



Genesis

Origins

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“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” Acts 8:30b- 31a

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Genesis Intro Part 1 | Origin Story

Welcome to Through the Word. My name is Kris, and today we open the book of Genesis. And what a journey we have ahead of us. Genesis is the origin story of all origin stories, the *epic* of *epics*—with some of the greatest stories and heroes of all time. Today we introduce the book. The word *Genesis* means origin—or *beginning*. And the book opens with those iconic words:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

Genesis is *the* origin story—the stories that explain how things got to be the way they are. Which is pretty amazing because the backstory changes everything. Think about it. What fueled Batman’s thirst for justice? Or Spiderman’s sense of great responsibility? And why is Aang the *last* airbender? It’s *always* the backstory.

Not just the *hero’s* backstory—their parents’ story, and their *people’s*. The backstory *shapes* the present—we understand today *so much better* when we go back to the roots—to the first seeds that became a forest.

Now consider: What if someone told *your* origins story? All you *experienced*, all you *overcame*. I’ll bet it would explain a lot. And your parents’ story. And back further—to the roots of your family tree—the people, the stories, the tragedies and triumphs that led up to *who you are*.

In a way, that’s what Genesis does for all of us. It goes back to the start—to the roots of life and of what it means to be human. And it explains *a lot*.

Genesis is the origins story for all creation, from the smallest atom to the furthest star to you and me.

Here in Genesis we get the foundations of humanity—made in the very *image of our Creator* (Genesis 1:27). The foundations of life and death, love and hate, good and evil—and the foundations of our relationships with each other, and with our Creator.

And all of those foundation pieces come through reading some phenomenal stories and fascinating characters. Because God works out his great plan for the world through the lives of ordinary people: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, *Joseph*.

Now their stories are not neat and pretty. They're full of struggle and deception and dirt and blood and all the complex mess that we call life. Abraham and Sarah are called out—to leave all they know, and trust God for a place they've never seen, and promises they have *no* sign of.

Jacob is a personal favorite. He's a trickster—raised in a *family* of faith, but *full* of issues. His struggle is epic. And his *faith*? Well—that's complicated. He calls God “the God of my father.” While other lives are a *walk* with God, Jacob's is a *wrestling match*.

And then Joseph. One of the greatest characters in all literature, Joseph holds *on* to faith through trial after tribulation—betrayed, sold, enslaved, imprisoned.

And every story delivers a phenomenal *depth* of character. If you've heard the kid versions—or the fast-forward summary version where everything works

out in a couple pages, get ready for a whole new experience. These stories are gritty, real, and *rich*.

But they are also redemption stories. God *redeems*. He takes broken people with broken lives—and finds the good, restores the purpose, and makes them *whole* again.

And there's one more character in *all* these stories—the one at the heart of it all. **The Bible is the story of God**, and of God's *relationship* with humankind. Genesis begins with God. He creates the universe, makes man and woman in His image, places them in paradise, and sets the rules. When they break the rules, it is God who responds, God who punishes, and God who sets in motion a plan to save them. As generations pass, we find humanity turning far from God, yet God pursues. He finds Enoch. He finds Noah, he finds Abram.

And He establishes **covenant**. That word is at the core of Genesis—and the whole Bible. A covenant is a binding agreement to form a relationship, and that is exactly what God is creating in Genesis. A new relationship—with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and ultimately—with us.

Now you have to ask: **Why doesn't the Bible tell the story of the whole world?** Why so much focus on one family line? Well, the Bible is about God's plan for the whole world—for *redemption*, and for *a new covenant*. But here in Genesis, God chooses to bring about that plan through one people. Don't misunderstand—this isn't about favorites, and it's not about good guys and bad guys—it's about God's plan. Listen to the words God uses in Genesis

12—his very first promises to the first patriarch, before Abraham had a single descendant:

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you... and *all peoples on earth* will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2-3).

If you want to understand God’s big plan for the *world*, you must follow the story of this people: *Israel*. In that story, the main characters will *not* always be *the good guys*. It’s not that kind of story. *God* is good. The *people... are* people. They get it right at times, and quite *wrong* at others. And we can *relate* to that. They’re not good guys or bad guys, but they are *chosen*.

And sometimes the life they’re chosen for—is not easy. They go through hurt and harm—often at the hands of their own kin. And God doesn’t prevent it—but he does work *through* it. By the time we close the book, one of our *best* characters will declare to some of the *worst* of them:

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20).

Now you may even recognize that verse. We quote it in church. But believe me, it’s meaning will go *so much deeper* and hit you *so much harder* when you get *the full story*. It is *redemption*.

And that redemption story would mean a *whole lot* to the man who first put it in writing, and to those he was writing to. Now the text of Genesis does not say who authored it. But the Bible refers multiple times to *Moses* as the

primary author of the Bible's opening books. Several times we see God instructing Moses to "Write down everything the Lord has said" (Exodus 24:4). Later passages throughout the Bible—and even Jesus Himself—point back to Moses as the author. Did Moses gather stories passed down, hear them directly from God, or some of both? We don't know. Yet for believers, this is *the Word of God*.

As 2nd Timothy reminds us, "All Scripture is God *breathed*." And 2nd Peter explains that Scripture never came by human will, but "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

So when we read Genesis, we're hearing Moses' words to God's people in his day—and God's words to all people for all time. And Moses' time matters. He wrote these stories as God's people were leaving slavery and stepping into promise. For them, these stories were *evidence*—God was faithful to their forebears, and He is faithful still.

But then—that word *evidence* raises a question: *Did these stories actually happen?* Are we reading ancient mythology or historical record? In the story of Creation, are we reading poetic interpretation or scientific precision? Those questions open a lot of debate. There are many views and many opinions. And yet—it matters. And it *affects* how you read the whole book. So before we hit chapter one, we'll come back for our *Intro Part 2* to talk through *all the views* and help *you* think through how to read this epic origin story.

You know, a few years back I decided to ask my Dad for his backstory. I didn't know much about his childhood. So he told me. He started with *his* dad's story, and each week I'd call him up and get a little more story. My dad was an American child in occupied Japan, tracked Russian subs in the Cold War, escaped a coup in El Salvador, and answered the phone in DC when the embassy in Iran called. His old boss was the top ranking hostage. It was *fascinating*. A few months in, we had almost gotten to the part when I was born—when I got a call. My Dad had a stroke. He lost the ability to speak. My father passed a few months later, but I was so glad that I finally got to hear *his* story—part of my story—part of who I am.

And that is how I read Genesis. It is our story, a part of who we are. And like my Dad did, we'll pick it up next time right where we left off—in the beginning.

Genesis Intro Part 2 | History, Poetry, or Myth?

Welcome back to our *intro* to Genesis. This is Part 2, and today we ask a crucial question: How do we read Genesis? Is it *literal* or *mythological*? *History* or *poetry*? Or all of those? Did these stories *actually happen*? The answers are hotly debated. So I'll do my best to stay balanced as I present several viewpoints.

My hope is that your main experience with Genesis will be entering the stories and relating to the characters. We're tackling historical accuracy *now* so you'll be ready to fully engage the story. Don't let the debate dissect the text until it dies.

Now much of the debate centers on *science*. Genesis isn't a science book, but its early chapters explain how the world was formed. Is it accurate? Is it meant to be? I studied engineering and worked on rockets, so I love this stuff, but I don't want it to distract us. So I'll give you a summary here in the intro, and we'll dive much deeper in our audio plan called *Science & the Bible*. If you like this stuff like I *love* this stuff, join me for *Science & the Bible*. For now, a quick overview.

And right up front, I want to frame our approach with another question: ***How important are these questions—to you?*** Seriously. How much do you *care*? That question—is crucial. Some people talk as if their faith *depends* on these answers. Like—if Genesis 1 isn't *literally true*, then *the Bible isn't true*. And if that, then even God isn't true! So Genesis 1 *must be true!*

And the atheist responds. “*No, Genesis 1 is not true, and that’s exactly why I don’t believe in the Bible or God.*”

But are those the stakes—for *you*?

Think of it this way: Picture in front of you a *Jenga* tower—little wooden blocks all piled up in a neat column. That tower is your *construct* of the world—it’s how you piece together your understanding of the world you live in. And all those blocks represent your *experiences, values, beliefs, relationships, etc.*—the pieces that build your world.

The tower is how you make sense of life. The essential blocks go at the base, the movable ones go higher. So when I ask, “How important are these questions?”, think of it as, “Where does it belong in my tower?”.

The idea here is *constructive deconstruction*. Sometimes we let *others* give blocks *that matter to them* a foundational spot in *our* construct. But that’s dangerous.

Example: A kid hears an intelligent Christian speaker claim the earth is six thousand years old, with evidence. Convinced, he wedges that block into his foundation—though he doesn’t fully understand the science.

Years later, an equally intelligent professor describes *billions of years*. He too has evidence. The kid gets defensive—not because he understands the science either way—but because a *foundational block* is challenged. *God* is on the line!

But hold on! Should that kid's *faith in God* be at stake for a scientific argument that *he cannot follow*? Should he decide his faith based on which smart guy is more convincing?

No. He shouldn't. And neither should you.

The truth is—there are very intelligent women and men on every side of these arguments. Believers, non-believers, scientists, historians. And each one makes a convincing case. But this is *your* faith. If you're a cosmologist by trade, go ahead—put this block at the *foundation*. If not, be wise. If science is a crucial part of how you see the world—as it is for me—then these blocks are important—mid-level. Critical, but also *movable*.

However, if your strengths lie elsewhere—and you do not particularly enjoy following complex science arguments, please do *not base your faith in Almighty God on someone else's science argument*. If they're diving deep on the age of the earth, the speed of light and carbon dating, do *not* put your *faith* on the chopping block.

Even if you're great at science, be wise about placing this block. I've been studying science for decades, and the Bible nearly as long, and I *still* wrestle this stuff, and *still* change my mind. And that's why I keep blocks like *age of the earth* higher—where it's safe to question and *wonder*, and my entire view of self and others isn't in jeopardy every time someone challenges it.

Don't build on a *wobbly* block. Move it. *That is constructive deconstruction*. You can build faith *and* build scientific understanding *stronger* when the tower's not in danger every time you *wonder*.

And that's my hope for you. *Wonder. Question. Challenge.* The Bible is *meant* for wonder. Genesis will bring up *hard questions*. It's *supposed to*. Good questions are how we *learn*. Maybe you struggle with science, but you *love* a good story. Awesome. *Engage the story*. And for those who *love* science too, isn't it questioning and wonder that move *science* forward?

So, where do these blocks belong—for you? Got it? Now let's dig in.

For a scientist, Genesis stops you about four words in: "In the beginning *God*." How do I *prove* that? How do I test *God*? That very argument has been cited in school board decisions to keep God *out* of science class. In my own youth, *that* was my reason for rejecting God: science verifies truth, and science can't prove God.

Interesting note: It is *also* impossible to test or prove that something is *random*. Thus *evolution by random mutation* is equally *unprovable*. In fact, no theory about our origin is fully provable, and every theory—with or without God—faces many challenges scientifically. That's okay. It's what makes both science—and *creation*—so fascinating: the *questions* are just as intriguing as the answers.

So what are the various views on Genesis—from those who *believe the Bible*? Some say that the creation story in Genesis is clearly poetry—rightfully crediting God, yet never *intended* to accurately describe the events scientifically.

Genesis 1 is in fact beautiful poetry, yet other believers say that it is also *accurate*—because it's *God's Word*. Yet among these, there are still varying

theories—with two major schools of thought being *Young Earth* and *Old Earth*. Young Earth theory holds the most *literal* interpretation of the text—where the seven days of creation are each literal twenty-four hour periods. Young Earth theory also adds up the stories that follow to find that earth is about six to ten thousand years old. Old Earth theory says that each of the seven days is in fact an *age* or *era* of the earth—lasting *millions* to even *billions* of years.

The ***Big Bang Theory*** is interesting. While some Christians today feel it contradicts Genesis, the theory was first proposed by a Catholic Priest, Georges Lemaitre. At the time, atheistic scientists despised the big bang theory because it insisted that the universe had a *beginning*—like in Genesis—and also forced the question: What started it? We'll come back to that.

Now, **evolution** is a sticking point. Most believers in *all* camps believe in *adaptation* and *natural selection*—the *observable* parts of evolution. From there, opinions vary. Many believe the *full* evolutionary theory, yet simply believe that *God* started and God guides it, and that Genesis poetically captures some point at which God took hold of the first humans and *formed them in His image*.

Others believe that while much evolution does take place *within* a species, one species never *evolved* into another. Some believe in evolution in general—but not the evolution of *man*. They view similarities in DNA or design not as evidence of relationship, but of the same designer. In Genesis, the description of animals made *according to their kind* fits well the concept of evolution *within* species. God makes two felines—and everything from house cat to mountain lion follows.

So the views vary. Yet all believers challenge fully *atheistic* evolution—the theory of *random* events *designing* the wondrous complexities of *life—without God*. Even the simplest cells hold thousands of astonishingly complex machines, all coded in DNA. Evolution attempts to explain the *progress* of living things, but *does not explain* where the machines, the code, or reproduction came from. It offers *no proven explanation* of where the building blocks, designs, or the laws of science *came from*. None.

So what do we do with that? Well first, understand that while these questions are important, they're not deal breakers on faith. You can read Genesis 1 as poetic or literal—or be undecided. You can believe young or old earth—or question both. But *bring your questions to the Bible*.

For me, faith in God is a foundation stone—I build my life on it. Faith in the Bible is pretty close—because it has *proven* itself over time. But the block with my interpretation of Genesis 1 or my views on evolution goes much higher—where it's free to move and adjust.

But moving on from there, what about *the rest of Genesis*? Can we read it *all* as poetic—like a mythology? The flood story has similar disagreements. But what about Abraham? The implications here are much different. God makes covenant promises to Abraham's family line—ultimately to *Israel*. Those promises include a Savior for the whole world. Not a mythical savior, a real one. The lands are real. The people of Israel are *real*. Jesus is a real descendant of Abraham. We have more evidence of a historical Jesus than we do of just about any other ancient person. So while I respect the opinions of those who disagree, I personally am convinced these are *real historical people*.

Maybe you're still undecided. That's okay. Engage the stories—even as you question them. They'll challenge you too. And if science intrigues you, check out our Science & the Bible series.

But for now, start with an attitude of *wonder*. We're about to embark on a journey through some of the greatest and most important stories in the history of our world. Does it matter if you read them as poetic or literal? Of course it does. But read them.

There is one way to read that is absolutely wrong. And that is to read *without meaning*. A poetic story can deliver truth that is just as *real* and *meaningful* as a literal one. As for me, I like to read it as *both*. It is beautifully poetic. And I engage with the characters as real people. If I get to Heaven and the Lord tells me I was off, that's okay. I can be wrong. I just don't want to miss what God wants me to see, and I think this is how to find it.

Engage the stories, relate to the people. And join me on a journey—*back* to the beginning.

Genesis 1 | In the Beginning

Welcome back everyone. We begin our journey through Genesis at chapter 1 today. If you've ever been fascinated by the creative process—an artist at work, an inventor in the lab—this is as good as it gets. It is the story of Creation.

Now for my fellow science thinkers—many questions will arise here. Please save those for our Science & the Bible series. The science matters—but today we're here to engage with the story. Genesis 1 unfolds in sublime poetry—words that carry beauty and majesty, painting the creation story like a sweeping symphony. Don't just read it, feel it. Let it wash over you. It all begins in verse 1:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

What an opening. And in just one sentence the foundations are in place: the beginning—time; the heavens—space; and the earth—matter. And God creating it all. The Artist has his workspace prepared. The canvas and raw materials are ready. Then in verse 2:

“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

That picture stirs the soul. A formless earth. Empty. Dark. But the Spirit hovers.

“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:3).

Oh what I would give to see that moment. Light is a wonder—so elegantly simple _ yet complex beyond comprehension. All the beauty of the visible world comes to us by way of light. Every wondrous color bounces around at light speed as photons with slight variations in wavelength. What a marvel. Light is energy—both wave and particle. Light is beauty—enabling sight. And light will prove to be one of the Bible’s greatest themes. 1st John says that God is light. In him there is no darkness. When Jesus arrives, the Bible describes the event as light entering the world. So we can see.

Back here in verse 4:

“God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:4).

I find something deeply satisfying in that sentence. God saw—it was good. Have you ever looked at something you made—a machine that works, a turn of phrase or rhyme that fits, the ideal solution with simplicity of design—and all the careful thought and clever insight that you poured in just sings back to you. Because it’s good. The Hebrew word *tōb* indicates pleasing and agreeable—like your very soul agrees with its goodness.

“God saw that the light—was good.” And is it ever. Don’t get me started on the electromagnetic spectrum. Wonder of wonders. As before, evolution offers no explanation whatsoever for the origin of light. We know how it’s made. We cannot explain why it exists. Its design. Its nature still boggles the greatest scientists.

Now watch carefully.

“...and he separated the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:4b).

Separation creates order. God is a God of order. And he will continue to separate throughout creation—and to the very end of the Bible. Two big themes already: light and separation.

Okay, so I can't resist just a bit of science fun here. Have you ever considered what the laws of science teach us about origins? Conservation of mass and energy—they cannot come from nothing. Or entropy—order cannot come from disorder. Not without something outside creating them. And they cannot be eternal—because counting time from negative infinity will never arrive at two thousand anything. Time, space, matter, energy, and order must have an origin—from outside. The laws of science insist on it.

Now look back at Genesis. In the beginning—time, God created the heavens—space, and the earth—matter, “let there be light”—energy, and he separated—order. And the source of it all —God—outside the universe. Did the Bible just answer every demand of the laws of science for our origins in the first four verses? I think it did.

Okay. Enough of that. Back to the story. Verse 5:

“God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day” (Genesis 1:5).

Now that word day is seen by some as a twenty-four hour period, and others as an era or age. The Bible tells us that God sees time differently—a day could be a thousand years, and vice versa. So for me, that's God's business. But I relate to this as a good day's work. Verse 6:

“And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water” (Genesis 1:6).

That vault between waters is the sky—Earth's astonishing atmosphere—separating clouds above from oceans below. Now keep in mind as you read that God is not simply putting clouds here and waters there, he is designing the very nature of things—gravity and temperature, evaporation and condensation that make the weather and water cycle possible. Science and art come together in one phenomenal masterpiece of design. Life cannot live without it. And again, an atheist view has no explanation for any of these building blocks outside of sheer chance.

So God separated waters to form the sky, then on day 3 God separated waters again to form dry land. And in verse 10:

“God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:10).

Have you marveled—at the very goodness—of the sky? Of the land? Of the sea? They are wonders all.

And in verse 11: “Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so” (Genesis 1:11).

Now this is amazing to me. God made all the beauty and color and intricate complexity of plants—out of dirt. And to every plant and tree, He gave the ability to bear seeds. Seeds are phenomenal. Every tiny, unimpressive seed hides within it detailed blueprints—from roots to stem to branches to flowers to fruit. It's all in there—coded in a language more complex than you can possibly imagine. Even the construction tools and machinery are tucked away inside that little seed.

How did that get there? Without it—no life.

So the land was planted, and once again in verse 12:

“God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:12).

And indeed it is—so good. Next time you see something beautiful growing, stop and appreciate _ its goodness.

Now it would seem that all those plants are initially living off God's light, but on day four He provides a new source. In verse 14, God fills the expanse of space with the stars and sun and moon in all their brilliance. I love the moon. And did you know that it is sized and placed with incredible precision—for light, and tides and seasons that make life possible? Notice again the word separate—day from night. And once again, “God saw that it was good.”

For the poetry lovers, watch how the rhythms and repetitions rise and fall like a symphony—the soundtrack of Creation—celebrating its beauty, its order, and its goodness.

“And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day” (Genesis 1:19).

Verse 20:

“And God said, ‘Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky’ (Genesis 1:20).

I changed my mind. This is the day I want to see! I want to see God plan the octopus. Specifically—the mimic octopus. Life underwater—astounds me. Life in the skies—exhilarates me. What a day!

God saw that it was good. And this time, he tells them to be fruitful and fill the waters—fly across the earth.

“And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day” (Genesis 1:23).

And at long last—day six.

“And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds” (Genesis 1:24).

Two words worthy of note: land—because animals are indeed made of dirt, and kinds—because species are a cornerstone of biological science to this day. And it is truly a masterpiece of design. Or as God observes—good.

One moment for dramatic pause—and at last, verse 26:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

Step back—and take in the moment of invention, the triumph of design, the masterpiece of artistry. The human body is—without rival—the most complex, most magnificent, most... indescribably brilliant design of working machinery in the known universe. Simply astounding. It is good.

And read carefully. Two essentials to God’s design for our humanity: the image of God, and the dominion of man.

The concept of God’s image fascinates me. It is as though God puts his signature on the masterpiece—marking it with a seal of his own nature. His reflection. What does it mean to be made in God’s image? Ponder that. We’ll come back to it.

Verse 28 is God’s first blessing for man:

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28a).

God gifts them with plants and fruit for food. And what do you make of man’s dominion? What does it mean to rule over the creatures of land and sky and sea? If indeed mankind is to reflect God, what should that rule look like?

Tyranny? Self-serving? Certainly not. Godly rule is service—to tend and care as a shepherd.

And so the poetry and majesty draws to a close in verse 31:

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day” (Genesis 1:31).

Read Genesis 1 today; and if you get one thing from this chapter, I hope that you will take some time each day to do just what God did. Stop. Look around at what He made; and see that it is very good. Now the world that we see today is a corrupted version of what God saw on day 6—sin has added all kinds of bad to the good. But if you will look, you are still surrounded by the goodness of God’s creation. So read the chapter, and take some advice from Job 37, “Stop, and consider God’s wonders.”

Genesis 2 | Garden of Eden

Welcome back to our journey through Genesis. In chapter 2, the story rewinds for a closer look at the creation of man and woman. It's the only story in the Bible that takes place before sin entered the world.

A little glimpse at life in paradise, with some insight into what we were made for. Do you ever get that sense that you were made for something? But what is it? And who put it there?

In Genesis 2, we get a closeup view—of not only when we were made, but what we were made for. A series of gifts from God to mankind—and each one gives us purpose.

Chapter 2 picks up right where we left off, after day six. Verse 1:

“Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work” (Genesis 2:1-2).

So God rests. He earned it. His work was good—and His rest was good.

Verse 3:

“Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” (Genesis 2:3).

Now watch carefully. Two words introduce two of the Bible's greatest themes: holy and rest. And what a gift that is. God blessed the rest.

For every overstressed student who ever woke up and realized—it's Saturday. For every weary soul who felt that freedom—I don't have to work today. Thank God for the gift of sabbath.

And watch the words—he made it—holy.

Holy means set apart—for a purpose. It also means whole or complete—not lacking. Honestly, it's a tough word to fully grasp, but the sabbath is a great start. One day a week is set apart—totally other. The whole day stands out. It's special, a time of rest—to enjoy people and enjoy God. Do you have memories of a time set apart—a vacation or retreat—that freed your heart to be the best version of you, and enjoy the best version of each other?

I know—it's rare. But holy things are rare. And here in Genesis 2, God shows us by example—a little secret to finding them. Rest. Enjoy a day set apart.

Both rest and holiness will weave through the Bible like divine tapestry.

The gift of Sabbath—we are made to find our rest in Him.

But right here, our story—backs up. Many scholars believe that what follows is an entirely different Creation account. God has a new name in this account. The genre changes from poetry to story, and we get a different view of God making humankind.

I do see those differences. But I just don't see a contradiction. A different view is precisely what it is. We zoom in to day six. God goes by several names and titles throughout the Bible, and each one is meaningful in its setting. Here we

are introduced for the first time—to God’s name. The LORD. The English word is misleading—because the Hebrew YHWH is a name, not a title. It’s relational. Yahweh. We’ll have the whole Bible to explore that, but in chapter two, we have the Lord’s relationship with the very first creatures made in his own image.

Let’s pick up the action at verse 7:

“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

In Hebrew, man is adam, formed from the ground—adamah. Some years ago I recall watching a documentary on evolution, where a scientist expressed the great disappointment that humans felt when science discovered that humans are made of the same elements on the periodic table that dirt is made of. In his view, it meant that humans—aren’t special.

But that’s not true at all. Humans are made of dirt—the Bible taught us that. It is stunning what God can do with dirt. But what makes us special isn’t the dirt—or even the design. That great machine did not live until the Lord “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” God’s image in chapter one, God’s breath in chapter two.

Verse 8:

“Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Genesis 2:8-9a).

What a plan: Trees turn dirt into pomegranates, and we eat the pomegranate—to replenish us. Or we eat the bird who eats the bug who eats the leaf from the branch from the tree from the roots from the dirt—because we are all of us—dirt. Same elements, rearranged spectacularly.

Our body connects us to Earth. Our breath connects to Heaven. Yet consider—food replenishes the body—same source. But what replenishes the soul? Can you think of something else in this world—that is breathed by God?

Now back in verse 9—something interesting.

“In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 1:9b).

What—are—those? The tree of life. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Two more themes that will span the Bible. These two trees reveal God’s will—and man’s freedom to choose—or refuse it.

A river waters the whole garden—splitting into four headwaters—the Pishon, the Gihon, the Euphrates and the Tigris. Even Bible literalists recognize that the flood would have remapped all of them, so there’s little use searching for Eden—though the hints are intriguing.

Now Verse 15:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 1:15).

Good work. Purposeful work. A place to build, to care, to create. This is the second gift.

The gift of work—we are made for purpose by God.

Then verse 16:

“And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’” (Genesis 1:16-17).

Now what sort of gift is this? Well, food is a lovely gift. But this is a command—one that comes with do and do not. But watch the words. “You are free to eat.” This gift comes with freedom.

But why the do not? God’s will is good fruit and good life. So why does freedom come with a don’t? Why can’t he eat that one?

But that’s just it. Adam can eat that one. He is free to choose it. Think about it. Would Adam have freedom—if there is no real choice? Would the choice mean anything—if there was no consequence?

Real choice must have real consequence, and so it does. “When you eat from it, you will certainly die.”

Gift number three is more than just God’s will, Adam received free will.

The gift of will—we are made for freedom in God.

One more to go, at verse 18:

“The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Wow. The very first not good. And it’s not sin or evil. It is loneliness. Adam will not do well alone. And watch God’s words. He will make a suitable helper. Is that like—a servant?

In a way—but not the way we might picture. The Hebrew word is ezer (ay-zayr). Search the Bible and you will find ezer used twenty-one times. Sixteen of those _ are a direct reference _ to the Lord himself. God is a helper. In the New Testament, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Helper, or Comforter.

God is seeking a partner for Adam who will reflect God’s own nature. But what creature can do that?

What follows is curious. The Lord brings out all of the wild animals and all the birds that he formed from the ground. And he brings them to Adam, and Adam names them. In verse 20:

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.

“Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2:20-23).

Now that—is poetry. Man's very first. Can you imagine the moment? What a sight—bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh. In her, Adam sees a part of himself. Yet transformed. In her he sees God reflected, for she too is made in God's image. Taken from his side—not to rule or be ruled over—but to help. And for anyone who would say that being taken from man's body makes the woman inferior, consider whose body you were taken from.

This is not just a marriage lesson—it's a humanity lesson. None of us are made for ourselves, but our purpose is found in who we are to others. In the helper, God gives a part of who He is. The woman is not lesser, she is essential.

The beautiful gift, the wonderful help—we are made to be God's help, and to find God's help in each other.

Verse 24:

"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

Here we find the very definition of marriage: two become one—a covenant of unity. Verse 25:

"Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25).

Now stop giggling at the naked part. Those are your great-grands. But pay attention. They felt—no shame. No need to cover or pretend. Imagine it. Content with who you are and what you've done. This is the life that God

intended for us from the beginning. It is also the life that God has planned for us in the end. And the story ahead will reveal his plan to get us there.

Sabbath, work, will, and each other. Rest with God, purpose for God, freedom in God, and help from God. We are indeed—quite blessed.

But what do you make of those two trees? One gives life—the other knowledge—at a price. And what will our two dear humans choose?

For now, read Genesis 2. Enjoy this one glimpse at life before. And I'll see you next time.

Genesis 3 | The Curse

Welcome back, my friends—to our origin story. Genesis 3 picks up with the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden.

Remember—some believers read this as literal history, others as poetic, yet both find truth. This is God’s Word to help us understand life. Our goal is to engage the story and hear what God has for us.

Chapter 2 painted paradise: fruitful work, glorious freedom, someone to share it with. Yet right in the middle—two curious trees: life, and knowledge of good and evil.

I imagine them standing in that shade, wondering. The Tree of Life—beautiful. The Tree of Knowledge—off limits. What is this knowledge of good and evil?

Aw, well. Back to frolicking. I mean, come on—sunny day, good friend, no shame—it’s frolic time.

But then.

Genesis 3:

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?’” (Genesis 3:1).

