's grace and our eyes of faith meet in the sacraments. This is what happens when we look at the rainbow. Faith grasps the promise attached to the sign. A promise holds no weight without faith, and a sign by itself is no good at all. But together, they mean something special. God made a promise and attached a sign to it. Now the rainbow is God's answer to Noah's altar. God says He will remember His promise every time He sees the rainbow.

## **A FRESH START?**

You would think that once Noah and his family came out of the ark and all the wicked people are dead that mankind would get a fresh start. Sadly, Noah and his family are still sinful, and it doesn't take long for sin to become an issue again.

Here's what happened. Noah planted a vineyard and got drunk on the fruit. This is sin. It may be the beginning of a new world, but it is old sin that is still there. It wasn't a sin to drink, but it was to lose self-control. In his stupor,

Noah laid naked in his tent. Ham, his son, saw his father naked and told his brothers. We're not given details, but are told only that Ham failed to respect his father's godliness. Shem's and Japheth's act of covering their father's nakedness was similar to God's act of covering Adam and Eve's nakedness; it was a godly thing to do.

Nakedness in the Old Testament was always a thing of shame after the Fall. It was both undignified and vulnerable. To see someone naked was to bring dishonor and to gain advantage over them. This is why God covered Adam and Eve's nakedness.

When Noah wakes up and learns what Ham did, he curses Ham's son Canaan, saying that Canaan will be a servant to his brothers. Noah also blesses the Lord, the God of Shem, and declares that Japheth will be blessed and dwell in the tents of Shem, while Canaan will serve them both.

Noah's sons belong to two groups of mankind—those who hide the shame of their nakedness and those who, like Ham, or rather the Canaanites, have no sense of their shame before God. The one group, the line of Shem, will be blessed (9:26); but the other, the Canaanites, can only be cursed (9:25).

God said, "Cursed be *Canaan*." Some ask, *Is the curse of Ham upon the dark-skinned races?* The clear and definitive answer is absolutely not. The Bible doesn't teach this. The color of your skin is because of sunlight from the outside, not because of sin from within. To say otherwise is not fair to dark-skinned people and it is not fair to God—because He didn't say it.

But note, no curse is placed on Ham; the curse was on his son, Canaan. We don't know how Canaan was involved in this incident, but it's important that he is mentioned. The children of Israel are entering the land of Canaan during the time Moses wrote this report. (Israel is a descendent of Shem.) This narrative let them know that God had pronounced a curse upon Canaan, a judgment on this race. All you have to do is read the rest of the Old Testament and secular history to discover the fulfillment of this judgment. The Canaanites have pretty much disappeared.

Why would God record this incident of Noah's sin? While there's no use trying to make excuses for Noah, the truth is he sinned. He didn't lose his salvation, but he didn't please the Lord. This story was recorded to let us know about the weakness of the flesh. The Lord Jesus said that "the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38). We may or may not

have ever gotten drunk, but we've been ruled by our flesh in ways that are just as displeasing to God. God includes mistakes like this one of Noah's to train us in how to live on this earth.

Noah lived another 350 years after the Flood and died when he was 950.

## GENERATIONS OF GENERATIONS

Genesis 10 focuses on the populations of the world that can trace their origins back to one of Noah's sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Japheth's descendants include the origins of many European and Asian peoples. From one son come the Russians and Baltic peoples. From another, the Indians and the Iranic races—the Medes, Persians, Afghans, Kurds. From yet another, we have the Greeks, Romans, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, etc. Coming from a final, the Germans, and European races, the Anglo-Saxon race, and the English people.

From Ham's descendants come some of the earliest great civilizations, such as the Babylonians and Egyptians. Ham had other sons, but the curse was only on Canaan. From Canaan came the Phoenicians, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites (all enemies of Israel), etc.

Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, is called out for being a powerful leader who established the kingdom of Babel and tried to unite humanity under his rule, becoming a “hunter of men's souls.” Nimrod was responsible for the Tower of Babel. He attempted to bring together the human race after the Flood in an effort to unite them into a people he could control and become a world ruler. He was the rebel, a lawless one, and he is a shadow or a type of the last world ruler, the Antichrist, who is yet to appear.

Shem's descendants lead to the line that eventually brings us Abraham and the nation of Israel, ultimately leading to the coming of Jesus Christ. Shem's descendants include various Middle Eastern peoples. It is Shem's line that we follow through the Old Testament.

All nations and people groups, though they diverge into different races and cultures, are part of God's plan. The listing of 70 nations represents a “farewell” from God before He focuses solely on Israel, but it shows His ongoing care and sovereignty over all peoples.

Throughout history, different races have had their periods of prominence, but ultimately, no group has proven capable of ruling the world justly on their own.

## THE “TOWER TO HEAVEN”

It's hard to believe today when people speak thousands of different languages, but at the time of Genesis 11, the world only spoke one language. We don't know what language it was, though whatever one it was, it may be the language we speak in heaven.

We just learned about the descendants from Noah's sons; chapter 11 picks up the story with one group from Ham's line. This ethnic group traveled to a plain in the land of Shinar, in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, and established a city. Armed with a new technology, the brick, they built a city and got into their heads to build a tower reaching to heaven. This was a defiant act against God. They said, “Let *us* build *ourselves* a city ... let *us* make a name for *ourselves*, lest *we* be scattered abroad ...” (Genesis 11:4). They wanted to make a name for themselves and rally together in rebellion against God.

As we have said, Nimrod led this movement. He built the city of Babel and evidently the Tower of Babel itself. This was to be his place to launch a world empire in opposition to God. To do so, he first needed a headquarters (Babel). Then he needed a rallying point that would bring a spark—like an inspiring song or a battle cry. It had to be compelling and motivating. Likely the motto was something like, “Let us make ourselves a *name*.”

God had said to scatter and replenish the earth, but they said, “*No way, we're organizing ourselves against You.*” The Tower of Babel was a campaign against God.

The Tower of Babel was likely a ziggurat, a religious symbol. These were structures where people worshiped the creature rather than the Creator. Some ziggurats were round, others were square, but they all had runways leading to the top, and on the top the people carried on pagan worship rituals.

Well into the project, God thought He'd come down and see what the people were building. He noted that since everyone spoke one language, they didn't have any communication barrier. They could get together and pool their knowledge and resources—and do anything they imagined.

Even though mankind has a fallen nature and is totally depraved, he is a very competent creature. God couldn't ignore this rebellion against Him, so He is going to put up a protective barrier. So for their own good, God stepped in. He broke up the mob and scattered them—by changing just one thing: their

language. Until now, everyone understood each other. But now, their talk sounded like *babel* (Hebrew for “confusion”). They were together in their rebellion, but now they can’t understand one another.

Many teach that languages developed gradually. But God said He confused their language so that, right then, while they were building, they suddenly couldn’t understand each other. The building project came to a sudden halt, and families moved away from Babel in every direction, just as God intended.

And that’s how countries and cultures and languages began. From the same family, we now live in different expressions of humanity. This was a miracle of speaking and a miracle of hearing. They *spoke* different languages, and those who *heard* couldn’t understand them.

Was this a blessing in disguise, or was it a curse upon mankind? For God’s purposes, it was a blessing. For man’s rebellion away from God, it was definitely a judgment.

## GOD CHOOSES HIS PEOPLE

Now begins a look at Shem’s family line that we’ll follow for the rest of the Old Testament. The Word of God will follow this line directly to the cross of Jesus Christ. God has recorded all of this as preliminary.

God first established that we are in sin. We saw it in the murder of Abel and witnessed Cain not acknowledging that he was a sinner. This was nothing but the *pride* of life.

At the Flood, we see how people were given over to the *sins of the flesh*. Their violence proved that their every thought and imagination was evil. They were blind to their need of God. They were deaf to His claim, dead to God, dead in trespasses and sins. Through Noah, God invited them to salvation, but they rejected it.

Then, at the Tower of Babel, we see the sin of the *will*, pure rebellion against God.

Now we stand at the place where the book of Genesis takes a turn. Actually, it’s like the great Grand Canyon goes right down through the book. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are on one side, and the last 39 chapters are on the other side. In the first 11 chapters we cover over 2,000 years, as long a period as the rest of the Bible put together. Contrast that 2,000 years with the 350 years from Genesis 12 through 50.

In Genesis 1—11, we studied four major events: Creation, the Fall of man, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. And now we turn our focus to the one man God chooses from one family. From this family will come our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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**NEXT: He was one of the most important people in the Bible,  
and he reminds us of ourselves.**

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## LESSON 6




## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why do you think the Flood changed humanity's relationship with animals as much as it did?
2. Even in something as tragic as the Flood, God's promises stand out. What impact can be made in your life by keeping the promises of God at the forefront of your thinking?
3. What do the sins of Noah and his sons tell us about humanity and our own sin nature?



7. Imagine being a member of Noah's family and stepping off the ark knowing that you were one of only eight people alive on Earth. How would that have felt? What do you think that would have been like?



**ALL NATIONS  
AND PEOPLE GROUPS,  
THOUGH THEY DIVERGE  
INTO DIFFERENT  
RACES AND CULTURES,  
ARE PART OF  
GOD'S PLAN.**



THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 7

# GOD CHOOSES HIS PEOPLE



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 12:1–15:6**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 12:1-12**, **Genesis 12:13–14:11**, and **Genesis 14:12–15:6**

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In the first 11 chapters of Genesis, we've traveled at light speed through 2,000 years of history. Now we're going to slow down to a walk.

In the first 11 chapters of Genesis, we looked at four amazing, stupendous events: Creation, the Fall of man, the worldwide Flood, and the Tower of Babel. In these events, God worked with the human race as a whole.

Now, beginning in Genesis 12, God deals with individuals. We'll study four people—who weren't necessarily great, but certainly important. From one person, He will make a nation. We'll study Abraham as a man of faith (Genesis 12–23); followed by Isaac, his beloved son (Genesis 24–26); then Jacob, the chosen and chastened son (Genesis 27–36); and finally, we'll look at Joseph's suffering and glory (Genesis 37–50). These four patriarchs' stories fill the rest of the book.

God demonstrated that He no longer wanted to deal with the whole human race. After the Fall, sin colored every relationship. Cain's sin was pride. He was angry that God rejected his offering but his brother's was accepted. This made him *hate* his brother, which led to murder. Pride was also Satan's sin. Pride is the sin of the mind.

Then at the time of the Flood, the rampant sin was the lust of the flesh. Man's actions and imaginations were to satisfy the flesh in open rebellion against God. Only one believer was left—Noah. If God had waited even another generation, He would have lost the entire human race.

It didn't take long to get back to that same place. Following the Flood, the Tower of Babel revealed that no one followed God.

After Babel, God decides to focus on one man, Abraham, who will become the father of a nation through which God's revelation and Jesus, our Redeemer, will come.

## ABRAHAM—MAN OF FAITH

By any measuring rod, Abraham was a great man. He is one of the greatest men who ever lived on this earth. The three great religions of the world—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—all go back to Abraham. One of the marks of a great man is fame.

Another mark of a great man is his noble character. Abraham was a generous man. Although skilled in business and politics, he kept his focus on God rather than the advantage he could wield in his dealings.

A great man stands above the rest as he rises at a time of destiny. He is ready and willing to be courageous at the right moment.

A great man must also be a man of faith. The Bible records that the greatest thing said about Abraham is that he believed God (see Romans 4:3). Every time God appears to Abraham, it was to develop his faith. Far from perfect, Abraham failed many times, but he got up and started again. This is also a mark of greatness.

## GOD'S CALL AND PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

(GENESIS 12:1-3)

God makes a threefold promise to Abraham (initially named Abram) that in reality is the hub of the Bible. The rest of Scripture unfolds these three promises:

First, God promises to show Abraham **a land** He will give him.

Second, God promises to make Abraham into a great nation (**seed**), bless him, and make his name great.

Third, God declares that Abraham will be **a blessing** to all the families of the earth. This is foundational to the rest of the Bible.

Has God made good on His promises to Abraham? God has certainly brought from him a great nation, and it has probably the longest tenure as a nation of any people on this earth.

Through the Lord Jesus Christ, Abraham has been a blessing to the whole world and the entire Word of God has come to us through Abraham.

God has fulfilled all His promises to Abraham—except the first one. God promised Abraham a land. Centuries later, it looked like God delivered them a land (under Moses and then Joshua). But God said He wouldn't let them be in the land if they turned away from Him. And they *are* away from Him today. God is doing exactly what He said He would do. The day will come when God will put the people of Israel back in the land, and when He does it, they won't have it halfway. But they will have to get it on God's terms and in God's appointed time.

God is running things. You don't need to be frightened by the headlines or disturbed by what's going on in the world. God is in control, and He is going to work things out His way.

## **HOW DID ABRAHAM RESPOND TO THESE PROMISES?**

By faith, Abraham obeyed God. He left his home, his business, and the high civilization of Ur, “not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). He didn't leave Ur to better his lot in life; he left out of obedience to God's instructions. Ur was a prosperous, high civilization. Abram and Sarai (as they were called then) likely lived a very comfortable life there.

Yet Abraham's obedience wasn't complete, because he took with him some of his family—his father and his nephew, Lot. Why didn't God want him to take his relatives? In Joshua 24 we learn that Abraham's relatives served other gods. They lived a while in Haran, a place of delay, until Terah died. Then they set out again for Canaan. Abraham didn't hear from God during that whole season.

When they arrive in Canaan, a land already inhabited by the Canaanites, a barbaric people, God appears to Abraham again and confirms the promise of land to his descendants. Not until Abraham acted on the light that he'd been given did God honor him.

Abram does two things in this new land. He pitches his tent (he moves into the neighborhood) and he builds an altar. Abram quietly worshiped God, and the Canaanites soon learned that he was a man who worshiped the Lord God. Everywhere Abram went, he left a testimony to God.

## **A LAPSE OF FAITH**

Abraham was settled in this land of blessing when a famine hit the land. News was everyone was relocating to Egypt. But God hadn't told him to leave. He was in the land God promised, but Abraham didn't believe God would take care of them or their flocks, and so they went down into Egypt.

Immediately, they have a problem. Abraham was afraid that once the Egyptians saw his beautiful wife, Sarah, that they would kill him to get her. So, they deceived everyone and said they were brother and sister. His fear was well-founded, because Pharaoh did take Sarah, but God acted on their behalf, in spite of their deception. In the days of preparation before Pharaoh would marry Sarah, God brought plagues to Pharaoh's household and let him know that he was not to take Sarah as his wife. Pharaoh confronted Abraham and gave Sarah back and kicked them out of the country. God protected them in Egypt, but didn't appear to them while they were there.

## **BACK IN CANAAN**

When Abraham returned from Egypt, along with Lot, they were both wealthy in cattle, silver, and gold. Once back in the land, Abraham revisits the altar he had built earlier in Bethel and called out for God. Although he stumbled in faith, Abraham always comes back to God. He worships God there and God receives him back (just as He will anyone who wants to come back to Him).

The Word of God is a marvelous Word if you let it speak to you. Notice Abraham got two things in Egypt which caused him untold grief. One was riches, and the second was an Egyptian maid named Hagar. We will see more about her later.

Because Abraham and Lot were both rich with livestock, the land couldn't sustain both of their large herds. Their teams of workers began to quarrel. There was so much conflict between them, and between Abraham and Lot, that they had to separate. They were also making quite a scene in front of the local Canaanites and Perizzites, and no one was impressed.



To resolve the conflict, Abraham proposes a peaceful separation. He offered Lot the first choice of land and he would take what was left.

Lot chooses the plain of Jordan, which was like a garden just like the land of Egypt, and settles in Sodom, a beautiful city in that day. (This was the biggest mistake Lot ever made.) Abraham heads far north of Jerusalem into Canaanite country. Finally, after a long time, God appears again to Abraham. (The minute that Abraham comes back to the land and separates from Lot, God returns in fellowship.)

God was pleased with Abraham and was honoring His promise. He told him to look as far as he could in every direction and as far as he could see, that was the land God would give to him. In the future God would be very specific about the land's borders. He also confirms His promise that Abraham would have a large family of generations.

So Abraham settled on the plain of Mamre near Hebron and built another altar to the Lord. Mamre means "richness" and Hebron means "communion." What a good place to be: in the place of richness and communion with God. This was Abraham's home and where he would one day be buried.

## THE FIRST RECORDED WAR

Meanwhile back in Sodom, the first recorded war in the Bible was taking place. Four eastern kings launched a military campaign against the five kings in this area, defeating them, sacking their cities, and taking captives. Among the captives was Lot, Abraham's nephew.

Abraham hears of this and will soon intervene to rescue Lot. At first, this account doesn't seem to fit with Abraham's story, but it reinforces, once again, why Abraham was a great man.

When enemy kings of the east left the area with their captives, they moved north along the west bank of the Dead Sea, which was not too far from Abraham's home. As soon as he heard the news, he began to pursue the enemy as they moved north. He armed 318 of his servants and pursued them. At Dan they divided their group and continued all the way north to Damascus. One group attacked from the rear and the other group went around, and caught them from the front. Abraham got the victory and scattered the enemy in the desert. He brought back all the goods and captives, including his nephew, Lot.

When they got back, the king of Sodom, Melchizedek, met Abraham with bread and wine. He was a priest of the most high God and he blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:18-19). This is one of the great mysteries of the Old Testament. Who was this man Melchizedek and where did he come from? What's his business? And how did he know "God Most High"? *El Elohim* is the most high God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the God of Genesis 1. He is *not* a local deity. Melchizedek also offered Abraham the elements of the Lord's Supper! What did he have in mind? How much did Melchizedek know?

Melchizedek is mentioned three times in Scripture. In addition to this passage, Psalms 110:4 says that Jesus Christ is a "priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 7 also mentions that Melchizedek was the high priest of the world in that day (not Aaron, who was just for Israel and just for the tabernacle). In His person, Jesus Christ is the High Priest for the world today after the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek just walks out on the page of Scripture with bread and wine, he blesses Abraham, and then he walks off the page of Scripture.

This blessing prepares Abraham for the tempting offer of dividing the spoils from the war. He was entitled to it, but Abraham wasn't in it for the booty. He wanted to rescue and recover his nephew. God helped him do that. Abraham pushed the wealth on to the men who fought with him but didn't take anything for himself.

God was pleased with Abraham's choices. Genesis 15:1 says, "The word of the **LORD** came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.'" God was Abraham's ultimate source of blessing and fulfillment ("his reward"), greater than any booty gain.

Then Abraham shares with God what is on his heart. He remembered God's promise of a seed—that he would be the father of nations and his offspring would be as numberless as the sand on the seashore. "*But I don't even have one child!*," Abraham said. If he had died in that battle with the kings of the east, his head servant Eliezer would have inherited his wealth.

Thus, God's revelation to Abraham underscores His faithfulness, protection, and the expansive fulfillment of His promises through both physical and spiritual lineage.

God is very practical with us. He says, "*I am going to give you a son, Abraham, just you wait and see.*" Then, God takes him outside, under the night sky, and asks Abraham to number the stars. Of course there are too many to count. "*This is how many your offspring will be.*"

Of course, among that offspring are two seeds. Abraham had physical descendants (the nation of Israel) and also spiritual descendants, those who come to faith in Jesus Christ, as Galatians 3:29 later explains. We are sons of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ—not in a natural line, but a spiritual seed.

God protects His promises until they are fulfilled. He is faithful to keep every one.

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**NEXT:** What happens when you do God's will your own way.

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## LESSON 7



### FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. After the Flood people went right back to sinning, just like they did before God sent His judgment on the world. What can this teach us about sin and its effects on humanity?
2. Abraham was a man of great failures, but he was also a man of greater faith. How can faith and failure both exist in the same person?
3. God chose Abraham out of all of humanity to bless. What does this teach us about God and His methods for dealing with us?

4. Abraham obeyed God, even when he didn't have all (or any!) of the information about where that obedience would lead. What roadblocks stand in the way of you having the same attitude and mentality in your own life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. At times Abraham's obedience was less than total, but God's faithfulness was always complete. How can knowing God's pattern encourage us when we fail God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Not only did Abraham's failures exist alongside his faith, but so did his fear. Does it surprise you to see a man credited as a champion of faith so fearful? Should Abraham's faith have driven all fear out of his life? Why or why not?

7. If you had been one of Abraham's servants seeing the different episodes of his life, would you have found his faith compelling or would his failures have driven you away from his faith?

## LESSON 8

# AMEN



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 15:6–17:27**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](http://TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 15:6–16:5**, **Genesis 16:6–17:7**, and **Genesis 17:8–18:8**

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*... And he believed in the LORD.* –Genesis 15:6

Essentially, Abraham said, “Amen” to God. God said, *“I will make your offspring like the stars in the sky,”* and Abraham says to God, *“I believe You.”* In the book of Romans, we learn that this statement of faith was the basis on which God approved Abraham. It was his turning point. He trusted God, and that faith set him right in God’s eyes. It was by God’s grace that Abraham was saved; God doesn’t have any other method of saving anyone. If you are saved, it’s because you believe God has provided salvation for you and accept the gift of Christ as your Savior. You believe God has done something for you, that Christ died for you and rose again. When you do, God will declare you righteous, as well.

Abraham was saved by believing God, and so are we.

Again, Abram is a very practical man, even pragmatic. God had promised Him the inheritance of land—now in essence, he wants that in writing and God agrees. God then told Abraham how to prepare a sacrificial covenant, a cultural practice of that time, in which two parties would walk between the divided sacrifices to seal their agreement.

Abraham got everything ready per God's instructions: he killed the heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon and divided them and laid each piece one against the other. When the buzzards tried to feast on the carcasses, Abraham shooed them away. And he waited for God to show up.

When the sun went down, Abraham fell into a deep sleep, so deep he was paralyzed. And in the night, God, represented by a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, passed through animals' sacrificed bodies, saying that the covenant depended solely on God. Both of these symbols speak of Christ—the furnace pictures judgment and the lamp speaks of Him as the light of the world.

This was like God saying, *"I make this contract with you. You will have a son. Meet Me down there, and I will sign on the dotted line."* God was using this picture to prove to Abraham that He was under contract to do it. He is promising something. Abraham is not going to go through it, because Abraham isn't promising anything. He just had to believe God.

That is exactly what took place when God sent His Son. God the Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. And the Son agreed to come to the earth and die for our sins that whoever would believe Him and accept His gift might not perish but have everlasting life (see John 3:16). We weren't there at the cross to make a contract, but God the Father and God the Son were there, and the Son went to the cross where He died for our sins. We were paralyzed by sin. We couldn't promise anything. But God said He would do His part, and He is asking us to do just one thing: to say amen to Him—that is, to believe Him.

## JUST A LITTLE LONGER

Now God tells Abraham of a time when his people will be put out of the land. It will happen three times in history, and this is the first time. He also foretold that they would return to the land. Later on it was the Babylonian captivity when they were carried off because they went into idolatry and were not witnessing for God, and they returned. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed, and for the third time they were scattered after they had rejected their Messiah. They have not yet returned. The Jewish presence in the land today is not yet a fulfillment of Scripture. It won't be until the Millennium when God gathers them back that they will return to the land, never to leave again.

God continues with His promise of a land to Abraham but says, "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). God loves the Amorites also, and wants to give them a chance to turn to Him. He gave them 400



years, but the only one in that land who turned to Him was that Canaanite woman, Rahab the harlot. She turned to God; she believed Him. God gave the Amorites this great period of opportunity.

God will save by grace *anyone* who will believe what He has done for them.

## A BAD IDEA

After the high of Abraham's faith shining like a star, this next account is tragic and sad, with ramifications that reach even us today.

It's hard to believe God when all circumstances are failing. Abraham and Sarah are not perfect, and they doubt if God will come through with His promise of a child.

So, why not make it happen on their own? A common practice in their day when a wife couldn't get pregnant was to have a child with one of their servants. When they were down in Egypt, Abraham got two things that really caused him trouble: one was wealth and the other was an Egyptian maid named Hagar.

Sarah's idea was for Abraham to have a child with Hagar, and Abraham listened to her. Perhaps they thought, *This might be the way God wants us to do it, for this is the custom of the day.* But God asked them to trust Him, and this was contrary to God's way of doing things. This is an historical fact, but not God's will. It was wrong, and God's not going to accept this strategy or His promise.

But they did it anyway. Soon after Hagar conceived, trouble broke out. The women were immediately in conflict and Sarah saw that she had been wrong to propose this idea. They still had a bit of their Ur of the Chaldees practices in their heads. However, the real fault of this strategy was that they just didn't believe God. Today, we tend to reverse the emphasis and say that taking a concubine is a sin and disregard their unbelief. Yet the disbelief is the major issue in God's eyes.

Because of the conflict between the women, things got hot in the household. Abraham told Sarah to treat Hagar however she wanted, and Sarah got mean. When Hagar couldn't take it anymore, she ran away to almost a certain death for her and her unborn child.

Hagar traveled quite a distance from home. Alone in the wilderness, Genesis 16:7 describes a precious, significant encounter. The angel of the Lord found her. This angel could very well have been the preincarnate Christ. It is just like Him, always out looking for the lost.

He asks Hagar, *“What are you doing out here?”*

*“I’ve run away from my mistress,”* she says.

*“Go back and submit to her and I will give you many generations of children, past counting,”* God promises.

So Hagar goes home, and it’s still not good. And it’s going to be an even greater sorrow to Abraham later on. Hagar gives birth to a boy, that boy who happens to be Abraham’s son. Abraham was 86 years old. God tells her to name him Ishmael, which means “God heard,” for He did hear and answer Hagar’s cry. According to God, Ishmael will be a wild man, a real fighter, always fighting and being fought, always stirring up trouble, always at odds with his family.

How interesting this prophecy in light of the history of the Middle East. The endless conflict is a fulfillment of this day in Abraham’s household. These tribes and peoples are sons of Abraham, too, but sons of Ishmael.

Hagar is blessed and blesses the Lord with a new name, “The God who sees me.” God deals graciously with her—it’s not her sin that put her in this situation. The Lord is a kind shepherd to her and brings her this good word.

## **GOD GIVES ABRAM A NEW NAME**

Yet Ishmael is not the child God promised to Abram. Genesis 17 provides a hinge to understanding the book, and perhaps the whole Bible.

When God first made His covenant with Abram, it included three parts: a land, seed, and blessing. Now Abram was 99 years old, and the Lord appeared to him and revealed Himself by a new name—*El Shaddai*, the Almighty God. He told Abram to walk before Him and be blameless, and then He reminded Abram of His covenant with him and His promise to multiply his generations. (“Covenant” is mentioned 13 times in Genesis 17.) This is the fifth time God appears to Abram. He comes now not only to make the covenant, but also to reaffirm the promise of a son that He has made, which absolutely rules out this boy Ishmael, of course.

God also gives Abram a new name. Up to this point his name was Abram; now it is changed to Abraham. *Abram* means “high father,” and *Abraham* means “father of a multitude.” But God makes clear that Ishmael is not the son God promised to Abraham, but that there would be another child.

And again, Abraham believed God. Romans 4:19 tells us that his faith in God was strong, regardless of his old age (now 100 years old) and Sarah’s inability to conceive at 90 years old. Her womb was dead, a tomb. And out of death came life: Isaac was born.

Life out of death—that’s the promise God is now making to Abraham. *“You will be a father of many nations.”* And just think how this is true. Abraham has had more children than any other person that has ever lived on the earth. For 4,000 years, two great family lines—the line of Ishmael and the line of Isaac—have had millions in each line. What a family! Add to that, Abraham’s spiritual seed, for we Christians are called the children of Abraham by faith in Christ (see Romans 4:16). Just think of the millions of people who are in Abraham’s spiritual line. God says here, *“I am going to make you a father of many nations,”* and He has made good on that promise. That’s because His covenant with Abraham is an *everlasting* covenant—not one that will be easily broken, and not one that is going to run out. That promise is still good today if we will trust Christ for everlasting life—that is a covenant God has made to us.

God tells Abraham what *He* will do. God says, *“I will.”* “I will make you exceeding fruitful; and I will make nations of you .... And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants .... Also I give to you and your descendants after you ... all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:6-8).

As a badge of this covenant, God asked that every man be circumcised. The Israelites didn’t circumcise themselves in order to become members of the covenant, but because they *had* the covenant from God. Circumcision played the same role as good works do for the believer today. You don’t do good works in order to be saved, but you do them because you are saved. You don’t join a church or get baptized to get favor from God, you join because you have favor with God. Even Jesus at eight days old was circumcised. It is on record that He was the son of Abraham, the son of David; He was in the line, and “born under the law.” Even if someone disobeys and is not circumcised, the covenant isn’t broken, just the relationship between the person and God. Even the whole nation of Israel when they came out of Egypt had disobeyed, but God restored them.

## THE SON OF THE PROMISE, ISAAC

When God changed Abraham's name, He also changed Sarai's name to Sarah. God blessed her and called her the mother of nations and said that "kings of peoples shall be from her."

And old Abraham just laughed!

He laughed not out of unbelief but out of sheer joy that this could happen. He hoped against all hope, and now it was going to happen. Abraham believed God and is absolutely overwhelmed by His wonder and goodness.

God said that Sarah will bear a son and they should name him Isaac. "I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him" (Genesis 17:19).

But then, all of a sudden, a thought comes to Abraham like an arrow to his heart. He thinks of his other boy, Ishmael (now a teenager). He loves him and it was a heartbreak to give him up. Abraham is reaping a heartache that he sowed when he sinned (see Galatians 6:7).

God says of Ishmael, *"No, he's not the child of promise. I won't accept him."* God does bless Ishmael and made him fruitful and multiplied his offspring. He does promise that he will make him a great nation ... but God's covenant, He said, is with Isaac, not Ishmael. Ishmael is not the one whom God had promised to Abraham at the beginning. He is not to be the father of the nation that God will use and the nation through which the Messiah will come. God is not deterred or deferred from that. He speaks as if Isaac were already born and with them in their house. He speaks of things future as if they are—but it *is* going to be next year.

## ABRAHAM'S TESTS OF FAITH

Before we go further with Abraham's story, let's review the times God presented him with a test and how Abraham responded. We'll see that when he failed or when he succeeded, it was always an issue of faith.

1. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, his home, and Abraham responded with partial obedience. He brought his extended family with him, but at least he moved out. When Abraham finally arrived in the land of Canaan, God blessed him.

2. Then there was a famine in the land of Canaan, and Abraham fled from the land of Canaan to Egypt. There he acquired riches and Hagar—and both were stumbling blocks.
3. The wealth Abraham got was a real test. He didn't forget God, and he was certainly generous toward his nephew, Lot. But eventually it was the reason they separated. God appeared to him again.
4. Abraham was given power when he conquered the kings of the east. Melchizedek met him and strengthened Abraham for the test. After defeating the kings of the East, Abraham was tempted by the spoils of war but refused them, showing his reliance on God.
5. God delayed the birth of a promised son through Sarah. Growing impatient, Abraham fathered Ishmael through Hagar, but Ishmael was not the promised son. The Arabs of the desert today still plague the nation Israel, and they will likely keep right on doing that until the Millennium.
6. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which will be detailed next (Genesis 18—19).
7. Abraham's ultimate test will be when he offers Isaac, which comes later in the story (Genesis 22).

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**NEXT: Is anything too hard for God?**

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## LESSON 8



### FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why would God enter into a covenant with Abraham that depended solely on Himself?
2. Why did God tell Abraham about a time when He would take the Israelites out of the land He was giving them? Do you think it increased or decreased Abraham's faith?
3. Abraham and Sarah chose to accomplish what God had promised them through their own methods. We might be tempted to condemn them for that, but are there ways in which we have the same attitudes and actions about God's promises?

4. Does it surprise you to see God showing grace to Hagar? What does Hagar's interaction with God—and her naming Him “the God who sees me”—tell us about the character of God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How would circumcision serve as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham? What does your answer tell us about humankind and how we think and act?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. No matter how much we tell ourselves otherwise, our sins always affect other people. Think of all the people in the story of Abraham whose lives were impacted by Abraham's sins. How should facing this truth change our attitude toward sins we are prone to tolerate in our lives?

7. When you look at the list of the tests of Abraham's faith, how do you think those experiences affected the people in these stories?



## LESSON 9

# SODOM AND GOMORRAH



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 18–20**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 17:8–18:8**, **Genesis 18:9–19:5**, and **Genesis 19:6–20:18**

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We have two kinds of Christians today—those living a blessed life and those who live a blasted life. Those who live a blessed Christian life, a life in fellowship with God, can be illustrated now by Abraham’s actions in light of coming destruction.

Those who have made shipwreck of their lives have gotten entirely out of God’s will. Their decisions have led to a blasted life. They may not have lost their salvation, but they sure have lost everything else. This is illustrated when we join Lot down in Sodom.

In Genesis 18 we find Abraham having prepared a feast for three visiting guests; we find out later that they’re royal guests. At the time, Abraham didn’t know who he was really entertaining.

One of the guests asked about Sarah, which seemed odd in this Middle Eastern, male-only gathering. He said, *“I’m coming back this time next year. When I arrive, your wife Sarah will have a son.”*

Sarah was listening at the tent opening, just behind the man, and she laughed, thinking, *Me, have a baby?* Her laughter was the “that’s just too good to be true” kind of laughter.

The guest then said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh ...? Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:13-14). Then Sarah said, *“I didn’t laugh.”* And the guest replied, *“You did so.”*

Only afterwards did Abraham and Sarah realize they were entertaining the Lord.

Abraham walked the guests out and in the distance they could see Sodom and Gomorrah, great resorts of that day, beautiful and restful.

## **GOD REVEALS HIS PLAN FOR SODOM AND GOMORRAH**

Since Abraham is a man of influence and will someday be the father of a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him, God doesn’t hide His purposes from Abraham (see Genesis 18:19).

The Lord tells Abraham that there was a great cry coming from these two cities because their sin was grievous. God was there to investigate in person. (He never does anything hurriedly or hastily.) God doesn’t want Abraham to think He was vindictive or without mercy and develop a distorted view of Him. So, God let him know His plans to destroy these ungodly cities.

When Abraham heard God’s plan, He asked Him directly, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” (He’s thinking of Lot, obviously.) Abraham had rescued him once; now he’s in danger again. Likely he worried about Lot’s relationship with God, but he at least believes he’s a saved man. So, he asked God, *“What about the righteous? What if there were 50 righteous people in Sodom? Would you destroy it then? Doesn’t the Judge of all the Earth judge with justice?”*

The rest of the Bible testifies to the fact that the Judge of all the earth always does right, that whatever God does is right. If we don’t agree, then we don’t have all the facts or don’t know all the details.

God answers Abraham, *“If there are 50 righteous, I will spare the city.”*

What about 45? *“If there are 45 righteous, I will spare the city.”*

What about 40? *“If there are 40 righteous, I won’t destroy it.”*

What about 30? *“If there are 30 righteous, I won’t destroy it.”*

What about 20? *“If there are 20 righteous, I won’t destroy it.”*

What about 10? *“If there are 10 righteous, I won’t destroy it.”*

Then the Lord went down to Sodom and Abraham went home.

You have to wonder, as long as he was questioning God, why didn't Abraham ask, *"What if there was just one righteous?"* He was worried about Lot. But the Lord would have likely said, *"If there's one that's righteous in that city, then I'm going to get him out and then destroy the city."* Because as it turned out, that's what happened.

There was one righteous man there. God knew about Lot, and God said, *"I can't destroy it until you're out."*

The same is true today. The Great Tribulation Period can't come as long as the church is in the world. Because Christ bore our judgment, and we believed Him. The Great Tribulation is part of that judgment; therefore, the church won't go through it. Sodom and Gomorrah is a picture of the world as it is today.

Abraham's conversation with the Lord is a picture of blessed fellowship with God.

But now the picture changes. We travel now from Hebron on the plains of Mamre where Abraham lives, down to the city of Sodom where Lot lives.

## LOT AT SODOM—THE BLASTED LIFE

Two angels walk into town and find Lot sitting in the gate. As in other ancient cities, the judges of the town conducted court in the gates. Lot happens to be a righteous man living in an unrighteous town. We learn from 2 Peter 2:8 that he was never happy living in Sodom, that the rampant sin "tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds." Years before when Abraham had given him the choice, Lot chose this rich area, but it was a tragic day for him when he moved to Sodom. He gained wealth but lost his family.

In the custom of that day, Lot welcomed the visitors into his home, and they reluctantly came in. *"We don't want to inconvenience you. We can sleep outside."* But of course, Lot knew they couldn't sleep outside safely, so he insisted they stay in his home. He fixed them a feast.

Then a horrible thing happened. The men of the city, both young and old, circled Lot's house, asking about the two visitors. They had sickening, perverted sexual plans for the men. The Word of God is specific on this, and you can't tone it down. The name that has been put on this sin from that day to this is *sodomy*. This is an awful sin.

Lot went outside to talk with the mob. He had lived in Sodom a long time and was used to this. This wasn't a new morality to him; it was just old sin. He even offered his two daughters to the mob but insisted they leave his guests alone.

Just then, the guests opened the door and pulled Lot back into the house and slammed the door shut. They made the mob lose their vision, so they couldn't find the door again. If they hadn't done that, both they and Lot would have been destroyed, because that was the intention of the men of Sodom.

But now time was up. The guests asked Lot to gather his family and get out of town, because the Lord had sent them to destroy Sodom.

Lot is in a bad situation. He had spent years in this city. His sons and daughters had grown up here, and apparently married people with those low ethical standards. Even Lot had learned to tolerate this wickedness. When he told his sons-in-law, *"Let's get out of here—God is going to destroy this city,"* they laughed at him. They thought it was a joke. Lot was out of God's will in this place, and he had no witness for God. No one would listen to him when all he wanted to do was save them. The same principle is true today: When you tolerate sin on their level, you lose your credibility.

Lot never enjoyed it down there in Sodom. Now that he is going to leave the city, he cannot get anyone to leave with him except his wife and two single daughters.

So the next morning, the angels hurried Lot along, but they lingered. Finally, they took the family by the hand and, in mercy, ran with them out of town.

Even Lot didn't want to leave. But he believed God, and he gets out of the city—but he didn't want to go as far as the mountains, as God had directed. He bargained, *"Would the little town called Zoar be far enough?"* You see, this man came out of Sodom, but he didn't come clean even out of there. And of course, for the record of his life, he got into a great deal of trouble there.

As they were running from the city, Lot's wife looked back. She didn't want to leave Sodom. Her body walked out, but she surely left her heart there. The Lord had said, *"Leave the city, and don't look back."* Lot didn't look back; he believed God. But she didn't. She didn't really make it out of the city. Right there on the spot, she turned into a pillar of salt.

The story of Lot's two daughters is as sordid as can be. They may have made it out of the city, but they brought its sinful morals with them. It's enough to say their wickedness shamed their father. It also created two people groups, the Moabites and the Ammonites, who both gave Israel trouble for generations. And it all began here.

In spite of everything, Lot was God's man and He extended mercy to him. But frankly, Lot lost everything except his own soul. His life is a picture of a great many people who won't judge the sin in their lives. They are saved, "yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). If we don't judge our own sins, God will.

What did Abraham think of all this? On the morning after, Abraham looked towards Sodom and saw what looked like the smoke of a huge furnace. Likely he was grieved and sad for Lot's sake. He didn't know if he had gotten out alive. Abraham didn't grieve for the city—he lost nothing. He wasn't in love with the things of this world. He knew God judges sin. Romans 1:24-25 says God gave them up to it. That is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

## ABRAHAM'S TEST—GENESIS 20

Abraham and Sarah have their own test to deal with. Before the blessing that they've waited decades to hold, they have to deal with some sin in their lives.

Abraham and Sarah traveled south into some unfamiliar territory where they encountered a king named Abimelech. Even at 90 years old, Sarah was beautiful. So, Abraham, once again, frightened that he would be killed and his wife be stolen, (again) lied and said, "She is my sister."

This is the second time they've done this. They were moving into an unfamiliar place and Abraham felt like it was beyond God's borders to protect them. When they first started out, Abraham didn't have complete trust and confidence in God, so he and Sarah made a pact that anywhere they went and it looked like Abraham might be killed because of his wife, that Sarah would say, "*He's my brother.*" And that would keep Abraham from being killed, so they thought. They used that strategy down in Egypt, and here they use it again. Now that sin must be dealt with before God is going to hear and answer their prayer in sending a son. Isaac will not be born until this sin is dealt with.

The same is true today. How different our lives would be, and our churches, if we would deal with the sin in our lives. Revival might just take place! Or at least a regular river of blessing—but that's not coming until we confess our sin before the Lord and get in right fellowship with each other.

Gratefully, Abraham was God's man, and he confesses his lack of faith before Abimelech and God. And soon, we're going to hear a baby's cry coming from their home.

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**NEXT: Did God really tell Abraham to kill his son?**

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## LESSON 9



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. “Is anything too hard for God?” is an easy question to answer, but do you at times find yourself struggling to believe that the obvious answer is really true?
2. Does it surprise you to see God sharing His plans with Abraham? Why do you think God chose to share His plans for Sodom and Gomorrah when He didn’t share future details of Abraham’s own life?
3. Lot made a choice to live in Sodom and Gomorrah, and the sin of those cities had a negative impact on his family. Sometimes we can’t help what we are surrounded by, so how can we not fall victim to the same effects of the sins of those around us?

4. The story of Lot's family is a tragic one. At many points along the way, Lot or his family members could have acted differently, but they were compromised by sin. What areas are there in your life that you are tempted to compromise your actions?
5. God judged Sodom and Gomorrah severely. What does this tell us about God?
6. After all Abraham and Sarah had been through, why do we encounter Abraham making the exact same mistake, committing the exact same sins all over again?



7. If you were Abimelech, how would you react to finding out you had been lied to by Abraham and Sarah? How would it have changed your view of their God?

HOW DIFFERENT  
OUR LIVES WOULD BE,  
AND OUR CHURCHES,  
IF WE WOULD DEAL WITH  
THE SIN IN OUR LIVES.

REVIVAL MIGHT JUST  
TAKE PLACE!



THRUtheBIBLE

## LESSON 10

# WHAT HAPPENED ON MOUNT MORIAH



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 21–23**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 21**, **Genesis 22:1-18**, and  
**Genesis 22:18–23:20**

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The arrival of a baby into a home causes a great deal of change. When long-awaited baby Isaac arrived into Sarah and Abraham's home, he brought difficulty—a lot of it. Specifically with Hagar and her son, Ishmael. As a young teenager, Ishmael has had a long time with Abraham as his father, and he doesn't want to give up his privileged relationship. Ishmael is Abraham's son just as much as Isaac. Abraham is grieved that there's conflict in his home, but it was sinful for he and Sarah to conceive of this plan years ago, and now they're reaping the consequences. God doesn't accept Ishmael as the son of His promise. Abraham is going to have to send Hagar and Ishmael away.

This conflict is an illustration of every believer's two natures. We've had an old nature since we were born and it controlled us. Naturally, we do what we want to do, good or bad. When we are born again, we receive a new nature. We're able to do what pleases God now. But this is also where the conflict begins. Romans 7 talks about a battle going on between our two natures, the new and the old. Both want to be in control. There comes a point when we must decide which nature we're going to live by. We have to decide if we will yield to the Lord and allow His Spirit to move in our life or allow the flesh to take control. There's no third alternative for the child of God; there's no living with both natures in harmony.

In this case, Hagar and Ishmael (the old nature) must be put out. Ishmael's antagonistic character begins to be revealed. His hand is against his brother, which is a picture of his lineage down through the centuries, even to today.

In Isaac's birth, we see a foreshadowing of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. God didn't suddenly spring the virgin birth on mankind. He had prepared us by several other miraculous births before this, including the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1), the birth of Samson (Judges 13), and here the birth of Isaac (Genesis 21).

Notice the remarkable comparison of the births of Isaac and of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. **Both had been promised.** When God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees 25 years earlier, God told him He would give him a son. In Isaiah 7:14, God also said to the nation Israel, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son." The day Jesus was born in Bethlehem was a fulfillment of prophecy.
2. **Both births included a long interval between promise and fulfillment.** For Isaac, 25 years. For Jesus' birth, generations. God had promised that there would come One in David's line, a thousand years before.
3. **Both birth announcements seemed incredulous.** When the three visitors on their way to Sodom stopped for a rest with Abraham and Sarah, they told them that next year at this time, they would have a son. It sounded impossible. And who was the first one to raise a question about the virgin birth? It was Mary herself. When the angel made the announcement, she said, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34).
4. **Both were named before their births.** Abraham and Sarah were told they should name their son Isaac. And the angel told Joseph, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).
5. **Both births occurred at God's appointed time.** Genesis 21 says that at the set time which God had spoken to them, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Galatians 4:4 says that "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son."
6. **Both births were miraculous.** The birth of Isaac was a miraculous birth, born to a couple long past their natural years to conceive a child. And miraculously, no man had any part in the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus.

7. **Both sons were a particular joy of their fathers.** Abraham named Isaac, “laughter” because of the joy they felt when they heard the news. And speaking of the Lord Jesus, the Father spoke out of heaven and said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Both sons were a joy.
8. **Both sons were obedient to their fathers, even unto death.** In Genesis 22, we’ll see Isaac obedient to his father, even when he was being offered up to die. That same obedience was certainly true of the Lord Jesus Christ.
9. **Both are a picture of resurrection.** Romans 4:19 tells us that Abraham “did not consider his own body, already dead ... and the *deadness* of Sarah’s womb.” Out of death came life. The Lord Jesus also was “raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25). We have in Isaac quite a remarkable picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## GOD SEES HAGAR

Abraham is upset by his broken family but obeys God, who reassures him that Ishmael, though not the promised child, will still father a great nation.

So with some bread and a jug of water, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away into the wilderness of Beersheva. The provisions didn’t last long and the desert was harsh. Hagar cried over her son, thinking they would die there. But God saw them and heard their cry. The angel of the Lord asked, “*What’s wrong, Hagar? Don’t be afraid.*” He reaffirms God’s promise to make of him a great nation.

Just then, God opened her eyes and she saw a natural well in the desert. She filled her jar and gave the boy a long, cool drink.

We’re told that God was on the boy’s side as he grew up. He lived out in the Paran wilderness and became a skilled archer. We don’t know any more from Scripture about Ishmael’s family line, but his descendants, the Arab people, are out there in the desert even today.

## HOW WAS ABRAHAM SAVED?

We saw how Isaac’s birth was a parallel picture of Jesus’ birth, and now in Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac there is a beautiful similarity to our Lord Jesus’ death. We learn a valuable lesson about Abraham’s faith in this section. It was the topic of two notable passages in the New Testament, James 2:21

and Romans 4:1-3. Both passages ask how Abraham was saved—was it by the things he did or by his faith? Genesis 15 records the time when Abraham was just beginning his walk of faith and only God knew his heart. God saw that Abraham believed Him. Even though Abraham failed many times, the day he took his son to be offered on the altar, his actions proved he believed God. Did he offer Isaac on the altar? No, but he was willing, and that very act of being willing reveals that he had the works of faith. The book of James emphasized Abraham's works of faith (Genesis 22) and the apostle Paul talked about his faith (Genesis 15). Abraham was justified before God by faith and proved it outwardly when he prepared to sacrifice Isaac.

## FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Abraham's life reflects repeated tests, but the ultimate test was the day when God asked him to do something very strange. God said,

***“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”*** –Genesis 22:2

This beloved son, Isaac, wasn't just a little lad. Isaac may actually be a young man, around age 30.

Notice how God parallels His instructions with His own Son, Jesus:

He says, “Take now your son.” Jesus Christ is in the position of Son in the Trinity.

“Take your son, your only son.” The Lord Jesus is said to be the only begotten Son.

“Your only son Isaac, whom you love.” And the Lord Jesus said, “The Father loves Me” (see John 10:17 and 15:9).

“Go to the land of Moriah.” Many believe that Moriah is the same place where the Jerusalem temple is built a thousand years later and where the Lord Jesus was sacrificed; that is, right outside the city walls, a thousand years after that. This is sacred ground.

God is specific that Isaac be offered as a “burnt offering.” A burnt offering was offered up until Moses' Law, and then a sin offering and a trespass offering was given. Here the burnt offering speaks of the person of Christ and who He is.

This idea of a human sacrifice raises the moral question: Is what God is asking wrong? And the answer is, yes, it's absolutely morally wrong. If we had met Abraham that day on the way with Isaac and asked him what he was doing, he might have said, *"I'm going to offer Isaac as a sacrifice."*

Isn't that wrong?

*"Yes. All the heathen nations around here offer human sacrifices, but God teaches that it's wrong."*

Well, then why are you doing it?