Surprising—a crafty serpent that speaks. The woman isn’t surprised; her whole world is new. But I think we’re meant to wonder at it.

A new character has entered—clearly other. He will weave his crafty way through the Bible’s story to the very end. And we should not be ignorant of his methods.

His first words: *“Did God really say?”* Strategy #1—challenge God’s Word. That battle continues to this day.

And watch the craftiness:

“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

Well, that sounds unreasonable. Did God really ban all the fruit? Verse 2:

“The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

(Genesis 3:2–3).

The woman catches the error—but adds the “don’t touch” rule. Still, she’s right about the consequence: you’ll die. But in verse 4:

“‘You will not certainly die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” (Genesis 3:4–5).

Now she has something to consider. Maybe God was wrong. Maybe He’s holding out. Why shouldn’t we know good and evil?

Notice—the serpent gives no directive. He just informs. No harm in information, right?

So she looks closer. And in verse 6, she makes three—rather tempting—observations.

It's "*good for food.*" Like eating it—would be—really good.

It's "*pleasing to the eye.*" So beautiful. Just—lovely.

And it's "*desirable—for gaining wisdom.*" I want wisdom. I want to know. I would be—wise.

The stomach wants it. The eyes love it. The mind needs it. Or maybe it's—the pride. In any case, the vote is unanimous. Back in verse 6:

"...she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." (Genesis 3:6).

And there it is. Do you know the feeling—of that moment—after? All the contemplation. All the reasoning. And it made sense. Right? But now...

And what does Adam feel? He was *with* her. Said nothing. Just went along. Do you know that feeling—when you could have spoken up, but didn't? Verse 7:

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." (Genesis 3:7).

Now there is a pitiful moment. The very first time—the very first sense of need—to cover. To hide. It is that dreadful feeling—called shame. Verse 8:

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:8–9).

Have you ever felt compelled—to hide from one—who loves you? Shame can be cruel. Isolating. Yet God calls out.

God behaves here much as He does with us. Sometimes He feels close. Sometimes distant. Sometimes temptation fools you. Notice they called Him *God*—impersonal. Now the *Lord God* is back, and calling Adam.

Verse 10:

“He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’

And he said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’” (Genesis 3:10–11).

It fascinates me that the Lord questions what He already knows. He gives Adam opportunity to answer—to take responsibility. Verse 12:

“The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’” (Genesis 3:12).

Now there’s a slick move. Adam tells—the truth. Commendable. But does he take responsibility? The Lord gave him the rule, and the Lord gave him the first opportunity to own up.

Adam’s facts are right, but is his heart right? His words blame the woman, and even blame the Lord. Verse 13:

**“Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’
The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”** (Genesis 3:13).

Once again—truth—with blame.

And in verse 14, God takes action:

**“So the Lord God said to the serpent,
‘Because you have done this,
Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust all the days of your life.
And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.’”** (Genesis 3:14–15).

Those are weighty words. At surface it almost reads like a myth of snakes losing their legs. But this is much deeper. A plan. This serpent is the enemy, and God sets out a battle between the serpent’s offspring and the woman’s.

Curious phrase. *Offspring* is *seed*—a word typically used for men. Could the woman’s seed suggest a virgin birth? The heel bite, the crushed head—what does it all mean?

Scholars call this the first hint of the gospel. Romans 16:20 will echo it. It is God’s plan for victory.

But then, God turns. Verse 16:

**“To the woman he said,
‘I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labor you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.’”** (Genesis 3:16).

So a curse on childbearing. For the woman, this hits hard. No other creature suffers birth pain like her. Marriage too is strained—what was meant for support now becomes struggle.

Finally God returns to the one He started with. Verse 17:

**“To Adam he said,
‘Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about
which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’
Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.”** (Genesis 3:17).

Wow. Have you ever felt cursed? Not like Madame Zeroni curses your no-good, dirty, rotten, pig-stealing great-grand-grandfather. God’s curse. It hits where blessing was—man’s work is now toil.

In verse 18:

**“It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.”** (Genesis 3:18).

Those thorns and thistles explain a lot. From paper jams to computer bugs—it sure feels like anything that can go wrong, does. Verse 19:

**“By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”** (Genesis 3:19).

And so the curse ends—in death. From dust to dust. God’s initial warning was not empty.

But why the curse? What is God’s purpose here? We’ll come back to that.

For now, Adam names his wife: Eve. Mother of all the living. And in verse 21:

“The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” (Genesis 3:21).

Notice—garments of skin mean that an animal had to die—the very first sacrifice to cover.

God’s next concern is to prevent Adam and Eve from eating of the Tree of Life. Apparently it could still make them immortal. And in this state of knowing evil—that is no blessing. In verse 23:

“So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:23–24).

And so we close. Yet so many threads have just opened.

The serpent will return—as Satan. He still misquotes God’s word, makes God’s rules unreasonably restrictive, then challenges it all. Temptation carries on—and those three simple temptations will be a prototype for every temptation—to the flesh, to the eyes, and to the pride. Check out our Luke 4 guide for insight there.

And more. Man's failure to lead, the hiding from God, the covering of shame—it all continues.

And the curse—pain in childbirth, frustration in work. What was God's purpose? Later Scripture—Ecclesiastes, 1 Corinthians 15, Romans 8—will show us. The curse has purpose, and hope. By Revelation's end, it is broken. The seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

For now, read Genesis 3—the fall. Next time is the fallout.

Genesis 4 | The First Death

Welcome back everyone. Genesis 4 on our journey Through the Word, and the sad reality of what the “knowledge of evil” does to life on our world. It’s the story of Cain and Abel—a story of envy, violence, vengeance, and for the first time death.

Yet the story begins with one of the most basic _ and most puzzling human actions: offering to God. What does it mean to give to God? And what does it take to be accepted by God?

Let’s dig in at Genesis 4 verse 1:

“Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel..” (Genesis 4:1-2)

So Adam and Eve begin to have kids—probably a lot of them. Ancient tradition says they had sixty. Cain and Abel appear to be among the first, but several decades have have passed here.

Now there are some good questions that you might be asking in chapter 4: Where did they find wives? Where did all the other people come from? Great questions. The quick answers are: They married their sisters, and a hundred years with long life spans and extended child-bearing years would result in several generations and several thousand people.

So Cain and Abel are brothers, grown men and living in a fallen world. In verse 2, Abel keeps flocks as a shepherd, and Cain works the soil as a farmer. Then in verse 3:

“In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.” (Genesis 4:3)

Offering is where this story begins, so what does that mean? Offering means giving back to the Lord. Not that God needs to get anything, but we need to give it. It's sort of like a child giving their Dad a present. Dad's money paid for it, and Dad didn't really need it anyway. But that's not the point. The action of showing gratitude is great for the kid's heart, seeing that gratitude blesses Dad's heart, and the whole experience strengthens the bond between them. Offering to God works much the same way.

Now Cain and Abel both made offerings, but verse 4 says that:

“The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast” (Genesis 4:4b-5).

Cain is mad. You know the feeling—when you just can't seem to get anything right. The frustration and anger build up like a weight in your eyes, curling your brow lower and casting your gaze downward—away from eye contact, and away from God. That is how Cain feels. But why?

Verse 4 says that the Lord looks with favor on Abel's offering and not Cain's. So what is this favor? And why isn't Cain's offering accepted?

It's also translated regard. The Hebrew word is sha'ah—it means to look with approval. Picture this favor from God like a father's look when he's proud of his kid. Not favoritism, but the fatherly pride of a good Dad _ in its purest form. There seems to be something built in to each of us that desires approval and recognition. It's the reason why kids say, "Mom and Dad, watch this." It's why we crave applause and cherish compliments. Yet this story is about more than just human recognition. It's about the smile on God's face when he looks at us. This is what I want. I want to hear the Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

So Cain and Abel both want God's approval, but why doesn't Cain's offering receive it? The book of James tells us that God doesn't play favorites. So why did God accept Abel's offering and not Cain's? The book of Hebrews offers this insight:

"By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did" (Hebrews 11:4).

That's it. The difference is faith. And you can see Abel's faith in the way he gave: the best portion from the best of his flock. He believes in God and makes the offering out of sincere gratitude, so he wants to make it the best. As far as we can tell, Cain makes no attempt to give anything special. And he doesn't have faith. So why does he offer at all? Maybe it's the same reason that millions of half-hearted believers walk into church and drop money in the plate every Sunday. I call it dead religion. They know it's the right thing that you're supposed to do, but they miss the heart of it—and without faith it

becomes worthless. Sorry, but God just doesn't have regard for empty, heartless religion. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

So Cain's half-hearted offering is rejected, but God isn't ready to lose him that easily. Check out verse 6:

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it'" (Genesis 4:6-7).

God's warning is serious. See Cain isn't in sin yet. He's angry—but he hasn't sinned. Yet the Lord knows that danger is close at hand. God gives Cain a second chance: Do right and be accepted. God wants to accept Cain, but if Cain refuses to try, sin is crouching at the door. Now there's a picture. Take a look at the nearest door, and imagine sin hiding right behind it. Waiting for you. Walk away from God, and you will find sin waiting at your next doorway. That sin desires you, but you must master it.

How does Cain respond? Verse 8:

"Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him (Genesis 4:8a).

Take a moment to respect the loss of life. It is the first human death. The first murder. Verse 9:

Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?'

'I don't know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?'" (Genesis 4:8-9).

Now God doesn't ask Cain because he doesn't know. But he does give Cain the opportunity to confess. Yet Cain plays dumb—as if God doesn't already know. He lies to God. Does he really think he'll get away with it? For that matter, do any of us believe that we'll get away with any sin? As if God doesn't see. Think about it: We stop cheating when the teacher is looking, or stop cussing when the pastor's in the room, but go right back to it when God is watching all the while. Why do we do it? No faith. Every sin demonstrates a lack of faith, and a small view of God. Cain simply didn't have faith. But his question is worth pondering:

"Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9).

What do you think: Are we? Are we responsible for one another's safety and well being? It is a question that would echo and reverberate down through countless generations. The Lord responds to Cain in verse 10:

"What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground' (Genesis 4:10).

Wow. Now there's a picture. Sin will always find you out. So God punishes Cain—but he mixes justice with mercy. Cain will live, but the ground will no longer bear fruit for him. He will live his life in restless wandering. Remember from chapter 2 that rest is a key Bible theme and a precious gift from God. Now Cain discovers the hard truth: there is no rest for the wicked. The weight of guilt would set on his back as a relentless burden.

There's more to the story, and the chapter. So read Genesis 4 and consider the offerings that you make to God. Are they prompted by faith or just going through the motions? Consider also your answer to Cain's question: Am I my brother's keeper? And read on to consider some thought provoking questions about revenge. The first murder would inevitably lead to the first cries for vengeance. But God makes it clear: vengeance is the Lord's (Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19). Yet will the people abide by that?

And if Cain's story—his life of restless wandering and guilt—sounds all too familiar to you, then listen carefully to the invitation of Jesus:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”
(Matthew 11:28).

Genesis 5 | In God's Image

Hello my friends! We are in Genesis 5 today on Through the Word with the very first family tree. It's also known as the Bible's first boring chapter. It's what we call a genealogy. And truth be told reading a list of names of people that you don't know—along with how old they were, when they had kids, and when they died—can be rather boring. But do not confuse boring with unimportant! Every good scientist, detective or historian will tell you: Boring facts can lead to surprising discoveries.

Now this particular genealogy is essential. It is, after all, your family tree—the very roots of it in fact. A family tree is a fascinating thing to research. It's where you come from, a part of who you are as an individual and as a human being. The roots of your tree begin in verse 1:

“This is the written account of Adam's family line. When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them “Mankind” when they were created” (Genesis 5:1-2).

So the opening verses remind us that God made Adam in His own likeness. We saw that back in chapter 1, and apparently it was worth repeating. You'll find that the Bible often repeats things that are important. Sort of a divine hint to pay attention. As it turns out, the words likeness and image carry one of the most important themes in the whole Bible. Do a search for the word image in the Bible and it's pretty fascinating.

So what does it mean? Well, an image is how we see something. You see an image and perceive what the thing is. And what is the purpose of the Bible but to reveal who God is? God reveals himself through His Word (1 Samuel 3:21). So image is big because God's image reveals God's nature.

As human beings, we have the awesome responsibility of bearing the image and likeness of God. So does that mean that we look like God? Well, maybe _ in a way. But I think this is deeper than appearance. Verse 3 tells us that Adam:

"...had a son in his own likeness, in his own image..." (Genesis 5:3).

Think about that. Have you ever watched a kid grow up, and every now and then you find yourself saying, "Just like his dad" or "Just like her mom"? And it's not just the chin or the eyes; it's a laugh or a talent, or maybe a kindness or stubbornness—something not quite tangible, but very real and wonderful. It is the likeness of their father or mother. In the same way we are—every one of us—made in the likeness of God.

Think of image like a picture. I see a picture of my friend laughing and my mind is flooded with memories. The picture itself is not my friend, but it reminds me of him. In the same way, mankind is not God, but there is that glimmer of Him that shines through us. When we show compassion or creativity, when we sacrifice our own need to help someone else, forgive a wrong, love an enemy or bless a widow, when we invent something or create artwork, then they can say of us, "Just like their Dad." That is what I think of God's image.

I'm sure there's more to it, but whatever that is, Genesis makes it clear that this is an essential part of our identity. It is at our foundation, the very definition of what it means to be human.

But what about the fall? What did the knowledge of evil do to God's image in us? The Bible doesn't spell it out, but something changed. The reflection of God's goodness and glory is distorted and corrupted by man's wickedness. Looking ahead in the Bible, the word image will return when God forbids idols. We were made in God's image, but it is a dangerous mistake to make god in our image.

Back here in Genesis 5, God made Adam in his likeness, Adam had Seth in his likeness, and the genealogy goes on from there. Let's catch up in verse 6:

"When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. After he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died. When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. After he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years..." (Genesis 5:6-10).

...and then he got very sleepy. No, wait—that was me. The reading got a little repetitive there, and I got a little tired. Seriously this is not the most eye-opening read, but there are some interesting questions to ask here.

For one, how did these guys live so long? Old man Methuselah was 969! There are several good theories on this, with some interesting science and history behind each one. Some theorize that each name represents a dynasty rather than one man, or that the years here are either figurative or represent a shorter period of time. Others who read it literally emphasize the very different

environment that existed before the flood or the original DNA of Adam and Eve starting from perfect and deteriorating with each generation.

Here in chapter five, the genealogy continues with a fairly predictable pattern. I call it the “lived, begat, died” pattern. Begat is old King James for having kids. Adam lived, had kids, then died. Seth lived, had kids, then died. So did Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, and Jared. And that was their record of life. But then in verse 21, one man stands out from the rest:

“When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years” (Genesis 5:21-23).

Did you catch that? Every other man lived, had kids, and died. And Enoch started out that way, but something happened. In verse 22, Enoch’s life is described as walking faithfully with God. That fascinates me. What does it take to have a life that stands out from the rest—one that adds up to more than life, kids, and dying? More than all that this world has to offer? The answer is simple: Walk with God. Live every step of this life in fellowship with your Creator. Enoch did. And check out what happened to him in verse 24:

“Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (Genesis 5:24).

That’s it. God took him. Enoch never died. God simply took him away. All the others lived and died. Enoch walked with God and never died, because God took him.

Now we get few details to work with here, but from the grand scheme, this is a life that I would like to emulate. To walk with God. To defy death in a world where every other life is defined by lived, had kids, and died.

Think about what it means to be a Christian. Jesus doesn't just ask us to believe a set of truths or join an institution, he invites us to follow him. Following requires walking together. The New Testament describes our life with God as a walk: walk in love, walk in truth, walk in harmony and unity and humility. In other words: Walk with God.

And as we do, Jesus promises that whoever lives and believes in him shall never die, but have eternal life. Just like Enoch, when you walk with God, he will take you to be with him forever.

Read Genesis 5 for yourself today. Search through the boring to find a few gems. Sometimes the boring passages are concealing a diamond in the rough.

And as you read through each generation, consider your own life. Will yours be recorded with all the rest—just another lived, begat, and died? Or will your life be a walk with the living God?

The amazing thing about it is: when you walk with someone, you start to act and talk the way they do. You don't become them, just more like them. It's as if you were being remade in their likeness. Turns out, that's what walking with God is all about, and that is what Jesus invites us to do. Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), and the "exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3).

We're made in God's image, but Jesus is God's image. To look at Jesus is to see God! We distorted God's image with evil and violence, but God sent his own Son to earth to restore our view of who he is. And more than that—to restore the image of God in us. To follow Christ is to be made new. We are “renewed in knowledge in the image of (our) Creator” (Colossians 3:10). As we walk with Jesus, we become more like Him, transformed into His image. That's what we were made for, and that is when people say of you, “You're just like your Dad.”

Genesis 6 | A World Gone Wicked

Welcome back to Through the Word everyone. Genesis 6 today, and our story opens—with a world gone wicked. In verse 5:

“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5).

Have you ever wondered how God feels about all the evil in the world? Violence, greed, lust, cruelty, war, oppression, slavery, abuse, assault... There is so much wickedness in this world, and God sees all of it. I can hardly handle watching the news sometimes. So how does God react? How does evil affect his heart? Is he angry? Sad? Compassionate?

In chapter 6, we'll get some insight on how God feels about the evil of the world. And we'll see what it takes for one man to take a stand in a generation mad with wickedness?

Now the chapter begins with a very interesting passage about the “sons of God” having children with the “daughters of man,” and the offspring are called Nephilim (Genesis 6:1-4). In verse 4:

“They were the heroes of old, men of renown.” (Genesis 6:4).

So what on earth are these Nephilim? It sounds like a Hercules story—a child of the gods having children with a human. But before you go singing Zero-to-Hero, these guys are bad news. Nephilim means fallen ones, and the

text appears to say they were half demon, half human (though some read this as the godly line of Seth marrying the wicked line of Cain). Now we have very little information to go on here, so we would be wise to avoid speculation or broad theories when the Bible has so little detail. The one thing we know from context is that this is one symptom of a world given over to evil.

Now moving ahead, it's interesting to me that verse five begins with "The Lord saw." That's key. God sees. And what he sees is:

"...every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5).

Wow. Verse 6:

"The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them" (Genesis 6:6-7).

The description in these verses is striking. The human race—wicked to the core. Not just their actions, but every inclination in their hearts. And notice God's response. His heart is deeply troubled. The Hebrew word there means hurt, pain, or grief. God isn't just angry, he's heartbroken. He hurts for the evil He sees. Grieve is a love word. You can anger anyone, but you can only grieve someone who loves you.

And a grief-stricken God looks upon a evil world, and makes a plan to wipe the human race from the face of the earth.

Now sometimes it can seem that the God of the Old Testament is all judgment and wrath. But I would challenge that. In Ezekiel 18, the Lord proclaims that He takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked,” but is pleased when they turn from their wicked ways and live. God loves to forgive, and God is always searching for a reason to hope—a reason to give a second chance. God waited until every last inclination in man’s heart was evil, then still gave them another 120 years to repent.

And God did find a reason to hope. In verse 8:

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth” (Genesis 6:8-10).

Here we have our first real Bible hero. Noah is one of the most intriguing people in the whole Bible. Try to forget your coloring book version of little old Precious Moments Noah here. Sure he was old, but there’s no reason assume he had a long white beard or even white skin for that matter. So see this man for who he was: one righteous man in a wicked world—one man who walked faithfully with God. He would also be lumberjack, carpenter, and zookeeper. And he was a real man, flesh and bones like you and me. Yet everyone in his life had become totally corrupt - every neighbor, teacher, cousin, friend—thought of nothing but evil all the time.

So how did Noah remain blameless? He had no one to look up to or stay accountable with. I think the real key is in verse 9:

“...he walked faithfully with God” (Genesis 6:9).

That’s it. The Lord was Noah’s mentor, his accountability, and his friend. The book of Hebrews explains Noah’s righteousness this way:

“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family” (Hebrews 11:7).

See the thing that made Noah righteous in a world gone wicked was not his impeccable character, nor his self-control. It was faith. Faith dwells in your heart and mind, but it comes alive in your walk. And faith is the heart of what it means to walk with God.

Now I have a question here. If God created the world, and the world was evil, did God create evil? For answers, let’s read verse 11:

“Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways” (Genesis 6:11-12).

Pay attention to the word choice. Corrupt is used three times. Corruption means ruin or decay of what was once good. Humans were not made corrupt, they became corrupt. They took the free will that God gave, and used it for evil. But God has a plan. Verse 13:

“So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth” (Genesis 6:13).

What did it take for God—our God, who is love—to get to the point where He simply wanted to destroy it all? Yet God was also determined to save Noah. So in verse 14, God started the instructions.

“So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out” (Genesis 6:14).

Put yourself in Noah’s shoes. This ark plan is quite a shock. And the dimensions are tremendous: three decks, one and a half football fields in length. But Noah responds in faith.

Now the story might be challenging to your faith as well. Is this even feasible? Would all the species on earth fit in a boat? And how would this worldwide flood thing work? There is an impressive amount of scientific research into these very questions. We’ll talk through some of that as we move ahead. For now, I think Noah is probably just as stunned and confused by the idea as we are. But don’t miss the heart of the story. It’s about more than a storm and a boat. Look at verse 18:

“But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you” (Genesis 6:18).

This story is a salvation story. And the heart of the story is a covenant. A covenant is a binding agreement that creates and defines a relationship between two or more people, or between people and God. The Bible is the

story of the covenants that God has made with humankind—to commit himself into a binding relationship with us. God could have simply told Noah, I'm going to save your life. But he goes way past saving. He makes a covenant. A covenant that basically says, I am committed to you and to your family. I got you.

For you and I, it's a powerful reminder of the invitation that Jesus gives us. Not only does He want to save you, He wants to commit Himself to you in a covenant. So how does Noah respond? Verse 22:

“Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22).

That's it. Noah obeys God. In a world gone evil, Noah trusted God at his word _ and simply obeyed. Faith and obedience go hand in hand.

Read Genesis 6. Consider Noah's faith in the midst of a world turned evil. And consider your covenant—the commitment that God has made to you and your family. And consider how you respond. And I'll see you back here in chapter 7.

Genesis 7 | The Flood

Welcome back everybody. Genesis 7 on Through the Word today, and the day finally arrives. We're in the story of Noah, and more than a hundred years have passed since God commanded Noah to build an ark.

Time passed, Noah built, and Noah waited. And he had kids: three sons were born to Noah and his wife, and the boys grew up. More time passed, and the boys were married. At some point Noah finished building, and still Noah waited. Noah had faith, and Noah had patience. Faith and patience are a powerful combination and two key ingredients in every Bible hero.

But what about you? Have you ever waited a long time for a day to arrive? Maybe a graduation or a wedding day. And for so long it seems that it will never come. But then it does. And everything changes. Or maybe it's something worse: a court date, or even judgment day. Days go by, years pass, and quite suddenly it arrives.

Here in Genesis 7, the judgment clock has been ticking for some time, and time is up. Verse 1:

“The Lord then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation” (Genesis 7:1).

So the waiting is over and God tells Noah to get in. Hide your kids, hide your wife, get the animals on board—it's gonna rain. And notice the reason the Lord gives for Noah's salvation: God found Noah righteous. That means he was right with God.

Now loading the Ark was quite a task, with two of each kind and seven of every clean animal, so God gave Noah seven days to get them all on board.

Verse 4:

“Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.’

And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him. Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth” (Genesis 7:4-6).

Noah’s obedience is striking in this story. He did all that the Lord commanded him. Jesus tells us that the one who loves God is the one who obeys His commands (John 14:21). Noah had faith, Noah had patience, and Noah obeyed God.

As for the rest of mankind, don’t forget where this story began: with every inclination of the thoughts of man’s heart only evil all the time. The heart of the Lord was grieved and filled with pain. We just read that yesterday. God held on to that heart full of pain for a hundred and twenty more years.

Now the Bible doesn’t give us much detail on the in between time, but in 2nd Peter he describes Noah as a “preacher of righteousness.” It’s quite possible that Noah preached to the people, calling for repentance and perhaps inviting them onto the ark. We don’t know for sure, but if he did no one responded—except his family. Peter also tells us that God is patient today, holding off final judgment in the hopes of anyone that will repent. With that

connection in mind, the seven days here might be a foreshadowing of the 7 year Tribulation. For Noah and for us, the day will come.

Noah got ready, his family boarded the ark, and pairs of every animal kind came to Noah and entered. Verse 10:

“And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:10-12).

And so judgment descended from above.

Now as you read, it is quite reasonable to ask: did this really happen? Did a flood cover the lands of the entire earth and kill every creature? It’s a good question with a lot of good answers, and much heated debate over evidence and historical timeline and how we read the Bible. Those who believe that the Genesis flood was a historical event see in it a more viable explanation for the fossil record and for much of the geological evidence we encounter. After all, fossils are generally created in a watery environment, when a creature is buried in mud and silt. The mud hardens around the shape of the creature, and voila: fossil. But creatures that die under normal conditions do not leave fossils. They decay and disappear. So why do we have so many fossils all over the world? Well the common explanation is millions of years of occasional floods and such. But many who believe the Genesis flood as historical attribute the vast presence of fossils to this flood. Similarly, the common explanation for the Grand Canyon is millions of years of wearing

away by the Colorado river. But others see evidence of one cataclysmic event doing much of the work: the Genesis flood.

There are a lot more arguments to be heard here, and I should clarify that there are fully devoted Bible believers on both sides of this one. Some believe the Bible and believe that the flood story happened exactly as it says here. Others believe the Bible and believe that the story is more of a legend with powerful lessons for us to learn from. And others still believe somewhere in between: that the story is true but the part about covering the whole earth is speaking in hyperbole.

As usual, I am not here to settle such debates. I have my opinions of course, but I would rather give you the freedom to explore and seek answers for yourself. As you do, I would encourage you with a few reminders:

1. Humility: Whatever opinions you have, hold them humbly. The Bible tells us that wisdom from God is humble and peace-loving (James 3:17). That means that your opinions don't make you better than anyone else, and you can discuss them without fighting over them.

2. Perspective: As you search for answers, your faith in God doesn't have to hang in the balance. The question of Bible literalism is not the foundation of Christian faith. Jesus is. Don't get me wrong, how you read it makes a difference. But basing your faith in God on scientific arguments that are probably over your head is dangerous.

3. The Message: Don't miss the point of the story. The geological implications of a flood are not the point. This story is about judgment and salvation. And

whether you read this as an allegorical warning or literal, cataclysmic, life-ending flood, the reality of God's judgment is the same.

Life and death are real, and Jesus makes it clear that this story is a warning for all of us.

Verse 16:

“The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the Lord shut him in” (Genesis 7:16).

So that's it. God shuts the door. God said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever” (Genesis 6:3), and he meant it.

He is phenomenally patient in mercy, and the Holy Spirit will strive with a man or woman for years to call them back to repentance. But he will not wait forever. He warns of judgment and makes a way of salvation, but when judgment comes the door is shut.

You know that feeling you get when you show up five minutes late and you're locked out? _ Yeah. Berate yourself all you want for being late, the door's locked. Heart sinks, mind reels. Why did I procrastinate? What was I doing that was more important than this?

So the Lord shut the door. And according to Jesus, it will happen again. In Matthew 24, Jesus warns:

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew

nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:37-39).

If we believe Jesus at his word, we had better take this flood story seriously and soberly. Verse 21:

“Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died” (Genesis 7:21-22).

And so the pervasive and relentless evil of mankind was judged. Yet the story of Noah’s family is a salvation story. It’s a rescue. Just as the Lord shut the world out, he shut Noah in. God saved Noah, and he can do the same for you.

Read Genesis 7, and consider your own judgment day. Will you be like Noah – mixing faith with patience and obedience? For more application, read 2nd Peter. Peter reminds us that although our own judgment may be delayed, it will come. God is not slow, but he does not want anyone to perish. He will give you many opportunities to repent, but do not mistake his kindness for weakness. “The day of the Lord will come like a thief.” (2nd Peter 3:8-10).

Genesis 8 | God Remembered

Welcome back to Genesis—at chapter 8 today. The floodwaters are high, the ark is floating, and Noah is waiting. Noah’s family—along with many thousands of animals and birds—are set adrift on an endless sea.

The forty-day storm let up, but now several long months have passed, and still no sight of land. You have to wonder how they feel by this time. God kept His word about the animals and the flood, but after five months with water as far as the eye can see, you start to worry. If you’ve ever felt like you’re drifting and forgotten—like every direction leads to water and no land—this story is for you. We begin at verse 1:

“But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded” (Genesis 8:1).

So our fearless crew was not forgotten, and the Minnow was not lost. “God remembered.” Don’t get the wrong idea—God hadn’t forgotten. “Let’s see—where was I? Feed the fish—check. Water the plants—check check. Wait—Noah! What happened to Noah?”

God is not forgetful. The word remembered indicates that God kept remembering, and kept his word.

Nonetheless, we sometimes feel forgotten. But God has committed—he will never leave you nor forsake you, and he will complete the work he began in you.