*"All I know is that God has commanded it. I don't understand it, but I've been walking with Him now for 25 years. He's never failed me, nor has He asked me to do anything that didn't prove to be the best thing. I don't understand this, but I believe that if I go all the way with it, God will raise Isaac from the dead, because I believe He'll do that."*

And that's what Abraham and his faithful son, Isaac, did. They got up early one morning, loaded firewood on their donkeys, and set out for the mountain God told them to go to. It took them three days to get there. Abraham was fully convinced that God was going to give Isaac back to him. On the third day, Abraham told his servants, *"You wait here. Isaac and I will go further, we'll worship and then come back to you."*

The transaction between Abraham and Isaac, between father and son, would happen privately. That's what happened at the Cross, as well. God shut man out; there was darkness at high noon. During those last three hours, that cross became an altar on which "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" was offered (John 1:29). Man is on the outside and the transaction between the Father and the Son is private. The picture is the same here; it's Abraham and Isaac alone.

First, Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. Remember, Jesus Christ also carried His own cross.

Then, Abraham took the fire in his hand, and a knife. The fire speaks of judgment and the knife speaks of sacrifice, the execution of judgment.

Isaac asks, *"Father, I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for burnt offering?"*

Abraham says, full of faith, "God will provide for Himself the lamb" (Genesis 22:8).

Then Isaac ties his son's hands and lays him on the altar, on the wood. Abraham didn't have to tie Isaac to restrain him. Isaac is likely a grown man and could have overcome Abraham if he wanted to. But Isaac is doing this in obedience, just as the Lord Jesus went to the cross. "Not My will," Jesus said, "but Yours, be done" (John 22:42). Jesus goes to the cross to fulfill God's will. Isaac is doing the same for his father.

What a picture.

Then Abraham stretches out his hand and raises the knife above his son to kill him .... This isn't the first crisis in Abraham's life, but it's the biggest. He doesn't understand it, but he's learned to obey God.

God has given Abraham four definite crises in his lifetime:

1. First, he was called to leave all of his relatives in Ur of the Chaldeans. He didn't succeed at this test at the beginning, but eventually, a break came.
2. His nephew Lot created test after test for Abraham, but he loved Lot. Then came the time to separate, and Lot went down to Sodom.
3. After Abraham and Sarah failed their test of waiting for God, they then had the son of Hagar, Ishmael, to deal with. Abraham cried on behalf of his son and hated to be separated from him.
4. Now comes this supreme test. He's asked now to give up Isaac.

Nobody understands all the details except the simple reason God has asked him to do it—at the same time that He promises that generations will come from Isaac. Abraham passed the test because he believed God to be true to His promise, even if that meant he would kill Isaac and God would raise him from the dead (see Hebrews 11:19). But as far as Abraham is concerned, he's willing to go through with it.

At the last moment, when Abraham had in his heart that God would be true, he raises the knife. And the angel of the Lord calls out from heaven and says, "*Stop.*"

"For now I know that you fear God" (Genesis 22:12). How does He know? By action, by Abraham's works. Previously, it was by faith, because God sees your heart. But your neighbor doesn't know—they can only know by your works. And that's the reason James can say that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). It has to produce something.



Every person who God calls—to be saved and to be used—He will test. God tested Abraham and, today, God tests those who are His own. The tests we are given are meant to strengthen our faith, to establish it, and to make us useful for Him.

## ABRAHAM PASSES THE TEST

***Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. –Genesis 22:13***

Abraham said God would provide Himself a lamb, but this was a ram. The lamb was not provided until 2,000 years later when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and identified Him as, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This is the answer to Abraham’s faith: God will provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering.

This is the picture from the Garden of Eden to the Cross of Christ. This little animal pointed to His coming, and God would never permit human sacrifice. But when His Son came into the world, His Son went to the cross and died. God spared Abraham’s son, but He didn’t spare His own Son, but gave him up freely for us all (see Romans 8:32). That cross became an altar on which the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world was offered.

Abraham named that place “Jehovah Jireh: God will provide.” Here’s where God intervened on his behalf.

For a second time, God had a message for him: *“Because you have done this thing I asked, you’ve not withheld your only son ....”*

Wait. Did Abraham offer Isaac? He didn’t kill him, but he believed God and went far enough to let Him see that he was willing to give his son. We see again that Abraham was saved by faith and then he demonstrated that faith. (Notice, God made a point to say “your only son,” just like God offered His only Son, Jesus.) God said that because he acted in faith, He will bless Abraham and multiply his seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand on the shore. “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:15-18; see also Galatians 3:8).

It’s true that the good news of Jesus Christ has been the blessing to all generations and to all nations of the world. Abraham’s obedience rested on his faith, and it led to action. Faith without works is dead.

Abraham likely knew a great deal more about the coming of Christ and the gospel than we realize. In fact, the Lord Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day” (John 8:56). God revealed a great deal to Abraham. Galatians 3:8 says, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’” Here on Mount Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac is a picture of the offering of Christ, and even His resurrection; it’s all here.

## ABRAHAM BURIES SARAH

The end of an era now begins. Abraham’s wife, Sarah, dies at age 127. She was 90 when Isaac was born, and now she’s gone. Abraham weeps for her and mourns. They’re living in Hebron, in the land they knew was the hope for the future. Abraham still considered himself a “stranger and a sojourner” even in the Promised Land God has promised to give him. As a respected man in Hebron, Abraham considered where to bury Sarah and was offered his choice of local sepulchers. Instead, Abraham asked to buy a cave nearby. They wanted to give it to him, but he insisted on paying for it. This was the land where they sunk all their hopes for the future and he wanted to be sure it stayed in his family.

This is a great spot to consider a spiritual principle. God has two great hopes and two great purposes. He has an earthly purpose and a heavenly one. This earth on which we live is going into eternity. It’ll be traded for a new model—there will be a new heaven and a new earth, but earth will be inhabited throughout eternity. God’s promise to Abraham and to those after him was always tied to this land. Abraham wanted to be buried in that land so that when the resurrection came, he and Sarah would be raised there. He never knew how many were coming after him, but there literally millions will be raised from the dead. Their earthly hope will then be realized.

God also has a heavenly purpose. In one of His last times with the disciples, the Lord taught them a new concept. They were all schooled in the Old Testament and had the Old Testament hope, but then the Lord said He was preparing a place for the church (see John 14:1-3). The New Jerusalem is that eternal home. This was a new concept for the disciples. God never told Abraham He’s going to take him away from this earth to heaven. He continually told him, *“I’m going to give you this land.”*

Abraham believed God. And that's the reason now that he wants to be buried and he wants Sarah to be buried in that land. Isaac and Rebekah as well as Jacob, brought all the way back from Egypt, are also buried in that cave.

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**NEXT: Finding a wife for Isaac.**

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## LESSON 10



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. How do you think Abraham and Sarah responded to becoming parents at such advanced ages? Which emotions do you imagine sprang from holding the fulfillment of God's promise in their own hands?
2. What was the point of God's question, "What's wrong, Hagar?" What did God want to remind Hagar of?
3. God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son is one of the most inexplicable passages in the entire Bible, and it's okay if we don't understand it completely. Are there parts of this story that you struggle to understand? What is something you learn about God in this story?



7. Imagine you were Isaac. How do you think it would feel to know you were the child God had promised your parents? Would that make you feel pressure or freedom?

## LESSON 11

# ISAAC GETS A BRIDE



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 24:1–25:18**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 24:1-32**, **Genesis 24:33-67**, and **Genesis 25**

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The book of Genesis can be divided into two parts. The first 11 chapters are about four great events and the second section, chapters 12–50, are about four outstanding people. In Genesis 12–23 we studied Abraham, the man of faith. Now in chapters 24–26 we will look at Isaac, his beloved son.

Isaac's life includes three great events. The first surrounded the anticipation and details of his birth. The second was the test that he and his father Abraham won on Mount Moriah. And now the third is the story behind Isaac getting a bride.

This is a very wonderful love story. It shows how God is interested in the person we marry. He's interested in your love story, and it is wonderful when you bring God into it. God set up two universal institutions for the betterment of mankind. The first is marriage and the other is human government. When these are broken, a society will fall apart.

The home is the backbone of any society. God established marriage to give strength and stability to society. The same thing is true relative to human government. A government must have the power to protect human life, that is the purpose of it. Human life is sacred, and it's the basis of God's laws.

This is a wonderful love story we'll study now, full of dramatic action and even a great spiritual picture. As we go through this chapter, notice how the Lord leads in all the details of their lives. He does the same today. Even in this early time in history, there were people who looked to God and followed His leading. And we'll see faith in Rebekah's response and the straightforward manner in which she decided to be Isaac's bride. When all the pieces are right, it's easy to follow God's will.

And so this is how the love story began ...

When Abraham was old and reflecting on how the Lord had blessed him his whole life, he thought how wonderful it would be if he saw Isaac married before he died. He wanted him to marry a woman who feared the Lord, not any of the local Canaanite women who worshiped idols. So Abraham sends his trusted servant, Eliezer, back to the land of Haran in Mesopotamia to get a bride for Isaac. He didn't want Isaac to go to Haran under any circumstance, but instead he entrusted the job to Eliezer.

*"But what if the girl won't come with me?"* he asks.

Abraham, as a man of faith, said, *"You can count on God to lead you. God has a bride back there for Isaac. He's promised me this."*

Abraham isn't taking a leap in the dark; he believed God would provide a wife to Isaac because He had promised that through Isaac would come a seed through which the world would be blessed.

Abraham's faith rested on what God has said. Faith always needs to rest on something. It isn't a gamble but a sure thing. God doesn't want us to just believe—He wants us to believe *His Word*. You can't force God to do something—that God has to do it because you believe it. We don't know what His will is, but whatever it is, that's what we want. God wants us to bring our needs to Him, but He has to be the One to determine how He will answer our prayers. Abraham isn't demanding anything of God.

*"If the woman won't come, then God has another way to work this out,"* he said.

## IN SEARCH OF ISAAC'S BRIDE

So Eliezer goes to Mesopotamia to get a bride for Isaac. He takes ten camels along and a bunch of servants. He also takes a lot of goods to trade and give as gifts. After weeks of travel, they arrive in Haran one evening, at the time when the women drew water at the well.



In those days, the women watered and took care of the livestock. As it was proper for a stranger in town, Eliezer waited at the well until the community was done with their watering. As he waited, he prayed for God's kindness to be on his master's house. He also prayed that the Lord would lead him in making the right choice. *Lead me to pick the one that You have chosen, Lord.*

He sensed God's sign was that when he asked a woman for a drink that she would offer to water his camels, too. That's how he would know.

It so happened that the words were barely out of his mouth when Rebekah came out with a water jug on her shoulder. The girl was stunningly beautiful and a young virgin.

Rebekah went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came back up. Eliezer ran to meet her and asked, *"Please, may I have a sip of water from your jug?"*

She said, *"Certainly, drink!"* And she held the jug so that he could drink. When he had satisfied his thirst she said, *"I'll get water for your camels, too, until they've drunk their fill."* Eliezer watched silently. *Was this God's answer?* She promptly emptied her jug into the trough and ran back to the well to fill it, and she kept at it until she had watered all ten camels.

Rebekah is lovely and polite and very kind to Eliezer and to his servants and camels. Eliezer likely just stood there in amazement, wondering if the Lord had so quickly answered his prayer. When the camels had done drinking, he brought out gifts—pure gold earrings and bracelets.

He asks her, *"Tell me about your family. Do you have enough room for us to stay the night?"*

*"Yes, of course, we do."*

Rebekah said she was the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah and Nahor. That means Rebekah was Isaac's aunt's granddaughter. (Nahor was Abraham's brother.) In that day, relatives were often married.

Of course, Eliezer sees God's hand in this. He's convinced God had guided him to the exact right place. He said, "being on the way, the **LORD** led me to the house of my master's brethren" (Genesis 24:27).

"Being on the way" is a great expression. The Lord leads those who are in the way—that is, those who are in *His* way, who want to be led of Him, and who will do what He wants done. God can lead a willing heart anytime, anywhere.

When Rebekah ran in their home and told her family about the foreign visitor, her brother Laban came out to greet Eliezer. (Watch out for Uncle Laban. Spoiler alert: he'll play an important part in years to come.)

Laban welcomes Eliezer and all his servants and camels into their home. He blessed them in God's name, the living God, the Creator, and he gave everyone something to eat and water to wash their feet. They were treated like royalty.

This whole scene is a marvelous picture of the relationship of Christ and the church. The church is often called "the bride of Christ." Today, she is being won through the Holy Spirit whom the Father and the Son have sent into the world. The Spirit of God, like the servant of Abraham, has come to talk about Another, to take the things of Christ and show them unto us. As Eliezer, the servant, has come to get a bride for Isaac, so the Spirit of God is in the world to call out a bride for Christ.

In many ways, Eliezer models the Holy Spirit in how he tells them about his master, Abraham. When a feast is put before Eliezer, he refuses to eat until he tells them why he's come. *"I want to tell you my mission."* This is the same as the Spirit of God who has come into the world to tell us about Another. God is first concerned to get the gospel to the people of the world.

Eliezer explains, "I am Abraham's servant." Like the Spirit of God who doesn't introduce Himself or speak of Himself, Eliezer's first concern is His master.

The servant then tells them about his master's house. Likewise, the Spirit of God wants us to know about the Father and His desire to save us. The Spirit convicts the lost world of three things: sin, righteousness, and judgment. We are not lost because we reject Christ, we are lost because, whether or not we have heard about Jesus, we are lost sinners. Then the Holy Spirit tells us there is a Savior who has carried our judgment and given to us His righteousness so that we can have a standing in heaven. The Holy Spirit has come to speak of Another.

Then Eliezer shares, "The Lord has blessed my master greatly." Did you know our Heavenly Father is also rich today in cattle and in goods? He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. How great *our* Father is, too!

Then Eliezer tells them that Isaac, the child of his master's old age, will inherit everything. In an infinitely greater way, the Lord Jesus is the Inheritor, and we are joint heirs with Him today.

*"My master made me swear Isaac won't marry a Canaanite, in whose land we live,"* Eliezer said. The Holy Spirit is calling out a people who, yes are sinners, but who have been made children of God.

Eliezer was so excited, he retold Rebekah and her family all the details of how he had come to them and how God was pointing to her as the answer to his prayers. But then he cautions them, *"Tell me what you think. If you plan to say yes to my master's generous invitation, then tell me now. But if not, tell so I can figure out what to do next."*

The family leaders say, *"As far as we're concerned, this is of the Lord. You can go ahead and take Rebekah."*

Then Eliezer brings out generous gifts of jewels of gold and silver and silk cloth and gives them to everyone in the family. This is the way the Spirit gives to the children of God. We have the earnest, the guarantee, of the Spirit when we come to Christ. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, we have access, we have joy, we have a hope, and we have the Holy Spirit (see Romans 5:1-5).

Then the men stayed up and feasted and rejoiced. Eliezer was eager to get back to Abraham, his master, and wanted to leave in the morning. But Rebekah's brother and mother asked to have a week or so to say goodbye. They also thought it would be good to talk this decision over with her.

Then they called Rebekah. She had likely been listening all this time. No one has paid much attention to her up to this point, but now all eyes turn to her, and they say, *"Rebekah, what do you think? Will you go with this man?"* She doesn't hesitate but says, *"I will go."*

Her family said goodbye to her and blessed her saying, "Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them" (Genesis 24:60).

Now they can start on their long trip back to the Promised Land. So Rebekah and her servants got on their camels and followed Eliezer and his troupe into the desert.

Can't you imagine them after a hard day of travel, stopping in the evening at an oasis? The campfire is built, and they have their evening meal. As they are sitting there in the desert, Rebekah may have said to Eliezer, *"Tell me again about Isaac."*

*"What do you want to know?"*

*“Tell me about the way he was born. Tell me about the way his father offered him on the altar.”* There was plenty of time to think and dream on their way back to the Promised Land.

When they finally arrived back into the pleasant country of Hebron and Beersheba, it just so happened that 40-year-old Isaac was in the field, praying. He looked up and saw the string of camels coming through the desert.

Rebekah sees him walking toward them and asks who he is. Throughout the long journey she has come to know *about* him, but now she is to see him face to face.

This is similar to our position even now. We love the Lord and think about Him, but we’ve not seen Him yet (see 1 Peter 1:8). Someday soon when He comes for us, we will know Him by the prints of the nails in His hands. What a glorious, wonderful, beautiful picture we have before us.

Eliezer tells Isaac all that had happened and delivers to him Rebekah to be his wife. Just as the Holy Spirit has sealed us and will deliver us to Christ at the day of redemption.

Rebekah then became Isaac’s wife and he loved her. She comforted him after his mother died. Do you know that Jesus Christ gains a great deal in our salvation? He wants us; He longs for us. We are His bride.

## ABRAHAM MARRIES AGAIN

Back at home, we visit again with Abraham. After his Sarah died, Abraham marries again. With his wife Keturah, he has a second big family. Yes, even though earlier we heard that his ability to conceive a child was past, he now has six more children. (When God does something, He really does it!) Isaac is still the child of God’s promise, but Abraham does have other children that we hear about in the future, but the Bible doesn’t focus on them.

Abraham lived 175 years, then he took his final breath and died happy and “full of years.” Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah next to his wife, Sarah.

After Abraham’s death, God blessed his son Isaac.

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**NEXT: What are you waiting for?**

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## LESSON 11



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Genesis is full of lots of themes and ideas that we see in every book of the Bible. What does it tell us that we see God's provision and caring for the life details of people in Genesis as well?
2. Towards the end of his life Abraham wants to find a wife for Isaac, and he entrusts this most important mission to his servant, Eliezer. Is there anyone in your life that you possess this kind of trust in? Are you the type of person that someone could trust like this?
3. God leads people in all sorts of ways in the Bible. Sometimes it looks so easy, like how he led Eliezer, but often it is much more complicated. How does God tend to lead you, and do you ever struggle with God's leading?

4. Many times in our lives we will never know the blessings that come to us because someone advocated on our behalf. Isaac gained a wife, but it was through the faith and actions of Abraham and Eliezer. Is there anyone in your life that needs you to support and advocate for them, even if they never know about it?
5. Rebekah is only too eager to go with Eliezer. Her willingness to pursue what she believed was ordained by God is a fantastic example. Why do you think she was prepared to immediately obey God's will? Is there some area in your own life that you need an attitude more like Rebekah's?
6. Despite all of the strife and tension at the end of Abraham's life we see his two sons burying him together. Does this surprise you? What does it tell us about the father, and what does it tell us about the sons?

7. How do you think Eliezer felt being given such a great task by Abraham?  
If you were Eliezer, would you have felt up to the task or would you have doubted yourself and God?

## LESSON 12

# TWINS



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 25–26**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 25** and **Genesis 26**

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Isaac and Rebekah began their life together and were happy.

But Rebekah, like Sarah, was unable to conceive a child. Isaac pled with God on her behalf for 20 years and finally the Lord said, “*It’s time.*” She then became pregnant—with twins!

Her pregnancy wasn’t easy. The two babies struggled together in the womb and Rebekah asked God about it. She knew something significant was happening.

The struggle of these two boys, which began before their birth, represents *the* struggle that still goes on in the world today. This is the struggle between light and darkness, between good and evil, between the Spirit and the flesh. Every child of God knows something of this struggle. (Read about it in Romans 7.)

The Lord told her, “Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23).

Sure enough, when she delivered the twins, the baby boys were as different at two nations. The first to arrive came out red and hairy and they named him Esau, “red.”



The younger son came out of the womb holding Esau's heel; so they called him Jacob, meaning "the usurper," because already he was trying to take Esau's place. But he didn't need to grasp Esau's heel—God had already promised that he would lead.

Here they are, twins, growing up together in this home. But no two boys were ever more different. They not only struggled in the womb, but they are against each other for the rest of their lives. They have different viewpoints and live by different philosophies of life. Their thinking was different and their attitudes were different. A whole different perspective on life was developing on the inside.

"So the boys grew." Esau became a cunning hunter, the outdoor boy, the athletic type. He pursued everything that was physical, but had no capacity or desire for spiritual things. He represents the flesh.

Jacob was a plain man. He lived indoors. He was his mother's boy and did what she told him to do.

Here is the problem in the home: "And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Genesis 25:28). Isaac and Rebekah played favorites, and that caused trouble from the start.

A closer look at the boys reveals their bents. The boy Jacob is cunning; he tries to be clever. He doesn't mind stooping to do things that are absolutely wrong. (And God will deal with him for this.) But although Esau was attractive on the outside, down underneath he had no interest in godly things. He was a man of the world. That's all he lived for.

Deep down, Jacob understood there was more to life; he valued the spiritual. It took God a long time to rub off all the debris to get down to Jacob's spiritual desire, but He finally did it. Before we are through with our study of Jacob, we'll see he was God's man all along, although he didn't demonstrate it until late in life.

When they were young men, we're told of an important incident in their home that tells of their characters.

Esau came in from the field. He had been outdoors, and he was tired and hungry. "*What's to eat?*" Apparently Jacob had made a stew; evidently he was a good chef.

"Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary," Esau demands.

Jacob saw his chance. He is a trickster and a traitor, and he wanted the birthright legally owned by the older sibling. Jacob said, *“I’ll sell you this stew in exchange for your birthright.”*

The birthright meant the one who had it was the head of the house and priest of the family. In this family, it meant the one who had it would be the one in the line that would lead to Christ. Esau attached no importance to it, and he didn’t want to be the priest of the family. He didn’t even want to give the impression that he was interested in spiritual things. He couldn’t care less about being in the line that led to Christ.

Jacob sees this, and he strategizes, *“If you’ll give me your birthright, I’ll give you a bowl of stew.”* Esau was happy with the bargain.

As much as Jacob valued the spiritual thing, he was also wrong in what he did. God had already promised, “The older shall serve the younger.” The birthright is coming to Jacob in God’s own time. But Jacob can’t wait, so he takes that which God has promised him. He should have waited for God to give it to him.

Jacob figured he would do what he could for himself. As long as he could help himself, why wait for God? He was clever enough. In the future, Jacob would learn the hard way.

So “Esau *despised* his birthright” and sat down and ate his stew. He had surrendered his birthright because it meant nothing to him.

## MORE ABOUT ISAAC’S LIFE

The Lord called men like Abraham, Jacob, and David, who were assertive and real go-getters. But God also called Isaac, whose great message for us is about patience.

While their twin boys grew up, Isaac and Rebekah had their own journey with God. During one season, Israel was experiencing a famine—just like the one Isaac’s father Abraham experienced when he and Lot took off for Egypt. But God told Isaac specifically not to go to Egypt.

Why did God tell him that? Because if he hadn’t, it would have been “like father, like son.” There was no generation gap of sin. It just flows right from one generation to the other. Generally, the son makes very much the same mistakes that the father did, unless something intervenes. And so God did.

He gave Isaac definite instructions in how to survive the famine and He confirmed the covenant He had made with his father, Abraham.

God says to Isaac, *“Don’t leave this land; don’t go down to Egypt. I want to confirm with you the covenant which I made with Abraham.”* And He repeated the three-fold promise about: (1) the *land*—“for to you and your descendants I give all these lands,” (2) the *nation*—“I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven,” and (3) the *blessing*—“and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (see Genesis 26:3-5).

God did this because Abraham obeyed His voice and kept His commandments. When God told Abraham something, he *believed* God and *acted* upon it. He demonstrated his faith by action.

Faith is something that you step out on. Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him for righteousness. God is now telling Isaac that He wants him to be that same kind of man.

## LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Abraham and Isaac both lived in the southern part of the land of Israel. Isaac obeyed God and didn’t go to Egypt, but he did move his family south to Gerar.

It didn’t take long before the men in Gerar were eyeing beautiful Rebekah. Isaac is afraid they will kill him to take her, so he repeats the sin of his father and says, “She is my sister.” The difference between Abraham and Isaac’s sin is that Abraham told half a lie and Isaac told a whole lie.

But their secret is found out. After they had been there a while, the king of the Philistines, Abimelech, saw Isaac showing affection to Rebekah. He knew right away that they were married and not siblings.

*“Why did you put us at this horrible risk?”* Abimelech demanded. *“We could have taken her by accident.”* Then Abimelech put a protective ban around Isaac and Rebekah and forbid anyone from touching them.

Abimelech became a good friend of Isaac’s. Isaac had the respect of the community just as his father Abraham had earned.