In verse 3, the water recedes steadily, but that's a long process. One hundred and fifty days pass, and in verse 4:

“And on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat” (Genesis 8:4).

Ararat is a mountain range now in Turkiye—or Turkey. Explorers from Marco Polo to modern times have claimed to find the Ark's remains.

But here in the text, notice the word rest. Noah's name means rest. A world of violence left no place for rest, and this story is about God bringing rest for his people.

The ark rests, yet two more months go by before they can see more mountain tops.

In verse 6:

“After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth” (Genesis 8:6-7).

Noah is searching for signs of land. But the raven just keeps flying. Some scholars see in the raven a symbol of the wicked—never returning to the one who saved them, never _ finding rest. Verse 8:

“Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground” (Genesis 8:8).

The dove finds no land, but it does return. Noah waits seven days, and releases the dove again. Verse 11:

“When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth” (Genesis 8:11).

Imagine Noah’s relief. Land. And life is growing. The symbolism here runs deep. Later in the Bible, the dove will come to symbolize the Holy Spirit, and the olive branch is an enduring symbol of peace all of over the world. It certainly meant peace for Noah.

Seven more days, and the dove is sent out—but does not return.

All of this is slow progress. It has now been over a year. That’s a long wait!

So while we’re waiting, let’s consider again some of those questions around whether or not this flood actually happened. As I told you before, these questions should not put your faith on the line. Remember Jenga. And recognizing that our faith is safe frees us to question and consider.

So our first consideration is the great collection of flood stories worldwide. Cultures from Babylon to China to Mexico tell of a great flood and one rescued family. Details vary. For skeptics, that only indicates that the Bible copied the story. But why does the whole world seem have this story in common? Believers explain that those stories are all based on an original true story—which the Bible gets right. However you interpret, it is fascinating to

recognize that a great flood and salvation story is foundational to diverse cultures planetwide.

Literalists also say the flood explains fossils and sedimentary rocks found high on mountains worldwide.

A fun question in all this: How could all those animals fit in to an ark? You'd be amazed just how much research has gone into working this out. Since chapter 6 gave us the dimensions, one book estimates 100,000 square feet for 16–35,000 animals—mostly smaller than sheep. And sure enough—there's room. Recall that two animals per kind cover for every eventual variety within a species.

As for water—many scientists tell us there is more than enough water now in the earth's crust to easily cover even the highest mountain.

What do I think? Did it all really happen? Honestly, I don't know for sure. I believe the Bible, and I engage with Noah as a real man in a real flood. But in the end, the science arguments are not my monkeys, and not my floating circus. Still, it's all very intriguing.

Okay, where were we? Ah yes, waiting. But after just over a year in the Ark, the waiting is finally over in verse 15:

“Then God said to Noah, “Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you” (Genesis 8:15-17a).

So the door opens—land ho! Everyone out—Noah’s family and all the creatures.

And now that they’ve made it, what lessons are here? The New Testament returns to Noah’s story several times.

Hebrews 11 presents Noah as an original man of faith—he heard God’s warning, and built the ark. His faith saved his family and demonstrated his righteousness.

2nd Peter 2 focuses on God’s character here, and his ability to condemn the guilty while protecting Noah’s family. And Peter applies it to us.

“If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment” (2nd Peter 2:9).

That answers two big questions: Will God punish the wicked, and will God rescue the righteous? Yes and yes. Evil may persist a long time, but God will punish. The righteous may endure trial on and on, but God will rescue.

Jesus also uses the flood story as a warning—to be prepared. Matthew 24 is about end times, and there Jesus compares the days before the flood to the days before the Lord’s return. People keep on doing what they do right up to the end, and no one imagines judgment could hit any time. So be prepared—at all times.

Our God is rescuer and savior. That ark saved Noah. The cross saves us. Jesus saves. And watch carefully what Noah does next. Verse 20:

“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it” (Genesis 8:20).

An altar. The place of sacrifice. The very first in the Bible. It will become an enduring image throughout the Bible. The text doesn't tell us what it meant to Noah, but we can see that God planned for this. Recall that two of each animal was brought, but seven of each clean animal—animals that could be offered in sacrifice.

Do not imagine that this altar represents a callousness to animal life. Quite the opposite. It is recognizing the sacred value of life that gives the altar its meaning. And I imagine it was Noah's understanding that God valued his life that gave him the heart to build it.

The altar will come back at critical times in the Old Testament. Man's way of saying, “My life is yours Lord.” Ultimately, every altar finds its fullness in the cross of Jesus.

And watch how God responds. Verse 21:

“The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

“As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,

summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease” (Genesis 8:21-22).

And so, that same heart that was filled with pain over the violence of man, the heart that regretted ever making man—God’s heart is now filled with compassion.

Read Genesis 8. In your waiting, know that God remembers—and be sure that you remember the altar that begins a new story in your life.

Post closer:

How high is the water mamma? Five feet high and rising.

Listen, if I’m stuck on an ark for months, I’m singing Johnny Cash songs.

Genesis 9 | Covenant

Genesis 9 today on Through the Word—a new world and a new covenant. Noah and his family are out of the Ark, and we left off with Noah meeting God at the altar. Note that. The grand chapter that follows all starts at the place of sacrifice. And the blessings given—will extend to you and me.

As we read, watch for one key word: covenant. Covenant is quite possibly the key concept to understanding the flow and message of the Scriptures.

A covenant defines the terms of a relationship—like a contract. It outlines the promises and commitments made in order to work together, live together, and even love each other in community. Follow the story of the covenants in the Bible, and you will see the terms by which God forms His relationship with humankind—with us.

Covenant is also at the core of what it means to be a Jew or a Christian. So let's dig in at verse 1:

“Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth’” (Genesis 9:1).

God's blessing to mankind included both fruitfulness—and new food. In verse 2, animal meat is now on the menu, as apparently humans were vegetarian before the flood. But watch verse 4:

“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (Genesis 9:4).

Interesting. Don't consume blood. It's a sensible rule for health reasons, but is there more to it? This rule will carry forward—it's a big deal in Moses' law, and it will extend all the way to the book of Acts, where the disciples decide to keep this law even for the gentile Christians who don't have to follow all the Jewish Kosher laws. What is so important about not consuming meat with an animal's lifeblood in it?

Consider ancient Pagan rituals. All over the world, consuming an animal's lifeblood was a way to absorb its life. Why is God so opposed? Leviticus 17 explains, "You must never eat or drink blood, for the life of any creature is in its blood" (17:14). We'll come back to that.

Verse 5:

"And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting" (Genesis 9:5a).

This is crucial. God makes us accountable—for every animal...

"And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being" (Genesis 9:5b).

Thus we are responsible to not harm or kill, responsible to defend and protect, and in verse 6, responsible to bring justice.

"Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans shall their blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made mankind" (Genesis 9:6).

Many view this command as the establishment of human government, with a firm foundation of justice. God brought justice to the previous world, now man is responsible. And the reason: God's image makes your life sacred. Honor God's image.

Now verse 8:

“Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you” (Genesis 9:8-9).

There it is: covenant. Every core relationship needs a covenant. Imagine a work relationship with zero definition of what boss or employee do. Or a marriage where husband and wife never communicate what they promise, what they expect, or what they even mean to each other. That's frustrating.

But what about your relationship with God? Do you know what promises he has made to you? What he expects of you? And what you've committed to him?

The Bible explains our covenants. Yes, plural. The entire Bible is structured around covenants. The word testament means covenant—old and new.

God establishes this covenant “with every living creature on earth.” In verse 11:

“I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Genesis 9:11).

So the heart of the covenant given to Noah is mercy. Never again will flood destroy us all. Man is still evil, but God is merciful and patient. Keep that in balance. God promises mercy, yet we are responsible for justice. That covenant sets a foundation for how we live in this world.

Then in verse 12:

“And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (Genesis 9:12-13).

And so God provides a sign for his covenant. Like a seal. Covenants are often marked with a seal—a signature on a document, a signet ring pressed into wax on a treaty, or a wedding ring placed on a finger. Here God sets a rainbow in the clouds like his very own signature in great big Crayolas.

But hold on. Doesn't science explain why we have rainbows?

Now I love the science of rainbows. With the sun behind you, and rain ahead of you, the wavelengths of light split as they enter the prism of every raindrop, then bounce off the back of the drop so that you see separated arcs of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet rain drops.

But pay attention. That answers how a rainbow is made. Not why. Science explains how, the Bible explains why. For more on that, check out our Science & the Bible series.

For me, every time I see a rainbow, I think three things: God is awesome, God has mercy, and God keeps His promises. To survive this life, you've gotta know what God promised you, and know that He will come through.

As God says in verse 15:

“I will remember my covenant” (Genesis 9:15a).

So what are the other covenants in the Bible? Here's a quick run through:

Through Adam, God made a covenant of free will with mankind—freedom within boundaries, real freedom with real consequences.

Through Noah, God made a covenant of mercy with all living things—God will not again destroy the earth by flood, but man is now responsible for justice.

Through Abraham, God made a covenant of promise with a chosen people—promised descendants and a promised land—and through them a blessing for all peoples.

Through Moses, God made a covenant of law with Israel—follow this law, and you will be my people and I will be your God.

Through David, God made a covenant for a King—a descendant of David to reign forever.

Then one more covenant is promised—foretold in Jeremiah 31. Called the “new covenant,” it offers a whole new relationship with God—one that would

fulfill the purpose of all that came before: the freedom, the mercy, the promise, the law, and the King.

So what is this new covenant? It's where the entire New Testament gets its name. And interestingly, it calls us back to that rule about not consuming blood. Do you recall what Jesus said with the wine at the Last Supper—the very first communion? He said:

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Did you catch that? Drink... his blood. New covenant. It all works back together. See our faith is not simply a belief system—it's a covenant with God—a promise forged in Jesus' blood and sealed by the Holy Spirit. For us, the Spirit is the seal—much like the rainbow is for Noah's covenant.

But doesn't the whole Bible say that drinking blood is wrong? Yes, and this is precisely why. The pagan custom of drinking in life by drinking blood—is not God's plan. God wants us to find life—in Jesus. That's why Jesus says:

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:53).

In other words, don't try to find life anywhere but in Jesus. Every other blood is mortal—but seek life in Jesus' blood, and the life you find will be eternal. Remember—this whole covenant in Genesis 9 is given to Noah at the altar.

Read Genesis 9. Dig into the promises and responsibilities of our covenant with God. You'll also find a story of Noah getting drunk—and a curious curse on one of his grandkids. We'll talk through that next time with chapter 10. For now, consider the covenant, remember God's promises. And if you've never made a commitment to Jesus, maybe it's time for you to step up to the altar.

Genesis 10 | The Origin of Nations

Genesis 10 today on *Through the Word* – also known as the Table of Nations. If you have ever been fascinated by people – by the incredible variety of peoples among the nations of the world – and wondered where all that variety came from, this is the place to start. Remember that Genesis is the book of beginnings – the origins-movie for everything. Genesis 10 gives us the origins of nations and people-groups of the world.

Now the chapter is about 90% names – and mostly names you don't know. So if you just read through it and move on, it is not interesting. But dig in a little bit, and Genesis 10 will help us put together a virtual atlas of the original peoples and places of the earth.

Let's start in at verse 1:

“These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood” (Genesis 10:1).

At first glance, this looks like another genealogy or family tree for Noah's three sons. That's true – but there's more to it. Sons become dads who become clans who become nations! As it says in verse 5:

“From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations” (Genesis 10:5).

So the name of one man can become the name of a nation or an empire. It's hard to imagine, but that's really the only way for it to happen. From Noah's perspective, this chapter records where the few people went to. For us, it tells us where the many people came from!

That's also known as anthropology – the study of human origins – of peoples and people groups. If you trust the Bible, as I do, then Genesis 10 is a foundation stone for anthropology.

For example, let's read verse 2:

“The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras” (Genesis 10:2).

That's Japheth – who is generally agreed to be the father of the European nations – mostly Caucasian. Matching ancient names with modern nations, Gomer is Germany, Magog is Russia, Madai is Media & Persia – what we call Iran, Javan is Greece, and so on.

Now this is not an exact science. The movement, expansion, and mixing of peoples and languages throughout history is complex, to say the least. Tracking it all is not simple, and I am not the anthropologist – so I can only pass on what others research. Plus it can be over-simplifying to just match a name with a modern country – but it does give you a general idea of what ethnic groups came from where.

So it's not always exact science, but it is science! Now, I know it is hard to imagine that Noah's three sons plus their wives turned into nations – and now we have 7 billion people – but do a little math. Go dig up your old math book and find the formula for population growth – P times e to the r - t power.

I got my calculator, so let's try it. P is initial population, r is growth rate, and t is time. Did I mention that I also teach math? Historical population growth rates fluctuate between 1 and 2% per year. That's r . Next up is time. The current evolutionary model says man has been here some two million years, but modern man only 200,000.

Okay – try the formula for evolution first. Start with 2 people plus a miniscule growth of one tenth of a percent – 200,000 years gives you a population number with 88 digits! 7 billion has ten digits. 88 digits is approaching a google. We would literally not fit on the planet.

Now, in the Bible model, take 8 people and a low growth rate of just half a percent per year, and it takes 4,118 years to get – several billion – a perfect match for the Bible timeline. Don't believe me, get a calculator.

Yes, this is science, and yes, I believe the Word of God is the Word of God, and that it's accurate. I understand that the evolution model could involve population loss at some points to force the math to work – but we've never observed that. This is not definitive proof of Bible accuracy, but it is solid defense of it. The Bible timeline actually fits the known rates, and the evolution model does not – not even close.

So – back in our table of nations, now that you know the timeline is realistic – let's take another look at who went where.

The three sons of Noah are Shem, Ham, and Japheth. They all started at Mt. Ararat in modern-day Turkey, and their descendants moved out from there – though they didn't fully scatter until after the Tower of Babel.

Japheth's descendants moved West and North and populated Europe and Russia. However, Madai – the Medes & Persians – stopped in the Middle East. This is why Iraq and Iran have very different peoples. Iraq is Arab – from Shem, while Iran is Persian – from Japheth.

Ham's descendants moved south into parts of the Middle East and Africa.

Reading verse 6:

“The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan” (Genesis 10:6).

So Cush is in modern-day Ethiopia. Egypt – also called Mizraim – became the Egyptian empire. Put moved to modern-day Libya; and Canaan covered much of the Middle East along the Mediterranean Sea – where Israel and Jordan are today. You’ll recognize his boys in verse 15 – the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and such.

In verse 17, Canaan is the father of the Sinites – which some believe refers to Sino or China. That would suggest that the Asian populations are from Ham, yet other scholars say Asians are from Shem, not Ham.

So Japheth to Europe, Ham to Africa, and now Shem. Shem’s descendants moved throughout the Middle East, in verse 22:

“The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram”
(Genesis 10:22).

The descendants of Shem include the Arab and Israelite peoples. Also, Aram was the father of the Assyrian empire, which is why they spoke Aramaic – also the language of Jesus.

Many of the names in Genesis 10 become significant later in the Bible. Ham’s son Canaan comes up throughout the Israelites’ story. Japheth’s son Magog is Russia, and it comes up repeatedly in end-times prophecy.

In verse 8, Nimrod was the founder of the very first kingdom – Babylon. We’ll talk about that in chapter 11. Skipping down to verse 25, to a man named Peleg – “in his days the earth was divided.” Two theories on that – either the earth’s peoples were divided – as in Tower of Babel – or the earth’s lands

were divided, which may explain why the continents look like puzzle pieces – and how animals reached the world from the ark.

Perhaps the most significant name comes up in verse 8:

“Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord” (Genesis 10:8–9).

So Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord – also translated “against the Lord” – as in “in God’s face.” Nimrod was also the very first man recorded to form a kingdom – several in fact. He founded Babylon and Nineveh.

Nineveh was a wicked kingdom in Jonah’s time, and Babylon would prove to be the most significant kingdom in the Bible – apart from Israel itself. From Genesis to Daniel to Revelation – keep your eyes on Babylon. We’ll see more in chapter 11.

Skipping down a bit to verse 25, there is a rather curious note in the midst of Shem’s descendants. Let’s read:

“To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided...” (Genesis 10:25).

Two theories on what this means. It either means that the peoples of earth were divided and scattered – as in Tower of Babel; or it means that the earth’s lands were divided – the continents split and formed the massive oceans we have now – possibly explaining why the continents look like puzzle pieces. It would also explain how the animals reached the whole world from the ark. A related theory says that the oceans were lower due to an ice age after the flood, and land bridges connected them. Melting glaciers covered the bridges and divided the earth. Whatever the case, they’re interesting theories.

Here's a good question – if Noah is everyone's granddaddy, where did all the races come from? First part of the answer – there is only one human race.

Acts 17 says:

“From one man he made every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth...” (Acts 17:26a).

So where do skin colors and other ethnic distinctions come from? The answer – is evolution. Let me explain.

There is more than one type of evolution – one is proven, the others are not.

Micro-evolution includes adaptation, minor mutations within a kind, and survival of the fittest. This is all good science, and totally kosher with the Bible. The mutations come from information that is already in the DNA – then survival of the fittest kicks in to make the beneficial trait more prevalent.

According to this model, the earliest humans had the DNA information available to make a variety of skin tones possible. When Ham's descendants moved into Africa, natural selection preferred darker skins. What happens in the DNA over generations is a loss of information – not an addition. Japheth's descendants up North did better with lighter skin, and darker skin DNA was lost over the years. That is micro-evolution.

Macro-evolution is another type – that happens when one kind becomes another kind of creature entirely, and new information is added to DNA which quite accidentally creates new organs and complex systems. Macro-evolution has never been observed, and is 100% theory.

Now when you learn evolution in school, pay attention. All of the observable evidence that is presented is for micro-evolution – and that's all. They say that

dogs make different dogs, and somehow that proves that wolves make whales and monkeys make humans. It is deceptive teaching, and bad science.

Speaking of DNA – a 2012 study showed that human DNA differences indicate a maximum of 5,000 years of diversification. Score two for the Bible timeline.

As you read Genesis 10, you may want to find a map online to match up with the names. And remember that the Lord is God of every nation. If you are fascinated by different peoples, remember that you may get to meet them. Revelation 7 says:

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”
(Revelation 7:9–10).

Genesis 11 | A Tale of Two Kingdoms

Genesis 11 on *Through the Word* – and the introduction of two great kingdoms. The Bible is a book of two kingdoms, and a tale of two cities. The two kingdoms are the kingdom of man and the Kingdom of God; and the two cities are their respective capitals—Babylon and Jerusalem. Their story will track from Genesis to Revelation. And though it is subtle, both kingdoms are introduced right here.

Genesis 11 is the backstory for these two, as God and man each take the first steps to building their kingdoms right here. Man's building project starts with bricks in verse 1:

“Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar” (Genesis 11:1–3).

Pause there a moment. Before man starts building with those bricks, we need to back up a second. The land they were in is called Shinar – which is another name for Babylon. Back in chapter 10, we saw a mighty man named Nimrod, grandson of Ham, who built up man's very first kingdom, and the first center of his kingdom was Babylon. This is big. The name Babylon will be used throughout the Bible to represent the kingdoms of mankind.

Babylon is also the birthplace of false religion. Nimrod, whose name means rebel, married Semiramis – who became known as the “Queen of Heaven.” Their son Tammuz was supposedly a miracle baby, and both mother and son were worshipped as gods.

Babylon was also the birthplace of commercialism – the world’s system of money and greed, which is the root of all kinds of evil.

So that’s Babylon – man’s first kingdom, and the start of both false religion and commercialism.

Okay – now that you have the background, let’s get back to the city of Babel in verse 4:

“Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth’” (Genesis 11:4).

So the folks in Babylon want to build a tower to heaven. *Bab-el* means Gateway to God, and that is exactly what they wanted – to build their way to God. Archaeologists find structures of this kind all over the ancient world. In Babylon they were called Ziggurats – a tall sloping tower with a staircase circling the outside.

This tower is a perfect picture of what religion is all about – and why it doesn’t work. To this day, religion is always about man building his own stairway to heaven. Somewhere in downtown Babel, there’s a lady who’s sure all that glitters is gold, and – well, she’s buying a Ziggurat.

Look at the words of the men in Babel. “Let us build ourselves a city and a tower... Let us make a name for ourselves.” This was all about man’s ego and pride – glory to man in the highest. They didn’t want to be scattered – but that was in defiance of God’s command to fill the earth in chapter 9.

So the Lord came down to see the tower, and He knew the danger. Then in verse 7, God said:

“Come, let us go down and confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city (Genesis 11:7–8).

So why was God so concerned? Man is a schemer, and man’s ability unhindered opened the door for too much evil. Look throughout history and see – technology is too often used for oppression, war, and materialism. I am not anti-technology, it does a lot of good, but I do recognize its danger. God did too, and so He frustrated the plans of men.

Why did God frustrate man? I believe it was the same reason He added frustration in the curse, and the same reason He frustrates our plans. For real insight on this, read Romans 8:20 – creation was subjected to frustration – with a purpose: to force us to hope in something beyond ourselves.

Then in verse 9:

“Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9).

So the languages were confused, and the people dispersed. *Babel* had meant gateway to God, now it just means confusion, because man cannot build up to God by his own work.

However – the false religion of Nimrod lived on, only Semiramis and Tammuz changed names – to Isis and Osiris in Egypt, to Aphrodite and Adonis, or Venus and Cupid – or Ashtoreth and Baal. The stories vary, but all of them are Satan’s counterfeit to Jesus’ story. This is why Revelation calls Babylon the “Mother of all harlots.”

But what happened to the false religion of Nimrod when the peoples were scattered?

That is interesting. The mother and son duo of Semiramis and Tammuz changed names. In Egypt they showed up as Isis and Osiris; in Greece – Aphrodite and Adonis; in Rome – Venus and Cupid; and in Canaan – Ashtoreth and Baal. Even in the Far East, Zoroaster means “son of Aster” – or Ashtoreth. The myths and legends vary somewhat from place to place – but all of that false religion appears to have an origin with Nimrod and Babylon. Their story is also eerily similar to Mary and Jesus.

Apparently Satan knew the story ahead of time and decided to write a counterfeit version, to dilute and twist the power of the truth in Jesus.

This is why Revelation calls Babylon the “mother of all harlots” – as in cheating on God with false idols. If you want to understand Revelation – start paying attention to Babylon here.

By the time of Daniel, Babylon had become the world’s greatest empire, and its capital was a man-made wonder. It was also sin-city, and the home and heart of all idolatry.

Then in verse 10, the story takes a sudden turn. Read with me:

“These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood” (Genesis 11:10).

(Hmm... this goes on for a while – how ‘bout we speed up...)

“And Shem lived after he fathered Arpachshad 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he fathered Shelah. And

**Arpachshad lived after he fathered Shelah 403 years...
When Shelah had lived 30 years, he fathered Eber...
When Eber had lived 34 years, he fathered Peleg...
When Peleg had lived 30 years, he fathered Reu...
When Reu had lived 32 years, he fathered Serug...
When Serug had lived 30 years, he fathered Nahor...
When Nahor had lived 29 years, he fathered Terah.
When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran”**
(Genesis 11:11–26).

Look – all Scripture is important, but some passages can be read faster than others.

(Slow down...)

“When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran”
(Genesis 11:26).

So verses 10 to 27 are a long genealogy – but why here? It is a very specific family line, from Noah’s son Shem, directly to one man: Abram.

A couple of notes along the way. Shem’s people are called Semitic – which is why people who hate Jews are called anti-semitic (though any Christian who hates Jews is an oxy-moron – emphasis on the last part).

Also the name Eber in verse 14 is where Jews get the name Hebrew.

But the real reason that this genealogy is placed here after Babel is that God is starting to build His Kingdom – not with bricks, but with a man. The story is not dramatic – not yet. It is simply a bunch of names – of people – because the Kingdom of God is about people.

Peter says that we are living stones, fitted together in God's temple, in God's Kingdom.

As we journey through the Bible, I want to help you see how the small stuff fits into the big picture. This one is huge. The Bible is indeed a tale of two kingdoms. The kingdoms that begin here in Genesis 11 form a contrast that will carry throughout Scripture: contrast Babylon with Jerusalem, idolatry with true worship, and empty religion with a real covenant between God and man.

Watch for the two kingdoms throughout the Bible – and most pointedly in Daniel and Revelation. And remember that Jesus' consistent message was this: the Kingdom of God is at hand.

For you Bible students, the tower of Babel is much like the great statue in Daniel 2, and the story of Abram is the beginning of that great rock of God's kingdom – not formed by man's hand.

Also watch through the Bible for this picture of a stairway to heaven – from Jacob's vision of a ladder to heaven – to Jesus' promise to Nathanael in John 1. Jesus Christ is the one and only stairway to heaven. As for this "gateway to God," Jesus said quite plainly, **"I am the gate."**

Read Genesis 11 today, and as you do, take note of one more thing.

Chapter 11 closes out with a road trip. Abram and his family hit the road in verse 31:

"Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan"

(Genesis 11:31).

It is fitting that the Kingdom of God should start out this way, with a journey. Abram is the first of God's faithful wanderers. Most of our Bible heroes were pilgrims in this life. Where Babel's men tried to gather in one place and build to the sky to make their own name great; Abram hit the road, following after the great name of God.

The Kingdom of God is found on the road, not in the tower. Jesus said follow me, not build for me. And when we do build, we are called to build people, not monuments.

So what about you? What kingdom will you choose? Will you build your own kingdom – your tower to heaven? Or will you choose the journey over the tower – and the call of God over the pride of man?

Genesis 12 | The Adventure Begins

Genesis 12 on Through the Word. And today begins the great adventure. The journey. The open road. Verse 1:

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.’” (Genesis 12:1).

There's something about a road trip. It's not just the destination, and it's not just the road. Something happens on that road. We grow, find ourselves, find each other. The Bible is full of journeys—but chapter 12 is a big one. This one changes everything.

It starts with a simple invitation, from the Lord to Abram, “Go from your country... to the land I will show you.” Don't miss it. This is Gandalf looking for someone to share in an adventure. This is the curious wardrobe that leads into a snowy wood. It's the start of a *journey*. Only this one is real life, with the real Lord.

So who is this Abram? Well, we met him in chapter 11. We know his genealogy, we know he's married to Sarai and has no kids, and that he comes from Ur in Chaldea, which history tells us was pretty upscale for it's day. As far as we can tell, his family worshipped pagan idols.

And for his past, that's about all we know. As for his future, that just got interesting.

Back in verse 1, God's calling comes in two parts go from and go to. First—is leave.

Leave your country: that's tough. Culture, roots, language that's a lot to leave.
Leave your kindred: even tougher. Friends, familiar faces.
Leave your father's household. Now that's the hardest. Family.

But it wasn't just going from it was go *to* "to the land I will show you."
Now if a friend told you to leave home and go with no destination specified
would *you* go? You better not go—unless you trust that friend. I mean *really*
trust. And that is precisely what this story is about. Faith, trust, and God's
faithfulness. ... (What'd you think I was gonna say?)

And that's the adventure man. Abram doesn't know where he's going. He just
trusts. Now some of us have no use for adventure. "*Nasty disturbing
uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner!*" But to follow God is to go
from and go to. And for Abram, it comes with a promise in verse 2. Pay
attention, this is important.

**"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make
your name great, so that you will be a blessing"** (Genesis 12:2).

That promise from God is a **covenant, a binding** agreement between God
and Abram, an agreement that forms a relationship. The entire Bible is built on
covenants.

And put yourself in Abram's shoes. God promises, "I will make of you a **great
nation**." Descendants. Abram doesn't even have one kid yet!

God promises "I will bless you and make your **name great...**" That's
interesting! And catch the contrast to the men of Babel who tried to "make a
name" for *themselves*. *Name* means reputation, honor.

Notice the desire for greatness is not in itself ungodly, and a good name is worth more than gold, but the selfish pursuit of fame is not only idolatry it makes an idol of *yourself*. The men of Babel wanted to make a name for *themselves* but Abram allows God to make his name great. But look again. That greatness wasn't for Abram's sake. Back in verse 2 **"...so that you will be a blessing."**

That's awesome. I'd say the one thing better than being blessed by God is being a blessing from God. *That* is a beautiful promise.

And it gets bigger in verse 3:

"I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Wow. Seriously, just wow. "All the families on earth." And look at the language God uses "bless those who bless you curse those who curse you" that's the kind of thing you say to a best friend. That's *loyalty*. "I got your back your friend is my friend." But it's the *Lord* talking. How do you *respond* to that?!

Verse 4:

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him (Genesis 12:4).

I like that God said go Abram went. Trust and obey.

Now it may not look like much, but this one small sentence is one massive change in the direction of history. It will affect everything for Abram, for *generations* that follow for the world. You may never know this side of Heaven the lasting impact of one small step of obedience to God.

And obedience is key Jesus told us that you can spot someone who loves Him it's the one who *obeys* His commands. And His command is love. So Abram heads out 75 years old with Sarai, his nephew Lot and in verse 5, *all their possessions*. In other words they don't leave a back up plan. For Abram, there is no there and back again. There's only there and never go back. And they arrive in Canaan.

And that's the place! "The land God would show him" is Canaan. So he travels through it to the great oak in Shechem. And in verse 7:

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." (Genesis 12:7).

And the promise just got bigger. Great nation, great name blessing to the world I got your back and now, the *land*. This land of promise will prove to be one of *the* great themes in the Bible. But for now Abram could only look around in awe.

What can he say? What can he do? Verse 7:

So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him (Genesis 12:8a).

An altar. Most likely a pile of large stones. Noah built the first now Abram. The word altar literally means "*place of sacrifice*." It was a place to *honor God*. To show Abram's commitment in *stone*. A place to say, "My life is yours Lord" and to remember that commitment.

And don't miss the contrast in verse 8:

From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 12:8b)

Notice for himself a tent temporary. For God an altar built of stone. This is the walk of faith. It comes with a conviction that what is seen is temporary, and what is unseen is eternal. So hold lightly to what is seen, and tightly to what is unseen.

But for us, how do we build altars? Today. Hebrews 13 says that we do have an altar the cross of Jesus, and every time we take communion we return to that altar. *And* Hebrews reminds us to give a *sacrifice* of praise, “to do good, to share with others for with such *sacrifices* God is pleased.”

Now the last half of chapter 12 is a curious story. I’ll let you read it but a couple things to watch for. First off Abram is *not* doing right here. He lies. Puts his wife at risk to save his own hide. He’s basically Abram the cowardly *liar*! But here’s the thing. God doesn’t give up on him. He didn’t choose Abram because he was perfect. He just chose him, and he honored Abram’s faith even when his faith faltered. God is faithful even when we are not.

And watch Sarai. *She* honors her husband even when he’s all wrong and God honors her *and* protects her.

Well, I’ll leave the rest to you. Read Genesis 12, and watch for *faith*. Faith that changed history. Today more than 4 *billion* people trace their faith back to a man named Abram, and a call from God Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Amazing.

Hebrews 11 sums it up:

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob ... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Genesis

“It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.”

Genesis 13 | Abram and Lot

Genesis 13 on Through the Word as we follow Abraham back to where he started. Sometimes you just need to go back where you started from, not back where you were born. I mean back to the start of a journey, or better yet, to a place of commitment. Back to the place where you first committed yourself to the road less traveled to your walk with God. For Abraham, that place is an altar where, following Abraham on a long journey, as he followed the call of God to the land that God promised.

He arrived there in Canaan, but then left for Egypt on an unfortunate detour. Let's join back with Abraham in verse 1:

So Abraham went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him into the Negev. Now Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. (Genesis 13:1).

So it looks like Abram is back into the land that God promised, and now he's got some riches with him. Sounds like a blessing. Sometimes it's a test. We'll see how those riches work out for him as we move on. Then back in verse 3:

And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord. (Genesis 13:3-4).

So Abram is back at Beth. El Bethel means house of God, which is fitting. It's the place where Abram built his first altar. An altar is a place of sacrifice, a

place of commitment for Abram. He's going back to the place of commitment and sacrifice to remember, to never forget the promises made.

For me, this is sort of like returning to the altar where I married my bride. Remembering the promises made, the cost counted and gladly paid. If you're married. When was the last time you read your vows? Your promises. Your richer and poorer, your sickness and in health. I remember the place where we first flirted. I remember the first I love yous was on the phone. I remember the first promises. And I remember the altar. I remember the bride all in white. I remember each promise. And I intend to keep every one.

So what about Jesus? Do you ever come back to the first altar where perfect love first broke your heart? I hope you do. That's what communion table is for. See a communion. Jesus calls us back to the altar, to the cross where Jesus committed to us and where we committed to him. That's why Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me.

So that's where Abraham is at. He's back to his first altar, calling again on the name of the Lord, but he's not there alone. Check out verse 5:

And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. (Genesis 13:5-6).

So Abraham's nephew Lot is still tracking with him in this journey of following God. It seems that both Lot's family and Abraham's family have gotten rich.

Lots of sheep, lots of cattle and not enough room. There's a very telling phrase at the end of verse six, *for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together*.

That phrase is probably on the epitaph of many a marriage. You know, it's sad. Nobody here said, you know, we could get rid of possessions and keep family and friends. Rather, they decided to hold on to those possessions that in verse 8:

Then Abraham said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you separate yourself from me? If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left” (Genesis 13:8-9).

There's some great wisdom here from Abraham with a healthy dose of humility. Abraham knows that family is always more important than the fight. That which ties us together is always greater than what we fight over.

Proverbs 17:14 says, starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam. So drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. So Abraham is the voice of wisdom here, and his humility shines through as he lets the younger man Lot choose first where he will live in verse 10:

“And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord” (Genesis 13:10).

Then down in verse 11:

“So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley, and lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other.” (Genesis 13:11).

The real key phrase there is Lot chose for himself. The story of Lot is an interesting one and a heartbreaker. We know from Second Peter that lot was a righteous man. He was a good guy. He was following after Abram and he was following after God, leading his family, doing well in the world. But his story goes south, or I should say east towards Sodom. Read with me. In verse 12:

Abraham settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tents as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked great sinners against the Lord. (Genesis 13:12-13).

The story of Lot is the story of a righteous man gone wrong. He never really walks away from God. He just walks a little too close to the world. See, Sodom was a wicked, wicked place, but the land around it was lush and beautiful. And it doesn't say that Lot and his family moved into Sodom. Not yet anyway. Just as they moved near Sodom.

When you hear the story of a good man failing when the mighty have fallen, you can bet that there was a moment somewhere in his story when he set up shop near Sodom. Lot is the quintessential backslider, and his story should be a warning for all of us. Watch yourself. Don't get yourself as close as you can to the world and to sin. Be careful that you don't lift up your eyes and choose for yourself.

At this point, Lot's doing all right. He hasn't really fallen yet, and he never really will fall completely off the walk with God. His family, however well, we shall see. As for Abraham, let's catch up with him. At verse 14:

“The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, ‘Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever’” (Genesis 13:14-15).

Here God is renewing the covenant with Abram. Remember that Abram went back to the first altar, back to call on the name of the Lord again, sort of like renewing his vows. Well, God didn't respond right away, perhaps because of the strife. Remember what Jesus says about the altar in Matthew 5:23:

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there, remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to them. Then come and offer your gift.

Abram did just that, and here God responds by renewing his own vows. All the land, not just to the east, but to the east, west, north and south, will belong to your offspring forever, and your offspring will be countless. This is quite a promise to Abraham, who had no children at the time. Abram was called to a walk of faith. And speaking of walk, check out verse 17.

“Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you” (Genesis 13:17)

So God says, go for a walk. And this is what I call a real faith walk. Go walk through the land even though it's not yours yet. But trust by my promise that this land is yours. I am giving it to you, says the Lord. Do you ever walk through what God has promised you? Do you ever just enjoy it all? Think through all the things that you're promised.

You don't have them yet, but walk through them by faith, knowing that the Lord will keep his every promise. So Abraham got started on that walk and he moved his tents. And the last verse, wouldn't you know it? He built another altar. Abraham's whole life seems to be defined by moving tents and building altars. This is the walk of faith. As Hebrews 11 tells us, *Abraham by faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Genesis 14 | Four Kings against Five

On Through the Word, the story of two God fearing men caught in a war that they didn't want and didn't ask for. Sometimes life doesn't ask your permission to get crazy. Check that life never asks your permission. It just goes. We're following the story of Abraham and Lot. Uncle and nephew. Both of them. Family men. Both of them followers of the Most High God. They left together the land of their youth. But now they've parted ways. The beginning of our story focuses on Lot. Lot was a righteous man living on the outskirts of the world. Lot is the Bible's first backslider.

The first man to fall away from a walk with God. How does it happen? How does someone just slip away from faith? Well, for Lot. First he chose for himself, and then he moved near Sodom. That's where we left off here in chapter 14. Lot is not an instigator in this story. In fact, Lot does not play a decision making role anywhere in the rest of his story. His last active decision that we see is his choice to move near Sodom. After that he is reactionary—only just along for the ride. He doesn't have to invite the war. When you live near Sin City, the war comes to you.

Then chapter opens in verse one with the Bible's very first record of war. There's not much detail here. What? Was it over? Was it worth dying for or killing for? Don't know. Doesn't look like it. There were four smaller kingdoms, including Lot's hometown of Sodom, taking on five kingdoms who were bigger, badder, and apparently had been holding them down. In verse four it says 12 years they had served Larimar, but in the 13th year they rebelled. So King

Chedorlaomer is the main oppressor in this story. And if you can't say his name, just call him the Big cheese.

We don't know much of what went down or what people fought, killed, and died for. But isn't that the way with war? War doesn't care if you understand it, or whether you have a reason to fight. War just overtakes you because you lived in the wrong place at the wrong time. That was Lot's story. Battle lines were drawn up in verse eight for Kings against five. It wasn't good guys against bad guys never really is. In verse ten, King Chedorlaomer wins the battle and Sodom and Gomorrah flee. So the bad guys won and the bad guys lost. And to the victor go the spoils. And with the spoils came Lot's family. Look at verse 12:

They also took Lot the son of Abraham's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom and his possessions, and went their way.

Wait a second. That said Lot was dwelling in Sodom. What happened to near Sodom? It seems that Lot and his family were not content to just live near Sin City. They finally moved in. And that's a key phrase there in verse 12. Why was Lot taken? Because he was dwelling in Sodom. The rest of Lot's story is driven by this one thing. Now contrast that with verse 13 and where Abram was living:

Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner.

These were allies of Abram. While Lot was living in Sodom, Abram was living with allies. So the question for you is where do you live? Do you dwell in the

greener pastures, as close as you can to Sin City, and find yourself stumbling in every now and then? Or do you live among allies who keep you strong in your walk with the Lord? And then in verse 14:

when Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by night he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus.

Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsmen lot with his possessions, and the women and the people. And so the man who kept his walk close with the Lord goes and rescues the man who wandered to the world. It's the way it usually goes, and it's the right thing to do for Abraham, but will not learn his lesson. I don't know. As far as we can tell here, lot never so much as showed up to say thank you. But two other men do show up. They're both kings. In verse 17 and verse 18,

The King of Sodom and the King of Salem each show up to visit Abraham in a place known as the King's Valley.

Now the king of Sodom showed up, of course, because Abraham had basically saved him and all the people of his little wicked town. But this other king is interesting. One of the most curious and controversial characters in the entire Bible. Look at verse 18.

And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed him and said, blessed be

Abram by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hands. And Abram gave him a 10th of everything.

And they're in four little verses. Is the whole story of Melchizedek. Who is this guy and where did he come from? He's a king of Salem and a priest of God, Most High of the true and living God.

He brings bread and wine. He blesses Abram, blesses God, and Abram gives him a 10th of everything. So what's going on? So this Melchizedek is a king in a place called Salem, which would later be called Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And he was also a priest of the Most High God. Now, what's a priest? A priest is someone who connects people with God. The Latin word for priest means bridge builder. And that's essentially what they do, building bridges between us and God on high.

Now, this is the very first priest that shows up in the Bible, and that's important. Now scholars debate on exactly who this Melchizedek is. But if you want to know, you've got to read Hebrews chapter seven. Hebrews tells us that Jesus is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Now scholars argue over just who Melchizedek is. Everyone agrees that he's at least a picture of Jesus. But many scholars believe that this is Jesus, and here's why. His name means King of Righteousness. Sounds like Jesus. His title is King of Salem, which means King of Peace. Sounds like Jesus. His capital city is Jerusalem. Sounds like Jesus. And he shows up with bread and wine. That sounds like communion. Which reminds me of Jesus. Melchizedek is the only man in the Bible who can serve as both king and priest, except for, of course, Jesus himself.

So if you ask me, I think this is Jesus. Whoever he is, Abram recognizes him as a genuine representative of God, and Abram gives him a 10th of everything. That's a tithe. The word tithe means 10th, and that 10th is a biblical standard for giving to God. Now why is this tithe so important? If you want to see what really matters to a person, don't watch his words. Watch where he spends his time and his money. What did Jesus say about treasure? Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. See, your heart follows whatever you invest your treasure into. And this is huge. And watch how this tithing affects Abraham's heart. When the worldly king of Sodom comes calling. Now the king of Sodom is a picture of Satan. And in verse 21

He said to Abraham, give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.

Now the word for persons can also be translated as souls. And just like Satan, this king offers all the goods, but he wants to keep the souls. Abraham's not buying it. In verse 22,

I have lifted my hand to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours. Lest you should say, I have made Abram rich.

Abraham's faith and his integrity shine through. Here he was tested. But how did he pass? Why wasn't he tempted? It was the tithe. His treasure was invested in the King of righteousness and the King of peace. And his heart followed. And now his heart is not easily tempted by all the stuff of Sodom. So what about you? Who or what makes you rich? How do you count your riches? And where do those riches come from? Read Genesis 14 today and

consider where you dwell and who makes you rich. Take lots example as a sober warning and look to Abraham, a man of integrity and the father of our faith.

Genesis 15 | Abraham's Covenant

Genesis 15 today on Through the Word, a chapter about believing God at His Word and learning to trust God to keep his promise.

Our story is about Abraham, a simple man who followed God's call to leave everything behind and follow the Lord to a new place. God made promises to Abraham, and Abraham decided to trust. When you make a deal with someone, when you enter an agreement to work together or build a relationship together, you put yourself on the line. There's a lot of risk. And the more you risk, the more you want some assurance. Do I know that I can trust this guy to keep his word? We've all had our trust broken before. I've been burned in both finance and friendship. So when opportunity comes up. How do you decide if you should trust again?

In Genesis 15, Abram is in that place of deciding whether to trust. Only this one is big. It is a trust in God. Abram has put his whole life on the line for this one. He walked away from everything and God's promises were big. Many descendants in a great big land and blessings for the whole world. But some years have passed and thus far no kids and no land. In chapter 14, Abram went to battle to rescue his nephew Lot.

He was offered loads of worldly reward by the King of Sodom, but Abraham turned it down. Which brings us to chapter 15, verse one.

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great.

God's promise of a shield and a reward are timely.

Abram was just returning from a war where he had made many new enemies, and he had turned down all of the earthly rewards. But God tells Abram not to be afraid, and instead of handing him a shield and a reward, God says, I am your shield. Rather than protect Abraham from a distance, God promises to be Abraham's protection.

And while in some translations God says, your reward shall be great, I believe the NIV and the King James have it better. God tells Abraham, I am your exceedingly great reward. God wasn't simply taking Abraham through all of this process in order to give him stuff. He was bringing Abraham through it to form a relationship, a covenant. God's promises to Abraham in verse one are amazing. We could spend all day just thinking about what it means. God is our shield. God is our reward. But if you think about it, you don't get it right away. Don't feel bad.

Abraham's mind was on human things. He wanted children and God was compassionate. And verse four, God assured him that his own son would be his heir. And in verse five

And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

That's a beautiful phrase there. He believed the Lord. Abraham was very much anxious and worried. It had probably been building up for years. That's hard to get past. But God said, you'll have kids. And Abraham just believed.

He took God at his word and imagined Abraham's joy standing there and counting stars. Anxiety gone. Years of built up. Worry vanished. Just simple faith. So as Abraham looked up and started counting kids, God looked down and saw something beautiful. He saw genuine faith.

And in verse six, the Lord counted it to Abraham as righteousness. And here we have the beginning, the key verse to one of the foundational principles of the entire Bible. Here is salvation by faith. The New Testament refers to this story and this verse specifically. On several occasions, Abraham believed and God credited it to him as righteousness. God credited. Credit means something placed on your account. You have it and it's there. So what was credited to Abraham?

Righteousness. The word righteous means right with God or a right standing before God.

The Hebrew word for righteous translates literally to rightly robed, as in properly dressed for the occasion. See, faith is like the garment that we wear to stand before God and feel unashamed, knowing that we belong there. We are righteous by faith. And then in verse seven:

And He said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."

God basically says, I brought you out to bring you in. That goes for you too. God brought you out of your old life with a purpose, and God will fulfill that purpose. And Abram believes God, but he asks for a little help with his unbelief in verse eight.

But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”

So Abram believes the promises, but he wants a sign. He wants a surety. Abram's been waiting on these promises a long time. He believes them, but he also knows how hard it is to hold on to belief while waiting. So he asks for a sign and God gives him one. The story that follows and the rest of the chapter will seem like a strange one to you, but it would make perfect sense to Abram. God and Abram are cutting covenant. God asks Abram to fetch a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon. And in verse ten, and he brought him all these, cut them in half and laid each half over against the other.

But he did not cut the birds in half. Now, for those of you wondering what on earth Abram is doing, understand that this was a traditional ceremony in that time when two people wanted to enter an agreement, but they wanted some assurance that they could count on the word of the other person. They would cut covenant rather than just sign a contract on the dotted line, they would take an animal, kill it, cut it in two, and then split the two halves opposite from each other and walk together between the two halves of the animal, basically saying, I'm dead serious about this agreement.

Okay, so this may seem a little strange to us, but we still do something similar only instead of dead animals, we walk between lawyers. Seriously though, lawyers are not than walk between the pieces together, God waits until Abraham passes out. The covenant that God made with Abraham was a one way commitment of unconditional love. It was entirely God's grace, asking nothing in return. Then in verse 17:

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying to your offspring, I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

So God cuts the covenant with Abram, and promises the land and the offspring without condition and without revocation.

Remember I told you in Noah's story that covenant is foundational to our relationship with God. This covenant with Abraham is the bedrock of the Jewish family and the Jewish faith. Like Abraham's life, it is not built on man's work or man's righteousness. It is built entirely on the faithful promises of Almighty God. Read Genesis 15 today and consider God's promises to you as well. Do you trust him? Do you simply believe him at His word? As the old hymn has it, *Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus just to take him at His word, just to rest upon his promise. And to know. Thus saith the Lord.*

Genesis 16 | Hagar, Ishmael, and the God Who Sees

Genesis 16 today and a story of running out of patience for God to keep his promises. Have you ever had to wait a long time for God to come through on his promises? Have you ever been tempted to sort of make God's promises happen your way instead of God's way? That's the story here in Genesis 16. Abram had received incredible promises from God of countless descendants, abundant land, and a blessing for the entire world. Abram believed, and his wife Sarai followed faithfully. But now time has passed. Years gone by. Abram is 85 and Sarai about 75, and Sarai is tired of waiting. Let's start at verse one. "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai" (Genesis 16:1–2).

So Sarai has had enough of waiting on God. Sometimes believing is not the hard part. This time the waiting is the hardest part. And Sarai's concerns are not petty. Not having kids can be a heartbreaker. Sarai has been in Canaan living like a refugee for ten years, and she finally hits a breakdown.

So Sarai is tired of waiting on God's promises and she gets a plan. She tells her husband, go in to my servant Hagar, and it may be that I shall obtain children by her. Now, that probably sounds very strange to you and I, because it is. But it was a normal practice back then.

Hagar would basically be like an old school surrogate mom. Abram would marry Hagar, but the children they have would be considered Sarai's so that

she could have descendants. It was an acceptable custom then, but was it God's plan? As far as we can tell, Abram never took the time to find out. He never prayed about it. He never waited on the Lord for an answer. He just listened, decided it was reasonable enough, and went for it. In verse three, Abram married Hagar. So they weren't technically in adultery, just bigamy, which I guess looks better on paper. But will it work out?

“And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, ‘May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me’” (Genesis 16:4–5). So Sarai's plan worked, but it didn't exactly work out. Not as she'd hoped anyway. That's the way it goes when you try to keep God's promises your way. So Sarai gets mad and she won't back down. Abram's got to be thinking, this was your idea. Stop changing your mind and stop draggin' my heart around.

“But Abram said to Sarai, ‘Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.’ Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her” (Genesis 16:6).

So Abram's got two marriages now, and both of them have turned to bickering. Hagar runs for it out into the great wide open. She's not running down a dream. She's just free falling. And that leaves me just about out of Tom Petty songs.

But seriously, though, what about this bigamy thing? Does the Bible endorse a man marrying two wives? Let's stop here a minute. The Bible records the story here, but does it endorse it? One of the great things about God's Word is that it tells the story like it happened. The Bible is real, and real life is complicated.

As for bigamy, God's initial design is one man married to one woman. The Bible never endorses or encourages bigamy. Every Bible story with bigamy tells it like it happened. What happened was always messy. Every time there's jealousy, conflict, and strife. In Abram's story, the second marriage turns every relationship into arguing and discord.

Multi-marriages happen in this world, and the Bible tells it like it is. Later on in the New Testament, the apostles give directions to go back to God's original plan. Christian leaders are told to have only one spouse. But how do you clean up the mess when a man already has two wives? God steps in to do just that.

“The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, ‘Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?’ She said, ‘I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai’” (Genesis 16:7–8).

The word fleeing there is also translated running away. And that's just what Hagar is. She's a runaway—young, pregnant, married into a situation way over her head and feeling lost. And guess who comes chasing after the runaway? Hagar didn't find him. It says the angel of the Lord found her.

So who is this angel of the Lord? He's a mysterious character, and he shows up several times in the Old Testament at key moments, visiting some of our Old Testament heroes. Now the word angel means messenger. So this isn't necessarily one of the created angels or demons as you normally think about them. This is the messenger of the Lord.

Now, Bible scholars have different theories on who this is. We'll get back to that in a minute. For now, let's see what he has to say to our runaway girl, Hagar.

“The angel of the Lord said to her, ‘Return to your mistress and submit to her.’ The angel of the Lord also said to her, ‘I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude. Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction’” (Genesis 16:9–11).

The compassion of the Lord shines through here. Understand that what Hagar was doing was essentially kidnapping the child that she was pregnant with. While running away was understandable, it was definitely illegal. And yet the angel of the Lord doesn't condemn her. He tells her to go home where she'll be safer and gives her some promises.

Her descendants will be numerous, too numerous to count, and her son will be named Ishmael. Ishmael means “God will hear,” because the Lord listens even to the cries of a pregnant runaway girl in a crazy situation. Now, Ishmael is not the son of the promise made to Abraham. However, God did keep his promise to Hagar.

Ishmael is the forefather of the Arab nations. The angel of the Lord gave Hagar some idea about what kind of man her son would be. Ishmael would be a born fighter.

“So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, ‘You are a God of seeing,’ for she said, ‘Truly here I have seen him who looks after me’” (Genesis 16:13).

Now wait a second. Watch the words carefully there in verse 13. It's not the angel who spoke to her. It is the Lord who spoke to her, using the name of God himself. And Hagar calls him the God of seeing, or the God who sees me. In Hebrew, it's El Roi, a name of God.

Hagar understands that the angel of the Lord is God in the flesh. Now, as I understand it, when God appears in the flesh, it is the second part of the Trinity—the Son. This is Jesus Christ appearing long before he came to earth as the Babe of Bethlehem. Watch carefully every time you see the angel of the Lord pop up, and you'll find a clue that gives away his true nature.

And when Hagar understands who the angel of the Lord is, she says something beautiful. Truly here I have seen him who looks after me. And surely that is the nature of Jesus—looking after the lost runaway girl in a crazy situation caused by some of his own people who took God's plan and got it all messed up.

If that's you, whether you're the runaway or the believers who messed up God's plan, remember the God who sees and looks after you.

Read Genesis 16 today and watch God's compassion and faithfulness. If you've heard God's promise but you're struggling with the waiting, may your faith be matched by your patience. And please let God work out his plan in his way.

Wait for the Lord. Take heart and wait for the Lord.

Genesis 17 | Seal of the Covenant

Genesis 17 today and the sign of the covenant. Today, the man of God gets marked, and this one is personal. God made a covenant with one man, Abraham, and with countless descendants that would follow. God's promises to Abraham included his plan for the world to bring a Savior for all nations. This was huge.

In chapter 15, Abraham asked for a sign so that he could know for certain God would come through. God gave him the sign as they cut covenant. But time passed and Abraham's faith weakened. In chapter 16, he tried to make the promise happen on his own. Now, in chapter 17, 13 more years have passed by, and God renews the promise unchanged. But this time, God asks Abram for a sign—a sign that Abram would never forget.

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly’” (Genesis 17:1–2).

Now to you and I, it may seem like God is showing up and talking to Abram every day. But for Abram, there's a lot of years in between. And Abram is growing up and maturing. Here in chapter 17, God says to Abram, it's time for that growing up to show some real progress.

I am God Almighty. He says, walk before me and be blameless. The King James has it “be perfect.” And you say, but nobody's perfect. Doesn't the Bible say that everyone sins? Yes, but the same passage in 1 John says, “I write you this so that you will not sin.” Abraham's been walking with God for a while

now, and it's time for his faith to grow and his walk to grow up. And I believe God would ask the same of you.

God confirms his covenant with Abram to make him the father of a multitude of nations, and in recognition of Abraham's maturing and of God's promise, God changes his name.

“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations”

(Genesis 17:5).

There are just a few men in the Bible who are honored by God with a change of name, and it is always something significant. Abram means exalted father, but Abraham means father of many. The change of name signifies a much bigger change—from the man that he was to the man that God is making him to be.

“I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:6–8).

So God restates the covenant with Abraham once more, and he makes it doubly clear that his promises are everlasting. That means no expiration date. Throughout history, Bible scholars have argued over whether God is done with the Israelites. Read the words here carefully. It tells me that God is not through with the Jews.

This applies to me. I am a descendant of Abraham. An everlasting covenant means that God will keep his promises. Promises to what? To give the land and to be our God. Now the story of the relationship between the Israelites and the Promised Land will take the entire Bible to talk through. It is a driving force in history, and for the last century has been at the fiery center of worldwide political debate. When God makes a promise, the whole world shakes.

Now everlasting is something that you should never forget. So God gives Abraham a little reminder.

“This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you” (Genesis 17:10–11).

Wow. Things just got a little bit personal in here. I know that made me feel awkward. But think about how Abraham felt. God. Come on. Noah got a rainbow for his sign of the covenant. Couldn't we just do a double rainbow or something? Apparently not.

God's plan. Circumcision is a permanent mark in the flesh, a reminder of something cut directly into the body. If you have trouble relating, think of what drives people to get tattooed. When I was 18, I permanently marked my right shoulder with the name Andrea. It's different, to be sure. Very different. But the drive behind it and the result are similar.

Circumcision is a sign. A man is marked in the flesh in the most personal way. I have a ring on my finger that reminds me of my covenant with Andrea. Any time and all the time, Abraham's descendants would have a mark that would

remind them—in the most personal and private of times—of their covenant with God.

God made it personal. They were to hide nothing from God. Circumcision was also symbolic. The cutting away of flesh meant something. And this part applies to all of us, both Jews and Christians. Now, if you're neither of those, you're welcome here. And good news. No circumcision required.

But what about Christians? The New Testament makes a clear distinction for Christians as to what that circumcision is all about. The early church argued a lot about this one. Why? Because lots of Gentiles were joining the church, and they were not circumcised.

So Jewish teachers in the Christian church got their flint knives ready to go. Hold on a moment. Paul, Peter, and the others made it 100% clear—circumcision was a sign of the Jewish covenant, not for the Christian. The follower of Christ is called to a circumcision of the heart, sort of a spiritual surgery where God cuts away the sinful nature of flesh from your heart.

Now, the sign of our covenant in Christ is the Holy Spirit working in us and through us. In verse 15, God renews his promises to Sarai as well. Sarai is Abraham's wife, and her faith and her walk have been growing and maturing right alongside Abraham. And in recognition, her name is changed to Sarah.

Here, God makes it clear that the wife is a part of the family covenant with God. The covenant was given to the man as the leader, but Sarah is an equal partner. In response, Abraham falls face down and laughs. Now it's hard to tell if this is disbelief, but I think it's joyous belief. He's a hundred, his wife is ninety, and they're going to have a son.

But then Abraham remembers that he already has a son.

“And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before you!’ God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac’” (Genesis 17:18–21).

So God makes clear distinctions between Ishmael and Isaac. And we should be very clear on this as well. God promised to bless Ishmael. Abraham loved his son, and God listened. The name Ishmael means “God hears,” and God has blessed Ishmael. The Arab people and the Arab nations are descendants of Ishmael, brother to the Israelites. And the Arabs are called right here by God's own word a blessing from God. That's pretty awesome.

Now, why do I say that? Because the Christian church over the centuries has a habit of twisting Scripture to make an excuse for racism, and it is a sin, plain and simple. God loves the Arabs. God blessed Ishmael with descendants. But the covenant was established with Isaac. This is not favoritism. God doesn't play favorites. This is a plan with precision.

God's plan and God's covenant was based on God keeping his promises. Ishmael would be blessed. He was human and valuable as any other, but he was not the one promised. God promised a son to Abraham and Sarah, and God would keep that promise. Galatians 4 explains that in the same way, your salvation is based on God keeping his promise to you—not on your work to earn it or make it happen your way.