## THE LORD BLESSED ISAAC

Isaac thrived in Gerar because God blessed him. His crops were bountiful and so was his reputation. He was enjoying an earthly blessing. God made good on His promise of blessing as they walked in fellowship with Him.

God promises us, not *that* blessing, but *spiritual* blessings. That is our portion today, depending on our walk with God. If you will permit Him, He wants to bless you abundantly in your spiritual life.

Isaac's field brought forth *a hundred-fold*. His life is as outstanding as his father's. And it's appropriate that we link their lives together. Isaac's birth and his life are interwoven with Abraham's experiences. Although Isaac was important when he was offered there upon the altar, again it was Abraham and Isaac together.

Their experiences together are offered as examples to us. This also presents a wonderful picture of the intimacy between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). And in the high priestly prayer of Jesus, He said, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). Also, He said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). Therefore, it is very appropriate that the story of Isaac and the story of Abraham be told together.

## ISAAC AND HIS WELLS

Now Isaac stands on his own two feet up against the Philistines—and it doesn't go too well. The Philistines are jealous of Isaac's prosperity, so they start to sabotage his efforts. Abraham had dug many wells in this land to water his herds, but the Philistines were filling them in. (This conflict with them continued to escalate on into David's time.)

Abimelech told Isaac, "*You're causing difficulty for us, and it would be better if you left.*"

The water was causing conflict among the shepherds. Isaac's men would dig a well and they would take it away from him. He'd move up, dig another one, and they would take that away from him. He would just keep moving up. Isaac was quite a patient man of peace! At one point he called a well, "the Lord has made room for us" for them both to be fruitful in the land.

## GOD VISITS WITH ISAAC

Finally, Isaac moves further south to Beersheba, and it was there that the Lord appeared to him to comfort him. (God appears to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Isaac's son, Jacob.) His decision to move out of Philistine territory must have pleased God.

***And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake."***

-Genesis 26:24

And on that spot, Isaac built an altar and called on God's name. His servants also dug a well. (You can always put a well down next to Isaac. And you can put an altar down next to Abraham. As we'll see later on, you can put a tent down next to Jacob.)

Soon they had an official visit from their old friend Abimelech from Gerar, with his advisor and the commander of his army, and they testified to God's blessing of Isaac and gave God glory (vv. 28-29). Isaac asked, *"Why are you here, since you sent me away?"*

They were afraid that Isaac might attack them, so they proposed a treaty. They said, "Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD" (Genesis 26:28-29)

So Isaac and Abimelech made a treaty of mutual non-aggression and sealed it by eating a meal together, "a feast" that Isaac made for his treaty partners. Eating together was often a sacred rite in the ancient Near East that sealed an agreement.

Although Isaac seems weak like a pacifist, in his dealing with the men of Gerar, his life and honorable faith in God impressed his neighbors. Isaac's strength presented in a different way than expected.

We then learn that Esau, his son (now 40), married two Canaanite girls from the Hittite tribe. Of course, this tribe was under God's curse. But Esau didn't care about the special calling God had on his family and instead wanted to establish himself as a great man of the world.

This decision grieved Isaac and Rebekah.

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**NEXT: Family dysfunction isn't at all fun.**

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## LESSON 12



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why do you think God used infertility so often to show His power in the lives of the family of Abraham? Can we find comfort in the all-too-common struggles of these couples?
2. Time. Time. Time. Over and over again we see God using the passage of time as part of His interactions with those He chose in Genesis. Nothing ever seemed to be easy or quick. This isn't how we typically want our faith to work, but is there a reason God might be making you wait for something? What might a long delay in seeing God act mean, and what might it not mean?

3. Jacob and Esau were very different people. The problem in their house wasn't their differences, it was Isaac and Rebekah's favoritism. For parents there's an easy lesson here, but even if you aren't a parent you might struggle with treating some people equally. Where did Isaac and Rebekah go wrong in how they thought about their sons? How can we avoid the same type of mistake in our relationships?
  
4. Esau's willingness to sell his birthright tells us something about him, and it isn't good. What does this show us of the character of Esau, and how can we take care to avoid developing the same character flaws ourselves?
  
5. Jacob's willingness to connive and use unsavory methods to achieve what he wants tells us something about him, too, and it also isn't good. What does this show us of the character of Jacob, and how can we take care to avoid developing the same character flaws ourselves?





**THE TESTS  
WE ARE GIVEN  
ARE MEANT TO  
STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH,  
TO ESTABLISH IT,  
AND TO MAKE US  
USEFUL FOR GOD.**



**THRU**the**BIBLE**

## LESSON 13

# DECEIVED



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 27–28**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](http://TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 27** and **Genesis 28**

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Isaac loved Esau most.

Rebekah loved Jacob most.

How could their home ever be happy?

The issue in Isaac's home was, first, who would get Dad's blessing? God had promised Rebekah that "the elder will serve the younger" so the blessing belongs with Jacob. Knowing that, Isaac tried to bypass Jacob and give his blessing to Esau. Jacob schemed to get the blessing on his own.

Nobody believed God. And the family unit was broken apart by deception and would never be whole again.

## JACOB TAKES ESAU'S BIRTHRIGHT

We've followed Isaac in his travels, making treaties and digging wells. We know him to be a great man of peace and patience, as well as prominent and powerful. But now he is old and his eyes are dim; he knows he's coming to the end of his life.

All during his life, Esau had been his favorite son. He was the outdoor boy who would bring home a deer or some other animal and barbecue it up just as the old man enjoys it. Now he wants to bless his son. He knows that God said “the elder will serve the younger,” but he intentionally forgets that in order to bless Esau. He tells Esau to go out and hunt some meat and he will bless him because of it.

Have you noticed the family strife in this last section of Genesis? First there was trouble in Abraham’s family because of Hagar. Now there’s strife in this family over these twins.

Rebekah overheard what Isaac said to Esau. Since Jacob is her favorite, she conceives a deceitful counter-plan. God includes it in His Word because it’s historical fact, but it is absolute trickery and cannot be condoned.

Rebekah tells Jacob to kill two goats and she will barbeque them like she knows her husband likes. Then she says, “Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death.”

Jacob says, “Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing” (Genesis 27:10-12).

Rebekah told him to do as she asked and she’d take care of it. She took some of Esau’s clothes and put them on Jacob and then put the skins of the goats on his hands and neck. Then she handed him the meat and bread she had fixed and sent Jacob into Isaac’s room with them. When his father felt his hands and neck, he’d think it was Esau. Esau’s clothes would make Jacob smell like him, too.

So Jacob went in to Isaac and played his part. He had all the right responses and played a pious fraud. The Lord had nothing to do with this deception.

He said, *“Hello, father.”*

*“Who are you?”*

*“I am Esau with the venison you wanted, that your soul may bless me.”*

*“You found it so quickly!”*

*“Only because the Lord brought it to me!”*

Then Isaac asked Jacob to come closer and he felt him and said, *“The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”* Isaac also smelled his clothes. He may have suspected something was wrong, but Rebekah knew him well and worked out every detail.

So Isaac ate the meal and blessed his son, Jacob.

***Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!*** –Genesis 27:28-29

Isaac is actually blessing Jacob with the blessing which *he* had received—he is passing it on. This is the blessing that already belonged to Jacob. God had already blessed him. God isn’t accepting this deception one bit.

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly exited the room, Esau came in from hunting. He fixed his barbeque and brought it to his father. It didn’t take but a moment for them both to realize that they had been deceived. Isaac trembled with emotion with how he had been taken in by this plot. And when Esau figured out what had happened, he cried out, *“Bless me, too!”*

But Isaac said, *“No, he took your blessing.”*

Esau admitted, *“You named him correctly; he is the usurper. He stole my blessing.”*

Isaac’s word to Esau was prophetic and sad: “By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother” (Genesis 27:40).

Jacob’s method in obtaining the birthright was despicable. The birthright was already his! The formality of his father giving a blessing wasn’t necessary at all. God didn’t condone his fraud and deceit any more than He condoned Sarah and Abraham’s plan with Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham hadn’t given the blessing to Isaac—*God* had! And it is God who gave it to Jacob. His trickery was not only unnecessary, but God will deal with him because of it.

## ON THE RUN

Esau hated Jacob for what he did and made his own plan. He thought, *Our father is old and won't live much longer. Just as soon as he dies, I'll kill Jacob. I'll get rid of him!* He brooded on this plan and evidently talked about it to others, because when word got to Rebekah, she got to planning again. She tells Jacob, *"You're going to have to leave home."* Little did she know that she would pay for her part in this sin.

Her plan was for Jacob to go to her brother, Laban, in Haran. *"Let him lay low for a while until Esau calms down."* But a few days' plan lengthened to 20 years.

Rebekah convinces Isaac that Jacob needs to go find a wife in Haran like Abraham's servant had found her. Esau's two Canaanite wives were making life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob needed to get out of Canaanite country and find a God-fearing wife with her family or else he'd probably do the same thing.

This was an excellent excuse to get Jacob away from danger and to find him a wife. She convinces Jacob to go back to her family and to her brother, Laban. Sadly, she dies before she sees Jacob again.

## JACOB LEAVES HOME

As Jacob prepares to leave, Isaac sends him off with a blessing and a command to not take a Canaanite wife. All the way through the Old Testament we find that God doesn't want the godly to marry the ungodly. Intermarriage always leads to godlessness.

***"May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."***

-Genesis 28:3-4

Isaac understands that God blessed Abraham, and that blessing had transferred to him, and now this blessing is to be passed on to his son, Jacob.

Isaac now sends Jacob to his brother-in-law, Laban (Rebekah's brother). This family was Syrian. Sometimes the question is asked, "Was Abraham a Jew? Was he an Israelite?" No, not yet.

Soon God will change Jacob's name to Israel. His twelve sons were Israelites. The line came from Abraham, he is the father of the race, but he wasn't yet Jewish.

We also learn that when Esau saw how much his father hated intermarriage with Canaanites, Esau goes out and marries Ishmael's daughter, hoping that would please his father. But he has no spiritual discernment whatsoever since the Ishmaelites were as much rejected as the Canaanites or the Philistines.

## JACOB'S LADDER

The first day on the road, Jacob covered about 40 miles. He traveled far and fast to get away from Esau. He stopped for the night in a place called, Bethel, literally, "the House of God."

What do you think he was feeling that night? Likely, he was lonely, probably homesick. As far as the record has told us, this was his first night away from home, out on his own for the first time.

Notice what happens. He lies down and uses a stone for a pillow. Bethel is a dreary place in the hills with large, bare rocks exposed. Its topography looked bleak and forbidding. Yet this was the place that captured the high point in Jacob's spiritual life, both now and also later in his life. So here is where he lay down to sleep.

Then Jacob dreamed of a ladder, grounded on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven. Angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood at the top of the ladder and said,

***"I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."*** –Genesis 28:13-15

In this area where God first appeared to Abraham after he entered the land, now God is giving the same promise to Jacob. God had repeated it to Isaac, and now He confirms and reaffirms that He will do this to Jacob.



What a gift this vision was to a lonely, homesick young man who had to leave home in a hurry. He is on his way to a far country, and this first night God says to him, *“I’m going to be with you, Jacob, and I’m going to bring you back to this land.”*

What did this vision of a ladder mean? The Lord Jesus interpreted it when He called Nathanael to be His disciple. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you, “I saw you under the fig tree,” do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man’” (John 1:50-51).

That ladder is none other than Christ Himself. The angels were ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. The angels ministered to Him; they served at His command. Nathanael will hear God’s voice from the top of that ladder, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). We can’t come to the Father directly, but we have access to the Father through Christ. The Lord Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the ladder—not one that we can climb but one that we can trust.

This truth was given first to Jacob, the usurper. About Nathanael our Lord said, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit” (John 1:47)—that is, you’re not *Jacob*, a trickster. But God will deal with him. God has given him this wonderful, glorious promise, but Jacob has so much to learn!

Isn’t that true of all of us today? No wonder God has to school us. No wonder God has to discipline us. He did it to Abraham and He did it to Isaac. He is going to do it to Jacob. Up to this point, everything has been going Jacob’s way. But now the Lord allows a trial to come to Jacob to discipline him. Trials put iron in our backbone; they put courage in our lives and enable us to stand for God.

When Jacob wakes up, he is afraid. “Surely the **LORD** is in this place, and I did not know it ... this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:16-17).

When Jacob ran away from home, he had a limited view of God. He thought that when he ran away from home, he was also running away from God. But God reminds him that he hadn’t left Him back home. He promised to be with Jacob.

The first thing Jacob did in the morning was to take the stone he had used as a pillow and set it on a pillar and pour oil on the top of it. “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me ... and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God’” (Genesis 28:20-21).

Jacob has a lot to learn.

He wants to trade with God. He says, “*God, I You will do this for me, then I’ll serve You.*” But God has already *told* him that He is going to do every one of these things for him—“*I am going to keep you; I am going to bring you back to this land; I am going to give you this land; and I’m going to give you offspring.*”

Jacob wants to bargain with God, but God doesn’t do business with any of us that way. If He had, Jacob would never have made it back to that land. God brought him back into that land by His grace and mercy. When Jacob did finally come back to Bethel years later, he came back a wiser man. That’s when he came back to worship and praise God for His mercy.

Even today many people say they will serve the Lord *if* He will do a certain something. But God doesn’t do business that way. He will extend mercy to you, and He will be gracious to you without asking anything in return. But He does say that if you love Him, you will really want to serve Him. That will be the bondage of love. It is the same kind of love a mother has for her little child. She wants to bless him. That’s the way God wants us to love Him.

He just wants to become your *Father* through faith in Christ.

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**NEXT: Family pain impacts every generation.  
So does God’s restoration.**

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## LESSON 13



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Isaac's attempt to bless Esau went against God's explicit promise. We know what Isaac attempted to do was wrong, but before his disobedient actions something was wrong with Isaac's thinking about God and about his sons. Where do you think Isaac went wrong with his thoughts?
  
2. The story of Jacob stealing Esau's blessing is the rare story where everyone seems to be doing the wrong thing and in the wrong way. But families don't get this way overnight. This was the product of years and years of sin and dysfunction. What does seeing this family's tragedy tell us about how families work, and how can we take a different course in our families?

3. Rebekah seems to have been a schemer, just like her son Jacob. But deceit always comes with a cost. What did her scheming cost her?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. In some ways Esau brings a lot of pain and suffering to himself (just like his father!), but there are also some heartbreaking moments of pain in his story. We all probably have an Esau in our lives who is their own worst enemy, but have you stopped to consider ways you can show compassion or empathy for that person? Who is that “Esau” in your life, and how can you minister to them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Most of us will never receive a vision from God like Jacob’s dream of a ladder, but the Scriptures give us far more revelation of God than Jacob could have dreamed of. Jacob’s dream gave him insight into who God is. What insights have you received about God from His words in Genesis and elsewhere this week?

6. At the core of God's revelation to Jacob was the promise of His presence. We have the same promise, too, but too often we allow life's circumstances to make us forget this precious promise. What is going on in your life that a renewed sense of God's presence would make better? Is there someone that God brings to mind that you could remind about God's presence in their life, too?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Imagine you could observe Jacob making his lonely trek away from all he knew to live with distant family members. How do you think his attitude and demeanor were different after the dream of the ladder than they were before? Do you think you could have seen a difference in his walk, in his facial expressions, or anywhere else after he had been assured of God's continued presence in his life?

## LESSON 14

# TIME TO GO



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 29–31**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](http://TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 29:1-30**, **Genesis 29:30–31:7**, and **Genesis 31:7-55**

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Up until now, Jacob had lived by his wits. He was cocky and clever and had perfected deceit. He would stoop to use any shady method to accomplish his purpose, and he was proud of it. But now he will reap what he has sown.

Jacob is ready to leave Bethel, the place where He saw a vision of Jesus Christ as the ladder into heaven. He resumes his journey and, after a time, arrives in Haran.

The first thing he sees is a well with a rock over its mouth. The water in this well is so important that it is protected by the rock. At a certain time in the day the stone was removed from the top of the well, and then everybody watered their sheep. Once *everybody* got the water they needed, the stone was put back on to close the well.

When Jacob arrived on the scene, the rock is still in place. He first asks, “*Where are we?*” When they answered, “Haran,” he asks if anyone knows Laban, the son of Nahor.

*“Yes, that’s his daughter, Rachel, coming with their sheep.”*

While they're talking, Rachel arrives with her flock. As soon as Jacob sees her, he rolls the stone from the well and waters the flocks for her. Nobody told him to water Rachel's flock, but he did it. Jacob made up the rules as he went through life—that is, the first part of his life. Now he is about to learn a tremendous lesson, and Uncle Laban will be the one to teach him.

When he meets his relative, Rachel, he kisses her and is welled up with emotion and cries with joy. He is her father's nephew—son of Rebekah, her father's sister. When Laban heard the good news, he ran out to meet Jacob and hugged and kissed him and brought him into the house. Jacob likely entertained them at dinner with his stories from the road, and how he tricked his brother to get his birthright, and how he used trickery to get the blessing.

Laban was convinced now that this was his nephew, and he says, *"You're my relative, so come in and make yourself at home."*

Then a month goes by. As a nephew from a far country, Jacob's not working. He's also likely hanging around Rachel. One morning, perhaps over breakfast, Laban says to Jacob. *"Listen, I don't want you to work for me for nothing, so let's work out an arrangement."* Laban is going to deal with his nephew.

We learn that Laban had two daughters: the older sister was Leah and the younger was Rachel. He knew Jacob was smitten with Rachel, for she was pretty and sweet. Leah, however, was not.

When Laban asks Jacob what his wages should be, Jacob says he's willing to work for seven years for Rachel. Laban accepts that bargain.

And so Jacob served Laban for seven years for Rachel, and "they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her" (Genesis 29:20). In the early years of Jacob's life, the only hint of anything beautiful or honorable is his love for Rachel.

Now that seven years of labor had passed, Jacob was eager to have Rachel's hand in marriage. So, Laban gathered all the men together and threw a party. And in the evening, Laban took his daughter ... *Leah* ... and brought her to Jacob. In those days, at the marriage ceremony the bride was heavily veiled, so she couldn't be seen. Poor Jacob didn't see the girl he was getting until the next morning. And it wasn't Rachel—it was Leah!

Jacob storms over to Laban and demands, *"What have you done to me? I served you for Rachel. Why have you deceived me?"*

Laban dismisses his objection by saying, *“It’s not our custom to give the younger before the firstborn.”* It’s a clause in the fine print that he had forgotten to mention to Jacob.

At the moment Jacob saw he had been tricked, did he remember when he had pretended to be the older sibling? He had to leave home because he had deceived his father. Now Jacob thinks he’s getting the younger sister and he gets the older sister instead. The tables are turned, and it’s a sad day for Jacob.

But Uncle Laban is willing to be “generous” in his dealings, so he has an offer to make: Work another seven years and you can have Rachel. That means Jacob will have two wives—something he shouldn’t have done. He’ll be in trouble before it is over.

So Jacob serves another seven years and takes Rachel to be his wife.

Some have asked, *So does God approve of polygamy?* No, God doesn’t approve of everything that is in the Bible. But it tells the truth about history. Jacob had two wives, and this is how it came about.

Jacob had plenty of trouble in his family from here on, and it all can be traced back to him using his own methods to get what he wanted.

## JACOB’S SONS

Whether they realize it or not, this young family will become one of the most important families of the Bible, for from these two women and their handmaids will come the 12 sons (and eventually 12 tribes) of Israel.

Jacob’s first wife, Leah, is a sad person because she knows she isn’t loved. She hoped when she had her firstborn, Reuben, that Jacob’s affections would turn to her. But no, he only loved Rachel.

Reuben is Jacob’s firstborn, but the line leading to Christ didn’t come through him. Rather, it will be Leah’s fourth son, Judah, that begins the kingly line. This is the line that gave us David and later on, the Lord Jesus Himself. Levi, the first priest, was also her son. Leah wasn’t loved by Jacob, but she was honored by God to be the mother of some of the outstanding sons of Jacob.

Meanwhile, Rachel couldn’t get pregnant. It led her almost to despair. In that day, a woman was disgraced unless she had an offspring. The more children she had, the better was her position.

Jacob was frustrated by Rachel's despair, thinking his love should be enough for her. But Rachel suggested, like Sarah had done generations before, that Jacob have children by her maid. (God hadn't approved of it then; He's not going to approve of it now.) Of course, this action brings only trouble.

Jacob's home was filling up with children. Two sons were born by Rachel's handmaid, two sons by Leah's handmaid, and then two more sons by Leah.

Then "God remembered Rachel ... and opened her womb" (Genesis 30:22). She had a boy and named him Joseph. Later she gave birth to Benjamin.

Jacob had 12 sons in all—the 12 tribes of Israel will come from them and finally the nation of Israel. Here is the list of Jacob's children:

<b>Born to Leah:</b>	1. Reuben
	2. Simeon
	3. Levi
	4. Judah
	5. Issachar
	6. Zebulun
	7. Dinah, daughter
<b>Born to Bilhah, Rachel's maid:</b>	1. Dan
	2. Naphtali
<b>Born to Zilpah, Leah's maid:</b>	1. Gad
	2. Asher
<b>Born to Rachel:</b>	1. Joseph
	2. Benjamin

## JACOB'S FAMILY PREPARES TO LEAVE

When Jacob finally got the courage to leave Laban and make a home for his own family, he asks Laban to let them go. He had served him long enough. But Uncle Laban isn't through with them yet. He sees how the Lord blesses

them and blesses him for Jacob's sake, and he doesn't want to let them go. He says, *"My boy, don't rush off. I've been blessed because of you. How about I raise your wages?"*

Jacob knows by now that any time Uncle Laban makes a deal, he is the one who will come off the winner. Jacob has learned this lesson, and he complains that he has nothing to show for his labor except two wives and a house full of boys. He says, *"God has blessed you and He has prospered you, and I don't have anything."*

So Laban says, *"Well, let's make a deal."*

And Jacob, ever the strategist, asks him to give him all the speckled and spotted cattle and all the brown sheep and the spotted and speckled goats. That would be adequate payment. In other words, the pure breeds will be Laban's, but the off-breeds, those that are not blue-ribbon cattle, will be Jacob's. Jacob said, *"You just let me have these, and they will be my wages."* That's a pretty good proposition for Laban. The cattle marking would prove what livestock belongs to whom. So Laban agrees to it.

Jacob takes the off-breeds so that only the full breeds would mate and bear offspring, and those would belong to Uncle Laban. The others would be his. Jacob is making an interesting deal.

Laban separated the animals into two groups. He also separated the two flocks by a distance of three days' journey. Laban's sons oversaw one flock, and Jacob oversaw the other flock.

Then Jacob did what he thought would result in his flock bearing additional speckled or spotted or black sheep and goats, and he multiplies his flock. Jacob displayed ingenuity; either by his knowledge of zoology or perhaps such knowledge given him by God. Or he might not have understood the laws of heredity, but just did what he thought would work, and God blessed him. Whether Jacob was smart or superstitious, the success of his plan was ultimately God's doing. Jacob was full of tricks, but God blessed him in spite of them, not because of them.

God blessed Jacob and made him "exceedingly prosperous." He got more servants, camels, and donkeys, as well as large flocks of sheep and goats. Camels were rare and only for the rich, but Jacob had a lot of them. God allowed him to become wealthy through his own work. If Jacob would have placed himself under God's hand, God would likely have given him even more. But at this stage of his life, Jacob relied on himself more than on God.



## TIME TO GO

Jacob now recognizes that the influence of Laban's household is not good for his growing family. The boys will be leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel, and God is anxious to get them out from that environment and back into the country He had promised to Abraham.

God finally tells him it's time to go. "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you" (Genesis 31:3).

Jacob calls Rachel and Leah to meet him in the field because he is afraid to talk his plans over at home for fear someone will overhear them.

Laban's countenance had turned sour toward Jacob, since his flocks and wealth were growing larger than Laban's. Jacob explained to Rachel and Leah that it is God who has blessed them, to the extent that Laban and his sons have become very jealous of him.

Jacob had worked hard for Laban for 20 years (and had changed his wages ten times)! Poor Jacob. But when he was perplexed and frustrated, not knowing where to turn, God intervened.

Now Jacob tells the actual reason why he wants to leave. He told his wives about how God spoke to him in a dream and explained how he multiplied the breeding of the cattle. God said, "*I did it! I saw what Laban was doing to you, and I blessed you.*"

"I am the God of Bethel," God said. He reminds Jacob of the night He appeared to him when he was running away, that first night away from home which he spent at Bethel.

"Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family" (Genesis 31:13). God wants Jacob to leave Haran because he has at this time 11 boys who are growing up, and they are already beginning to learn bad practices in a home filled with idolatry.

Rachel and Leah were supportive of Jacob's decision because their father had not been fair to them, either, and they likely would have no inheritance. They tell Jacob to do whatever he thinks is best and they will stand with him.

So Jacob gets ready to leave in a hurry. Remember this was the same way he left home when he was escaping from his brother. Now he is leaving his uncle—but this time it's not his fault.

What Jacob didn't know was that Rachel had stolen the household idols that belonged to her father. Rachel had been brought up in a home of idolatry, and she wanted to take her gods with her.

They waited for the time when Laban went to shear his sheep miles away and they snuck out in the direction of Mount Gilead, which is just east of the Jordan River. They cover a lot of ground fast.

But by the third day, Laban found out that Jacob had run and Laban was fast on their trail. He's angry enough to kill Jacob and recover all the possessions Jacob had taken, as well as his two daughters and their children. But God intervened.

That night in a dream, God spoke to Laban, warning, *"Be very careful what you say and do."* All the while, Laban was coming, breathing fire and brimstone, but now he changed his tune. How clever Uncle Laban is, how diplomatic! He tries to make Jacob feel guilty for depriving his family of a wonderful send-off party. He says he wanted to have had a great celebration and a fond farewell. But don't believe him.

Laban admitted that he wanted to do them harm (because he was hurt), but that Jacob's God spoke to him in the night and prevented him from doing anything bad.

Next, he asks about the stolen gods. Jacob didn't know that Rachel had stolen the gods, and he didn't believe Laban. But Laban didn't believe Jacob. After 20 years, they knew each other well.

Laban searched everyone's tents but couldn't find the family idols. Rachel had put them in the camel's box and then sat on it. When he came into her tent, she said she wasn't feeling well and didn't want to get up. (Rachel is her father's daughter! So clever and deceptive.)

Rachel's taking of the family idols (the teraphim) from her father was much more serious than we know. Whoever possessed the household gods implied leadership of the family, which meant that Jacob was going to inherit everything old Laban had! That is the reason Laban was so upset by it. He didn't want Jacob to get his estate—he felt he had gotten too much already.

Jacob gets a little confidence now. They can't locate the idols, and Jacob is sure they aren't anywhere around. He wants to rebuke his father-in-law who has come after him.

*"So what's my sin?"* he demands. *"Why do you come after me with such a vengeance?"*

He had served him well for 20 years, he was treated unfairly and harshly at times, and all the while he took care of Laban's investments. Here is the man who is clever, who thought that he could get by with sin. But God didn't let him get away with any of it, because God made it very clear that whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.

Jacob refused to submit to God at home, so he had to submit to his uncle. Jacob came to receive a wife in dignity, but he was made a servant because God respects the rights of the firstborn.

Jacob had deceived his father, so he was deceived by his father-in-law. Jacob, the younger, became as the older. Then he found out that he was given the older when he thought he was getting the younger.

He revealed a mercenary spirit that displayed itself in the way he got the birthright, allowing his mother to cover his hands with the skins of kids of goats. Later on, we will see that his own sons will deceive him in very much the same way. They killed a kid and in its blood they dipped Joseph's coat of many colors.

He deceived his father about being the favorite son, and he will be deceived about his favorite son, Joseph. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.

Jacob has had his day in court, and his conclusion is that God was his judge.

***“Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night.”*** –Genesis 31:42

Now he is going to leave Laban. They bid each other goodbye and make a contract. Jacob set up a stone for a pillar, a heap of stones was gathered, and a contract was made. These two tricksters agreed that God was their witness. They agreed: “May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another” (Genesis 31:49). In other words, this was a contract made between two rascals who are going to quit stealing from each other.

After this, they separate. The pile of stones remained at Mizpah as a boundary line between Laban and Jacob. Each promised not to cross over on the other's side.

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**NEXT: When you meet again the one you wronged.**

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## LESSON 14



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why do you think God allowed so many things He disapproved of to be done by the people He had chosen to make a nation from?
2. Does it surprise you to see the kingly line would come from the fourth son of the unloved wife? What does this tell us about God? What does it tell us about how God's plans work?
3. How do you explain why God would continue to bless Jacob in spite of his deceitful actions?

4. Laban, like his nephew Jacob, had no problem hiding the truth if it would benefit him. Do you know anyone like this? What makes people like this so difficult to be in any sort of relationship or partnership with?
5. Again and again in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we see people who should know better resorting to lies, half-truths, and deception. Are there times you struggle to be up-front and honest? When are those times, and what needs to change for you to be more honest?
6. One of the great tragedies of Jacob's life is that he is a man without any quality relationships. Every single person in Jacob's life has been burned by him, and the cycle just repeats. Do you know people like this? Have you ever been afraid you are that person? What are some ways we can learn from Jacob's mistakes with relationships?

7. What do you think it would be like to have been one of Jacob's children?  
Can you imagine what that family would have been like to grow up in?

## LESSON 15

# TURNING POINT



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 32–34**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 32**, **Genesis 33**, and **Genesis 34**

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When Jacob reflected on his life as an old man, it's what happened now that he remembered as his life's highest point—a turning point in his relationship with God. Up until now, Jacob didn't really act like God's man. He was a bad witness to the world who wouldn't have picked him out as a believer in God.

God had to do some discipline in order to get Jacob's heart (see Hebrews 12:6). Jacob got his college degree at the school of hard knocks, with Uncle Laban as its president. It took Jacob 20 years to learn, and he certainly worked for it.

Now Jacob is going to represent God, so God is beginning to deal with him directly in order to bring him into the place of fruit-bearing and of real, vital service and witness for Him.

On his way back into the Promised Land, Jacob met angels in front of him. He must have recognized who they were from his earlier meeting in Bethel. As he crossed the border into his home country, he knew he would soon meet his brother Esau.

He remembers the last time he saw Esau 20 years ago. Esau was breathing fire against him. So this time, Jacob sent messengers in front of him and instructed them to say, *"When you get to Esau, my brother, say to him, 'My lord Esau.' Refer to me as 'your servant, Jacob.'"* Jacob has sure changed his

tune. He had manipulated for the birthright and had stolen Esau's blessing. Jacob had been a rascal, but *now* his talk is different. Perhaps he had learned some hard lessons from Uncle Laban.

The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, *"We met your brother, Esau, and he's coming to meet you with four hundred men."*

Now Jacob is terrified, because he didn't know Esau's intent. He may have quizzed his servants, *"Did he seem upset? Or bitter or hateful toward me?"* Even if the servant said, *"No, he seemed glad you were coming,"* in Jacob's imagination that could mean Esau was glad for the opportunity for revenge. Jacob was upset. Since he thinks he's in a bad way, he divides his group in two and sends them in different directions, thinking that if his brother strikes one group, then the other can escape.

Then he shows hints of thinking differently. He asks God for help in his distress.

***Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"*** –Genesis 32:9-12

Jacob cries out to God on the basis that He is the God of his father Abraham and the God of his father Isaac. And for first time, he says, *"I am not worthy of the least of Your mercies."* For the first time, he acknowledges that he is a sinner in God's sight. When any person begins to move toward God on that basis, God will communicate with them.

Jacob has a rough night. He strategizes how to pacify Esau. He plans to send out a very generous gift of livestock, goats, sheep, camels, bulls, donkeys—divided into three sections. When Esau rides towards Jacob, he'll encounter the first one, and the servant will say, *"We are bringing you a gift from your brother, Jacob."* Then Esau will ride on a little farther and meet the second herd, and then later, a third. By then, Jacob hopes Esau's hatred will be softened.



Jacob sends all that he owns and all his family across the Brook Jabbok, but he stays on the other side so that if his brother Esau comes, he might kill Jacob but spare his family.

When Jacob prayed, he reminded the Lord, *“You told me to return to my country. You said You would protect me.”* But does he believe God? No. He makes all these arrangements, which reveals he isn’t trusting God at all. We often take the same position. We might take our burdens to the Lord in prayer. Then when we get through praying, we put each burden right back on our back and start out again with them. We don’t really believe Him, do we? We don’t really trust Him as we should.

Jacob is coming to terms with his life’s poor choices, and it fills him with fear and doubt. He had mistreated Esau. God had never told him to get the birthright or the blessing in the way he did. God would have gotten it for him. And so now, Jacob is left alone ... waiting.

But Jacob isn’t alone.

Uncle Laban was in back of him and his brother Esau ahead of him. Jacob is no match for either one. He is caught now between a rock and a hard place, and he doesn’t know which way to turn. That night he was alone because he wanted to be alone, and he wasn’t looking for a fight.

Now, we’re told Jacob encounters a Man who wrestled with him all night. He’s not going to give up easily. Who is this one who wrestled with Jacob that night? It was none other than the preincarnate Christ. (See also Hosea 12:1-5 for more description of this night.)

Here’s how the night went:

***Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” So He said to him, “What is your name?” He said, “Jacob.” And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”*** –Genesis 32:24-28

Jacob isn’t wrestling, he’s just holding on to this One. Jacob found out that you don’t get anywhere with God by struggling and resisting. The only way you get anywhere with Him is by yielding and just holding on to

Him. Abraham had learned that, and that is why he said “amen” to God. He believed God, and He counted it to him for righteousness. Abraham reached the end of his rope and put his arms around God.

This lesson is for all of us when we get in that position, when we need to trust God. When you are willing to hold on, He is there ready to help you.

Jacob resisted Him until the touch of God crippled him. Then, recognizing at last who He was, Jacob clung to Him until He blessed him. From this point on we see a change in Jacob. God marked this change in Jacob’s heart by changing his name to Israel. He *is* a new man.

## BROTHERS MEET AGAIN

In the morning, Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with 400 men. He doesn’t know if Esau is coming as friend or foe.

But when they got closer, Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and they cried. Well, they’re twins, they’re brothers, after all. God must have touched Esau’s heart, because the last we saw of him, he had sworn vengeance that he would kill Jacob.

Then Jacob introduces his family to his brother. Esau then asked about all the flocks and herds Jacob had sent ahead of him. *“They’re for you, Esau!”*

Esau might have laughed when he replied, *“I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”*

***And Jacob said, “No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” So he urged him, and he took it. –Genesis 33:10-11***

What a switch. Up to now, each brother was trying to get something from the other, especially Jacob. Before, he had traded a bowl of stew to get a birthright; now he is willing to give flocks and herds to his brother for nothing! He insists his brother take his gift. Something radical has happened to Jacob.

Esau then invites Jacob to travel with them, to show them the way and protect them. But Jacob is mindful of his young family and the young in their flocks and herds. They couldn’t move fast. *“We can’t keep up with*

*your army, Brother Esau. You go ahead.*” So Esau left some servants to help Jacob’s family and went ahead home to southern Canaan in Seir, the “land of Edom.” After their father’s death, he moved to Mount Seir, which God gave to Esau for a possession (see Deuteronomy 2:5).

## A NEW LIFE FOR JACOB

A great change has come over Jacob. All his clever scheming amounted to nothing. God had warned Laban not to harm Jacob, and God readied Esau to reconcile with his brother. Now Jacob had peace on both fronts. God had arranged all of this for him. Had Jacob been left to his own cleverness, he would have come to a violent death.

Before too long, Jacob is going to look back over his life, and when he does he is going to see the hand of God and will give God the glory. But for now, Jacob is learning how to walk with his spiritual legs.

In his new home, Jacob builds an altar, just like his grandfather Abraham was accustomed to doing wherever he went. He calls the new place El Elohe Israel, which means “God, the God of Israel.” Jacob identifies his new name with God’s name. This indicates real growth in a man who is just learning to walk. But it’s slow growth.

He’ll need to grow as this next chapter in his family’s life brings tragedy.

## A FAMILY SCANDAL

One of the reasons God prompted Jacob to get his family out of Laban’s house was the ungodly environment the children were exposed to there.

Family trouble was not new with Jacob. We witnessed strife in Abraham’s family as well as Isaac’s. Jacob’s family suffered trouble, especially with Leah’s four boys. This may be fallout from the plurality of marriages or from the fact that Jacob didn’t love Leah, and her children took lesser priority to Jacob. These four boys—Simeon and Levi in this story and Reuben, the firstborn, and Judah in the future—all turned out rather badly because of flagrant sin in their lives.

When Jacob settled his family in Canaan, he was hoping to get them reoriented to their home culture. One day, his daughter Dinah visited the local town. A boy from town, the son of Hamor the Hivite, saw her and raped her. After the fact, this guilty young man wanted to marry her.

When her brothers found out, they had a war counsel. Hamor, the father of this boy Shechem, came to ask for Dinah's hand for his son. He also wanted to propose that other marriages take place between their families so they would be one community (and Jacob's wealth would become theirs through inheritance).

Although intermarriage would have been wrong, it seems that Dinah should have been given to Shechem, because that would have prevented a worse sin. Jacob should have stepped up to lead his sons, but he didn't know they planned to trick Shechem and Hamor.

*"We can't allow our sister to marry someone uncircumcised,"* they said deceptively. (But nothing was mentioned of the crime against their sister.) Jacob's sons pose the challenge. *"If you're willing to go through the rite of circumcision, everything will be all right."* (This is like saying if you join a church and use all the right words, then you are a Christian. But that's not true. If you have trusted in Christ, something has happened, and you are a different person.)

So the men of Shechem and Hamor agreed to be circumcised. And while they were recovering from this delicate surgery, Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi, went into town and killed all the men as an act of revenge. Then the other brothers joined them in stealing all the city's livestock, wealth, and women and children.

When they came home, Jacob said, *"You have made my name to stink among the people of my land."* He yells at them for giving him a bad name, but says nothing about the sin they've committed. Jacob is growing, but he hasn't yet grown far enough.

Then the boys defend themselves and their sister. *"Somebody had to do something!"* But obviously they took it too far.

Today we know God's direction to let Him take vengeance rather than taking it for ourselves (see Romans 12:19-21). The minute we attempt to take revenge, it means we are no longer walking by faith. We are saying that we can't trust God to work it out.

The tragic things that took place in this chapter of their lives were the result of Jacob walking in the energy of the flesh. At Peniel when he wrestled with God, Jacob learned not to trust himself but not yet how to trust God. He

wasn't a godly leader to his family and wasn't equipped to herd his 11 boys. After this tragic event, Jacob now is beginning to see God's hand in his life, and next he makes a decision he should have made a long time ago.

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**NEXT: God changes Jacob into Israel.**

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## LESSON 15



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What do Jacob's preparations for meeting Esau again tell us about his life and his state of mind? Why do you think he was this way?
2. Wouldn't meeting angels on the way to your destination make you more confident? Why do you think that even angelic messengers could not allay Jacob's anxiety?
3. What does it tell us about Jacob's attitude at this point in his life that he seems to turn a corner from scheming, to fixing problems himself, to calling out to God?

4. Why do you think the Man Jacob wrestled with changed his name? What do you think is the significance of the name Israel?
5. The reunion between Jacob and Esau doesn't go as we might expect. Rather than returning to their combative ways, the two brothers embrace. What does this tell us about relationships that seem to be hopelessly fractured? Can you take heart from Jacob and Esau for any troubled relationships in your life?
6. The tragedy that befalls Dinah is one of the most sordid episodes in the entire Bible. What does this calamity tell us about human beings and our capacity for sin and evil?

7. If you had lived in the area where Jacob and his family settled, how would you have reacted to the news of the killings of Shechem and Hamor? What would you have thought about Jacob's God after that?



— IF YOU HAVE —  
TRUSTED IN CHRIST,  
SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED,  
AND YOU ARE A  
— DIFFERENT PERSON. —



THRUtheBIBLE

## LESSON 16

# FULL CIRCLE



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 35–36**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 35** and **Genesis 36**

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After the sad experiences Jacob's family experienced, God instructs Jacob to go back to Bethel. Just the mention of that location would have brought back many important memories for Jacob. As a young man when he ran from his mother's house to get away from Esau, Jacob spent his first night in Bethel. Asleep on a rock as a pillow, Jacob dreamed of a ladder from earth to heaven and he saw angels going up and down.

Now God is calling Jacob back to Bethel, and he finally begins to take the spiritual leadership in his home. God gives Jacob three instructions:

First, they were to "put away the strange gods that are among you" (Genesis 35:2). Why would they have idols? If you remember, when Jacob, Rachel, and Leah ran from Laban, Rachel slipped out with the family gods. It would be easy to assume that Jacob would have gotten rid of them because he knew the living and true God. But he hadn't, and now we find that his entire family is worshiping these strange gods. Now Jacob says they've got to go.

Secondly, God says, "*Be clean.*" For the believer, that means dealing with sin in your life (see 1 John 1:9). God will forgive, but we must confess.

Third, *“change your clothes.”* In other words, get rid of the old garments. In Scripture, garments speak of habits. Like a football player wearing a uniform—that is his habit.

The day Jacob went back to Bethel, he started living for God.

When Jacob thought of Bethel, he remembered how God met him when he was in distress. He was running away from home, homesick and lonesome, and came to Bethel where God promised to be faithful to him. Now years later, Jacob saw how God had certainly been faithful to him. Now God invites him to, *“Go back where you started. Begin again.”*

As they traveled back to Bethel (that had previously been named Luz), Jacob and his family were protected by God so no one pursued them. And he built an altar there and called the place El-Bethel, which means *“God of the house of God.”* This reveals spiritual growth in Jacob’s life.

## GOD RENEWS HIS PROMISE

There at that place where God had met with Jacob decades before, God appears again to him. All those years God had been trying to deal with Jacob, but in many ways those years spent with Uncle Laban were wasted years.

***And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body.”*** –Genesis 35:10-11

“I am God Almighty”—this is the same name God used to introduced Himself to Abraham.

***“The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.”*** –Genesis 35:12

This now is the third time God has promised this important land to his family—first to Abraham, then to Isaac, and now to Jacob. The Lord had to tell each one of these men about it at least two or three times.

Jacob built a pillar of stone on the place where God talked with him. On the pillar, he poured out a drink offering and called this place, Bethel.

This is the first mention of a drink offering. Leviticus tells us of five offerings, but not a drink offering. The drink offering was just poured on the other offerings, and it went up in the steam. The apostle Paul told the Philippians that this is the way he wanted his life to be—just poured out like a drink offering (Philippians 2:17).

## BENJAMIN IS BORN

With his beloved wife, Rachel, Jacob had one son, Joseph. Now as they traveled from Bethel, Rachel went into labor with their second son. As the baby was born, Rachel was dying. She called him Benoni, “son of my sorrow,” but Jacob looked down at him and said, *“I’ve lost my lovely Rachel, and this little fellow looks like her, so I’ll just call him Benjamin, ‘son of my right hand.’”* While it was true that the boy was the son of Rachel’s sorrow, Jacob could not call him Benoni. He was not the reason of *his* sorrow; he was the son of his right hand, his walking stick, his staff, the one he would lean on in his old age. This helps us understand the great sorrow Jacob will go through later on. All of it has its roots in Jacob’s sin. God doesn’t approve of the wrong in our lives. We won’t get away with it.

Jacob’s love for Rachel was perhaps the only fine thing in his life during those many lost years. He was totally devoted to her and allowed her to get away with anything (like keeping her father’s idols). She had given Jacob his son Joseph, and now she gives birth to Benjamin. His life meant her death. It was a great heartbreak to Jacob.

The other ten boys were no joy to him at all. God reminded him, likely every day, that it was sinful to have more than one wife. This is especially obvious in the treatment Joseph received from his half-brothers.

Jacob loved Joseph and Benjamin, and the other boys were jealous of them. He shouldn’t have shown such partiality to Joseph, because he knew how painful his own growing up years had been when his father had pushed him aside. He knew the trouble it had caused.

## ISAAC DIES

Speaking of Isaac, the old patriarch, full of days, died and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him. This was the only time, following Jacob’s return to the land, that we see these brothers together again.

Esau and his family became the nation of Edom, that settled southeast of the Dead Sea. If we listed their names, they would be the same as circulate the Arabian desert today. It's a mountainous area. The capital city, the rock-hewn city of Petra, stands there today. Prophecy in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Obadiah concerning Edom has been remarkably fulfilled.

Esau was an attractive young man, but he was a man of the flesh. But so was Jacob for most of his life. Could God have made a mistake about His choice of Jacob over Esau? Esau looked so good on the outside. A little prophecy in Obadiah shows us Esau unveiled. By now, one little Esau has become about 100,000 Edomites. Each one of them is a little Esau. Look at that nation and you'll see what came from Esau. What do we see? A nation filled with pride (Obadiah 1:3-4). The pride of their heart was a declaration of independence, a soul that says it can live without God and does not have a need for God. That is Esau.

In the last book of the Old Testament God says, "Yet Jacob have I loved; but Esau I have hated" (Malachi 1:2-3). God never said that until over 1000 years after these men lived, but God knew the heart of Esau at the beginning. After they worked their way out in history, God chose correctly.

If we follow Esau and his three wives, we'd move with them out of the Promised Land to the land of Seir in Canaan. Here, Esau's family welcomed Amalek—which is the beginning of the Amalekites. Down through the centuries those tribes in the desert pushed out in many directions—some across North Africa. All the Arab tribes came from Abraham—through Hagar, the Egyptian, and through Keturah, whom he married after Sarah died. The tribes have intermarried, but they belong to the same family as the Israelites.

This is the family history of the Middle East, which extends farther back than any other source and reaches us in today's headlines.

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**NEXT: The story behind that coat of many colors.**

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## LESSON 16



### FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why was it necessary for Jacob and his family to remove the old ways of thinking and worshiping before they could move forward with God?
2. Memory can be a powerful ally in our spiritual lives. With that in mind, what do you think God's purpose was in telling Jacob to return to Bethel, the scene of his greatest spiritual moment?
3. Again and again we've seen God repeat His promises through one generation after another. What does God's continual repetition of His promises tell us about the way He reveals Himself to us and how we should think about His words?



7. Imagine you were commissioned to write a biography of Isaac.  
What is one word you would choose to summarize his life?



## LESSON 17

# BROTHERS AND FATHERS



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 37–38**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 37:1-19**, **Genesis 37:20–38:1**, and **Genesis 38:1–39:2**

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In Genesis 1–11 we cover 2,000 years of history.

In Genesis 12–36 we cover the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now, for the remaining 14 chapters of Genesis, we focus on one person—Joseph. More chapters are devoted to Joseph than the accounts of Creation, the Fall, the Flood, or the patriarchs. Why should Joseph be given such prominence in Scripture?

Here are some reasons to consider:

1. Joseph's life is a good and honorable life (see Philippians 4:8). God wants us to have whatever is good, virtuous, and great before us, and Joseph's life is a fine example of that.
2. No one in Scripture is more like Jesus Christ in his person and experiences than Joseph. We'll discover at least 30 parallels.
3. From Jacob's family line comes the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jacob is living in Canaan as Joseph's story begins.

## FAMILY CONFLICT

Jacob moved his family south of Bethlehem to Hebron (where Abraham had lived). This is the place of fellowship, of communion with God.

We've made no secret that most of Jacob's sons were trouble (with the exception of Joseph and Benjamin). These brothers took a long time to learn the lessons God wanted to teach them.

Our story picks up on a day when Joseph was 17, a teenager, the youngest of the brothers tending the flocks. Benjamin, still very young, was at home. That night, Joseph brought his father a bad report about the other boys. Of course, nobody likes a tattletale.

More than that, nobody likes the favored child. Now, Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than any of his other sons. To show it, he made him a coat of many colors. Jacob should have learned a lesson in his own home. Parents playing favorites never leads anywhere good. His own father had favored his older brother, and Jacob knew what it was to be pushed aside. But here he does the same thing.

A "coat of many colors" is the same as saying it was a coat with long sleeves. This would be a major fashion upgrade from the typical fabric drape of the day. To put sleeves in the coat would set that person off from the others. It was a sign he wouldn't do hard labor and that he was favored.

Naturally, the brothers hated Joseph for being their father's favorite. They couldn't even speak nicely to him. Sin was a family tradition for Jacob's tribe.

Sin ruins lives, and sin ruins families; sin ruins communities, and it ruins nations. This is the problem with our families and cities and nations today. There is just one cause: God calls it *sin*.