Now, your work is not worthless. It is valuable, just as Ishmael had value. But it can do nothing to save you or get you to heaven. That is 100% based on

trusting God to keep his promise, no matter how long you have to wait. And that is Isaac.

And speaking of the wait, God finally gave Abraham a time frame—one more year until Isaac would be born. So Abraham responded once again in faith, and he and all the men of his household were circumcised on that very day.

Read Genesis 17 today. Maybe God wants to get a little personal with you, to remind you it's time to grow up, to mature, and be blameless. And maybe he wants to remind you that he always keeps his promise.

Genesis 18 | Will You Sweep Away the Righteous with the Wicked?

Is God truly just? Does God punish the wicked and does he protect the righteous? In Genesis 18, the Lord visits Abraham to renew a promise, but more importantly, for Abraham to learn a lesson about God's justice and about God's mercy. The balance between justice and mercy, between God punishing the wicked and protecting the righteous is a delicate one.

Where do you draw the lines? Where is the line between God's wrath and God's grace? God longs to forgive but also declares, vengeance is mine, I will repay. You could spend days pondering through this, and it would be time well spent to. To understand this challenge is to get to know God's nature and his predicament.

God deals with this every day. Here in chapter 18, God will share his struggle with one of the few men that God has called friend. It is Abraham, the father of our faith. Let's check in at verse one.

“And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him.” (Genesis 18:1–2).

So Abraham looked up, and he saw three men. But these were no ordinary men. Verse one says very clearly the Lord appeared to Abraham. So one of the three men is the Lord himself, and the other two are likely angels.

And they're headed in a direction when Abraham sees them and invites them to stay for a while. The three guests agree to stay, and Abraham hurries about to prepare a meal. Then in verse nine:

“They said to him, ‘Where is Sarah, your wife?’ And he said, ‘she is in the tent.’ The Lord said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year. And Sarah, your wife shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.” (Genesis 18:9–10).

So Sarah is doing a little eavesdropping at the tent door. And when she overhears that she's going to have a child at 90 years old, she can't help but laugh. Now notice in verse 12 that Sarah laughed to herself, but she was not the only one who heard it.

“In verse 13 the Lord said to Abraham, ‘why did Sarah laugh and say, shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord?’” (Genesis 18:13–14).

I love that verse. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Truly, nothing is too hard for God. However, God does have to deal with some very difficult predicaments. In fact, he's on his way to one in verse 16.

“Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to set them on their way.” (Genesis 18:16).

“The Lord said, ‘shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.’” (Genesis 18:17–18).

Now if you know this story, you know what's coming next. God is on his way to judge and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. But why is God compelled to share his plan with Abraham? So much so that God acts as if he's human. He even allows Abraham to plead and reason with him man to man.

So why does God do it? Verse 19 explains.

“For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.” (Genesis 18:19).

God chose Abraham with a purpose, and he wants old Abe to understand the way of the Lord. Abraham must wrestle with justice and mercy as God does, and understand both judgment and salvation, and get it well enough to pass it on to his children. The question here is much bigger than why did God share? The question is why Israel? Why the covenant with Abraham?

God's plan for the world revolves around his promises made to this one man. That's why the Bible focuses so much on this one people group. So what are the Israelites chosen for? First part of the answer is in verse 19.

“To keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.”
(Genesis 18:19).

The Israelites are keepers of God's Word and of God's ways. Now of keeping His Word. They did an outstanding job. As for keeping God's ways, the rest of the Bible tells a sad story. But there's more to God's plan for Israel, and verse 19 isn't done.

Abraham's descendants were to keep the way of the Lord so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. The bigger plan was about God's promise. And what did God promise Abraham? Descendants. Lots of people to keep the way of the Lord and be a light to the world.

Land a place for that light to shine from and a blessing for the world. The ultimate plan was a savior for the entire world. Through Abraham's seed. Would the world be blessed? Not all the Israelites see to singular the Israelite the Messiah, Jesus the Savior.

Back in chapter 18, God tells Abraham his short term plan in verse 20.

“Then the Lord said, ‘because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether, according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.’” (Genesis 18:20–21).

Now hold on here. Why does God speak as if he's a man? Why does God say, I came to check it out as if he doesn't already know. Why say if I find doesn't God already know exactly what's going on? Now to answer that, consider who is this conversation for?

It's for Abraham. Of course, God wants Abraham and you and I as readers to understand and make sense of it. God doesn't just execute justice from heaven and leave us wondering. This time. He walks it out in a way that we and Abraham can understand.

God wants us to learn the difficult balance of justice and righteousness, so that we can direct our children to keep the way of the Lord. Now, keep in mind as you read that Abraham knows his nephew Lot lives in Sodom, and Abraham has already risked his life once to save Lot and the people of Sodom. So in verse 23:

“Then Abraham drew near and said, ‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are 50 righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the 50 righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked. Far be that from you. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?’” (Genesis 18:23–25).

This is the heart of the matter. God is the judge of the earth. Will he not do what is just. Yes, but what is just.

I could also say. Will not the judge of all the earth stop the wickedness? Will he not protect the weak and punish their oppressors? Women and men alike are raped just for visiting Sodom. Should God let that go on?

Here is the dilemma. Is God truly just? Is judgment fair? What about the good people? Does God send good people to hell?

God wants Abraham to grapple with this stuff. God wants you to grapple with this stuff. Read Genesis 18 today. Follow Abraham's pleadings with the Lord and wrestle with the balance of God's judgment and his mercy.

And consider what this story would mean to Abraham's descendants, who would be called to execute God's judgment on a wicked, evil, and sick, sick nation in Canaan. And yet, before that, Israel was called to wait 400 years in bondage, while God showed mercy and great patience with that same evil nation. By the time Abraham's plea is done here in chapter 18, he learns that God would spare an entire city just to save ten righteous. Imagine that a whole city in Ezekiel 18, which is a phenomenal chapter on God's justice. Go read Ezekiel 18 there.

“Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone. Repent and live.” (Ezekiel 18).

Genesis 19 | Sodom & Gomorrah

Judgment. Genesis 19 today on Through the Word, and today is Judgment Day. I don't mean today for you and I. I mean in the story it's Judgment Day. Then again, who knows? Today could be the day for us too. Do you live as though any day could be the day? Do you live ready to go?

Now, before we dig in, parents, this chapter has some serious adult content. So, kids, please let your parents check it out before you listen. Thanks. That means hit the stop button now.

All right. We left off with two angels on the way to the town of Sodom, because an outcry against the city had reached the Lord. Let's pick up the story at verse one:

“The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, ‘My Lords, please turn aside to your servant’s house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way’” (Genesis 19:1–2).

Lot is the main character in our story, a righteous man living in a wicked, wicked town. Lot is the classic backslider. A walk with God that just slipped off back into the world, as far as we can tell. He never stopped believing in God. He just chose the world first.

In verse one we find Lot in the town gate, which means that he's a leader in Sodom now. He started out on the outskirts, now he's in the in crowd. When the two angels show up, Lot immediately convinces them to stay at his home, keeping them away from the depravity of the town. But it doesn't last.

When you live in the wrong place, you don't have to find sin. Sin finds you. Kids, if you haven't hit the stop button yet, now's the time.

“But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them’” (Genesis 19:4–5).

Now when these men say “know them,” it's a euphemism. What they really mean is rape. Two strangers show up, and every man in town, young and old to the very last, shows up for a gang rape. This place is sick.

Lot goes outside and makes an attempt to stop the violence by offering his two virgin daughters in place of the men. No, I don't know what Lot is thinking, if his morals have gone wack or what, but it doesn't matter. You can't bargain with sin. It never works.

The men turn on Lot, and in verse nine they said, **“This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.”** Then in verse ten, the story gets intense:

“But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door. Then the men said to Lot, ‘Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city? Bring them out of the place. For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it’” (Genesis 19:10–13).

There's urgency in the words of the angels, and sometimes I wonder if I have the same urgency to save my family and friends.

In verse 14, Lot goes to warn the men who were engaged to his daughters, but they laugh him off. When sin reigns free, judgment sounds like a joke. Think about that. They had a chance, and they laughed.

“As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of this city.’ But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him. And they brought him out and set him outside the city. And as they brought them out, one said, ‘Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away’” (Genesis 19:15–17).

I am dumbfounded at the hesitation of Lot. He just keeps lagging. But I am even more amazed at the mercy of God. The angels nearly have to drag Lot's family out, but verse 16 explains, the Lord was merciful to them.

And here we have the heart of the whole story. There are two basic lessons here, and both of them are explained in 2 Peter 2:6:

“If God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men—if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment while continuing their punishment” (2 Peter 2:6–9).

Peter states clearly that Sodom and Gomorrah were an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly. Judgment is real and it is coming. But that's not the only lesson here.

I've heard people say, "If God doesn't judge America today, he owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology." Is that true? Is America worse than Sodom? America has perversity, to be sure. Sexual perversion. Pornography. Divorce rate. Violence. We worship money and pleasure. America is corrupt.

But someone is making a difference. And the youth that follow Jesus are making a difference in their generation. Remember I told you the story of Sodom has two lessons, and they're right here in 2 Peter 2. He says that the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials, and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment.

God knows how to rescue godly men. For those struggling to live right and stay pure, God rescues you out. But for the ungodly—for those who could be struck blind and still try to grope around to commit sin—the Lord knows how to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment.

So Lot and his family reach safety in a small town nearby. And sad to say, there is one more hard lesson to be learned here. The family was told repeatedly, don't look back. Now there's a lesson for you and I. When God saves you from depravity, don't look back.

After they reach safety, however, Lot's wife looks back. What made her do it? In Luke 17, Jesus shares the story of Sodom, how the people were eating and drinking, buying and selling like any other day, when fire and sulfur destroyed them all. Jesus says it will be just like this on the day that he is revealed. And then he says to believers, "**Remember Lot's wife**" (Luke 17:32).

And then he explains, **“Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it”** (Luke 17:33).

In other words, anyone who chases after all the worldly stuff of Sodom and calls that living will lose it all. But anyone who lets go of what the world calls life and holds on to Jesus will find the life that is truly alive. Lot's wife couldn't let go. She turned back, wanted to keep the old life, and she became a pillar of salt.

When a Christian turns back to the world, it's like the life is gone. They become a statue of the Christian that used to be so vibrant and alive.

Read Genesis 19 today. Feel the angels' urgency to save. Remember Lot's wife. And don't look back.

Genesis 20 | Making the Same Old Mistakes

Hello Through the Word listeners, we are in Genesis 20 today, and Genesis 20 is a story about Abraham making the same old mistakes again. How is it that a faithful follower of God can keep on making the same stupid mistake? I hate it. I hate that awful sinking feeling when I know I messed up, and worse yet, when I knew better. I'm a believer. I'm not supposed to screw up.

Well, if you are familiar with that feeling too, take heart. We're in good company. And if your mistakes make you wonder if God's calling on you is still valid, read Genesis 20 with me. The whole fiasco begins at verse one:

“From there, Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur, and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, ‘She is my sister.’ And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah” (Genesis 20:1–2).

So the chapter begins with a little *déjà vu*. Didn't we just read this story? Abraham moves to a new land. He's afraid they'll kill him to get Sarah, his wife, who's so beautiful. So he says that she's his sister. And King Abimelech takes her to marry. It is the same story. Only last time it was Pharaoh in Egypt, and it was 20 years earlier. Abraham just hadn't learned.

Abraham's wife Sarah was beautiful. And this is the second time on a visit to a foreign land that the local king wants to take her to be one of his wives. Now Abraham sees this coming, and he is convinced that they will kill him to get to his wife. So he tells the people that Sarah is his sister. Now you have to ask, what happened to the man of faith, and when did he turn into a coward? He

puts his wife in jeopardy to save his own hide. Thankfully, God was looking out for Sarah even when her husband wouldn't.

“But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, ‘Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife’” (Genesis 20:3).

So God says, you're a dead man. And Abimelech pleads his innocence. He didn't know.

“Then God said to him in the dream, ‘Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart. And it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her’” (Genesis 20:6).

So God protected Sarah, and God protected Abimelech as well. But what God says next is what really amazes me:

“Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live” (Genesis 20:7).

This is amazing. God tells Abimelech now of all times that Abraham is a prophet. That's wild. The only thing Abimelech knows about this man is that he lied. And God says, this guy's my prophet. A prophet is someone who speaks for God. And God is not ashamed of Abraham, even at his absolute low point. God sticks up for him. Now there is a true friend.

There are two good lessons to learn here. The first is from Romans 11:29:

“The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).

In other words, if God has called you, if he's gifted you, God doesn't take it back. Now this explains a few things. It explains how a preacher can

genuinely speak God's word and connect with people and then sin terribly. Which is awful. But it happens. And it explains that God is not done with you even when you screw up.

The second lesson here is that though a prophet speaks for God, he is not perfect, and most of what he says is not from God. Abraham is human, and he lied. So just because God chooses to speak through a man or a woman one time doesn't mean you should trust everything they say.

So Abimelech wakes up in the morning and he tells his servants about the dream, and everyone's afraid.

“Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, ‘What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.’ And Abimelech said to Abraham, ‘What did you see, that you did this thing?’” (Genesis 20:9–10).

Now this is interesting. The pagan king finds out that the man who lied to him is actually a man of God, and he wants an explanation. Abraham attempts one:

“I did it because I thought, ‘There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife’” (Genesis 20:11).

Now think about Abraham's excuse here a moment. He says that he lied because there's no fear of God in this place. So he's sure they were going to kill him to get to his wife. Abraham knows from experience that the fear of God restrains evil, but these people had none.

Now here's the irony. Abraham blames their lack of God-fearing. But what was Abraham doing when he lied? Who is he afraid of? Abraham feared man more than he feared God, and that's why he lied. Believer, don't blame your failure on someone else's shortcomings. Yes, they affect you, but ultimately your actions are on you, and it is your respect for God that matters most. Your decisions are driven either by the fear of God or the fear of man. Not their fear. Yours.

Next, Abraham digs his pit a little deeper:

“Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife” (Genesis 20:12).

So Abraham's trying to get off on a technicality here. I told the truth, just not all of it. It doesn't work that way. A partial truth with an insinuated lie is a lie just the same. If you purposefully mislead someone, although your words are technically true, you're still lying to their face. And it's a sin.

Now, I don't know what Abimelech thinks of Abraham at this point, but that dream certainly put the fear of God into him. He returned Sarah to Abraham, gives Abraham a bunch of gifts, and tells him he can live wherever he wants.

“To Sarah he said, ‘Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated’” (Genesis 20:16).

There's a touch of sarcasm there when he says “your brother.” But to Sarah, Abimelech is very respectful, and he puts a great emphasis on her innocence.

So did Sarah do the right thing? She honored her husband's request—stupid as it was. Abraham put her in jeopardy to save his own hide, the opposite of

his calling as a husband, and she submitted and respected. Honestly, would you have done it? Sarah was faithful. She showed respect even when Abraham didn't deserve it.

Husbands are called to unconditional love. Love like Jesus. But wives, do you recognize your calling to unconditional respect? Respect your husband not for his sake, but for God's. Peter tells Christian wives to win their unbelieving husbands over with their respectful and pure conduct.

Sarah was in a crazy situation here. There was no good, clean answer for what she should do. But Sarah decided to respect her husband's direction, and in the end, God protected her and vindicated her. That means she's guilt free.

And what about Abraham?

“Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children” (Genesis 20:17).

That is pretty amazing. Abraham prayed and they were healed, even after he made the same mistake again. God desires Abraham's prayers and he waits for them to respond.

Read Genesis 20 today, and if you're a believer, consider the irrevocable nature of God's calling on you. Even when we mess up badly, God restores us and calls us to pray for the very ones who saw us fall.

Why do we fall, Bruce? So we can learn how God picks us up.

Genesis 21 | Isaac & Ishmael

What do you call someone who always keeps their word? Well, I'd like to call them friend, because that is someone that you can trust. In Genesis 21, God keeps his word. Abraham and Sarah have been following God and trusting in his promises for several decades now, with the promise of a son being foremost in their minds. Waiting on God's timing is not easy, but it does pay off.

Let's pick up at verse one:

“The Lord visited Sarah, as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him” (Genesis 21:1–2).

In the first two verses alone, God's faithfulness to keep his word is stated three times—“as he had said,” “as he had promised,” and “at the time at which God had spoken to him.” God came through. Sarah was 90. Abraham 100. And God came through.

Abraham did his part. He circumcised the boy as he had promised on the eighth day, and the boy was named Isaac, which means laughter. Now, this is a beautiful name to give to a little boy, and I love what Sarah says about it in verse six:

“God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh over me. And she said, who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age” (Genesis 21:6–7).

Sarah is 90. She waited a lifetime for this, and the last 25 years she waited on God's promise. And now she just laughs. You know that feeling when you've waited a long time?

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12).

That is exactly where Sarah is at. At long last, God has brought her laughter. Sarah laughed before, but that was the laughter of disbelief. This time it's pure joy.

But life wasn't all a box of giggles just yet. There was another boy, Ishmael. Let's read verse eight:

“And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing” (Genesis 21:8–9).

So baby Isaac gets a party because he's not nursing anymore. And Ishmael is caught mocking—which is understandable, considering he's about 17 years old and he's invited to a weaning party. I mean, come on. But honestly, teenagers mock, and it's not good. Mocking shows a false maturity.

“God mocks proud mockers” (Proverbs 3:34).

In other words, mockery works just like the rubber and glue principle. When you make somebody else look small, God bounces it right back on you and makes you look small.

Sarah is not having it. She tells Abraham to get rid of Hagar and Ishmael. But at verse 11:

“The thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you. For through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring” (Genesis 21:11–13).

So God says, listen to your wife, Abraham. That's a good verse for husbands. But this is a tough call. Nonetheless, Abraham has to trust God on this one. God kept one promise to bring a son through Sarah, and he will keep this promise to bless Ishmael.

Abraham sends Hagar and the young man Ishmael with food and water, but it doesn't last long.

“When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot. For she said, let me not look on the death of the child. And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, what troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation” (Genesis 21:15–18).

So Hagar got desperate, and she gave up hope. And once again the angel of God shows up to visit, just as he did before. Now watch the wording carefully and you may find a clue that the angel of God is none other than God Himself: *“I will make him into a great nation,”* he says.

And I love the promise that God makes here. He doesn't just say, "Yes, your boy will survive the night." He says, "I will make him a nation." But think back a second. The angel of the Lord already promised that to Hagar the last time she gave up hope. Sometimes we get so caught up in the trials of the moment that we forget what God has already promised for the long term.

"Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water" (Genesis 21:19).

God had had a plan all along, and a momentary trial would not get in the way of God keeping his word.

"And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow" (Genesis 21:20).

So Ishmael survived, and he grew up and got married. But Ishmael's story is a hard one. Was Ishmael unwanted? Was he a mistake that his parents made only to be cast away when he came of age? We know that his dad loved him, but he had to feel lesser in some ways.

His family was messy, to be sure, but it wasn't his fault he was born into it. And yet verse 20 says, God was with the boy as he grew up. Listen, mistake or not in human terms, doesn't matter. God was with him and God blessed him.

Read Genesis 21 today, and as you do, there is one more very important picture to draw for you here. Galatians chapter four explains that this entire story of the two sons is one big allegory. Now it is clearly presented as a true story, but it is also a picture of a spiritual truth:

“For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants” (Galatians 4:22, 24).

Now, what that means is that Hagar and Sarah represent two different ways to enter relationship or covenant with God. Hagar represents the covenant of Mount Sinai, the law. Hagar was a slave, and living by the law will only make you a slave to the law.

We cannot be set free or made righteous by keeping the rules of the law. All of our works to save ourselves are just works of the flesh, and that's what Ishmael represents—our own fleshly attempts to make God's plan happen. Salvation by works. Trying to be good enough. It's all slavery. Slave to sin or slave to the law—you're still in chains.

Now Sarah represents the covenant of promise. Promise to Abraham and fulfilled in Jesus. Sarah is the free woman, and the children of her covenant are meant for freedom. **“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free”** (Galatians 5:1).

Now, this isn't talking about Isaac and Ishmael, not the real ones, nor about the Jews and the Arabs. It is the covenant for all people that comes by faith in Jesus Christ. Galatians explains that every one of us was born a slave to sin and to the law. And every one of us is invited to be like Isaac, a child of promise in God's promise.

We are born to be free. Free to live and love. And in that freedom there is so much joy and laughter.

“So you are no longer a slave but a son” (Galatians 4:7)

Genesis 22 | Abraham, Isaac, and the Ultimate Sacrifice

Genesis 22 on Through the Word.

As we come to one of the most difficult and one of the most important stories in the Old Testament, this one will stop you and challenge your concept of love, of sacrifice, and of the heart of God.

We find Abraham in a good place in life. He has a son. His wife is laughing, and he made peace with his neighbors. Life is good. God is good.

Chapter 22, verse 1:

“Some time later, God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you” (Genesis 22:1–2).

Ah! Say what?

It sounded like God just asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. As in, kill. So much for life is good. And what about God is good?

If you don't know this story, I encourage you to see it through to the end. If you do know how it ends, remember that Abraham doesn't. All he knows is that God is good. God is faithful. And God just asked him to do something that doesn't make any sense—because murder is wrong.

And just to clarify: if ever a moment comes when you think maybe God is telling you to murder, He is not. Obey God's law. Do not murder. Stick to that. And most of you, I hope, would say yes.

Of course. Murder is very wrong. Don't do it.

So what's with this story? That instinct is right. And I believe God expects this story to be jarring. I'm sure it was for Abraham. So let's walk through it with him and trust God for the message here.

Trust God is exactly what Abraham did.

Verse 3:

“Early the next morning, Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about” (Genesis 22:3).

So Abraham heads out. Gotta wonder what's going through old Abe's mind along the road here. He heard a clear word from God. No foggy wonderings. This was the voice of God. And Abraham knows God's voice.

God is good. He's been faithful to keep His word for decades. God made a covenant with Abraham, and Abe trusted. And at the very heart of that covenant is a promise of descendants. And God came through. And He said, *It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.*

So now what? How does he get descendants through Isaac if Isaac dies without kids?

I'm sure Abraham asked that question as he looked over at Isaac. Based on the timeline, Isaac is somewhere between childhood and 30-something. It could well be a young adult.

And do not underestimate the sinking weight in the heart of a father looking at his son and knowing he could lose him. Or *could* he lose him?

God said that Isaac will have offspring.

Hebrews offers a little insight into Abraham's thinking here. *Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead.*

So they kept going.

Verse 4:

“On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance”
(Genesis 22:4).

The place is called Moriah. It's a mountain ridge that goes through what would later be Jerusalem.

“He said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you’”
(Genesis 22:5).

Now watch his words there: *We will come back to you.* Somehow Abraham has faith that his son will return.

Verse 6:

“Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, ‘Father?’ ‘Yes, my son?’ Abraham replied. ‘The fire and the wood are here,’ Isaac said, ‘but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’”

“Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ And the two of them went on together” (Genesis 22:6–8).

Remember that phrase. It will come back.

And the two of them went on together.

“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son” (Genesis 22:9–10).

“But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied” (Genesis 22:11).

“‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son’” (Genesis 22:12).

“Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son” (Genesis 22:13).

Don’t miss that last phrase: *instead of his son*.

So the Lord stopped him. And the Lord provided.

Verse 14:

“Abraham called that place ‘The Lord Will Provide.’ And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided’” (Genesis 22:14).

Interesting. The saying was, *It will be provided on the mountain of the Lord*.
What mountain?

That question is the key to understanding all of this.

That mountain they're on is Moriah. Later, Jerusalem would be built there—and God's temple. And just outside that town, a mount called Golgotha, or Calvary. Two millennia later, on that very same mount, one of Isaac's own descendants—a rabbi named Jesus—would hang on a Roman cross.

Jehovah Jireh. On the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided.

And all of this story, from beginning to end, is a striking foreshadowing of that event.

This story is jarring. It *should* be. God did not want Abraham to sacrifice the life of his own child. But He *does* want us to grapple with the reality and the heartbreak of what it took for Him to sacrifice *His* Son.

Walk back through the story:

Take your son, your only son, whom you love.

Jesus is the only Son of God. The voice of the Father declared at Jesus' baptism: *This is my Son, whom I love*. Isaac bore the wood on his back, just as Jesus bore the wooden cross to the same mount. And remember when Isaac asked about a lamb, and Abraham said, *God himself will provide the lamb?* That word was prophetic. God would provide the lamb. And it would be God Himself. And I wonder what it was like for God the Father to watch Abraham go through this—knowing that Abraham would not have to follow through, but *He* would.

And what about Jesus? He saw it too.

In fact, the angel of the Lord who stopped Abraham—do you remember who that is? That's the Lord Himself.

I'm convinced that's Jesus.

What was it like for Him, knowing this would be the same mountain?

And did you notice that Abraham looked up and saw a ram? But a ram is not quite the same as a lamb.

So that ram was not the promised lamb. That's why it was said, *On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.*

And so it was.

And just as the ram was sacrificed instead of his son, so Jesus was sacrificed instead of you.

Instead of me.

He took our place. He paid the price for our sin so we could be forgiven. So we could live.

Verse 15:

“The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all

nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me”

(Genesis 22:15–18).

And so the Lord renews His covenant with Abraham. And notice: *through your offspring*—the word there is singular. While Abraham’s descendants are a blessing to the world, I believe the Lord is referring to one particular descendant.

The Word become flesh.

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The one and only—Jesus.

Genesis 23 | Wisdom in the House of Mourning

Genesis 23 today, on Through the Word. A chapter of wisdom that can only be found in the house of mourning.

Abraham and Sarah, faithfully married for so many decades. Pilgrims and sojourners together to the end, are separated at last by death.

At verse 1:

“Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her” (Genesis 23:1–2).

So Sarah is gone from this world, and Abraham weeps. They were married for a century. Abe and Sarah are both known for their faith in God and their faithfulness to God. But it should not be missed that this man and woman who were faithful to God were also faithful to each other.

Oh, they had their trials, and they both had their failures. They had foolish ideas and bad mistakes. But they also had each other. And their relationship with each other outlasted all the rest.

Abraham was called to one wild adventure of a faith walk, and Sarah followed her husband faithfully through it all. She stuck with him even through his failings and weaknesses, and together they saw God faithful to keep His promise.

Sarah is one of the great female heroes of the Word—a woman of faith. And in the New Testament, she's made an example for Christian wives

everywhere. Here in Genesis 23, Sarah dies and Abraham weeps. A man of faith can weep. But his tears are not the tears of despair. They're tears of loss, to be sure.

But I believe they were also full of hope.

When a loved one dies, that time in the valley of the shadow of death can teach you some things. There is wisdom to be found in mourning.

Ecclesiastes 7 says:

“The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure” (Ecclesiastes 7:4).

So what does our old wise man Abraham learn from his mourning time?

Verse 3:

“And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, ‘I am a sojourner and foreigner among you. Give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight’” (Genesis 23:3–4).

So Abraham gets up from his weeping, and his first words are: *I am a sojourner and foreigner among you*. This is the first time we see Abraham acknowledge this fact. Now, he says this, for one, because he doesn't own any land to bury his wife. But I believe that Abraham has a profound realization here.

Death has taught him something.

Hebrews 11 retells much of Abraham's story as a powerful example of the journey of faith, along with many other faith heroes:

“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

This word in Hebrews is directly about Abraham. He never received all the land that God promised him—not while he was still alive anyway. But he knew that it was coming. And he acknowledged right here in our story that he was a stranger and an exile.

It took Sarah’s death to really get it. But he got it.

Then Hebrews says:

“If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country—that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:15–16).

This is the heart of the entire story. Abraham and Sarah walked together and walked by faith. They were promised a homeland. But at some point, they came to the realization that home was not on this earth.

Now, the promised land for their promised descendants was indeed the land where they sojourned. But their home—their real land of promise—was a heavenly city. Abraham watched cities and kingdoms rise and fall. He saw two go down in burning sulfur—the very place where his nephew had tried to make a home on earth.

So he and Sarah lived in tents. Their lives were marked by two things: tents and altars. They were pilgrims here.

Hebrews 11 also says:

“He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

And that is our calling as well—if we are to walk by faith in Jesus. You may not really own that fact until you reach the house of mourning. But every house here is a tent. The only city with foundations that last is the one whose builder is God.

Abraham understood. But he still needed some land for a tomb to bury his wife’s old tent—that is, her body.

So Abe visits the Hittites nearby to buy some land.

Verse 5:

“The Hittites answered Abraham, ‘Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead’” (Genesis 23:5–6).

So the Hittites are agreeable, and Abraham chooses a location. Two times Abraham uses the phrase: *bury my dead out of my sight*. Abraham learned something in the house of mourning, but he does not intend to live his entire life there.