Joseph is the object of discrimination—his father discriminates in his love for him, and the brothers discriminate in their hatred against him. Joseph and Benjamin likely got more teaching, time, and personal attention than the other ten boys. These seemed to be the only two boys in whom Jacob was interested. A sad commentary on this unfair dad.

## JOSEPH'S DREAM

Why would Joseph tattle on his brothers if he knew they hated him already? Likely he was naïve to just how wicked we all can get.

Joseph was also naïve to how his dream would poke already existing bruises in his brothers' hearts. He said, *"Listen to this dream I had about us"*:

***"There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."*** –Genesis 37:7-8

Can't you imagine how they sneered? *Him? Rule over us?* The dream only made them hate him more. But then Joseph had another dream. "This time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me" (v. 9). This time, the brothers knew he was talking about themselves, the sons of Israel (the eleven stars).

This same image appears in Revelation 12 where a woman is described clothed with the sun, the moon is under her feet, and she had a crown of 12 stars upon her head, meaning the nation of Israel.

We are seeing the nation of Israel at its beginning here. Genesis is like a bud, and the flower opens up as we go through the Scripture. Here is a bud that won't open until we get into the book of Revelation.

Old Jacob understood it exactly, and he asked, *"Does this mean that your father, your mother, and your brothers are going to bow down to you?"* All Joseph could answer was, *"That was the dream."* His brothers paid no attention to it, but Jacob remembered it.

## THE BROTHERS' PLOT

Jacob and his family lived in Hebron, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem. The brothers (minus Joseph and Benjamin) were grazing the family's sheep miles from home. Jacob sends Joseph to go check on them and see if they need anything. So Joseph travels to Shechem where they were supposed to be. This is rugged terrain, and Joseph couldn't find them. He heard from a local that they had moved the flocks to Dothan, a long way even farther north, so he set off to join them.

Even when he was still far off, his brothers saw him coming in his coat of many colors. They sneered, *"Look, here comes the dreamer."* They really hated him. Then their ideas started churning. *"We should kill him. Or we*

*should throw him in a pit and say some wild animal got him.*" Here they are, probably 100 miles from home, and they agree, *"Let's get rid of him now, and we'll see what will become of his dreams!"*

Reuben, the firstborn, had better judgment than the others. He says, *"We can't kill him."* Who knows, if Reuben hadn't spoken up they could have killed Joseph then and there. It was Reuben's idea to throw Joseph in a pit. *"Don't shed his blood—and that way he'll be out of our lives."* (Reuben intended to rescue Joseph out of the pit and take him home to his father.)

The first thing they did was strip Joseph of that hated coat. Then they threw him into an empty pit. And then they had lunch. As they ate, they saw a caravan of traders from Gilead, descendants of Ishmael, heading down to Egypt.

It was Judah's idea that instead of killing their brother and getting his blood on their hands that they should just sell him to the traders. *"He is our brother, our flesh and blood, after all."*

And that plan satisfied the brothers. They just wanted to get rid of him—they didn't care how. They knew the traders would take him to Egypt and would sell him there as a slave. Slavery in most places was a living death, and they knew they would certainly never hear from him again.

So the brothers got Joseph out of the pit and sold him for 20 pieces of silver. And Joseph was on his way to Egypt.

Then Reuben, who apparently wasn't with them for the sale, went back to the pit and found it empty. He cried out and tore his clothes.

The brothers devised a good story to tell their father. They took Joseph's coat, killed a goat, and dipped the coat in its blood. They took the coat to Jacob and said, *"Is this Joseph's coat?"* They pretended they didn't recognize it and asked their father if he did. Jacob knew it was Joseph's coat, and he came to the natural conclusion that he had been mauled to death by a wild animal—just as the brothers had schemed.

Let's pause and take another look at this. The brothers killed a goat and used that blood on the coat. Sound familiar? Remember that when Rebekah and Jacob deceived old Isaac that they took the skin of a goat and put it on Jacob's hands and arms? Now Jacob's sons use goat's blood to deceive Jacob. Now that he is a father, he is deceived in the identical way that he had deceived his own father years before.

Jacob's grief for his boy was inconsolable. His children tried to comfort him, but he refused all consolation. Yes, he certainly loved this boy, but it also revealed that Jacob hadn't learned to walk by faith yet. He will learn (as we read in Hebrews 11:21), but he's still on his way.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, Joseph is sold as a slave to Potiphar, the captain of the guard in the palace.

## **A SORDID INTERLUDE: JUDAH'S STORY**

After you have read this next story about Judah, you may wish that it had been left out of the Bible. Its only value is that it gives us background on the tribe of Judah, out of which the Lord Jesus Christ was born.

This story in Genesis 38 deals with Judah's sin and shame. Jacob's sons all had their problems, but they tell the story of a dad who spent too much time accumulating a fortune rather than teaching his children. He was so different from his grandfather. God said of Abraham: "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the **LORD**, to do righteousness and justice, that the **LORD** may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Genesis 18:19).

Well, Jacob didn't do that. He didn't have much time for his boys—which is tragic, because each one got involved in something sinful.

This story of Judah gives us another reason for including it in God's Word. In the next chapter we go down to Egypt with Joseph. God sent Joseph ahead to prepare the way for his extended family. Not only will it preserve their lives during the famine in Canaan, but it will get them out from under the influence of the wicked Canaanites. If Jacob and his family continued on in Canaan, they would have likely dropped down to their sinful level.

We follow Judah around for several years and watch his life unravel.

Judah left his brothers and went to stay with a man in a Canaanite city, Adullam. While there, he married a Canaanite woman named Shua. She got pregnant and had a son named Er. Then she had another son named Onan and a third named Shelah.

When it came time for his first son to marry, Judah found him a wife named Tamar. But Judah's firstborn was so wicked that God Himself killed him.

Now, just look at this family—it's loaded with sin.

As was the custom, Judah told Onan to sleep with his brother's widow so she could have a child in her husband's line. But Onan didn't want to share the inheritance, so he wouldn't produce a child for his brother. God was so offended by what Onan did that He also took his life.

So Judah tells his daughter-in-law, Tamar, *"Live as a widow at home with your father until my son Shelah grows up."* So Tamar went to live with her father until the younger son is ready for marriage.

Time passed and no word from Judah. (He was worried that Shelah would also end up dead, just like his brothers.) Eventually, Tamar realized that Judah was not going to give Shelah to her as her husband. So she takes off her widow clothes and dresses like a harlot with a heavy veil and sits in a place where she knows Judah will pass by.

When Judah walks by, she propositions him. (He didn't recognize her as his daughter-in-law; he thought she was a prostitute.) Tamar saw this as an opportunity to take advantage of him, and she did. He promises her a goat from his flock in exchange for her services. She asks for a pledge from him (a deposit) to make sure he sends payment. She asks to hold on to his signet ring, his bracelets, and his staff. He gives them to her and the deal is sealed. She gets pregnant by her father-in-law.

Tamar then goes home, puts away her veil and changes back into her widow's clothes. Judah sends the goat to her previous location and wants his possessions back—but they can't find "the harlot" anywhere.

Three months later, Judah is told that his daughter-in-law "played the harlot" and is pregnant. Judah is incensed and demands that she be burned. That's Judah—with the old double standard.

God's people are acting just like Canaanites, which is why He will take Israel out of Canaan and sequester them in Egypt. He'll separate them and isolate them in Goshen to get them away from this terrible influence.

The charge against Judah is really a double one. His sin is terrible in itself, but it was against his own daughter-in-law. This is the way the Canaanites lived. We think that we are in a sex revolution today, but the heathen have always had sexual freedom. (By the way, the entire Canaanite line is no more. God did away with them for good.)

This was repulsive even to Judah, but we can see how he had adopted some of the customs of the Canaanites. Well, Judah had certainly lowered himself to their level, and look at the results.

***Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins were in her womb. And so it was, when she was giving birth, that the one put out his hand; and the midwife took a scarlet thread and bound it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, "How did you break through? This breach be upon you!" Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.*** –Genesis 38:27-30

Remember those names. Judah. Tamar. Perez. Zerah.

If we look at the genealogy of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 1:2-3, we read: "Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. *Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar.*" Then as we follow through the genealogy, read verse 16: "And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ."

It is an amazing thing that the Lord Jesus Christ should come through the line of Judah and Tamar. He came into the human family, through a sinful line.

***For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*** –2 Corinthians 5:21

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**NEXT: A different kind of prison ministry.**

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## LESSON 17



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. In a way, the animosity that Joseph's brothers felt for him was understandable; he was the favorite, and they were not. But even understandable sins are sins. What could they have done differently to alter their attitudes and perspectives about their brother? Is there anything in your own experience you could rely on to point them away from sin, even if they were being mistreated?
2. What do you think God's purpose was in sending Joseph the dreams about the stars and sheaves? If it was going to cause trouble for Joseph, why would God do that?



3. As the firstborn son, Reuben probably had some influence over his brothers. What can his half-hearted attempt to save Joseph without confronting his brothers tell us about our own tendencies to avoid uncomfortable situations where we might stand against the majority?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. The hatred of Joseph's brothers seems out of proportion to what Joseph had done to them, but we must remember that it wasn't because of who he was: the favorite son of Jacob's favorite wife. Often our problems with people will have a lot more to do with *what* we are than *who* we are. Can you think of any conflicts in your life that this played a role in? How can understanding this help you navigate difficult relationships and animosity?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. If you had been writing the book of Genesis, would you have been tempted to leave out the story of Judah and Tamar? Why or why not?



## LESSON 18

# NOT FORGOTTEN



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 39–40**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 38:1–39:2**, **Genesis 39**, and **Genesis 40**

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Joseph is the Old Testament illustration of Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

No one else in the Old Testament models the purpose and providence of God more clearly than Joseph. God’s hand is on his life and His leading is obvious—from our perspective. From Joseph’s perspective, everything seemed to go wrong and the world often looked dark. But we can see that each event in Joseph’s life was a step toward bringing good for the glory of God.

Interestingly, Joseph was the only patriarch in Genesis whom God didn’t communicate with personally. God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not to Joseph. In this way, we can identify with Joseph. God hasn’t appeared directly to anyone today, yet we can still know He is leading us. In one of the best moments in Joseph’s story, when his brothers thought he would turn on them because of what they had done years before, Joseph clearly knew God was with Him. He said, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

We learn a valuable lesson from Joseph. If we are God's child, in His will, we can be confident that nothing happens to us without His permission. God works all things together for good to them who love Him. Even our misfortunes, heartbreaks, and sufferings are for our good and His glory. If we could see through the events of our lives to His ultimate purposes, we would choose these things ourselves, or at least understand them.

God has built a hedge about every child of God, and nothing gets through it without His permission. Even Satan recognizes this, as he made clear in his contest for Job's heart (see Job 1:10).

Now let's follow this young man, Joseph, and see what is going to happen to him in Egypt.

## ON THE SLAVE BLOCK

At 17, Joseph would have been a prize as a slave on the open market. He was bought by Potiphar, a captain of the guard in the military. He had his office in the Pentagon of that day, and he was part of the brass, a prominent official.

Even as a slave, the Lord was with Joseph and He prospered him. When Joseph came to Potiphar's house, blessing soon followed. Everything Joseph did flourished. Potiphar trusted Joseph with his whole household, with every detail, without even accountability. He believed in this young man's integrity and trusted him. Potiphar's focus was on pleasing Pharaoh, so he let Joseph handle his personal affairs.

We wish it was "and they lived happily ever after," but this is reality not a fairy tale, and trouble soon followed Joseph.

## TEMPTED, THEN FRAMED

Potiphar had given Joseph the full run of his home, and he was busy. Also in the home was Potiphar's wife and she was busy, too—scheming. Joseph was a handsome young man, and it's very possible that Potiphar was much older than his wife, as was the custom of the day. Joseph is in front of her every day, and eventually she tries to seduce him.

Joseph's response is worth studying. First, he refused simply out of loyalty to Potiphar. "Look, my master ... has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Even in this temptation, this young man serves *God*. Egypt was a land of idolatry, yet Joseph kept a testimony for the living and true God and a high moral standard, even a high view of marriage.

But the woman didn't give up. Every day she tempted Joseph to sleep with her, yet Joseph didn't give in. Soon she built up a boiling resentment against Joseph for his "rejection," and she's going to get her revenge.

One day, as Joseph went about his business, she caught him alone and grabbed at his clothes. He got away from her, but she pulled his cloak off. When she saw that she had a tool to use, she cried out and accused him of attempted rape.

She also accused her husband of bringing "this Hebrew slave" in to mock her. (Had she been guilty of this before?) Poor Potiphar had no choice but to defend his wife, though perhaps he suspected something of her all along. Perhaps he knew Joseph was being framed. Nevertheless, the expedient thing was to remove Joseph and forget the whole matter.

## PRISON

Joseph's life has had some serious turns. He was once his father's favorite son but was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery. Then he's getting along well in his new position when he is unjustly accused of sexual assault by his boss' wife. He could make no defense and is immediately thrown in prison.

He just doesn't stand a chance.

But even now, Genesis 39:21 says, "But the **LORD** was with Joseph and showed him mercy ...."

First the Lord gives Joseph favor with the prison guards. They like him and learn to trust him. God is the one who is giving Joseph favor. God is with him and is leading him. All of these experiences are moving toward the accomplishment of a purpose in this young man's life. Joseph recognized this, and it buoyed his spirit and gave him hope. His terrible circumstances didn't get him down. He recognized God's hand on his life and didn't get discouraged.

Is it the will of God that Joseph is in prison? It's almost essential that he be there.

## JOSEPH AND JESUS

Unlike any other Old Testament person, the life of Joseph pictures many details that we see in full in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's look at these comparisons:

1. Joseph's birth was miraculous in that it was by the intervention of God as an answer to prayer. The Lord Jesus is virgin-born—certainly miraculous! **Luke 1:27**
2. Joseph was *sent* by his father to his brethren. Jesus was *sent* to His brethren—He came first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. **Matthew 15:24**
3. Joseph was *loved* by his father. The Lord Jesus was *loved* by His Father, who declared, "This is My beloved Son." **Matthew 3:17**
4. Joseph was hated by his brothers without a cause, and this is what the Lord Jesus says about Himself: "They hated Me without a cause." **John 15:23-25**
5. Joseph had the coat of many colors, which set him apart. Christ was set apart in that He was "separate from sinners." **Hebrews 7:26**
6. Joseph was sold by his own brothers for 20 pieces of silver, and the Lord Jesus was sold by one of His own brethren, Judas, for 30 pieces of silver. **Matthew 26:15**
7. Joseph announced that he was to *rule* over his brethren. The Lord Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah. Just as they ridiculed Joseph's message, so they also ridiculed Jesus. In fact, nailed to His cross were the words: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. **Matthew 27:37**
8. Joseph was put into the pit, which was meant to be a place of death for him. The Lord Jesus was crucified. **Luke 23:33**
9. Joseph was raised up out of that pit. The Lord Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. **Acts 10:40**
10. Joseph obeyed his father when he sent him to find his brothers. The Lord Jesus obeyed His Father so that He could say He always did the things which pleased His Father. **John 6:38-39**
11. Joseph was mocked by his brethren. When they saw him coming, they said, "Look, this dreamer is coming" (Genesis 37:19). The Lord Jesus was mocked by His brethren. When He was on the cross, they said, "If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross." **Matthew 27:42**

12. The brothers refused to receive Joseph, and the brethren of the Lord Jesus, the Jews, refused to receive Him. They plotted to kill Joseph, and we are told they took counsel to plot the death of the Lord Jesus. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” **John 1:11**
13. Joseph’s coat dripping with blood was returned to his father. They took the coat of the Lord Jesus and gambled for it. **Matthew 27:35**
14. After Joseph was sold into Egypt, he was lost sight of for many years. Christ ascended up into heaven. He told His disciples that they would not see Him until His return. **John 16:16**
15. Joseph was tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and he resisted. The Lord Jesus was tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and He won the victory. **Luke 4:1-2**
16. Joseph became the savior of the world during this period—in the physical sense, he saved them from starvation. The Lord Jesus Christ in every sense is the Savior of the whole world. **John 4:42**
17. Joseph was hated by his brothers, and they delivered him to the Gentiles. He couldn’t defend himself, and he was unjustly accused. The Lord Jesus was also delivered by His own to the religious rulers who in turn delivered Him to the Gentiles. He was innocent. **Matthew 27:17-26**
18. Pilate didn’t believe the accusation that was brought against the Lord Jesus. He found Him innocent, yet he scourged Him. And Joseph had to suffer although Potiphar probably knew he was innocent. Potiphar had to keep up a front before Pharaoh as Pilate had to keep up a front before Caesar. **Luke 23:4**
19. Joseph found favor in the sight of the jailer. And in the case of Jesus, the Roman centurion said of Him, “Certainly this was a righteous Man.” **Luke 23:47**
20. Joseph was numbered with the transgressors. He was a blessing to the butler, and he was judgment for the baker. The Lord Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One was judged and the other was blessed. **Luke 23:39-43**
21. Joseph stood before Pharaoh when he was 30 years old, and the Lord Jesus began His ministry when He was 30. **Luke 3:23**
22. Joseph is the one who had the bread in the famine. Jesus Christ said, “I am the bread of life.” **John 6:35**

Without a doubt, there was something special about this man, Joseph. But as special as he was, nothing can compare to the beauty and majesty of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## BACK IN PRISON

Why was it the will of God that Joseph be in prison at this time? We're about to find out. Around this time, the butler to the king of Egypt and his baker had done something that landed them in the same prison where Joseph was. (Remember this was Pharaoh's prison.) This was not a coincidence.

Joseph was already in a good position, even here in the prison. Because God gave him favor, everywhere he went, Joseph's ability was recognized (see Proverbs 18:16). God is moving in his life with a very definite purpose.

Joseph got to know the baker and the butler because the guard gave him the responsibility to take care of them while in prison. That's how Joseph came to know that both the butler and the baker had a dream one night, but they were sad because no one could tell them what their dreams meant.

Jacob offered, *"Don't interpretations come from God? Tell me the dreams."* He says that God, not humans, knows the meaning of dreams. But by asking them to tell him their dreams, he implies that God will help him understand their meaning.

Even in this, Joseph gives God all the glory. We learn a valuable lesson from this young man—anything we do for the Lord should be done for God's praise. We're not blessed as much as the Lord would like to bless us because when He gives us something wonderful, we take it for granted and don't give God the glory. Joseph models the right response.

God used dreams in the Old Testament in a unique way, because the whole canon of Scripture wasn't complete. We don't need dreams the same way today because God speaks to us through His Spirit and through His Word. But in that day, God used dreams and symbols that were familiar to them to teach them something about Himself and His purposes.

The butler told his dream about a vine and branches to Joseph. He was familiar with the symbols of serving his boss wine, etc. God gave Joseph the ability to interpret his dream and promised the butler that he would be restored in three days.



Then he asked the butler a favor. *Would he put in a good word for him with Pharaoh? Would he help him get out of prison?* Joseph tells him a bit of his story and asks, *“Please don’t forget me.”* The record doesn’t say, but the butler probably promised he would speak to Pharaoh on Joseph’s behalf.

Next, Joseph hears the baker’s dream that was full of practical symbols of his profession—baskets of food and feeding birds. Joseph’s interpretation wasn’t so rosy. He said that in three days, the baker will be taken out and hanged, and the birds will eat his flesh.

Three days later it was the Pharaoh’s birthday, and he threw a party for all his servants. On that day, he restored the butler and hanged the baker, just as Joseph had said.

The butler was freed from prison, but he forgot all about Joseph. Joseph’s one glimmer of hope that the butler would remember him to Pharaoh is lost.

God wants to leave Joseph there for a purpose. If Joseph had been released from prison then, he likely would have returned to Israel. But now, when the time comes for Joseph to interpret Pharaoh’s dream, they won’t have any problem finding him.

In spite of the discouragement, Joseph believed God was moving in his life. Joseph was faithful in every relationship of his life. He was faithful to Potiphar. In prison he was faithful to the keeper of the prison. He was faithful to God, always giving Him the glory. He will soon be faithful to Pharaoh, and he will be faithful to his own brothers. Joseph’s faith in God made him faithful.

Joseph’s faith in God allowed him to have an optimistic outlook on life, even under all his trials. His faith made him sympathetic and kind toward everyone, including this baker and butler and someday he will be kind to his brothers.

His faith also made Joseph humble. He gave *God* the glory for all his achievements. He *believed* God, like his great-grandfather Abraham had believed Him, and this faith produced blessing in his life.

So we leave Joseph—forgotten in prison. But God hasn’t forgotten him, and He is at work in his life.

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**NEXT: If you’ve ever waited on God for a long time,  
you’ll love Joseph even more.**

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## LESSON 18



### FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why do you think God only communicated to Joseph via dreams when He spoke audibly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is there anything we can learn from that for our own lives?
2. Genesis presents Joseph in Potiphar's house as a man of integrity who would have been a wise and hard worker. But Genesis is also clear that the blessings and prosperity which came to Joseph—and as a result, came to Pharaoh also—came from God. Do you ever fall victim to the temptation to believe that blessings come your way because of your hard work, your intellect, and your integrity? How can we stay focused on where blessings truly come from?

3. When tempted by Potiphar's wife, Joseph refuses because he doesn't want to sin against God or Potiphar. How different is his attitude than what we've seen previously from his relatives and ancestors? How do you think Joseph came to have this attitude about his sins?
4. One of the most amazing things about Joseph is that he seems to almost always think the right way about things. He seems to have an ability to see his life—even things as horrible as slavery, false accusations, and imprisonment—through God's eyes. Do you think it is possible for us to develop this perspective? What do you need to do to develop this way of thinking in your life?
5. It sounds counter-intuitive to think of God blessing someone in prison. We might wonder why that person would even be in prison if God was blessing him. Are there areas in your life where you don't feel blessed, but maybe God is blessing you anyway? What are some of those places?

6. After everything he has endured, being forgotten by someone he helped get out of prison might be as hard as anything else he has had to deal with. This story should remind us to forever be grateful for those who have blessed us. Is there someone in your life from whom you have benefited, and to whom you need to express gratitude? When was the last time you said, "Thank you," to the people God has used in your life?
  
7. If you were going to present all the parallels of the lives of Jesus and Joseph, how would you do it? What are some ways to visually represent all the ways the life of Joseph mirrors that of our Savior?

Genesis is like a bud,  
and the flower opens up  
as we go through  
the Scripture.



THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 19

# DREAMS AND SURPRISES



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 41–42**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 41:1–45**, **Genesis 41:46–42:14**,  
and **Genesis 42:15–43:15**

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Two years is a long time to wait.

That's how long Joseph sat in prison, hoping to be released. But he's a foreigner, kidnapped from his homeland, sold into slavery, and unfairly imprisoned with no one to defend him. And he's forgotten.

But not by God. All this was happening to Joseph for God's purpose in his life and in God's bigger picture of redemption. Wouldn't it be great if we could recognize God's hand in our lives? It would give us a totally different outlook on life.

Joseph's story is a true rags to riches story. Truth is better than fiction, after all—and that's the case in this thrilling episode from Joseph's life. God was developing Joseph's character, as well as his patience through these days of adversity. (See Romans 5:3.)

## PHARAOH HAS A DREAM

Two years after the butler's release from prison, his master, the Pharaoh, has a dream. This was his dream: He saw seven healthy cows grazing in a meadow on the banks of the Nile. Then, seven scrawny, gaunt cows swallow the seven fat cows.

Pharaoh wakes up from the dream, wonders if that dream meant something, but then goes back to sleep. Again, he has a second, similar dream: Seven healthy ears of grain grow out of a stalk, followed by seven scorched ears that swallow the first seven. Pharaoh again wakes up and realizes this, too, was a dream, but he knows it's important and symbolic.

He's upset by these two dreams and calls together all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. He tells them his dreams, but no one could explain what they meant. As it happens, the butler was in the room listening, and he remembered Joseph had explained his dream when he was with him in prison.

So the butler speaks up and says, *"I know a guy ...."*

The butler explains his backstory to Pharaoh, with the caveat that this young man was a Hebrew and servant to the captain of the guard, but he correctly explained both his dream and the dream of the baker.

Pharaoh conceded, *"We've tried everybody else, let's give this young man a chance to explain my dreams. I have the feeling they are significant."*

With the directive straight from the palace, Joseph is quickly snatched from his cell, given appropriate court clothes, and he shaves. If you notice Egyptian artwork, all the men are clean-shaven, no facial hair. This is a sign of new life in front of Joseph; like a resurrection, he is raised up.