There’s a good lesson here for Christians. Allow death to teach you its lessons. But don’t dwell on that shadow forever.

Jesus defeated death for us. And He is faithful to turn our mourning into dancing—in His time—if we are willing to dance again.

In verse 9, the location Abraham chooses for a tomb is the cave of Machpelah, which means "double doors." It's a fitting place to bury a believer in Christ. The grave has two doors: an entry and an exit.

The cave at Machpelah belonged to a man named Ephron. And in **verse 11**, Ephron responds:

“No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead” (Genesis 23:11).

Now, this appears to be very generous of Ephron. But I think I know a ridiculous dance when I see one.

Ephron is attempting to start the ridiculous bargaining dance with Abraham. This is a common bargaining tactic used in the Middle East to this day. You have a known buyer, so you make yourself look generous by offering it for free. It's rarely genuine, but it looks good.

Abraham insists on paying for the cave. So Ephron responds again that it's a gift—but he happens to let the price slip along the way.

In verse 15:

“My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me?”

Leave behind any unpaid debts.

So Abraham pays in full.

Verse 20:

“The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites” (Genesis 23:20).

And so the chapter closes with Abraham dwelling in a land promised to him by God—a land large enough for a nation—here purchasing the only property he would ever own in his lifetime.

Abraham walked by faith.

Read Genesis 23 today. And read Hebrews 11 too, if you can.

If you are mourning, learn something there. But do not mourn as those who have no hope.

Jesus conquered death. He rose from His cave.

And in Christ, we say—along with Abraham, and with Sarah, and with the writer of Hebrews:

“Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come”
(Hebrews 13:14).

Genesis 24 | A Bride for My Son

Welcome back to the book of Genesis.

Today—the great quest, the grand search, the thrilling pursuit... Abraham sends his servant to find a bride for his son Isaac. Now there is a task: finding the right person to marry. For some, a joyous and singular event. For many, a deep frustration and arduous journey.

There's a reason that this one task is the central storyline of ten zillion books and reality shows and scary movies—I mean—romantic comedies.

Well—sometimes all of the above.

Our story in Genesis 24 is one of the oldest such stories. And as we shall see, God uses it to illustrate one of the most important elements in His plan for mankind. The symbolism here is amazing. But it's a story first. So let's start in verse 1:

“Abraham was now very old, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. He said to the senior servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, ‘Put your hand under my thigh’” (Genesis 24:1–2).

Now don't misread this part. A little awkward in our culture, but in Abraham's, it was simply a way for his servant to make a serious and solemn oath.

Abraham is sending him to choose a wife for his son. No small matter. This is personal. This is big.

This is—an arranged marriage. That was the culture. Actually, that was part of most cultures in most of history. But even for parents who don't arrange the matter, if you love your kids—who they marry—is a very big deal. So Abraham gets a solemn oath.

His Canaanite neighbors are bad news. So Abraham says: choose a wife from my relatives—like a cousin. Again—common practice for most of history.

So the servant asks, what if the bride is unwilling to come back? Should I take your son out there?

No. Abraham insists—Isaac stays here. The Lord promised this land to my offspring. And the Lord:

“...will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there” (Genesis 24:7).

Verse 8:

“If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine.”

So—the servant swears an oath, loads up ten camels with all kinds of goods, and sets out for Aram Naharaim and the town of Nahor. Nahor is Abraham’s brother—son of Terah. But it’s been a while.

The servant arrives just outside of town. And after the long journey, he has the camels kneel down near a well. No doubt thirsty after the journey. It’s evening—the time when women come to the well for water. And the servant stops—to pray.

Verse 12:

“Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.”

In his prayer, the servant asks God for a sign: when I ask a young woman for a drink of water—if she also offers to water the camels—let her be the one You have chosen.

And before he finishes the prayer, Rebekah arrives—carrying her water jar on her shoulder. So—the servant approaches and asks for water.

Rebekah obliges, and in **verse 19**:

“I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink.”

So she did. That’s a lot of work, by the way. Ten camels drink a *lot* of water. And water was generally fetched by descending stairs into the well, filling the jar, and carrying it up. This is gonna take a while.

Verse 21:

“Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.”

The camels drink up, and the servant gives Rebekah a gold nose-ring and two gold bracelets—about four ounces of gold. Not bad.

And he asks her:

“Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?”

She answered him, **“I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milkah bore to Nahor.”**

Not only that, but they also have plenty of straw for the camels and room to sleep.

Verse 26:

“Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord.”

Praise the Lord. He is good, He is faithful. I love it. And watch what the servant says:

“As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives” (Genesis 24:27).

I love it. What a beautiful picture of how the Lord guides us through life. We don’t get signs and wonders for every step, but as we trust and obey, and just venture forth, He leads us on the journey—and gets us where we need to be.

Well, Rebekah runs home to tell her family. And her brother Laban takes special interest. Notice in **verse 30**:

“As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister’s arms...”

Laban will become a central character some chapters from now. Take note here—he eyes the gold—and runs out to meet the guy who brought it. And for his part, Laban is all grace and hospitality. He welcomes the servant, makes room for the camels, the men with him—even sets food out for all of them.

But the servant speaks up:

“I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say” (Genesis 24:33).

And so he recounts the whole story.

Now—as he retells the story—we have an opportunity to see the story from another perspective. All of this—every element—is a grand picture of our own story.

Remember two chapters back—when Abraham was called to sacrifice his son? That was a clear picture of Jesus—whom the Father sacrificed for our salvation. Well, watch how the story plays out.

Isaac pictures Jesus. Notice—we haven't seen Isaac since the mountain of sacrifice. We know he's alive—but he simply doesn't appear in the story. But in the meantime—the father sends a servant to find the son a bride.

The servant—pictures the Holy Spirit.

And catch the picture: Father God sends the Holy Spirit to find a bride for the Son, Jesus.

Now this is the greatest finding-a-bride story of all time.

The servant heads out with ten camels. Ten is the number of law—as in Ten Commandments. And the camels play a central role in finding the bride.

Galatians tells us that the law is like a guardian—or teacher—that brings us to Christ. The law—do not steal, do not covet, do not have any other gods—all of it shows us that we are sinners—that we need grace.

We can work and work to try to water all ten camels—and keep all Ten Commandments—but it's hard work.

Yet the Holy Spirit teaches us grace. He gives us gifts that we don't earn or deserve.

So the gold pictures the gifts of the Spirit.

And notice—the servant never speaks of himself, goes unnamed. Just as the Holy Spirit doesn't call attention to Himself, but is always working to bring glory to Jesus. And core to the Spirit's role is finding a bride for Christ, inviting us into a covenant with a groom we haven't even seen—but we will.

Well, back in our story.

The servant finishes his story, and he puts the question to the father and brother. Will they consent to the marriage?

Verse 50:

“Laban and Bethuel answered, ‘This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other’” (Genesis 24:50).

They recognize—this is a God thing.

And the servant praises God and brings out more gifts—*“gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing”*—and he gives some to Rebekah, and more still to her family.

For them, this was an assurance that this guy is legit. And—it's just grace. God provided much for Abraham, and the servant passed on the blessing.

For us, the gifts of the Holy Spirit—those special abilities and opportunities that He gives to us—to Jesus' bride—some natural like helps, teaching, and encouragement, others supernatural like prophecy and healing—those gifts are an assurance that God's promise is legit.

Like an engagement ring—they remind us that God will come through.

We have a wedding ahead. We will see Jesus.

Speaking of which—the chapter ends as Rebekah says her goodbyes, receives a beautiful blessing, and hops up on a camel for the long road—to meet her groom.

Isaac is out in the field—sees the camels approaching in the distance. Rebekah also looks up—and sees Isaac. She gets down from her camel—and covers herself with a veil.

In the symbolic picture—notice she leaves the camel. The law may bring us to Jesus—but our new covenant is not based on works of the law.

But more importantly for our story—Isaac marries Rebekah!

Verse 67:

“So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”

Isn’t that beautiful? *He loved her.*

Great story. Read Genesis 24, and for more insight on the symbolism here—we have a b-side today to dig into all that good stuff. So please join me for that, and I’ll meet you back here—in 25.

Genesis 25 | Jacob & Esau

Welcome to Through the Word. My name is Kris Langham, and we are in Genesis 25 now.

In chapter 25, a new generation is born, and with them, a war begins. We've come to a major shift in our story. The first generation of the faith is passing from the scene. Sarah has died already. And now Abraham will join his bride. Isaac is now the patriarch of the family, and his boys will come out fighting.

There is a battle, and the battle we read about here is more than just sibling rivalry. It is a picture of the war that rages inside every Christian—the battle between the spirit and the flesh. We'll see that soon. But first, we close out Abraham's story, beginning at verse 7:

“These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.” (Genesis 25:7–8)

So there it is. Abraham, the great man of faith, died at a good old age indeed, and his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave with his wife Sarah, buried in the only property that Abraham ever owned—still trusting in God for the promise of so much land for his descendants.

Now, remember I told you before that typology is like symbolism or foreshadowing—Old Testament Bible stories that are true, but also picture a spiritual truth often explained in the New Testament.

This is important stuff as you read, so here's a quick review of the symbols so far. Scholars can argue over the details, but here's the big picture: Abraham is the father of the faith, and he serves as a picture for us of Father God.

Abraham's wife, Sarah, is a picture of Israel. Israel is often likened to a wife for God the Father.

Now their son Isaac is a picture of Jesus. Jesus is the Son of the Father and born into this world through Israel, of course. Now what about the storyline in Genesis 22? Abraham was called to sacrifice his son Isaac—a powerful picture of Father God making a sacrifice of His Son, Jesus the Christ.

Now, Abraham didn't go through with it, but the picture was powerful. In Genesis 23, Sarah dies, and in a similar way, Israel was removed from their homeland soon after Jesus died. They got kicked out in 70 A.D.

Then in Genesis 24, a bride was found for Isaac, and there we saw an amazing picture of how the Holy Spirit finds a bride for Jesus. Isaac married Rebekah, and she serves as a picture of the Christian church. Christians are the bride of Christ.

And that brings us to Genesis 25.

And the heart of the story here is about the next generation. So where do Isaac and Rebekah's kids fit into this picture?

Let's start at verse 19:

“These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to be his wife.” (Genesis 25:19–20)

Then verse 21:

“And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.” (Genesis 25:21)

So Isaac prayed for children, and God listened. And in verse 22:

“The children struggled together within her, and she said, ‘If it is thus, why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.’” (Genesis 25:22–23)

So there are twin boys in Rebekah's womb, and they are fighting up a storm before they hit daylight. The boys would be Esau and Jacob, and the Lord declared His plan from the start. The younger was chosen to lead. Jacob was born second, but he would become Israel, the father of the nation.

Now, whether that was predestination or foreknowledge, I'll leave between you and the sovereignty of God. What I can tell you is the typology here.

Remember that Rebekah pictures Christians—and inside Rebekah, a war rages. These boys picture for us the battle between the flesh and the spirit. When you become a Christian, the battle inside you begins.

Esau is a picture of the flesh—born first, as is the flesh first in us. Esau's name means “hairy,” and he is a manly man from the very start. He's red and hairy at birth, and he grows up to be a skilled hunter.

Now Jacob was out second, but he grabbed the heel of Esau on the way out. Jacob means “heel catcher,” as in, grab your heel and trip you up. Jacob is a

picture of the spirit in us—born second, but destined to rule. Jacob was a quiet man and a homebody, but also a bit of a trickster.

Unlike the spirit, Jacob would become known for his deceit. The deception begins at verse 29:

“Once, when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, ‘Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted.’ Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright.’ Esau said, ‘I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?’” (Genesis 25:29–32)

Pause there a moment. To understand this story, you have to know what a birthright is. The birthright was Esau's right as the firstborn to become the patriarch of the family.

When the father died, it included a double portion of the inheritance so that Esau would take responsibility for the family—for their welfare, and also for their spiritual leadership.

Now the birthright should mean everything to Esau. But right now, he's not interested. All he can think about is—he's hungry. He's been out hunting, and he sees a bowl of stew that Jacob's cooking, and he's willing to give up his birthright for a quick bite.

Now remember that Esau pictures the flesh. And the flesh is always hungry for more. Never satisfied. And it's that hunger that makes the flesh foolish. His hunger may be lust, greed, selfish ambition—it doesn't matter. It's always about “I need, I want, gimme gimme gimme.”

Have you ever noticed that your flesh tries to act so strong—and it gets so weak—when it's faced with just a little temptation?

"I'm about to die," Esau said. You are *not* going to die without that stew. Or that girl. Or that money. Or that car. Or toy. Or phone. Or whatever momentary pleasure you crave.

Face it: your flesh is a drama queen. Every whim and desire—suddenly life or death. And it will press you with the gravity of its need, until the things that you really value don't seem to matter in comparison.

"I'm about to die! What good is my job, wife, husband, kids, reputation, ministry, calling..." The things that men and women sacrifice—for a pot of stew, or an image on a screen, or a little green paper—are mind-boggling.

Esau gave up his birthright. This was huge. It was his life. His whole future was wrapped up in it. But the flesh will always trade *anything* in the future for what it wants right now.

Jacob was quite happy to oblige. And in verse 33:

“Jacob said, ‘Swear to me now.’ So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob.” (Genesis 25:33)

Read Genesis 25 today. Watch as the war begins. And watch for the pictures and insights into the war inside you.

And watch out for the foolish hungers of your flesh that distort your values—and destroy your future.

If you are truly hungry, then listen to Jesus in John chapter 7:

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:27, 35)

Genesis 26 | New Generation, Same Old Story

Genesis 26 on Through the Word—with a new generation and the same old story.

Abraham has gone now, and we focus now on Isaac's life. Much of what we read will sound very familiar to what we read in Abraham's story. Life can be like that. Each generation in a family can be so different, but their stories have so much in common.

That can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on the previous generation's story. We'll see a little bit of both in Genesis 26, and we'll find some good insight on things like repeating your father's mistakes—and even generational curses.

Let's dig in at verse 1:

“Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelek king of the Philistines. And the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.’” (Genesis 26:1–4)

Now if you don't pay careful attention, you might say, haven't I read this part already? There's a famine, a move to Gerar, King Abimelek, God's

promises—this all happened before. And it did—to Abraham. That's why in verse 1 it says “a famine besides the one in Abraham's time.”

Isaac has his own life to live, but in some ways, he's got to go back. There's a famine, as each new generation must face its own trials and prove its own faith. And more importantly, the Lord appears to Isaac. He repeats the very same promises made to his father—land, descendants, and the blessing for all nations.

In every generation, God must renew His promises and show Himself faithful once again. These promises are monumental. They are eternal. God is confirming the covenant of Abraham. The rest of the Bible and the plan for all humanity rests on this.

And God makes sure that the next generation knows them well—and knows them personally.

Then next up is another repeat. Only this one is not so good. Let's read at verse 6:

“So Isaac settled in Gerar. When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, ‘She is my sister,’ for he feared to say, ‘My wife,’ thinking, ‘Lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,’ because she was attractive in appearance.” (Genesis 26:6–7)

So Rebekah is a beauty, and Isaac lies to prevent getting killed by jealous men. And we have some serious déjà vu here. Isn't this the same mistake that Isaac's father made—twice? And this one is in the same place.

Even Gerar, with King Abimelek—though this is likely the son of the previous king, since they often kept the same name. Well, like father, like son. And let

this be a warning to dads: your kids will copy what you do, no matter how foolish.

Now this story, however, is resolved a little quicker than the last one. Abimelek looks out his window and catches Isaac and Rebekah in a PDA—and he puts an end to all their shenanigans. But this story brings up a deeper question: are we doomed to repeat our father's mistakes?

Let me tell you my story.

My father was a man that I respect very much. There's so much about him that I try to emulate. But my dad had his faults too—and there are some that I do not want to repeat. My father loved me, and I knew it, and I choose to pass that on to my kids.

But I am not doomed to repeat my father's mistakes. Yes, our parents' lives affect us deeply—success and failure, strength and fault. And I don't know your story or your parents. You may stumble along the same path, but it is your choice whether to stay on it.

The Bible does not validate the idea of a generational curse. And if you wrestle with this issue, I would encourage you to check out Ezekiel 18, which is a phenomenal chapter where God makes it clear that He deals with every generation individually.

The story moves on in verse 12:

“And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.” (Genesis 26:12–13)

So even after Isaac's foolish mistake, he is blessed. God kept His promise of blessing from back in verse 3, which also goes all the way back to Isaac's father. Which makes you think again—back on that generational curse idea.

Yes, Isaac had a common weakness with his dad. Whether it was DNA or bad example, he messed up just the same. But if anything, what we see here from God is a **generational blessing**—and that is much more the nature of our Lord.

Listen to what God says in Deuteronomy 5:9:

“I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (Deuteronomy 5:9–10)

Now the first part of that verse is a tough one. God visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Now, this is challenging, but that phrase can be understood and interpreted in two different ways.

It could mean that God punishes the kids for Dad's mistake—like a generational curse. But God vehemently argues against that in Ezekiel 18. So what else could it mean?

It says **God visits**—as in, God knows that your father's sin will affect your life with serious consequences. But **God visits**. He keeps coming back, generation after next, to show a way out.

And the heart of the verse is the second part: **God shows steadfast love to thousands of generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments.**

God is drawing a striking contrast between the 3 or 4 generations affected by those who hate God—and the **thousands of generations** that He blesses for the sake of the one who loves Him.

Isaac was blessed abundantly because his dad loved and obeyed God.

Now—even blessings come with challenges in this world, especially when envy creeps in. The Philistines were nearby, and they started to covet Isaac's wealth. The Philistines started plugging up Isaac's water wells just for spite. But Isaac moved on into more open spaces.

And there God met him in verse 24:

“And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, ‘I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.’” (Genesis 26:24)

So there it is. God said to Isaac: **I am with you.** I believe that is the greatest of all encouragements.

Think about that little phrase. When you're a kid and afraid, do you want Dad to say, “Everything's going to be okay”? Or, “I'll be here with you”? When you're going through a rough time, which friend is closer—one who sends help from a distance, or one who goes through it with you?

Our God does make things okay. And He does send help. But most importantly, **our God is with us.**

Isaac responds in verse 25:

“So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac’s servants dug a well.” (Genesis 26:25)

And there in that one verse, you have the three marks of Isaac's life.

Like his father before him, Isaac was marked by **tents, wells, and altars**. The **tent** showed that Isaac was a pilgrim—a stranger and alien on this earth. The **well** was a marking of a life watered with the blessings of God. And the **altar** showed a life sacrificed to God.

For you and I, our tent is this body—as we are pilgrims passing through. Our well is the living water of the Holy Spirit and the cleansing water of God's Word. And our altar is the cross of Jesus Christ. We are crucified with Him—a life given wholly to the Lord.

Genesis 27 | The Blessing

Genesis 27 on *Through the Word*—and the story of Isaac blessing his son.

Now exactly *which* son he will bless is a little tricky. Even Isaac gets confused about that one. In this story, we see the awesome value of a father's blessing upon his son. Sadly, we'll also see two boys who are willing to lie, cheat, and deceive in order to get it.

We are in the story of the first patriarchs of the faith. Isaac is an old man now, and his twin boys, Esau and Jacob, are fully grown, but not yet married. Esau was older by only a few seconds, but that was enough to give him all the rights of firstborn. And yet God declared from the very beginning that the older will serve the younger.

That was God's plan—for Jacob to be the leader. Ultimately, as we shall see, God will have His way. But what the people do in the meantime is rather a mess.

Let's read verse 1:

“When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, ‘My son’; and he answered, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.’” (Genesis 27:1–4)

So Isaac is old and blind now, and he wants to give Esau his fatherly blessing. Esau was a hunter, while Jacob a homebody. So Isaac sent Esau out on the hunt.

Now, before we get too far, I have to point out something in Genesis 27: everyone is getting it wrong. Everyone but God.

Of course, you have to get used to this in the Bible. We like to look for the good guys and the bad guys—or at least someone to root for. But in the Bible, as in real life, we don't always have a good guy in every story. The Bible presents real people, and here we have a family with four people who believe in God—and every one of them is getting it wrong.

Lies. Deception. Selfish ambition. Rebellion against God's plan. Anger. Even hatred.

The amazing thing about it is—God still accomplishes His plan. But there will be a high price to pay for the deception. This family will be driven apart before we're done.

So what did Isaac do wrong?

Isaac knows God's declaration that the older will serve the younger. But the older is his favorite, so he is stubbornly resisting God's will—and charging ahead to bless Esau. Isaac appears to be the innocent party here, but as the patriarch, he is responsible for his family, and he is the one who instigates the whole mess by choosing a favorite and trying to bless the wrong son.

Next up, Rebekah gets it wrong.

Rebekah was eavesdropping and she overheard Isaac's instruction. But she wants Jacob to get the blessing. Jacob is Mom's favorite. So she calls Jacob over and gives him a plan in verse 8:

“Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you. Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.”

(Genesis 27:8–10)

So Rebekah has concocted a scheme to trick her hubby into blessing the wrong son. Or is it the right one?

It's a little hard to keep track. But what is Rebekah doing wrong?

Well, for one, she's plotting a huge deception. And another, she's disrespecting her husband. But isn't she just trying to do something that God had already planned?

Yes, but Rebekah is trying to accomplish God's will—and do God's work—but **in her way**. And it will backfire. You **cannot** achieve God's will **in your way**, as we shall see. God *will* work out His plan, but your schemes and your way will cost you.

So what is this blessing anyway? And what's the big deal?

It's not the birthright—that was the inheritance and the responsibility for leading the family. But what's this *blessing*?

Children—all children—crave the blessing from their parents. They long to hear from Mom and Dad about who they are and where they are going. Here in America, our culture has almost completely lost this concept.

But every kid needs it.

There's two essential elements to the blessing: a **proclamation of who they are** and a **revelation of where they are headed**.

*My son, this is what I see in you now, and this is where I see your life going.
My daughter, I have watched God do this work in you, and this is the plan I think He has for you.*

This is not about forcing your dreams on your kids. It's about believing in them. Better yet, it's about believing **God** for who He made them to be—and where He is leading them.

Without the blessing of their parents—especially dads—kids wander without direction. *Who am I? Where am I headed? And who is supposed to tell me?*

So parents—for you and I both—**give your kids the blessing**.

So that's what Rebekah wants for Jacob. But Jacob is not too sure about the plan at verse 11:

“But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, ‘Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.’” (Genesis 27:11–12)

Now notice that Jacob's only real concern is that he would *seem* to be mocking—or *appear* to be tricking. Never mind that he *would* be lying. He's only concerned with **how it looks**.

And this is where Jacob gets it wrong: he puts **reputation over character**.

It's not who I am—it's what people think of me that matters.

D.L. Moody said, *“Character is what you are in the dark.”*

Well, Rebekah reassures him and comes up with a plan to put Esau’s clothing on Jacob, and use hairy goatskin on his arms and neck for hair. And it works.

Jacob goes in with the clothing, the fuzzy arms, and the food ready to go. But Isaac still seems a little leery. In verse 24:

“He said, ‘Are you really my son Esau?’ He answered, ‘I am.’” (Genesis 27:24)

So Isaac checks the hairy arms. He smells the clothing. And the great deception works. And in verse 28, Isaac gives the blessing:

**“May God give you of the dew of heaven,
and of the fatness of the earth,
and plenty of grain and wine.
Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!”** (Genesis 27:28–29)

That’s it. Jacob was blessed.

It was God’s plan from the beginning, and it would be accomplished one way or the other. But the repercussions of Jacob’s lies, Rebekah’s refusal to trust God’s way, and Isaac’s denial of God’s plan—those repercussions started immediately.

No sooner did Jacob walk out, than Esau walked in. A narrow escape—but it wouldn’t last.

Esau enters, and both he and Isaac realize the deception. Both are shaken. But Isaac finally recognizes that the blessing was truly for Jacob after all.

Esau is fit to kill, and he begs for a blessing:

“Have you not reserved a blessing for me?”

But there was no blessing to give—and Isaac knew it.

But why was there no blessing for Esau? What was God’s plan here?

I don’t know for sure, but perhaps God knew something. Remember that Esau pictures the flesh. Esau was a hunter—a manly man—but not interested in spiritual things.

He despised his birthright, counted it worthless, and that included the spiritual leadership of the family. Esau did not want to lead spiritually. And God had no blessing for the man only interested in the flesh.

Esau is enraged. And his anger turns to murderous venom against Jacob. Rebekah fears for Jacob’s life and sends him away to her brother.

And Rebekah—who tried to accomplish God’s will *in her way*—would never see her favorite son again.

As for Jacob, he is no man of faith just yet. As you read, you’ll notice that he still refers to the Lord as **his father’s** God—not his own. But God knows the future, and His plans would be accomplished.

Not through the man Jacob *is*, but through the man Jacob *would become*. Jacob has a long journey ahead. And because of his lies, that journey was now a lonely one. We’ll see Jacob again, out on the lonesome road—in chapter 28.

Genesis 28 | If God Will Be With Me...

Genesis 28 today, as we follow Jacob out to the open road—alone for the first time, and starting a journey that would alter his life.

Jacob is one of the most complex and compelling people of the Bible. He's not your typical hero. In fact, at this point, he's not even a man of real faith in God. Not only did he lie and connive his way into his father's blessing—he brought God into the lie.

As you may recall, when Isaac challenged him about his story, he said, “*The Lord your God helped me.*” He never says *my* God—only *your* God. Jacob knew that the Lord was Father’s God—and Grandfather’s God. But for Jacob himself? No. Not personal. Not yet.

Jacob's real story is still ahead—and it is one of the truly epic faith journeys of the Bible.

Well, we find Jacob in a heap of trouble here in chapter 28. He got the blessing he wanted, but he buried every bridge he had in the process. His brother Esau wants him dead now, and he has a plan to make it happen.

The story begins with farewell instructions from his father to go find a wife—and one more blessing for the road. So Jacob heads out on his journey to a place called **Padanaram**, which always makes me think of Bananarama, but that’s completely beside the point.

It was a 500-mile trek, and he was on his own—which always makes me think of Whitesnake, which really just means I need to get my head out of the 80s.

Seriously though—do you know what it is to hit the road alone? Jacob had no one. You’ve got to wonder what Jacob felt about God at this point.

He grew up learning about the God of all creation. His father built altars, prayed, made sacrifices, and blessed Jacob in God's name. But in those days, most people believed that when you left home, you left your god behind.

And then in verse 11:

“And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.” (Genesis 28:11)

There’s an old saying that a clean conscience makes for a soft pillow. Jacob had the opposite. He was alone—and he deserved it. And it looks like he chose a pillow to match how he felt. A rock.

And then in verse 12:

“And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, ‘I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth 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 promised you.’” (Genesis 28:12–15)

Now *that* was awesome.

Seriously—look at what Jacob says in verse 17:

“How awesome is this place!”

And by awesome, he means—*stand in awe and be amazed that you don't drop dead because you just saw a ladder to heaven. Angels going up and down. And Almighty God up at the top speaking to you.*

That is awesome.

Now what Jacob saw—and what God said—is huge.

First, the ladder, or the stairway. You may have heard of Jacob's ladder. This is it. A connection between earth and heaven.

There's nothing that says that we can climb it—certainly not in our own strength. The key here is that Jacob finds out that there is **a way** to heaven. He doesn't climb up. Angels do. But it *does* exist.

Now, the Old Testament never reveals how to go up. But Jesus, in John chapter 1, told Nathanael:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” (John 1:51)

In other words—Jesus said, *the mystery of the ages—the ladder to heaven—is finally revealed.* And the ladder is the Son of Man. The Son of God who was born a man. **Jesus Himself.**

Now, if you don't believe in Jesus, that's okay. Jacob was not a believer either. Not yet. But at least come to grips with **who Jesus claimed to be.**

And Jacob was coming to grips with who this God is. In verse 13, God spoke:

“I am the Lord, the God of your father.”

God recognizes that Jacob has not yet called Him his own God. But God makes His promise here nonetheless. He makes three promises, in fact—**exactly what He had told Abraham.**

It is the covenant: **land, descendants, and all the peoples of the earth blessed through you and your offspring.**

This reminder is so important. God’s plan for the Israelites was always a plan to **bless the whole world**—all peoples—through one chosen people, and one particular chosen offspring. And that one offspring was, of course, the Messiah.

God always brings it back to the big plan. But in the midst of God’s big plan for the world, Jacob has his own life to live. And right now—it’s a mess.

So the Lord spoke personally in verse 15:

“I am with you. I’ll watch over you. And I will not leave you.”

God has big plans, but He still cares personally for **one little person.**

Now all of this amazes me.

God met Jacob at his absolute low. He just lied to his dad—and brought God’s name into the lie. And **God meets him.**

Now Jacob hasn’t done anything good. He doesn’t even really have faith in God yet. And **God blesses him.**

Now **this is grace**—and it is truly amazing.

Jacob is amazed too. And in verse 16:

“Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.’” (Genesis 28:16)

This is the heart of a man who has just been struck with the reality of God’s presence—and even more, God’s personal care.

Have you ever been struck? Just overwhelmed—in awe—and even fear and trembling? *This is God. He is here.*

Your heart drops as if gravity just doubled. Your mind is struck with sudden clarity. And all your human strength, all your struggles, and all your clever ideas and schemes—suddenly feel so small.

“How awesome is this place,” says Jacob.

“This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

Early the next morning, Jacob sets the stone pillow he had used up on its end to make a memorial out of it. It is a night that he wants to remember. And in verse 19:

“He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.” (Genesis 28:19)

That is, from separation to **house of God**. And that is exactly Jacob’s experience.

Right there, in the place of total separation—driven away by his own schemes and lies—there he found the house of God.

And there he makes a vow in verse 20. The word “if” here at the beginning might better be translated as “since”:

“If [or since] God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.” (Genesis 28:20–22)

And so Jacob seals it. The liar and deceiver. The trickster—driven by selfish ambition. The man alone—who referred only to his father’s God—now declares:

“The Lord shall be my God.”

And he puts his money where his faith is. He has nothing now—but he dedicates a tenth of everything, from here on out, to the God who provides it all.

Read Genesis 28 today. Let God meet you on the lonesome road—and make your decision.

Will you keep referring to the God of your father, or of your friends?

Or will you finally say:

“The Lord shall be my God”?

Genesis 29 | Jacob and Rachel... and Leah

Welcome back, everyone. Pastor Kris here, keeping you company on our journey through Genesis. Hope you're enjoying the trip.

And speaking of trips—Genesis 29 at verse 1:

“Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples.” (Genesis 29:1)

So Jacob is back on the road—a changed man after a powerful encounter with God. The Hebrew here literally means “happy feet.” He’s got a spring in his step now. He thought that he was utterly alone—but the Lord was in that place. And the Lord promised, *“I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.”* And that’s a pretty good reason for happy feet.

It does not mean—an easy road.

So Jacob’s happy feet take him back to his mom’s hometown, **Paddan Aram**. Which still sounds like Bananarama to me—but that’s beside the point.

Verse 2:

“There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it...” (Genesis 29:2)

So Jacob approaches the shepherds to ask where they’re from.

“Harran.”

“Do you know Laban?” — that’s Jacob’s uncle.

“Yes, we know him.”

And in verse 6:

“...here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep.” (Genesis 29:6)

Enter stage left—Rachel.

A quick side note here: through most of history and all over the world, a first cousin was a good candidate for marriage. Today, we understand genetic risks. DNA loses information with each generation, and inbreeding multiplies that loss.

Four millennia back, that likely wasn't an issue because DNA was closer to the original. But God did set strong rules against incest in Leviticus 18:6–18—thank God for that.

But here, get over the cousin thing, and recognize that Jacob just got his first look at a very pretty girl.

Verse 7 is funny. As Rachel approaches, Jacob tells the shepherds to:

“Water the sheep and take them back to pasture.” (Genesis 29:7)

In other words—scram.

Do people still say *scram*? Skedaddle, fellas. I think Jacob is hoping to meet Rachel without the guys present. But the boys make some excuse about waiting for all the flocks to gather, large stone over the well, blah blah blah.

Verse 9:

“While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd.” (Genesis 29:9)

Now check out this move:

“When Jacob saw Rachel... and Laban’s sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle’s sheep.” (Genesis 29:10)

This is a man-move here. Let me move that large stone for you, miss. And how ‘bout I water those sheep for you too? Hey—first impressions matter. And first thing, Jacob makes himself helpful.

Now this is not just a guy thing. Guess who Jacob learned it from?

Remember—it was his mom, Rebekah, who did the very same thing for the camels when Abraham’s servant arrived in Bananarama—I mean Paddan Aram—I mean, Rebekah’s hometown. And that first impression got her a husband.

A humble heart to help is attractive—in both men and women.

And check out the result. Verse 11:

“Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud.” (Genesis 29:11)

Now the kiss is not necessarily romantic. It was a normal greeting (though I think he enjoyed this one a little more). But the weeping? Jake, my man—hold it together.

But I get it. He’s been through a lot—and sometimes you gotta let it out. His timing could use some work.

But that’s okay. I’m still rootin’ for ya, Jakey. Actually, these are my ancestors—so I’m definitely rooting for you!

Anyway. Rachel tells her dad, and Laban runs out to meet Jacob:

“He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home...”

(Genesis 29:13)

See—told you a kiss wasn’t romantic.

Now this is our second encounter with Laban, and he is once again the picture of hospitality. But don’t trust first impressions too quick.

Some time passes, and Jacob sets to work as a shepherd with Laban’s sheep. Laban asks Jacob what wages he should pay him—and I think Jacob’s been waiting for this one.

Verse 16:

“Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.” (Genesis 29:16–17)

Enter stage right: **drama.**

Two sisters. Leah is older. Rachel is beautiful.

Is that fair? Is it right to say one sister is prettier? The Bible doesn’t offer commentary on right or wrong here. It just tells it like it is. How we react probably says more about us than about God.

But this is life. Some people have more natural beauty. The rest of us—not so much. And in most societies, that creates some drama.

For God’s part, He reminds us that He doesn’t see us the way people do:

“People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

So why does God make some people more beautiful in the first place? I don't know. It's worth pondering though.

I think we learn a lot when we get past the surface and see people the way God does. We all face different challenges—some are ignored for their averageness, others are objectified for their beauty. Both wrong—but it happens.

Pay attention here, and we just might learn something about the tricky relationship between love and looks.

Right or wrong, Jacob falls for the pretty one.

Verse 18:

“Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, ‘I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.’” (Genesis 29:18)

Laban agrees, and in verse 20:

“So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.” (Genesis 29:20)

Now that is almost too sweet. But I get it. I used to drive twenty miles through traffic every day just to see my girlfriend. And no kidding—I loved the traffic—because it brought me to her.

We're married 20 years now, and traffic is still worth it.

Back in Jacob's story, there's a lesson here on romance.

If you just love her—because being with her feels good—that’s fun, but it’s not love. It is the work and the wait—and your attitude through it—that really proves your heart.

Understand that *no-sex-before-marriage* has a purpose.

Girls—give him time to prove his character.

Guys—show her that she’s worth waiting for.

So Jacob waits and works. The time comes, and Laban throws a wedding feast.

Verse 23:

“But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her.” (Genesis 29:23)

Oh no.

I don’t know how much alcohol was involved, but I guarantee—Laban planned this carefully.

Verse 25:

“When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?’” (Genesis 29:25)

Oh boy. Hard truth here. Just because you do right, doesn’t mean the world will do right by you.

Verse 26:

“Laban replied, ‘It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one.’” (Genesis 29:26)

And that should remind Jacob—that he hasn’t always done right. After all, deceiving someone by switching the older with the younger—is a familiar story.

Laban basically says, *“Round here, we don’t put the younger before the older—like some folks.”*

The deceiver has become the deceived.

That doesn’t make it right. Jacob was essentially raped by way of deception—and it’s very wrong.

So Laban makes Jacob a deal: you can have Rachel too—for seven more years of work. What can he do? He takes the deal and marries Rachel.

Now he has two wives.

Verse 30:

“Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah.” (Genesis 29:30)

Oh no. This is a recipe for rivalry.

But in verse 31:

“When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless.” (Genesis 29:31)

That verse impresses me. **The Lord sees the unloved.**

So Leah has a son—Reuben. And she says:

“Surely my husband will love me now.”

Yet he doesn’t.

Time passes, and another son:

“Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, He gave me this one too.”

So she named him **Simeon**—which means “one who hears.”

Son number three:

“Now at last my husband will become attached to me.”

So he was named **Levi**—*attached*.

She’s still pining for a love that Jacob just won’t give.

And then a fourth son:

“This time I will praise the Lord.”

So she named him **Judah**—which means *praise*.

And for the first time, Leah looks to God alone—and simply praises Him.

Genesis 30 | Jealousy

Hello, *Through the Word*. We are in Genesis 30, right in the middle of Jacob's story. And in this chapter we have jealousy, greed, deception, rivalry—somehow God's grace just showing up through all of it.

Now, if you hear all of that and say, *that sounds to me like family*—that's exactly what it is. Jacob is starting a family, and so far it's a little messy. It started off with the wrong wife on the wedding night, and it just got messier from there.

Jacob has two wives now: Rachel, the woman he loves who hasn't been able to get pregnant yet, and her sister Leah, who never feels loved by Jacob but has four sons already. It's complicated. And that's life. Life is complicated.

Keep in mind here that Jacob is a man of faith now. He believes in the one true God. He wasn't before—he was a liar and deceiver. But God met Jacob on the lonesome road and declared His great plan for him. Jacob believes in the Lord as **his** God now.

But following God does **not** make all your problems go away. I hope you know that. God said to Jacob, *I am with you. I'll never leave you.* But He never said, *no more problems.*

Well, Jacob's problems are just heating up here in chapter 30, beginning at verse 1:

“When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or I shall die!’” (Genesis 30:1)

“Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, ‘Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?’”

(Genesis 30:2)

So Rachel is still barren, and she envies her sister. Most of this chapter is driven by envy. It's ugly. It's destructive. It will drive this family to endless division. But envy is inherent with polygamy.

I don't think that God wired the heart to share romantic love with two partners. It's made to be exclusive. Consider what Song of Solomon says:

“I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine... Like a lily among thorns is my bride among the maidens.” (Song of Solomon 6:3; 2:2)

Romantic love is made to be exclusive. Now, the irony of course is that Solomon—who wrote that—apparently knew it, but never lived it.

Polygamy can make a mess. This is not a condemnation. In many places, polygamy is still practiced today. God doesn't condemn it here in this chapter—He just presents it like it is.

In the New Testament, Jesus brings marriage back to the beginning—when God made one man and one woman, husband and wife. Your heart is wired for **one**. Your heart is also wired for just **one** God. You cannot serve two masters.

That's the issue with idols. If you love God and love money—or pleasure, or knowledge—there's always going to be conflict. And conflict is exactly what Jacob gets.

Rachel, the one he loves, says, *“Give me children, or I shall die!”* This one gets Jacob angry:

“Am I in the place of God?”

There’s a powerful insight on marriage here. **Your spouse is not God.**

Don’t ask your spouse to do God’s job—or to be what God is supposed to be for you. I call this *spousal idolatry*. This is why I don’t buy into that old romantic notion of “*You complete me.*”

It sounds sweet—but it’s way too much pressure for a spouse.

Your spouse **cannot** complete you. You have too much missing. Only God can fulfill you. Satisfy your soul. Answer your heart’s cry. Truly understand you.

Find your satisfaction in God. Take the pressure off your spouse—and you will both enjoy marriage much more.

As for Jacob, I don’t think he had any time to enjoy his marriage. He’s got two wives jealous of each other already. Then Rachel gets an idea—and here comes wife number three.

Verse 3:

“Then she said, ‘Here is my servant Bilhah. Go into her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her.’”

(Genesis 30:3)

So Jacob has wife number three. And along come sons number five and six.

This marriage is just like the one Abraham had with Hagar. Bilhah becomes a wife to Jacob—but really more of a surrogate mom for Rachel. This is not by God’s direction, but it was common practice, and the Bible tells it as it is.

And that is **complicated**.

Bilhah has two sons: **Dan** and **Naphtali**. And Rachel starts to feel vindicated, because they are sort of surrogate her kids.

Verse 8:

“Rachel said, ‘With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.’” (Genesis 30:8)

Rachel thinks she’s won—but a battle driven by envy is a battle that no one wins.

Leah jumps back in the ring, ready to fight. Verse 9:

“When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.” (Genesis 30:9)

So Jacob marries wife number four.

Now for any of you thinking, *Hey, lucky Jacob—four wives and he gets whatever he wants*—hey, don’t be a fool.

A man is wired to want to bring happiness to his wife. No matter what Jacob does, he can’t make his wives happy. That’s frustrating.

Proverbs 21 says:

“Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.” (Proverbs 21:9)

Jacob had **four** wives—and **two** of them quarreled constantly.

So Zilpah has two sons: **Gad** and **Asher**. And this is starting to feel like Santa Claus—counting off his reindeer. Eight boys so far.

A question—so if all this four-wives stuff is wrong, or at least not God’s best plan, then does that mean that these extra kids are also not God’s best plan? Are they mistakes?

Hey—this is personal. I’m Jewish on my mom’s side—so I came from somewhere in this mess.

Now this is a real key:

Only God can make a masterpiece out of a mess.

People make mistakes—and people make kids. But only God can make the soul of every child. And God makes plans and purpose for every soul.

If you were born into a mess that you didn’t create, take heart. **God made you.** And **God does not make mistakes.**

As you read Genesis 30, Jacob’s family is not the ideal family—not the way God meant family to be. Yet God is building the Jewish people out of this mess.

Jesus was born out of this family.

Check out Jesus’ family tree sometime. The Savior of the world—God’s plan for all humanity—came from a family line with more than one human mistake.

So the kids keep on coming. And now Leah has three more: **Issachar**, **Zebulun**, and finally a girl, **Dinah**.

And then, at long last—in verse 22:

“Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach.’ And she called his name Joseph.” (Genesis 30:22–24)

So Jacob’s **eleventh** son is Rachel’s **first**, and his name is **Joseph**.

Then at verse 25, the story shifts direction:

“As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, ‘Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go.’” (Genesis 30:25–26)

So Jacob is ready to go home. He’s got that old Daughtry song from *American Idol* stuck in his head—and he’s going home.

No, Uncle Laban’s not ready to let him go that easy. Not only did Jacob marry his two daughters, but Jacob still works for Laban as a shepherd.

And Laban knows that the Lord has blessed him greatly—because of Jacob. Laban is still an idolater. He doesn’t follow the Lord. But he knows when God has blessed him.

But Jacob’s got to get back and start his own household. These places and these faces are growing old—and he’s got to move.

The rest of the chapter is a classic duel between two classic tricksters.

Jacob and Laban are both con artists. But Jacob is a **God-fearer** now.

As you read, watch how Jacob’s new life in God plays out—how he stands on his honesty, of all things. And watch how the old con man, Laban, uses Jacob’s honesty against him.

Read Genesis 30 today. Wade through the mess. Watch the family grow. And watch carefully for God's plan—and God's grace—to shine through it all.

Genesis 31 | Separate Ways

On *Through the Word*, and the time has come for two generations to go their separate ways. It's a hard transition for any family when the kids are grown and it's time to leave the nest. The family dynamics get complicated. The young generation has its own dreams and goals, ready to build a new family. But for the older—this was their dream. This was their family. And now it's leaving.

Here in chapter 31, the younger generation is Jacob with his wives, Rachel and Leah. And they're really not all that young anymore. Jacob has twelve kids now. Twenty years have passed since Jacob showed up in town with nothing—nothing that is but a birthright back at home, some severely burned bridges keeping him from it, and a promise from God to be with him and see him through.

Twenty years passed—twenty years of hard work on his father-in-law's farm. And Jacob has a lot to show for it. Or does he? Is it his? Or is it Laban's?

Laban is the older generation, and this is where the family dynamics get sticky. Jacob did the work, but the sheep and goats and fields were Laban's from the beginning. There's a lot more now—so who keeps the profit?

That's the contention. And it heats up in verse 1:

“Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, ‘Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth.’ And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before. Then the Lord said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.’” (Genesis 31:1–3)

So God says, return home. And Jacob gets ready. He sends for his wives so that he can tell them the plan. And there's a key phrase here in verse 5—Jacob tells the two women:

“The God of my father has been with me.”

It is the promise that God made him at Bethel—the same word God just repeated for his trip home: *I will be with you.*

There were many promises that God made to Jacob, but I believe that this is the one that really sustained him through the struggles. And struggles—there were.

Verse 6:

“You know that I have served your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me.”

Several times in the chapter, we see God stepping in to protect His servant Jacob. God promised to watch over him, and God came through. Laban was tricky, but God always saw.

So Rachel and Leah listen, and they agree to go in verse 16. Then Jacob packs the whole family up on camels, gathers the flock, and hits the road.

Then two little things add a twist to the story.

Verse 19:

“Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee.” (Genesis 31:19–20)

So Rachel stole Dad's idols. Laban still worshiped empty gods—and apparently so did Rachel. And here it all gets sticky.

Jacob left home twenty years back and apparently tried to leave deception and trickery behind. But now—Laban first changed brides on Jacob, then changed his wages ten times. On the way out, Rachel steals the idols and doesn't tell anyone, and now Jacob tricks Laban by not telling him they're leaving.

It is a huge web of lies. It's hard to tell who's zoomin' who. But the chase is on.

Jacob makes three days out before Laban's sons catch on—and seven more days before they catch up. On the way, God Himself warned Laban not to mess with Jacob. But Laban's still ticked.

Verse 26:

“And Laban said to Jacob, ‘What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly.’” (Genesis 31:26–28)

So Laban lets it all out. He's mad—and it's hard not to have a little pity on the guy. He was a con man, for sure, and never fair to Jacob. But the old grandpa never even got to kiss his grandchildren goodbye.

Laban plays the innocent victim here, and he insists that he would have thrown them all a grand farewell party. Then the web gets a little stickier.

Verse 30:

“Why did you steal my gods?”

Pity the man whose gods can be stolen. And that goes for more than just statues. That’s your money, your toys, your car, your fame, your drug, your fix—it can all be taken away.

Laban’s gods were indeed stolen. And Jacob is clueless about it. But Rachel still has a few tricks up her sleeve—or really, under her saddle.

Laban goes on a thorough hunt for the idols while Rachel is sitting on them the whole time in the camel’s saddle. Then Rachel pulls a classic—she tells her dad:

“I can’t get up, because the way of women is on me.”

And it works. And I’m starting to wonder which spider is spinning the biggest web.

Laban can’t find the idols, and Jacob feels vindicated. And with that one last straw, Jacob finally lets loose on twenty years of pent-up frustration.

I’ll read you the highlights starting in verse 36:

“Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on

my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.” (Genesis 31:36–42)

Yep, Jacob’s ticked. He’s not buying Laban’s sweet old grandpa routine—not this time. And notice that Jacob credits God for protecting him. He calls God *the Fear of Isaac*—just to strike a little extra fear of God into Laban.

And in verse 43:

“Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, ‘The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine.’” (Genesis 31:43)

Laban’s defense gives us a real glimpse into his heart: *My daughters, my children, my flocks, all you see is mine.*

The heart of a deceiver is self-centered and self-serving. Laban knows that he had almost nothing when Jacob showed up. He knows that it was Jacob who worked, and on Jacob’s account that God blessed. But the selfish heart still holds on.

But what can he do? His daughters and grandkids are leaving. And Laban makes one last request.

Verse 44:

“Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.” (Genesis 31:44)

Laban wants a witness. Five times he uses the word *witness* here. He has to let his family go out of his sight—and a con man never trusts what he can't see.

In verse 49 he says:

“The Lord watch between you and me, when we are out of one another’s sight.” (Genesis 31:49)

As for Jacob—he’s just fine with the Lord watching over him. That’s the one thing he’s counting on.

So with God as witness, the deceivers finally settle. And they have that farewell meal after all. And early the next morning, Laban plays the good granddad one last time—and he kisses the kids goodbye.

Genesis 32 | Wrestling With God

On Through the Word, and the moment that Jacob has been dreading for 20 years is almost here. Jacob is finally heading back to his homeland. Going home means facing his past—facing the brother that may still want him dead. Jacob is not the same man that he was on this very same road on the way out. Jacob had only a staff, but God met him there, and God was with him throughout the 20 years. That changes a man.

But Esau wouldn't know all that. As far as Esau knew, Jacob was still the same conniver that had taken away all that really mattered from him—the one that he planned to kill. How do you face your past? How do you go back to a home that you tore apart? And how do you explain that the *you* that they knew was a whole different *you*?

I remember my high school reunion—University City, class of '92—and it was the most surreal experience of my life. Because they all knew unsaved Kris, which was a totally different guy. But how do you explain that to people who have no concept of what it is to be born again—or a new creation in Christ?

That's essentially the dilemma on Jacob's heart as he treks back the 500 miles to home. The chapter begins with a visit from the angels of God—perhaps reminding Jacob that he's not alone on his journey.

And then in verse 3:

“And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, ‘Thus you shall say to my lord Esau, Thus says your servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and

female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.”

“And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, ‘We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are 400 men with him.’” (Genesis 32:3–6)

Jacob had had no contact with Esau, and the first messengers were sent in hopes of softening things up a little. Jacob’s words are dripping with humility—and trying to hide fear. But the report that Esau has 400 men coming out has Jacob in a serious panic.

In great fear, he splits his household into two groups. But he has to press on. God told him to go.

So in verse 9:

“And Jacob said, ‘O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good, I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’” (Genesis 32:9–12)

This is an honest and very candid prayer from Jacob. He’s scared. He really believes that his whole family could die here. So he reminds the Lord of His

own word: *You said, go back. You said, I will make your descendants countless. So God, save me.*

No one will count my descendants if we all die today. Now, this is a prayer I can relate to. When it looks like I'm about to hit the end, I remind God of His promises—not because He forgets, but because *I* need to remember. And I need to remember that *God remembers*.

Jacob is pouring his heart out, and he is proclaiming his own faith. He's scared, but he still trusts God. And he's still moving forward. Now that's courage.

Jacob is still afraid, and so he makes a plan to appease his brother Esau. He sends a series of gifts ahead of him—goats, rams, camels. All told, more than 550 animals sent for his brother.

And in verse 21:

“So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp. The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone.” (Genesis 32:21–24)

So Jacob sends everyone else ahead. Okay, so maybe he's not so courageous after all. Jacob is on his own one more time—on the same lonesome road he had been way back when. Only he wasn't alone then. And he's not alone now.

Back in verse 24:

“And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, ‘Let me go, for the day has broken.’ But Jacob said, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’” (Genesis 32:24–26)

We’ve been watching as Jacob’s frustrations have built up. Years of bickering between his wives. Twenty years of hard work and cold, sleepless nights. Cheated by changing wages—and yet accused of stealing Laban’s property.

Jacob was a homebody—not really a fighter. But if you’ve paid attention, most of Jacob’s words have been building up frustration. *Am I in the place of God? Ten times you changed my wages.* And now his frustration is topped off with fear of facing his own past.

So when an unknown man shows up to wrestle, Jacob’s ready to fight. And the fight is on till daybreak.

What is it inside a man that drives him to fight? Why does he beat his chest at the world and challenge all comers to duke it out? There is a fire inside of man—pent up over a thousand frustrations about who we are and what we’ve been through. But who is it that we really want to wrestle?

In verse 27:

“And he said to him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Jacob.’ Then he said, ‘Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.’” (Genesis 32:27–28)

“Then Jacob asked him, ‘Please tell me your name.’ But he said, ‘Why is it that you ask my name?’ And there he blessed him.” (Genesis 32:29)

So Jacob called the name of the place *Peniel*, saying:

“For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.”

(Genesis 32:30)

So Jacob figures it out—after spending all night releasing his anger through headlocks and half nelsons. Jacob is disabled at the hip with just a touch. But he still won't let go.

When the man tells him *you have striven with God and with men*, Jacob gets a clue. This was no man. Jacob demands to know his name, but he won't tell. As if to say: *You know exactly who you've been wrestling with—not only all night, but your whole life.*

Jacob finally understands—it was God all along. Every man must come to a point where he realizes that all of his fire and all of his struggle is ultimately with God. And there will never be an end to it until we wrestle it out with God Himself.

Life is a battle. And faith is a fight. Even Paul looked back at his life and said:

“I have fought the good fight.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

It is not a fight to win. It is a fight to *stand*. And even when we limp—to hold on to God to the very end. To refuse to let go without a blessing. To overcome all that life throws at us, and ultimately, to see God face to face.

Jacob walked away that morning with a limp and a new name. Humbled and broken—and yet somehow, in his brokenness, I believe that he was finally made whole.

Genesis 33 | God, the God of Israel

On Through the Word, and the showdown has arrived. Jacob and Esau. The grudge match that waited two decades. And finally, the face-off is here.

Jacob ran from home with nothing. After conniving and deceiving his way into the family birthright and the father's blessing, Jacob realized that he had pulled the last straw—and Big Brother Esau was fit to kill. Jacob ran and never looked back.

Twenty years later, in trembling obedience to God, Jacob is headed for home. He truly believes that his entire family is in mortal jeopardy. He spent the entire night wrestling with God and walked away with a limp. The sun has risen, and the showdown begins.

“And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.” (Genesis 33:1–3)

Now that's a good switch. A day earlier, Jacob was hiding at the back of the pack. Perhaps his face-off with God changed the way he deals with fear. Jacob finally limps his way into the lead—which is a great picture for any dad: humility and courage together.

Then in verse 4, the moment arrives:

“But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.” (Genesis 33:4)

Well now—that went better than expected! Don't get confused here. It says that Esau "fell on his neck." This is not Esau's kung-fu surprise move. "Fall on the neck" is Bible talk for a big throw-your-arms-around-the-neck hug. This is reunion time. Two brothers, reunited at last.

Now wait a second—what happened to the big showdown? Where's the fight? We had all this tension and build-up, the grudge match twenty years in the making, and all we get is one fall-on-the-neck? That's just a hug.

Where's the battle? Where's the fight?

The fight was settled in chapter 32 when Jacob wrestled it out with God Himself. There's a real insight here. When a man will wrestle it out with his Creator and find his peace there, he will be amazed at the peace he finds with his brothers.

There's a saying that a man has to battle his demons—but I believe that's a mistake. That's a fight we'll never win. It is *with God* that we must wrestle, and *with God* we must find our peace.

Romans 5 says:

"Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Then Romans 12 says:

"As much as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18).

Notice that peace with God comes *first*.

Then in verse 5:

“And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, ‘Who are these with you?’ Jacob said, ‘The children whom God has graciously given your servant.’” (Genesis 33:5)

So Jacob presents the whole family—and all of them bow humbly in their turn. Notice that Jacob is very careful to give all credit to the *grace of God* for all that he has. Jacob knows that he had nothing—and that he deserves nothing. Yet God is so good.

Then Esau wants to know the story on the 550 animals that he received as gifts.

In verse 8:

“Esau said, ‘What do you mean by all this company that I met?’ Jacob answered, ‘To find favor in the sight of my lord.’ But Esau said, ‘I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.’ Jacob said, ‘No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me. Please accept my blessing that I brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.’ Thus he urged him, and he took it.” (Genesis 33:8–11)

So Esau respectfully declines the gift—but Jacob insists. And notice again that Jacob credits everything he has to the grace of God.

Esau, on the other hand, never bows. And never once credits God for anything he has. Pay attention as you read. Esau is very polite here—he’s

forgiving, hospitable, and showing some real maturity. All of it is commendable, but there is never once a sign of faith in God.

Hebrews 12 describes Esau as “unholy” or “godless.” Remember that Esau is a picture of the flesh. A godless and fleshly man can be refined—even noble—but it does not make him *good*. We are justified through faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God.

One more thing to notice from Jacob in verse 10. He says that seeing Esau is like *seeing the face of God*. Now how did that happen?

Esau—Jacob’s lifetime rival. The one he tricked. The reminder of his worst sin. The one who wanted to kill him. The source of his trembling fear—literally the night before. So how on earth is *seeing Esau* like *seeing God’s face*?

Remember—Jacob saw God face to face the night before. He was amazed to still be alive. He even renamed the place **Peniel**, which means *face of God*. And now, as Jacob comes face to face not with God, but with his *greatest fear*, his brother, and with all the regret of his past, he is again amazed to still be alive.

So why is seeing Esau like seeing the face of God? Because Jacob sees that *God has already gone before him*. Not the gifts. Not the servants. But God had already settled things. Jacob knew God did this. It were as though God was standing there, looking at him and smiling.

God had worked it out all along. And now Jacob sees God—even when he doesn’t see God. And *that* is the walk of faith.

If you fear God, you need fear nothing else.

Then in verse 12:

“Then Esau said, ‘Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you.’” (Genesis 33:12)

And here, something funny happens. Esau wants to walk together back to Seir, which is where he lives. Jacob insists that he’ll be too slow with all of his young ones.

You go on ahead, he says. I’ll meet you there.

Only—Jacob never goes to Seir.

Either he was lying... or he just got scared again. We don’t know. Some Bible teachers say Jacob is backsliding here—still afraid of his brother, and back to deception. Others say Jacob did the right thing—apart from the lie, of course—that he *shouldn’t* be yoked together with ungodly Esau.

What do I think? I honestly don’t know. Sometimes it’s hard to tell. But you should definitely read it for yourself.

As you do, notice one last key element in the final verse. Jacob had moved his family to Shechem, and in verse 20:

“There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.” (Genesis 33:20)

The name of the altar means *God, the God of Israel*. This is a profound statement for Jacob. He is laying claim to his new name—**Israel**—which means *governed by God*, or possibly *wrestles with God*.

Again—I don’t know. But you can wrestle with it.