Joseph is brought before Pharaoh and told why he had been summoned. Can he interpret these two dreams?

Right away, Joseph gives God the glory. He says, "It is not in me (I can't interpret it); God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (Genesis 41:16).

Pharaoh repeats the dream to Joseph—one dream of two parts. The way the same message was repeated, given to Pharaoh twice, adds to its importance. *God is showing you what He is about to do, Pharaoh.*

Here is Joseph's interpretation: The seven healthy cows represent seven years, the same as the seven good ears: the dream is one. The seven thin and ugly cows (and seven empty heads) which came up after them are seven years of famine.

Seven years of great plenty will come for all the land of Egypt and will be followed by seven years of famine. All the land will be depleted by this severe famine.

Joseph repeated the meaning to Pharaoh twice. *"God will soon bring this to pass."*

Then Joseph advised Pharaoh how to collect all the surplus during the seven years of plenty and also how to keep it in storage for survival during the lean years.

## PHAROAH PROMOTES JOSEPH

Not only does Joseph interpret the dream, but in his enthusiasm and discernment, he suggests what Pharaoh should do. God is leading him in all of this, of course.

God is giving them notice that there will be a worldwide famine so severe that even Egypt will be affected. Because Egypt is an irrigated land, they don't rely on rainfall. The Nile overflows the land every year, bringing not only water, but sediment which fertilizes the soil. However, God is warning them that the seven years of famine will impact Egypt, too.

As Pharaoh listens to Joseph, what he says makes sense. Who better than Joseph to administer the details? Where did Joseph get this training? Likely from his time in Potiphar's house when he had charge of his estate. Now he will have charge of everything in Egypt.

Pharaoh is impressed by Joseph, not just for his ability to interpret dreams, but for his godly attitude. No one is wiser than Joseph, and Pharaoh recognizes it. The greatest ruler in their corner of the world promotes Joseph to be his second in command.

***"You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." –Genesis 41:40-41***



What a tremendous transition this is in Joseph's life. From the back of a prison cell to the throne next to Pharaoh. Pharaoh also took off his signet ring and put it on Joseph's hand (equal to having Pharaoh's signature). He gave him a royal wardrobe and a neck chain that gave him the same authority as the Pharaoh.

Pharaoh also gave him the "second chariot," which solicited everyone to bow the knee before him as he passed by. With these new privileges, Pharaoh also gave 30-year-old Joseph an Egyptian Coptic name, Zaphnath-Paaneah, which meant "the revealer of secret things," and a wife named Asenath, who was the daughter of the priest of On.

After these 13 years in Egypt, Joseph is now the prime minister, second only to Pharaoh in the whole country. This begs the question, why was Pharaoh so willing to accept him? Primarily, of course, the answer is that God was with Joseph. But there may also be another practical reason. Many scholars think the Pharaoh at this era in Egyptian history was one of the Hyksos kings, who were not native Egyptians but were Bedouins from the Arabian desert. This nomadic group took over the throne of Egypt for an era. If this is true, Pharaoh was actually closer in nationality to Joseph than to the Egyptians. This racial bond with Pharaoh would have helped him build confidence in Joseph. Hyksos kings found it difficult to find someone loyal and faithful to them in Egypt. Faithful was Joseph's middle name. He was faithful to whomever he served, as he will be to this Pharaoh.

The Hyksos kings were later expelled from Egypt, which helps us understand why in Exodus 1:8 we read that "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."

So at 30 years old, Joseph takes up his work in Egypt. During these first seven years of plenty, he is gathering the abundant produce of the land into storehouses. He stored the grain in cities with a plan for easy distribution. He gathered so much corn that it was "as the sand of the sea," until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable. Under Joseph's management, Egypt was the breadbasket of the world.

## JOSEPH'S TWO SONS

During those days of plenty, Joseph became a father. He named his first son Manasseh, which loosely means "amnesia," because it means "God made me forget." He was so much involved, doing so much good, that he's not homesick anymore. He now dresses like an Egyptian, talks like an Egyptian, and lives like an Egyptian.

He named his second son Ephraim, meaning “fruitful.” God had made him forget his father’s house and had made him fruitful in the land of Egypt.

Then the seven years of bountiful crops ended, and the famine began. Joseph is 37 years old. The famine is worldwide. Joseph opened all the storehouses and all the countries came to Egypt to Joseph to buy corn.

Including a family from the land of Canaan.

## **JACOB SENDS HIS SONS TO EGYPT**

The famine hit Jacob’s family hard. They were looking for ways to survive. Jacob heard that Egypt had corn to buy, and so he got his ten sons together and said, *“Go to Egypt and buy us some food!”*

Jacob had faith and he coupled it with action. He believed the corn would bring them life, so he acted on his belief. That is the same as saving faith. How can one believe in Jesus? The Bible says, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ...”* (Acts 16:31). You hear something and you believe it. That is what Jacob did. That is how he brought life to his family. And the way we get eternal life is through faith in Christ.

Why did Jacob only send ten sons? Wasn’t there one more son? Yes, but Jacob favored Benjamin and couldn’t tolerate the risk of losing him. (After all this time, Jacob still hadn’t learned his lesson about favoritism.) What if mischief befalls the other ten boys, then what? It’s a risk he doesn’t mind taking. Joseph and Benjamin were Rachel’s sons. He’s already lost Joseph. Benjamin was his last link to Rachel, the wife he deeply loved. So now he sends out all ten and keeps only Benjamin with him.

God was actually working another plan with the famine. He wanted to get Jacob’s family out of Canaan, away from the sins of the Canaanites and bring them to Egypt to settle in the secluded spot of Goshen.

## **JOSEPH RECOGNIZES HIS BROTHERS**

In Egypt, Joseph was busy distributing the food to all the foreigners who came for help. You have to wonder if he kept a special eye out for his brothers among the delegates from all over the world. He knew they would have to come. So he watches.

Then came the day when ten men walk in the room and all bow down on their faces in front of Joseph. You have to wonder how he felt. Do you think Joseph remembered his dream from decades before? Ten sheaves of wheat bowing down to his sheaf? Now it's taking place right in front of him.

Joseph recognized his brothers; why didn't they recognize him? First, they thought he was dead. Or at least they never expected to see him again. Joseph did expect them. Also, more than 20 years have gone by. Joseph is now almost 40 and he is dressed like an Egyptian, and speaks and acts like an Egyptian.

The first thing Joseph says to them is, *"Why are you here?"* He speaks roughly to them, to test them. He accuses them of being spies. *"No, we are ten brothers."* They confess that they really are 12 brothers, but one is home with their father and the other "is not." They consider Joseph dead, but there he is standing in front of them!

Joseph continues the test. For the third time he accuses them of spying. *"Prove to me you're not spies."* And he put them all in prison for three days to think about it. The truth is, Joseph is working a plan. He wants to see Benjamin, his full brother. These men are really his half-brothers.

On the third day, Joseph tells them, "Do this and live, for I fear God" (Genesis 42:18).

He goes on to say, *"If you're as honest as you say you are, one of your brothers will stay here in jail while the rest of you take the food back to your hungry families. But you have to bring your youngest brother back to me, confirming that you're telling the truth. And not one of you will die."* So, the brothers agreed.

Joseph never misses an opportunity to give a testimony for God. Certainly he is giving one here. He always gives God the glory as the One who is directing his life. The statement "I fear God" should have encouraged the brothers to believe that they would be treated justly at his hand.

The brothers are grown men, some over 50 years old. They're in a tough spot. Something about this scene also brings back the guilt they share in Joseph's mistreatment, two decades earlier. They said, *"Now we're paying for what we did to Joseph. We saw how terrified he was. He begged us for mercy. But we didn't listen to him. Now we're the ones in trouble."*

While they talked among themselves, they were speaking Hebrew. Joseph understands every word. Up till now, Joseph communicated with them through an interpreter, to pose as an Egyptian. They're actually confessing their guilt to Joseph without realizing it. They think that what's happening to them is God's vengeance on them for Joseph's murder, and they are repenting before God.

Joseph hears every bit of it, and is moved to tears. He'd love to throw his arms around each one of them and call them "brother." But he dares not reveal himself yet, because he wants to see Benjamin.

The brothers agree among themselves that Simeon will stay while the rest return to Canaan. Joseph is so emotionally charged by all this that he had to excuse himself to weep privately. He then washes his face and comes in again as if nothing has happened.

The brothers are sold corn, but Joseph commanded that their money be given back to them, hidden in their sacks. He also gave them food and provisions for their trip. On the way home, they opened their sacks and discovered the money. They were terrified! They already felt like this ruler was suspicious of them. They thought this could be a trick. Now he might accuse them of stealing the money. They decided to bring the money back with them when they returned.

## WHAT WILL JACOB SAY?

When the nine brothers returned home and told Jacob, their father, what had happened, Jacob was overwhelmed. *"First, I lost Joseph. Now, I've lost Simeon. And you want to take Benjamin?"*

Poor Jacob. He's not the trickster he used to be, but he's also not the man of faith he will be. But he is growing.

Reuben makes his dad a promise to bring Benjamin back alive. But Jacob's life was wrapped up in his boy, Benjamin. He is the son of his right hand. He is Jacob's walking stick; Jacob leans on him. *"No, I won't let Benjamin go down to Egypt."*

Meanwhile, Simeon sits in prison back in Egypt.

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**NEXT: A bittersweet reunion of brothers.**

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## LESSON 19



### FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. It isn't unusual for us to see God making someone wait before He does something amazing with their life. What spiritual benefit can come from having to wait? How can you actively work at getting better at waiting?
2. The way that Joseph gives God the credit for the interpretation of the dream—before he has even heard the content of Pharaoh's dream—shows an incredible level of faith and confidence in God. Why was Joseph able to be so confident in God after all the evil God had allowed to happen to him?

3. Joseph's appearance before Pharaoh is, in many ways, the culmination of all his life's experiences up to that point. We can see clearly how each thing he endured had prepared him for that moment, but we don't always get clarity like that in our own lives. How can we stay faithful like Joseph, even when we don't understand what God is doing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Pharaoh didn't just let Joseph out of prison, but he elevated him to a prominent position in Egypt. Imagine you were a member of Pharaoh's court. How would you have reacted to this prisoner becoming so prominent in Egypt? Would it have made you curious about Joseph's God that revealed dreams?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Joseph's brothers went to Egypt never expecting to meet the brother they had sold into slavery. What does this tell us about sin and its consequences?

6. If you were Joseph, how would you have reacted when your brothers showed up in Egypt asking for your help?

7. What does God's plan to have Jacob send his sons to Egypt tell us about God and His sovereign plans?

## LESSON 20

# THE TEST



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 43–44**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 42:15–43:15**, **Genesis 43:16–44:28**, and **Genesis 44:25–45:28**

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Time goes by. Simeon is still in prison in Egypt. Jacob won't release Benjamin to go to Egypt. Weeks, maybe months, go by. What should the brothers do?

Eventually, all the corn the brothers bought in Egypt is gone. They will starve to death if they don't go back to Egypt to buy more food.

Judah reminded them all that “the man” (their brother, Joseph) had presented a clear mandate: *Only come back if you bring your youngest brother with you.*

Judah asks Jacob again. “*You wouldn't send Benjamin with us before, but there's no use going back if he's not with us. The ruler won't see us.*”

“*Why did you tell the man in the first place that you had another brother?*”

They hadn't intended to tell “the man” everything, but he kept probing them. He wouldn't stop until he got his questions answered.

Then Judah offers himself as a surety for Benjamin. A surety is someone who takes another's place. Judah says, “*I'll take full responsibility for his safety. My life for his. If we don't bring him back safe and sound, I'll take all the blame.*”



It's important to note that this "surety" promise came from Judah, for from the tribe of Judah came the Lord Jesus who became our Shepherd, who took our place on the cross and bore our penalty. He was our surety. We could not meet God's holy standard on our own, but the Lord Jesus stepped in and took upon Himself our sin and gave His life for ours. This is a beautiful picture of what Jesus did for us.

Finally, because there are no other options, Jacob agrees to let Benjamin go with his brothers back to Egypt. *"But don't go empty-handed. Bring gifts of honey, nuts, and spices. Also bring double the money—the money for the first provision and more money for this shipment. And God Almighty give you mercy before the man ...."*

## JOSEPH INVITES HIS BROTHERS TO HIS HOME

Now comes the dramatic moment when the ten brothers stand again before Joseph in his court.

Can't you picture Joseph scanning the group, looking for Benjamin?

When he sees him with them, Joseph instructs his servants to bring the men to his house and to prepare lunch for them all. He wants a private audience with them.

This causes the brothers to panic. They can't imagine him inviting them to his home for any *good* reason. Joseph had dealt with them so harshly before ... and now he's inviting them to lunch? *"Is it because of the money returned in our sacks? Does he want to get us alone to attack us?"*

Under ordinary circumstances, this would be something to brag about. But the brothers have a guilt complex. They know what they've done, and now they think it's happening to them. They hadn't hesitated to make a slave of Joseph when they sold him to the traders in Egypt. Now they might be the ones to become slaves. Guilt changes joy into misery.

When they get to Joseph's front door, they hesitate and try to explain, or apologize, or plead their case to Joseph's servant. *"We just came to buy food. Then we found our money returned in our sack. We've brought it back! We have more money to buy more food. We don't know how this happened ...."*

Apparently, Joseph had at least partially let his servant in on what was happening. He comforted them, *“Don’t be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks. I was paid for your food; everything is in order.”*

Then he brought Simeon out to them. And he gave them water and had their feet washed and cared for their pack animals.

When Joseph got home, they presented him with their gifts and bowed themselves to the floor. Joseph likely was seated on a platform above them. Like a good host, he asks them how they are, *“Is your father well? Is he alive?”*

This is quite a moment for Joseph, to hear how his beloved father is after all these years.

*“Yes, our father is well.”* They bowed again to the floor. Benjamin goes down on his face, too.

Joseph looks at this young man, “his mother’s son.” He asks, *“Is this your younger brother you told me about?”* Joseph said to Benjamin, “God be gracious to you, my son” (Genesis 43:29).

Joseph couldn’t contain his emotions. He was so deeply moved to see his brother again that his heart went out to him. He had to get out of the room as quickly as he could. He went into his private quarters and wept. It has been 22 years since he saw Benjamin. He never imagined he would have this moment.

Then he washed his face, got control of his emotions again, and said, *“Let’s eat.”*

According to Egyptian custom, Egyptians would not eat with Hebrews, it was repulsive to them. So, they set up the lunch table in separate rooms. When they were seated at their lunch table, the brothers noticed something odd. Joseph had arranged the place cards, and had them seated according to their ages. Reuben was first, his proper place, and Benjamin the last, in his proper place, and the rest of the brothers were in their right age order. They looked at each other, shocked by this detail, and wondered how Joseph knew about them.

Joseph couldn’t keep from showing his affection for his own brother, Benjamin, so he gave him five times as many portions as the rest. That young man has been living through a famine—this was likely his first real meal for a long time.

Everything went well—the food and drink was lavish, the conversation was wonderful. Everyone had a great time.

## A NEW TEST

Now Joseph has another test in mind when he sends his brothers home with the grain. He tells his steward to fill as many sacks with food that they can carry. And like last time, he tells him to give them back their money. But in the youngest brother's sack, also put a silver cup from Joseph's table.

In the morning, the brothers set off for home. When they weren't that far out of the city, Joseph sends his steward to catch up with them with a troop of soldiers. When they overtake them, they accuse them of being thieves. A silver cup is missing, and they have stolen it.

The brothers cried, *"We didn't steal anything! If you find that cup in our sacks, then whoever has it will die, and we'll be your slaves."* (They were sure none of the brothers stole the cup.)

The steward agreed, *"Whoever has the cup will become our slave."* So they searched everyone's pack, and the cup was found with Benjamin. (Just where Joseph had told his steward to put it.)

Joseph was testing his brothers' relationship and affection to Benjamin and their father. After all, they had sold *him* into slavery. Have they changed? Will they be willing to let Benjamin go into slavery to save themselves? Joseph needs to satisfy his mind on this question before he makes himself known to them. The test he uses here would give him absolute proof that his brothers wouldn't repeat the tragedy he had experienced at their hands.

The brothers are overwhelmed by this turn of events. They turn their caravan around and head back to the city. They weren't going home without Benjamin. Back at Joseph's house, they fall on the ground before him again—this time in painful agony.

*"How could you have done this? Did you think I wouldn't notice?"*

Judah steps up and acts as the spokesman for the group. He's willing to take Benjamin's place. His defense of his brother is one of the most moving passages in the Bible. He also confesses that it is because of their sin against Joseph that this has come upon them.

Judah says, *“What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God is behind this, exposing how bad we are. We stand guilty before you and ready to be your slaves—we’re all in this together, the rest of us as guilty as the one with the cup.”*

Joseph dismisses their offer. *“Only the one with the cup will be my slave. The rest of you are free to go back to your father.”* Joseph wants to test their love for their brother.

Judah then presents his case. He recalled how they first came to this place.

*“When we came before, you asked if we had a father and a brother. You said we were to bring our brother back with us to get Simeon. But we know our father is an old man. Our youngest brother is the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother’s children, and his father dearly loves him. The lad can’t leave our father, or our father will die.*

*“When we told our father what happened in Egypt and that we must bring Benjamin back with us, he refused. Our father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, “Surely he is torn to pieces”; and I have not seen him since. But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.’*

*“If we go home without Benjamin, we fear our father would die, since his life is bound up in the lad’s life. I promised my father that I would bring him back to him and if not, then I would bear the blame before my father forever. So please, let me take my brother’s place and let Benjamin go home with his brothers” (see Genesis 44:18-34).*

In Judah’s recounting what had happened, Joseph learns how their father had been deceived about what had been done to him so long ago. In fact, this may have been the first time any of the brothers had confessed this much.

Judah’s speech also tells us that Jacob is still not relying on the Lord, as much as he’s leaning on this boy, Benjamin. If anything had happened to Benjamin, it would have killed him—he would have gone down into his grave, sorrowing.

When death comes to a loved one, Christians reveal their faith in God. Others may collapse completely when this happens. But if you both are children of God, you know you will see each other again someday. Therefore,

we see Jacob has not yet arrived. He is growing in grace, but he still doesn't completely trust God.

Again, Judah is the spokesman for the group, but any one of the brothers would have offered himself. Joseph tests his brothers, and they all pass the test. Rather than to see Benjamin go into slavery, they are willing to take his place. This is a different, transformed band of brothers.

Much later in history there came One in the line of Judah who bore the penalty for the guilty. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, willingly took the place of the guilty. His life for ours.

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**NEXT: Jacob's story comes full circle.**

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## LESSON 20



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Simeon spent a decent amount of time in prison. Was there some irony in him taking his brother's spot in an Egyptian prison, even if he didn't know it?
2. What do you think Benjamin was thinking on his way to Egypt? Was he afraid of what would happen in Egypt? Was he afraid of his brothers?
3. Joseph's brothers are, understandably, racked by guilt from their past actions. What does their reaction tell us about human nature and how, without Christ, our sins remain on us?



7. We've seen Judah in particular do some awful things in Genesis, but he is the one willing to sacrifice himself for Benjamin. Do you think he has had a change of heart, or is this just temporary because of the circumstances?



## LESSON 21

# I AM YOUR BROTHER



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 45—47**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 44:25—45:28**, **Genesis 46**, and **Genesis 47**

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When Jesus came the first time, 2,000 years ago, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). In fact, the Jews delivered Him up to be crucified.

But a day is coming when the Lord Jesus Christ will come the second time and He will make Himself known to His brethren, the Jews. The prophet Zechariah says, “And one will say to him, ‘What are these wounds between your arms?’ Then he will answer, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends’” (Zechariah 13:6). Christ will make Himself known to His brethren. “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness” (Zechariah 13:1). This will be a family affair between the Lord Jesus and His brethren, the Jews—a time of tremendous joy and celebration.

When Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, we get just a taste of how wonderful that day of Jesus Christ’s own revealing will be.

## IT'S ME, YOUR BROTHER

As Joseph listened to Judah confess their sin and explain what the last 20 years have been like for them and their father, he is overwhelmed with emotion. He couldn't hide it. So he cleared the room and wept openly and loudly—so loudly that the Egyptians and Pharaoh's house heard his crying.

No one knew why he was upset. His servants and his brothers were confused.

In reality, now that he has tested his brothers, there's no reason for Joseph to hold back revealing his true identity from them.

*"It's me,"* he says, weeping. "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" (Genesis 45:3).

What?? His brothers were *terrified* at his presence. It has been close to 25 years since they sold him to the Ishmaelites, and they are sure he will want to get his revenge. They are too shocked and frightened to speak.

But Joseph calls them close. "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt."

*"I'm your brother."* What a moment! Can you imagine how they felt?

Notice Joseph's reaction here. He's not angry, and he doesn't seek revenge. That would be normal—so why doesn't he? He saw God moving in his life. God had permitted this heart-wrenching betrayal for a purpose. *"God sent me here ahead of you to save lives."*

Joseph obviously had pondered this for a long time. God had put him in this place and given him favor with Pharaoh so he could save his family's lives ... so there could be a remnant in Egypt to deliver them. He was also God's way of saving the world, by providing food when the famine prevented any harvests.

He says, *"So you see, it wasn't you who sent me here, but God. He set me in place as a father to Pharaoh, put me in charge of his personal affairs, and made me ruler of all Egypt."*

If we could see the hand of God in our lives like Joseph did, would we become angry and seek revenge? Likely not. At every turn, Joseph gives the glory to God.

Joseph was 17 when he was sold into Egyptian slavery. He likely spent up to ten years in Potiphar's house, then at least two in prison. He was 30 when he first stood before Pharaoh. So far, they had experienced seven years of plenty and now two years of famine. So Joseph is around 40 years old and has been living in the land of Egypt for over two decades. He sees the hand of God in all of this.

*"Now, go get our father and tell him everything. And bring him and our whole family down here to Goshen. You can be near me and for the next five years of famine, I'll take care of everything you need."*

Jacob and his family couldn't have survived the famine if they stayed in Canaan. Their faith likely wouldn't have survived, either, living among the Canaanites. Joseph invites them to live in the land of Goshen, the best part of Egypt. It is in that land that God will grow them from a family into a nation, sheltered from the rest of the world.

The brothers listen to all this news and stand absolutely spellbound before Joseph. They have no words. It was unbelievable that Joseph was right there in front of them.

Joseph couldn't hold back anymore. He embraced his brother Benjamin and they both cried. What a tender scene between these two brothers. Joseph and Benjamin are both marvelous men.

Then Joseph hugged and kissed each brother and wept with them. As the brothers began to recover their senses, they had quite a talk together.

The news then spread around the house. The intense crying led to intense joy and people could hear it. Pharaoh wanted to know what was going on. Likely he was told, *"You know those 11 men who came down from Canaan? They're Joseph's brothers!"*

The news delighted Pharaoh. Why? Remember that Pharaoh was probably a Hyksos king and of the same racial line as Joseph and his family. He hadn't been able to fully trust the Egyptians but was pleased with Joseph's faithfulness. He was glad there were going to be more like him.

Pharaoh extended the invitation to Joseph's brothers to get their families and come live "off the fat of the land." He sent wagons for the women and children and elderly to ride to Egypt in style. The wheel had not yet come to Canaan, but the Egyptians were more advanced. *"Don't worry about anything, we've got everything you need here."*

Joseph sent his brothers home with provisions and expensive gifts. He gave Benjamin extra money and rich clothes. They loaded up 20 donkeys with provisions and sent them on their way.

When the brothers got home, they told their father that Joseph is alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. Jacob's heart fainted, and he had a hard time believing it was true. But when he heard what Joseph said and saw the provisions he sent, Jacob became convinced and started to get excited.

*"I've heard enough—my son Joseph is still alive," he said. "I've got to go and see him before I die."*

Likely Jacob thought he would go to Egypt for a visit and wait out the famine. But he died in Egypt, never returning to Canaan except to be buried. It was a hard decision to go to Egypt. God had instructed Abraham to stay out of Egypt. He had trouble there. God told Isaac the same thing.

So now the question is, should Jacob go down into the land of Egypt? He needs a little more encouragement than the invitation from his son Joseph or even from Pharaoh. He needs to have God's permission.

As the family traveled south, they came to Beersheba. Here he did an amazing thing: He offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. The first time he left that land on his way to Haran, Jacob had come to Bethel. Was he looking for God? Or was he interested in His leading? No, he thought he was running away from God. He didn't think he needed God in his life at all.

That was the case for most of his life. Jacob hadn't been looking to God, but now, as he comes to Beersheba, he offers sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God sees his heart and is gracious to him. He appears to him that night and calls his name, "Jacob, Jacob!" And Jacob said, "Here I am."

Then God says, "I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes" (Genesis 46:2-3).

God promised Jacob that He would create from his family a great nation down in the land of Egypt. Did God do that? We find the answer in the next book of the Bible, Exodus: "But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7). There was a real population explosion of Israelites in the land of Egypt. God made good on His promise to Jacob.

## JACOB'S GEOGRAPHICAL BIOGRAPHY

Jacob's life can be divided into three geographical locations that also picture his spiritual levels: the land of Haran, the land of Canaan, and the land of Egypt.

Jacob arrived in Haran, running away from his brother. He was God's man living in the flesh. Years later, he left Haran, running from his father-in-law and again afraid to meet his brother Esau.

In the land of Canaan, Jacob had a wrestling match with God. He was God's man fighting in his own strength.

Now he's going to Egypt. He's not running from anyone anymore, nor is he walking in his own strength. Now he's walking by faith. Jacob has become the man that God wanted him to be. Only God can make this kind of man.

This progression is true for many Christians today. There was that time in our lives when we heard the gospel, the Word of God, and we turned to God. Then we went through a period of struggle when we thought we could live our lives in our own strength; perhaps that lasted for years. Then came the time when we grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and began to walk by faith.

## JACOB AND FAMILY ARRIVE IN EGYPT

Because of the famine, Jacob gathered his whole family, 66 people in all, and left for Egypt. He now had God's permission. And all of their livestock had to go with them, since none could have survived the famine. When you add Joseph's family in Egypt, the total household of Jacob grows to 70 souls. We see all their names listed in Genesis 46—they're important because this is the family line that leads to our Lord Jesus Christ. Some of these names are in the genealogy in Matthew 1, at the beginning of the New Testament.

There's another reason God included these names (and others) in His Word. He's got a book called the Lamb's Book of Life. Is *your* name written there? Just as we are all in the line of Adam by birth, your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life by the *new* birth that comes by receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. When you do that, you become a child of God.

God knows *your* name. He knows you better than anyone else knows you. He knows you and loves you more than anyone else ever did. God knows *you personally*.

In Jacob's genealogy we read names that mean nothing to us. We live among millions of people. But God knows each person by name, and He loves each one of us. We may not be thinking of Him, but each one is precious in God's sight, and Christ died for each one. You are an individual to God. And the names listed in Jacob's genealogy are people who we don't know, but God does. He delighted in including their names because they were His. Do you belong to Him? Is your name written down in the Lamb's Book of Life?

## A FAMILY REUNION

When Jacob's wagon came into Goshen, Joseph was there to meet him. Joseph hugged his father's neck and embraced him, and they wept there for a good long while. The emotion was quite real. What a reunion this was.

Jacob was an old man, ready to die. God sustained him through the trip. Now, seeing Joseph both revived him and helped him be ready to die. God allowed him to live for a few happy years in Egypt, finally reunited with Joseph. Jacob is now "the child of God who lives by faith," and so he is called by his name, *Israel*.

Joseph tells his brothers that when Pharaoh asks them their occupation, they should tell him that they are shepherds and that they take care of cattle. The Egyptians didn't care for shepherds nor shepherding, so that opened up an opportunity for the children of Israel to do something that the Egyptians wouldn't want to do. Pharaoh was happy to entrust his stock to people he trusted.

Then Joseph presented his father to Pharaoh. We've watched Jacob through his whole life and at times were not impressed with his character. But that's shifted now that Jacob—now called Israel—is a man who walks by faith.

When Israel meets Pharaoh, he blesses him. Israel is beginning to live up to his name. Jacob blesses Pharaoh as a witness for God.

Pharaoh asks Jacob, "How old are you?"

The old Jacob would have said, *"Well, Pharaoh, I am 130 years old, and let me tell you what I've accomplished in my lifetime ...."* He would have bragged and boasted.

But Jacob is a different man now. He said his life is really nothing to brag about. "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life" (Genesis 47:8-9). Instead of bragging about tricking his old father, he says

he doesn't measure up to his fathers. Jacob is a changed man. He gives glory to God for his life, and he makes no boast that he has accomplished anything.

Jacob is now 130 years old and will be 147 when he dies. He spends 17 years in Egypt. He might have been on the verge of death when he came, but the joy of finding Joseph alive and of being with him prolonged his life 17 years.

Jacob (Israel) has finally arrived. What an opportunity he has to list his accomplishments or to brag that he's better than anyone else, but he doesn't take advantage. If we all told the truth, we would say that we are just a bunch of sinners and we haven't anything to brag about except a wonderful Savior who has been gracious and patient with us down through the years. He is all any of us have to boast about.

## THE FAMINE CONTINUES

As Joseph got his father and his brothers settled in "the land of Rameses," the famine continued. Because of Joseph's planning, grain had been stored in Egypt, but the land wasn't producing grain. Evidently the famine has spread all over Africa, because the Nile River is not overflowing, which is necessary for Egypt's crop production. Whole populations migrated to the cities where they would be near where the grain was stored. Joseph had planned this all out from the beginning.

Joseph, as Pharaoh's agent, was able to save Egypt and its neighbors from the severe season. But he also was used by God to fulfill His promises to bless his family through himself (promised in his dreams), and to bless the whole world through Abraham's descendants (see Genesis 12:3).

Joseph stewarded money from Egypt and Canaan, livestock, land and slaves, and 20% of future harvests. This tax was common, even generous, in the ancient Near East when the average was much more. But just as Jacob blessed Pharaoh for his generous gift of the best of Egyptian land, God blessed him with prosperity. Later, in Moses' time, God cursed a different Pharaoh because he dealt harshly with the Israelites.

## JACOB'S FINAL DAYS

When Jacob knew that his days were short, he called his sons together. He asked Joseph to promise him that they would bury him in Canaan, not Egypt. Perhaps he knew he would not make it back to Canaan in his lifetime.

Perhaps he thought his family might become comfortable in Egypt and never want to go back to the land God promised them.

This request revealed Jacob's faith in the covenant God made with his fathers. After all, the hope of the Old Testament is an *earthly* hope. Abraham believed he would be raised from the dead in that land, so he wanted to be buried there. Isaac believed the same. Now Jacob is expressing that same faith. Old Testament believers never hoped to "be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and enter the city of the New Jerusalem, which is the eternal and permanent home of the church. This is the hope of the church.

The hope of the Old Testament is in Christ's Kingdom, which will be set up on this earth. When that happens, Israel's great hope will be fulfilled, and these people will be raised for that Kingdom. The first thousand years of it will be a time of testing, and after that the eternal Kingdom will continue on and on.

This is why Jacob doesn't want to be buried in Egypt. If he had no faith or hope in God's promise to him, it wouldn't matter where he was buried.

It makes no difference where believers are buried today. At the time of the Rapture, wherever we are, we shall be raised, and our bodies will join our spirits; that is, if we have died before the Rapture takes place. If we are still living, then we shall be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. (See 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.) The living "in Christ" and the dead "in Christ" in all of these places will be caught up, no matter where our bodies are. Our hope is a heavenly hope.

Jacob believed this hope of resurrection and that is why he wants to be buried back in the land. He hopes to be raised from the dead in the Promised Land. Jacob has become a man of faith.

Jacob's last chapter was the best chapter of his life.

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**NEXT: Jacob gives blessings and his farewell message.**

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## LESSON 21



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. When the moment finally arrives and Joseph is ready to reveal himself to his brothers, he breaks down and weeps loudly. What does Joseph's reaction tell us about expressing our emotions?
2. How could Joseph have attributed the evil done by his brothers to the work of God?
3. Jacob's life comes full circle on the way to Egypt as he reaches Bethel and offers sacrifices to the God of his father. It has taken Jacob's entire life, but he has finally come back to where he started in faith. Are there ways we can mimic Jacob's trip to Bethel? What can we do to bring ourselves back to the place where we were spiritually close to God?



7. If you were tasked with interviewing the people we have encountered in the story of Jacob's life to write a biography of the man who had been renamed Israel, what would you title the biography?

*The spiritual life*  
IS A GROWTH AND  
A DEVELOPMENT,  
NOT SOMETHING THAT  
HAPPENS IN A MOMENT,  
*but over a lifetime.*



THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 22

# BLESSINGS AND BENEDICTIONS



Begin with prayer



Read **Genesis 48–50**



Listen at [TTB.org/Genesis](https://www.TTB.org/Genesis) to **Genesis 48**, **Genesis 49:1-15**,  
and **Genesis 49:16–50:26**

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Hebrews 11:21 tells us that “by faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.”

Jacob has come a long, long way in his life with God. He illustrates to us that the spiritual life is a growth and a development, not something that happens in a moment, but over a lifetime. Our life in God is a walk in the Spirit (see 2 Peter 3:18). God doesn’t force us to grow but is very patient with us, just as He was patient with Jacob.

As Jacob neared the end of his life, Joseph took his two sons to visit their grandfather. What a joy that must have been for Jacob—to see his favorite son, with his two young boys. Jacob never dreamed he would see Joseph again; he thought he had been killed. Yet he sees Joseph elevated to this important position in Egypt, and he can trace the way God had worked out the affairs of his life.

Jacob’s thoughts go back to the time God appeared to him at Luz (Bethel). He tells Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me ... and blessed me.” Jacob remembers God’s promise, “Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession” (Genesis 48:3-4).

God's promise that Jacob mentions runs through the Old and New Testaments. He made this same promise to the line of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The covenant had three parts: (1) the *nation*, (2) the *land*, and (3) the *blessing*. God rehearses the first two parts here with Jacob. (1) Nation: "I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people ...." (2) Land: "... and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession."

The third part of the covenant is important for us today, as it is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

## JACOB'S 12 TRIBES

When the Bible lists the 12 tribes of Israel, they don't include Joseph, but instead his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. (If you're doing the math, that makes 13 tribes, but Levi, as a tribe of priests, is not included in the count. Levites are not given any land but were scattered as priests throughout the other tribes.) Both of Joseph's boys are over 17 years old, because they were born before Jacob came to Egypt. They each become a tribe.

Now Jacob blessed his two grandsons. The one who would stand before Israel at his right hand would be the one with priority. Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, with his left hand on Manasseh's head. Joseph guided his right hand to Manasseh, the firstborn, and tried to correct it. But Jacob was doing this intentionally.

Even though Jacob couldn't see too well, he could tell what Joseph was doing. Joseph was pushing the older son to the position of Jacob's right hand and the younger son toward the left hand. But Jacob just switched hands. He crossed his hands and put his right hand on the younger son. He knowingly gives the blessing to the younger.

We have to remember that God doesn't pay attention to our customs, here giving the oldest priority favor. The oldest boy isn't always the one God chooses. He certainly doesn't choose any of us because of our natural ability. God can use talent, but it must be dedicated to Him. We must be *yielded* to Him to be used of Him.

Jacob gave the younger boy, Ephraim, the priority. Ephraim becomes the leader above Manasseh. In future generations we see that the tribe of Manasseh marched under the banner of the tribe of Ephraim in the

wilderness march, as described in Numbers 1. Joshua, the great leader after Moses among others, came out of the tribe of Ephraim. Manasseh would be a great tribe, too, but the younger son would be greater—“his descendants shall become a multitude of nations” (Genesis 48:19).

Then father Jacob blessed his own grown son, Joseph. It must have been a special moment. He blessed his son in the name of God, who “fed me all my life long.” Jacob boasts about nothing except a wonderful Redeemer. He wants his descendants to have this same blessing. And because Joseph has two sons representing him, he would have a greater inheritance than the other brothers. In addition, Jacob gave Joseph a personal gift of land near Sychar where Joseph was buried (see John 4:5). This continues to be contested land to this day.

## JACOB BLESSES HIS SONS

After Jacob blesses Joseph and his sons, the rest of the sons went into their father’s deathbed. Jacob now has all 12 sons around him, and he gives them his farewell message.

Anything that a man says on his deathbed is important because he likely will tell the truth, if he hasn’t told it before. He’s got nothing to lose.

Jacob now wants to tell his sons about “the last days.” Interestingly, some of what Jacob said has been fulfilled, but most of it waits to be fulfilled. Moses tells us a little more about the tribes, but quite remarkably, all of Jacob’s prophetic insights look to the last days.

Jacob has been on the go all of his life and wants to keep going, but he knows his days are complete. Now he leans on his staff and brings his boys in close.

He begins with **Reuben**. He recognizes that a great deal about his oldest boy reminds him of himself. “Unstable as water,” described Jacob’s life in the beginning, and it was true of his oldest son for his whole life. “You will not excel,” Jacob told his firstborn (Genesis 49:4). We don’t know a lot about Reuben’s tribe, except that it didn’t produce any significant leaders, judges, kings, nor prophets. During the time of the judges, Reubenites were uncertain and hesitant (see Judges 5:15-16). In part, Reuben’s instability is due to his uncontrolled sex drive. He slept with his father’s concubine. By not giving firstborn responsibilities to Reuben, Israel protected his family from reckless leadership.



The next two boys, **Simeon and Levi**, are described together because they not only were full blood brothers, but they had the same disposition. They were violent, angry men (see Genesis 34:25-31). Jacob called these boys, “instruments of cruelty” (Genesis 49:5). When they defended their sister, Dinah, only one man was guilty, but they killed a whole town. Jacob said they would be scattered, and they were. Simeon was the southern-most tribe. But when the nation divided, they just fade away into the other tribes. In Levi, however, we see God’s grace at work. God took a cruel person like Levi and made him head of the priestly tribe. God’s grace changed us from sinners into a kingdom of priests also. All believers are priests today. None of us deserve such an honor (see 1 Peter 2:5).

These first three sons suffered for their sins, but Jacob’s prophecies were still a blessing. They were still in the family and enjoyed the promises as Jacob’s heirs. Rueben lost his first place, then Simeon and Levi lost their role, but there’s another boy, also a sinner—but notice what the grace of God did for him.

From the line of **Judah** will come the Lord Jesus. One of the most remarkable prophecies in Scripture says, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people” (Genesis 49:10).

Jacob/Israel’s prophecy for Judah is the most important, so let’s look closer at it. We’ve been told in Genesis 3:15, the very first prophecy in the Bible, that the “seed of the woman” will bruise the serpent’s head. He’ll be the one to get the victory. That seed was confirmed to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob—and now it’s confirmed to Judah. Out of Judah’s line, the Messiah will come. He’s called Shiloh, meaning “rest/tranquility.” He’s the One who will bring rest. And the people who heard Jesus in that day when they rejected Him remembered He turned to the crowds and said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). That’s Shiloh. Shiloh had come.

Jesus is that Seed; He’s Shiloh. And He’s also the One who will hold the scepter. The scepter of this universe is in nail-pierced hands today. And not only do these pictures point to Christ, but we’re told that, “there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel” (Genesis 49:24). Jesus is called a shepherd and a stone. In Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17, the coming Messiah is also called a star. So, with the coming of Christ, He is the Seed, He’s Shiloh who brings rest, He’s the One who holds the scepter. He is the Shepherd



who gives His life, and He's the Chief Shepherd who is coming someday. He is the Stone that the builders rejected, who has become the cornerstone, and He's the Star, the bright and morning star for His church today.

Still concerning Judah, Israel continues to tell his son that from his line will come One riding on a donkey into Jerusalem, offering himself as the Messiah, the King, the Savior. He's wearing garments washed in wine, which is His own blood. When He comes for a second time, Isaiah 63:2-3 tells us that He will wear dyed garments, not in His own blood this time, but the blood of His enemies. This is one of the most remarkable prophecies about our Lord Jesus Christ that we have in Scripture.

If we trace Jesus' line from the beginning, we'll see:

- Adam to Abel (when Abel was murdered, God raised up another seed, Seth)
- Seth to Noah
- Noah to Shem
- Shem to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- Jacob to Judah

God is moving according to a pattern and a plan.

Here are Jacob's blessings to the rest of the brothers. Many of these prophecies were geographical and wouldn't make sense for hundreds of years until Joshua divided the country between the tribes. Their detail was remarkable.

**Zebulun** will live furthest north by the seacoast. He will prosper, perhaps by working with the Phoenicians in their maritime industry or because the north/south trade route from Turkey and Syria traveled down to Egypt through this region.

**Issachar's** future will be tied to the land, specifically in lower Galilee and the Valley of Jezreel. They will be farmers, preferring harvesting over a political life. They will form the hardworking backbone of the nation.

**Dan** will be the judge of Israel—coming true through Samson's judgeship. This leadership will backfire, however, and will need the salvation of the Lord Jacob promises. Dan's tribe eventually leads the nation into idolatry and rebellion.

**Gad** will be effective in battle and will effectively defend his tribe.

**Asher** will enjoy very fruitful soil in the lowlands of the Mount Carmel range, some of the most fertile land in Canaan.

**Naphtali's** blessing, "is a deer let loose; he uses beautiful words," could mean he will enjoy the admiration of the other tribes in a special way (like what Deborah and Barak sang about in Judges 4-5) or that he would speak flattering words to the Canaanites.

**Joseph's** blessings were rich and abundant. During his lifetime, Joseph faced a lot of opposition that he overcame by faith. Like the vine over a wall, Joseph had left the land and gone down into Egypt, but he still was a witness for God there. Judah may have received the leadership of the tribes, but Joseph obtained the double portion of the birthright (1 Chronicles 5:2). His sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were put in the land where Samaritans lived later on; in Jesus' day it was called "Gentile territory" (a great place for gospel witness). The two tribes that came from Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, became very prominent, important tribes, but these tribes also caused the division of the kingdom. They led the nation in idolatry. Jeroboam came out of the tribe of Ephraim and in these new northern tribes they worshiped the two golden calves (see 1 Kings).

Perhaps in light of this, Jacob/Israel calls them back to the God of Israel, the Mighty One of Jacob, the Creator, the Redeemer, "the God of your father," and "the Almighty" (Genesis 49:25).

**Benjamin** is pictured as a warrior ("a wolf"). His tribe produced many warriors in Israel's history (Ehud, Saul, Jonathan, among others). Jacob prophesied that Benjamin would dominate his enemies, "morning" + "night" = "always." When Judah's southern kingdom pulled away from the idolatrous northern tribes, Benjamin's tribe stayed with the house of David.

From here forward in Israel's history, every Jew comes out of one of these tribes. We follow David and his line most closely. David came out of the tribe of Judah, Jesus' kingly line.

## JACOB DIES

After he charged his sons, Jacob asks to be buried "with my fathers" in the cave that Abraham had paid for in Canaan. He wanted to make sure he stayed in that land until the day where he will be raised from the dead when God fulfills His promises to the nation Israel.

Today, the believer's hope, as part of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, is to be caught up with Him in the air and to go to a place called the New Jerusalem out in space. These are two different hopes, and they are both glorious.

When Jacob died, Joseph naturally grieved. He loved his father. Joseph then directed his physicians to embalm his father's body. We know that the Egyptians were experts at mummification. It took the Egyptians 40 days to embalm and mourn Jacob. They respected this grand old man called Israel who had become a real saint in the land of Egypt. They also respected him as Joseph's father. Once the days of mourning were past, Joseph asked and received Pharaoh's permission to return to Canaan to bury his father (their little ones and flocks must stay in Goshen—perhaps as a guarantee that Joseph would return).

A great number of attendants and family accompanied Joseph back to Canaan to bury Jacob. It caused quite a stir among the Canaanites. Likely, Jacob's mummy is still in Hebron today.

## THE BROTHERS ARE FEARFUL AGAIN

Now that their father is gone, the guilty/forgiven brothers are afraid that Joseph will turn on them—that his forgiveness wasn't real. They talked about it with Jacob before he died and he wrote Joseph a message that basically said, *"Please still forgive them."* When the brothers confess this to Joseph, he breaks down crying. And his brothers fall on their faces again, repenting of their sin. They offered to be his servant. (How many times has young Joseph's dream of them falling down before him come true?)

Joseph told them through his tears, *"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"*

***But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.***

—Genesis 50:20

God has a far-off purpose that we can't see. When trouble comes or when we ask, *Why does God allow this?*, we must remember that He has a good purpose in view. He doesn't allow anything to happen to you unless it will accomplish a good purpose in your life.

Joseph kindly assured them that he would take care of them all. And he did.

Joseph lived till he was 110 years old and enjoyed his great-great-grandchildren.

## **THIS IS THE WAY THE BOOK OF GENESIS ENDS**

It began with God creating the heaven and the earth, and it ends with a coffin in Egypt. What had happened to the human family? Sin had intruded into the creation of God.

Why was Joseph not taken up to Canaan and buried there at this time? Joseph was a hero in Egypt, and they probably had a monument raised at his grave. But Joseph says to his own people, *“When you go back to Canaan, don’t leave my bones down here!”* Hebrews 11:22 mentions this as the crowning act of faith in Joseph’s life. Joseph had the same hope as Jacob—a confidence that God would give them the land of Canaan as an eternal possession. Joseph believed that God would raise up His earthly people to inherit the land of promise.

In Exodus 13 we see that Moses and the children of Israel took the bones of Joseph with them when they left Egypt.

## LESSON 22



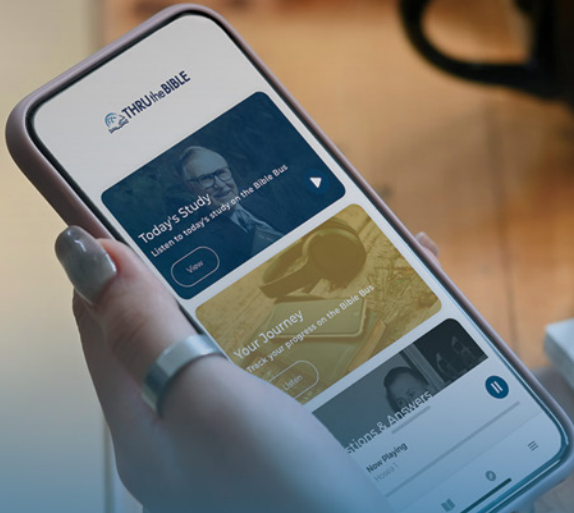
## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. For all of the negative things we could say about Jacob, he had an amazing finish to his story. How special would it be for it to be said of you that when you were dying, you worshiped?
2. Why do you think it was important for Jacob to rehearse all God had done for him, for Joseph, and his sons?
3. When we read the story of the patriarchs, it is a direct line to us today because of God's promise that, in them, all the world would be blessed. What does it tell us about God that when He was dealing with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob He also had us in mind?



7. Imagine you were an Egyptian seeing Jacob's family move to your land. What do you think your perspective would have been on these shepherds from a foreign land?

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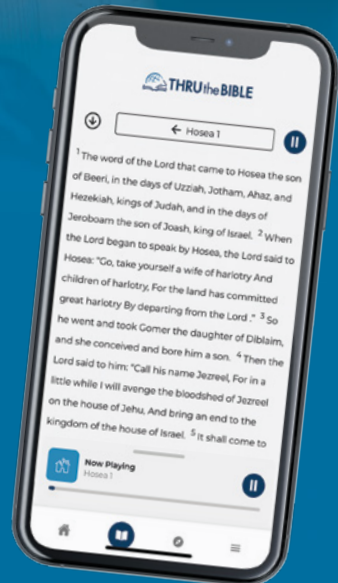


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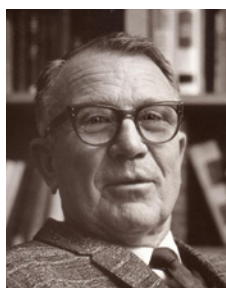
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## ABOUT DR. MCGEE AND *THRU THE BIBLE*

Dr. J. Vernon McGee, a pioneer in Christian radio, was a pastor and teacher of God's Word who in 1967 started *THRU the BIBLE*, a 30-minute radio program. His goal was to reach his local area—the San Gabriel Valley and metropolitan Los Angeles area—with the whole Word of God, simply told.

To his surprise, people listened. And the Word spread. Today, God uses *THRU the BIBLE* to share His Word with people in almost every nation on earth through over 250 global languages. We are committed to “take His whole Word to the whole world” and invite everyone with this same heart to join us in this mission.

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