More importantly though, Jacob calls God the *God of Israel*. Every time until now, he has called God the God of Abraham, or of Isaac—only of his fathers. But now, Jacob claims both his new name *and* God as *his own God*.

God has fulfilled His promise—and Jacob's request. And Jacob responds with an altar. God is *his* God now. And his life belongs to God alone.

Genesis 34 | Rape, Revenge, Fury, and Grief (PG15)

On Through the Word. And if you are a kid, it's time to turn it off. This chapter has some adult content, so let your parents check it out first. Go ahead and hit the stop button now.

Parents, I'm sorry to tell you, but this chapter has the kind of content that you wish you never had to explain to your kids. The Bible is a holy book, but it is not always a happy book. It is *history*. And history can be harsh.

You will not find good guys and bad guys in this chapter. Almost everyone does wrong. Everyone follows the flesh or the rules of the world, and it leaves a mess of destruction.

Some Bibles have titles at the top of each section. The NIV calls this chapter *Dinah and the Shechemites*. It sounds like a '60s rock band to me—or maybe a country-Middle Eastern fusion. If only it were that nice.

The ESV titles this section *The Defiling of Dinah*. That one's a little more accurate. And it only gets worse from there.

We left off with Jacob and his large family traveling back toward home. But the place they ended up was not where God had called them to go. First it was Sukkoth, on the wrong side of the Jordan. Then it was Shechem—just barely back in the Promised Land.

And a very worldly town. It was the wrong place to raise a godly family. As we shall see in verse 1:

“Now Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her

and humiliated her. And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, ‘Get me this girl for my wife.’” (Genesis 34:1–4)

So the story begins with a rape.

Dinah is the only daughter of Jacob—or the only one we know about—with eleven brothers. It’s no wonder she wants to meet with the women of the town. But the local prince sees her walking by and grabs her and, well, the rest is awful.

The prince’s name is Shechem—same name as the town. But then in verse 3, the text takes a drastic turn. Shechem’s soul is drawn to Dinah—or his heart, in other translations. *He loved her and spoke tenderly to her.*

Now where did *that* come from?

What kind of two-faced wacko is this guy? Does it seriously say that he *loves* Dinah?

It does. And it is twisted and wrong. His heart was drawn to her, sure—but that heart was dark and self-centered and lacking all self-control.

Singles, please let this be a reality check for you. A heart driven by love can still be a foul and disgusting heart just the same.

Girls, he may *love* you. And he may speak *tenderly*. But without self-control and self-sacrifice, the same passion that drives the feeling of love and tenderness will quickly turn to lust, violence, and violation.

True love waits.

There is good reason that God says wait until marriage to have sex. A man and woman must prove their love in sacrifice and self-denial before they express their love physically.

First *sacrifice*, then *commitment*, then *celebration*. That's why weddings take place at an altar.

Hop in bed *before* the altar, and you're really just saying, *I love myself, and I think you should love me too*. It's self-love, not sacrificial love.

Marriage is founded on the covenant of sacrifice and commitment, *then* celebrated in bed. Altar first, bedroom second.

I don't care how tenderly that loser speaks to you. He's a jerk. The heart that is drawn to you is a heart of poison. So get away.

Well, that's the story on Shechem and Dinah. First rape, then love. Now he demands that his father get this girl for his wife.

Dad obliges in verse 6:

“And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.” (Genesis 34:6)

The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry—because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter. For such a thing *must not be done*.

But Hamor spoke with them, saying:

“The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife. Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us,

and take our daughters for yourselves. You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.”

(Genesis 34:8–10)

Shechem’s dad plays the consummate host here. Yet you’ll notice—there’s no place for an apology. Hamor tries to cover over it all with a little romance.

My son’s heart is set on your daughter.

Be careful when men claim to think with their hearts—yet act with their passions. Or when they use romance to cover aggression.

Then Shechem himself speaks up in verse 12:

“Ask me for as great a bride price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife.”

(Genesis 34:12)

So it looks like Shechem is willing to pay *any price at all*.

When the heart is allowed to lead, it will offer to pay *any price*—never truly counting the cost. The heart is terrible at counting cost.

So use your *mind*.

Notice—Shechem never promises to *care for her* or *provide for her*—only to pay off the family.

Then in verse 13:

“The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.” (Genesis 34:13)

They said to them:

“We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people. But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and we will be gone.” (Genesis 34:14–17)

Shechem said, *Name any price*. And boy, did Dinah’s brothers name a price. Circumcise every man in town.

The cost was high. But Shechem doesn’t hesitate. In verse 19:

“And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob’s daughter.” (Genesis 34:19)

Again, these are very romantic terms. That’s all well and good, but a man without character or morals can be delighted with a girl just as easily as a good man.

Ladies—don’t be fooled by romantic terms and notions. He may be delighted in you, and that can change his *words* for a little while—but it will not change his *character*. A jerk is still a jerk.

And unfortunately for Shechem, a jerk in love is also a *fool*.

He falls for the trap all too easily. Shechem and his father go right to the town gate to make their case.

Hey, these men are friendly! Let's join families! There is a small price to pay, but there's a benefit too.

Look at verse 23:

“Will not their livestock, their property, and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.” (Genesis 34:23)

And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised.

So the deed was done. And the trap was set.

The rest of the story is very dark indeed.

Jacob's sons had no intention of keeping their word. It was a trick.

Circumcision on a grown man leaves him weak for several days. And on the third day, Simeon and Levi—two older brothers—took their swords and wiped out every man in town.

It was brutal, and it was hideous. They rescued Dinah from the house where she was still being held, and then the rest of the brothers came through and plundered the town.

It was a dark and terrible day in the family of Israel.

Jacob attempts to correct his wicked sons—but it is weak.

In verse 31, the boys hide behind their own sense of justice:

“They said, ‘Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?’” (Genesis 34:31)

The brothers insist they were justified. Shechem did wrong, so he deserved it. This is the perverted sense of justice of the world—and of the flesh.

If I am wronged, I have the right to avenge many times over.

Vengeance is the Lord's. Let Him repay.

Later, when God gave the rule *an eye for an eye*, it was given to *limit* man's vengeance and stick to equitable justice.

So where is justice in this story? Do Simeon and Levi get away with it?

No. God is always just. And we *reap what we sow*.

In Genesis 49, Jacob prophesies over his sons—and their future suffers for their actions:

“Cursed be their anger... I will scatter them in Jacob.” (Genesis 49:7)

As for you and me—read Genesis 34 today.

A hard story to stomach, but lessons God would have us learn—hopefully by reading, rather than experience.

Genesis 35 | Return to the House of God

Genesis 35 on Through the Word. And today is the day to get back. Back to the place where you first met with God. To the place that God first became real to you. Where you found out that God loves you, that He has a plan for you.

We're following Jacob's story, and it has been up and down all the way. So many trials. Yet God has been faithful to stay with him and see him through. And just when it looked like Jacob's life might find some stability—finally finding peace with Laban and Esau—Jacob moved his family to Shechem. There, his daughter was raped, and two of his sons went on a rampage of vengeance.

And now Jacob finds himself in a mess of deception one more time. Worried yet again about vengeance and vendettas. So where can he go this time?

God has the answer in verse one:

“God said to Jacob, ‘Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau’” (Genesis 35:1).

So God tells Jacob to get back. Back to where you once belonged. Bethel is the place where Jacob encountered God for the first time. God met Jacob on the lonesome road, running from his own lies and his own brother. And God appeared to Jacob and promised to stay with him and bring him back home.

Jacob declared God as his God, and he called the place Bethel, House of God. But that was a lot of years ago, which is exactly why God called him

back. Time wears memories thin, and Jacob needs to remember. We can get there too.

I fell in love with Jesus 17 years ago. I made commitments—for life, for eternity. But sometimes, I need to get back. In Revelation 2, Jesus tells His church:

“You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first” (Revelation 2:4–5).

That word *repent* is a real key. It means to turn around, to change your mind and change your direction. Jacob realizes that he has wandered away, and it's time to turn back.

So in verse two:

“Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.’ So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem” (Genesis 35:2–4).

So check this out. Jacob's family wasn't just in the wrong place—they had the wrong gods. A whole collection of foreign gods was in Jacob's house. It's no wonder their lives were a mess.

In order to get back, they've got to get rid. Rid of all the empty gods. That's true for you and I as well. When God calls you back, just get rid of the soulless

gods of money, pleasure, knowledge, and self. Those dead idols don't answer for anything.

But God did. And God does.

So in verse seven:

“And there he built an altar and called the place El-Bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother” (Genesis 35:7).

That altar that Jacob built is an emblem of sacrifice. *My life is Yours, God*. It was before, but I declare it again now.

And the new name for the place is interesting. El-Bethel. *El* means God. So the name is God of Bethel, or God of the house of God.

So what about you? Where's your Bethel? Where you first encountered God? For me, my Bethel was more of a time than a place. It was 1996. I was 21. The place was always moving. It was in my car—an '89 Nissan Sentra, cherry red—through the radio.

Nothing supernatural. I just stumbled upon the teaching of the Bible for the first time. And for the first time, God was revealed to me.

That's how it works. God reveals Himself through His Word. I didn't know that then. But God met me there—chapter by chapter, verse by verse, with several teachers. I should have called the car Bethel, because it was like God's house then. And I and my wife were totally changed.

Andrea and I were so overcome by the love of Jesus, just pouring out through His Word to us. And it wasn't the car, or the place, or the teachers, or even the Word itself. It was the God of that place. The God of the Word.

We just loved Jesus.

And I think that's why Jacob called the place El-Bethel. Because it wasn't about the house of God. It was about the God of the house of God. *El-Bethel*.

Moving on. There is a peculiar repetition of an old event starting in verse nine:

“God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, ‘Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.’ So he called his name Israel” (Genesis 35:9–10).

Now, God had already changed Jacob's name. But it's repeated here. See, Jacob's name change represented another change—a transformation of character. Jacob means heel-catcher, or deceiver. But that's the old man.

Israel is the new man. Israel could mean *wrestles with God* or *governed by God*. I think it's the latter.

Jacob the deceiver is now a man submitted to and governed by God. He wasn't acting like it for a while. But here, God reminds Jacob of who he's called to be.

God also reminds Jacob of His great plan for him. Jacob may have gone off track for a while, but God's plan still stands.

The chapter ends in sorrow for Jacob. In verse 18, his wife Rachel dies—the love of his life—while giving birth to his 12th and final son, Benjamin. The 12 sons are listed for posterity in verses 23 to 26.

And then, at long last, Jacob's journeys bring him back home to see his father one more time.

“Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him” (Genesis 35:28–29).

And so the great patriarch passed on. The son of Abraham. The man of faith, who carried on the knowledge of God and passed it on to his son Jacob.

And the timing here is rather amazing. For me, as I am recording this, one of my heroes in the faith and a patriarch to my spiritual family has just passed away.

Pastor Chuck Smith was 86 years old on this earth. And he's now just about three days old in heaven.

Pastor Chuck was one of those teachers on the radio when God met me at my Bethel. He taught the Word of God faithfully. And he was the one who taught most of the other teachers to do the same as they did.

God met me there. God was revealed to me through His Word. And I am so honored to pay that forward.

Chuck Smith was a great teacher—a humble and noble man of God. And he died, as it says of Isaac, old and full of years.

But it was never about the man of God. It was always about the God of the man of God. The God of Abraham. The God of Isaac. And Jacob. The God of Chuck Smith.

And now—my God as well.

I owe Pastor Chuck a lot more than I can count. And I want to dedicate this teaching to Chuck Smith. And I want to say thank you. And thank you, God, for Your faithfulness—through Chuck, and to Chuck.

As for the rest of you—read Genesis 35 today. And as you do, ask yourself:

Isn't it time for you to get back to Bethel?

Get back!

Loretta!

Your daddy's waiting for you. He's high on grace and low on vendetta.

Get back home, Loretta.

Genesis 36 | The Account of Esau

Hello friends, and welcome back to our journey through Genesis. So great to be with you for more Bible adventures.

We are in chapter 36, and I have to admit, this one is not quite so... adventurous. In fact, there's really no story here at all. Genesis 36 is mostly... genealogy. I know—your favorite. Mine too, of course. Who could not love spending 43 long verses struggling through names that you can't pronounce?

But before we judge too quickly, let's give it a chance. Verse 1 begins:

“This is the account of the family line of Esau (that is, Edom).

Esau took his wives from the women of Canaan: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite—also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth.

Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, Basemath bore Reuel, and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in Canaan” (Genesis 36:1–5).

Okay, so it is just as exciting as we expected. Not exactly a page-turner. I guess if you're looking for baby names, this chapter certainly has a lot of... options. Have fun with that.

For the rest of us, it's a little more challenging to figure out—why we're reading this. It's a genealogy.

But we do trust that **all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness** (2 Timothy 3:16). Okay, great. It's useful. So how do we use this one?

I have a few thoughts on this. First of all, just because something is useful doesn't mean that it's interesting or exciting. Instruction books for assembling furniture are useful—not exactly interesting.

Second, this is a great reminder that the Bible is a collection of many different types of writing: poetry, theology, law, history, prophecy. Genesis is history. Most of the history is narrative—as in story. And stories are great. We love stories—they keep it interesting.

But history also includes other elements. Genesis includes covenant promises—those are very important. And history also includes records: lists of facts and dates and wars and leaders—and people.

The Bible is a historical record. It's not just a bunch of myth stories to teach us lessons. Some people believe that it's all mythology—but the Bible never states that the stories are mythological, and it is not written in the style of any other mythology. It is written—like a history. Including genealogies like these.

So if the Bible isn't all meant to be interesting stories, how do we read chapters like this one? What do we get out of it?

We can start by treating this chapter as it is: a record. Records are kept for reference, not for bedtime stories. But why do we have this record?

The question to ask is: why is this chapter important—not just interesting? How does this information fit the story and flow and purpose of the Bible? And why genealogy in particular?

Let's start there. Remember that the Bible is the story of God working out a plan for the salvation of the world—and working that plan through a particular group of people: the descendants of Abraham.

Those descendants are key to the whole story, so the Bible tracks them for us—in stories, and occasionally, genealogies. Well, I should say, it tracks *some* of them. There is a split in the family tree right here—between Isaac’s twin boys: Esau and Jacob.

That split started in the womb. Poor Rebekah carried around dueling twins. Jacob, of course, was renamed Israel, and his descendants are the Israelites. Esau was also called Edom—which means *red*—and his descendants are the Edomites, later also known as the Idumeans. (Edom sounds like Idum.)

Now the Bible spends a lot of time on Jacob’s line and the nation of Israel. They’re at the center of God’s plan, leading up to Jesus, the Savior of the world! Esau’s line is rarely the focus, but it does come up. And there are some important lessons to be learned, and several rather infamous descendants to find.

So let’s take a look: *“the account of the family line of Esau (that is, Edom)”* (36:1).

Verse 2 starts us at the beginning with Esau’s wives. The first two were Canaanite—Adah and Oholibamah. Isaac and Rebekah were not happy about that. Then he married Basemath, the inventor of Algebra.

That’s not true at all. Just seeing if you’re still awake.

Next we get Esau’s kids: Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

Before we move farther, remember that Esau is for us, an essential typological picture. Typology is, of course, the symbolism that God sets in the Old Testament that gives us living pictures of New Testament truth and doctrine.

Esau and Jacob provide us with a powerful picture of the flesh and the spirit. Interestingly, *Edom* in Hebrew is spelled exactly like *Adam*—the Hebrew word for man or human. And Edom really is a picture of the flesh side of man—the godless side.

The ongoing struggles between these two brothers can teach us some things about the battle inside you and inside me.

“The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other” (Galatians 5:17, NIV).

That conflict is core to understanding our life following Jesus. We cannot live by the flesh and follow Christ. The New Testament dedicates a lot of ink to this essential truth.

Living by the flesh can mean following after lust and greed, or it can mean self-righteous religion—trying to prove your goodness by your works rather than God’s grace. The flesh cares more about self than about God or others.

And that’s what we see in Esau. He sold his birthright for a bowl of food. *Feed the belly!*

Philippians warns against legalistic teachers who focus on works:

“Their god is their stomach ... and their mind is set on earthly things” (Philippians 3:19).

And Hebrews warns us:

“See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son” (Hebrews 12:16–17).

So back here in verse 6:

“Esau took his wives and sons and daughters... and moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob” (Genesis 36:6).

This is interesting. It says:

“The land where they were staying could not support them both” (36:7).

In much the same way, one person cannot sustain living by both the flesh and the spirit. Romans, Galatians, and Colossians all remind us to die to the flesh and live by the Spirit. As long as you keep both—they’ll be at war.

So Esau moved to a land southwest. Fast-forward, and that land was home to the nation of his descendants: the Edomites. The land of Edom is modern-day Jordan, southwest of Israel.

At the height of the Edomites, the capital city was Petra. If you recall *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, the amazing rock city carved into the side of a cliff—that’s a real place: Petra. You can visit it today.

Back in Bible times, the Edomites and Israelites were neighbors—and usually at some level of hostility.

Verse 9 continues the genealogy of the Edomites there in their new homeland. The descendants of Eliphaz and Reuel. It lists the chiefs among the people. A few interesting names show up here.

In verse 14: Amalek—the father of the Amalekites. If you recall the story of *Esther*, the villain Haman was an Agagite—descended from Amalek. So Haman, who plotted to murder and annihilate the Jews—was an Edomite. His plan was thwarted by Esther.

Then in verse 23:

“The sons of Shobal: Alvan, Simon, Theodore...”

No wait—it’s “Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam.”

Sorry—got a little mixed up there.

Then verses 31 to 43 list the kings of Edom. Their kingdom would rival Israel for centuries, and battles would flare on and off. When Israel turned from God and the Babylonians invaded, the Edomites joined in—basically taking the opportunity to kick Israel while they were down.

Your flesh will always kick you while you’re down.

The prophecy of *Obadiah* was against Edom—and is the best place to read if you want to see where their story leads.

The Israelites later defeated the Edomites in the Maccabean age in the 100s BC, and largely assimilated the Edomites into Judaism.

By then, they were called *Idumeans*, and the last ones we hear of were the Herods! Remember—the line of wicked kings in Jesus’ time. They were Idumean.

There were several King Herods—all awful, and all lived for the flesh: power, greed, and lust. Herod the Great killed the babies of Bethlehem. Herod

Antipas beheaded John the Baptist, and was part of Jesus' trial. He demanded a miracle from Jesus and sent Him back to Pontius Pilate.

The flesh wants signs, but doesn't care for truth.

Herod Agrippa put the apostle James to death and jailed Peter in Acts 12. But God put him to death after some of his fans declared him to be a god—and he didn't stop them.

And the last Herod in the Bible judged Paul on trial—and Paul almost got him to believe in Jesus. Almost. Not quite.

And that is the story of the Edomites. Where are they now? Lost to history. There are some theories.

But more important to us—is the very real battle between flesh and spirit in each of us. The flesh wars against our spirit.

Romans 7 describes the battle within—whenever you find yourself unable to do the good things you want to do—and doing the bad things you don't want to do—that's the flesh.

The solution? Die to the flesh, and live by the Spirit. Romans 8 lays it out for you.

Read Genesis 36. Yes, you can skim through the names.

But tomorrow, we get back to story—and a good one at that: Joseph.

I'll see you there.

Genesis 37 | Joseph the Dreamer

Genesis 37 on Through the Word, beginning at verse 2:

“This is the account of Jacob’s family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers...” (Genesis 37:2).

Chapter 37 begins with a young man named Joseph. What follows is one of the greatest epics in all antiquity. It is the story of an extraordinary life—a life that would affect the entire world.

The story ahead will span about 20 years. For Joseph, those years will carry him from 17 to 37.

Isn’t it amazing how much can happen between 17 and 37?

Now as you read, there’s a lot to be learned—life lessons, essential Bible themes. But before any of that, I want you to enter the story. If you know how it ends—try to forget that, and experience it as Joseph did.

Remember seventeen for a moment, and imagine life with ten older brothers.

Back in verse 2, Joseph is tending sheep—the flocks of his older brothers, **“and he brought their father a bad report about them.”**

Uh-oh. Joseph is a tattler. A snitch. What is it about kids that makes them love to tell on their siblings—and loathe when it’s done to them? It’s destructive—on both sides.

Verse 3:

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age.”

Ooooh—that’s a problem. Twelve sons, and Jacob has a favorite. That’s dangerous.

Joseph is younger—and dad’s favorite. So Jacob **“made an ornate robe for him.”** The word behind *ornate* is tricky to translate. Could mean colorful—or could mean with big sleeves. Either way, the idea here is authority. Jacob put the young one in charge. The kid wearing the big sleeves doesn’t do dirty work—he tells others what to do.

Verse 4:

“When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.”

Do you remember how important approval was at seventeen—how much you just wanted to be liked? Joseph’s big brothers are his whole world—but they won’t speak one kind word. And dad’s favoritism doesn’t help.

And neither does verse 5:

“Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, ‘Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.’”

“His brothers said to him, ‘Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?’ And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said” (Genesis 37:5–8).

Oh boy. Maybe better to keep the dreams on the down-low, Joseph. But he doesn't—he tells everyone. And in the second dream, the sun, moon, and stars bow down to him. Even dad is mad about that one:

“Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?”

And here we arrive at the crossroads—of God's big plan for Joseph's life—and the real world, that wants nothing to do with it.

You may have been here.

As we shall see, these dreams were from the Lord. But how do you wait on God's plan when your whole world is pushing in the other direction?

Joseph's brothers are envious. And envy is a killer.

Every skill and success in the life of your brother is joy in the heart of the humble—and poison in the veins of the envious.

For Joseph's brothers, that poison is growing deeper. They head to Shechem to graze the sheep—and dad sends Joseph.

Verse 14:

“Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.”

Bad idea. But Joseph hits the road—big sleeves and all. He gets directions and heads to Dothan. But they see him coming.

Verse 19:

“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.” (Genesis 37:19–20).

Things just got serious. Those dreams have them tweaked. Because in those dreams—they get humbled. Little do they know that that humbling is God’s plan for them—to save their lives.

Don’t be surprised when God’s big plan is to humble you. That humbling may save your life.

You say—what about Joseph? How come everyone bows to him? Well, before Joseph is exalted the highest—he will be humbled the lowest, by far.

Take heed—if you think God has big plans for you, expect the humbling to come first.

Back in our story—Reuben, the eldest, hears the plans and tries to rescue Joseph.

Verse 22:

“Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.”

Reuben secretly plans to rescue Joseph later.

Joseph arrives—his brothers strip him of his robe and throw him into the cistern. The cistern is empty—no water. Which means he won’t drown, but also means he could die of thirst.

Verse 25:

“As they sat down to eat their meal...”

Wait—hold on—what? As they sat down to eat?

How callous the heart that can just sit to eat. But they do. And as they do—opportunity presents itself. A caravan of Ishmaelite traders.

Verse 26:

“Judah said to his brothers, ‘What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.’ His brothers agreed.”

Pay attention to whose idea this is: Judah. His story will weave in and out with—and in stark contrast to—Joseph’s.

Here, Judah does—well, is it the right thing? He saves Joseph from death—by selling him into slavery.

After all, *“He is our brother.”*

“Shouldn’t kill your brother. But if you sell him—you get paid—so it evens out.”

Judah is the ethical pragmatist. Right and wrong sort of bend to necessity. And his brothers—agreed.

They sell their brother for twenty shekels of silver. That’s two apiece. I don’t imagine that any of them enjoyed spending it much. Probably burned a hole in their pockets—and their conscience.

Blood money.

Somehow Reuben missed all of that. He shows up—too late. The brothers realize they need a story for dad. So in verse 31:

“Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, ‘We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.’” (Genesis 37:31–32).

And the lie—works.

Jacob mourns, and refuses to be comforted. *“I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.”*

And in verse 36:

“Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.”

Joseph is seventeen.

Do you remember 17? I do. Got my first car. Had my first girlfriend. Only girlfriend, really.

Joseph would look back and remember—the year he was sold—like property. A slave. He would remember his father’s last goodbye, and remember exactly how much money his brothers bargained to sell him.

Now as you connect with the humanness and heartbreak of Joseph’s story—let it also connect you with the humanness of another story: Jesus.

Jesus was loved by the Father—and sent by the Father—to the Israelites, His brethren. Some followed—but many hated. In the end, Jesus was

betrayed—and sold for silver coins. A robe was put on Him—and He was mocked.

His body was placed in a tomb rather than a cistern—but He too came out.

It's not the same story, of course—but the little hints and connections are no accident.

And the most important connection—the big question:

Is God greater?

Can God take all this evil intent—and use it for good?

Can He do that in your life?

We have to read on.

Read Genesis 37 today. And when you're done, we have more insights on the B-side audio guide—some challenging thoughts on God's sovereignty when all goes wrong, and on Jacob, and the dangers of favoritism. A few extras that we edited out for time.

And we'll see you back here—in chapter 38.

Genesis 37 B-Side | Sibling Rivalry

Hello everybody. Welcome to Genesis 37, the B-Side.

A few extra insights and observations that didn't quite fit in the main audio guide. Now, our story is about Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers.

It's amazing how many Bible stories revolve around sibling rivalry. Think about it. It's amazing how much strife in the world—and in your life—comes from sibling rivalry. Seriously, can you imagine the difference in your family if all the siblings in all the generations got along?

Actually, three generations of it come up in this one story. You've got Joseph and his brothers, of course. But then think about Jacob. Don't miss the irony here—that Papa Jacob is deceived with the blood of a dead goat from the flock.

Remember how he deceived his dad? He slaughtered a goat from the flock, and he lied to his dad—all to get the blessing away from his brother.

And then it goes all the way back to Jacob's dad, Isaac. Remember the feud between Isaac and his brother Ishmael? Here we have the descendants of Isaac, and they sell one of their own to the Ishmaelites—the descendants of Isaac's brother.

Now at the heart of this sibling rivalry is envy.

“And I saw that all toil and all achievements spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind”
(Ecclesiastes 4:4).

Envy is destructive. It destroys joy. It destroys relationships. But watch carefully—there are some contributing factors here.

The first one is the favoritism. Jacob favored Joseph. Remember verse three:

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age” (Genesis 37:3).

Now, you’d think Jacob would know better. His dad favored his brother—and that did not end well. A parent who favors a child damages all their children, including the favorite.

In Acts, Peter declares:

“How true it is that God does not show favoritism” (Acts 10:34).

It’s important to know that our Father in heaven doesn’t show this kind of favoritism. And James insists:

“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism” (James 2:1).

Now, another factor here is Jacob setting up his son to be a snitch. *Go check on your brothers*, he says.

Now, parenting is no easy task. And sometimes, when you have one good kid, it can seem like it’s easier to put the good one in charge—or worse yet, to get them to tattle on the others. But it is dangerous to do anything that sets your kids against each other. They’ll do enough of that on their own.

Parents have to fight against the snitch mentality. We want our kids to be good—but not by telling us how bad their siblings are.

And one last observation here at the end of the chapter. When the brothers lie to their father, Alistair Begg noted that it is virtually impossible to commit just one sin. There's always a follow-up.

Usually, it's more lies to keep covering for the first one. And these brothers will live in those lies—for 20 years. The lies become a part of their home, part of their family dynamic.

Lies and guilt don't generally make for healthy family dynamics. We will see these guys 20 years later, still unable to get past the guilt. I'm sure they thought they could—but it didn't work.

And they also didn't get the extra affection they were looking for from dad.

Sin does not pay off.

And one more observation as we look to what's ahead: Joseph's story reminds us that sometimes the center of God's will is the eye of the storm.

The will of God and the sovereignty of God are hard concepts to grapple with. And most of the time, they can only be comprehended in the long view of time—looking back to how it all worked out.

Everything about Joseph's situation in this moment looks awful. What hope is there? What good is there to see? There's none. There is only faith.

Now, we have the benefit of time. We can turn the pages faster than Joseph can live them. We can skip ahead to see purpose—to see Joseph declare:

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Genesis 50:20).

That's amazing. Think about it. His brothers' motives were envy, greed, and hatred. But God used it. God worked His good.

But then put yourself back in Joseph's place—at 17 years old, sold into slavery. How can Joseph see that now, in the midst of it?

His only answer is faith. He has to trust God for what he cannot see.

And you and I are called to the same. We are called to a life of walking by faith and not by sight.

“For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

And that's it for the B side. Thanks for joining me for the extras.

Genesis 38 | A Sordid Affair

Genesis 38 on *Through the Word*—a chapter... well, a chapter that you almost want to skip. A sordid tale here in 38—and not one for kids, I’m afraid. Kids, pause it now and ask your parents to check it out first. Parents—well, you’ll see.

Do you remember Judah—the brother who saved Joseph by selling him? Thirty-eight begins as Judah leaves home, moves out, and meets a Canaanite girl. He gets married and has three sons: Er, Onan—not the Barbarian—and Shelah—not an Australian girl. They’re all boys. And time... passes. Boys grow up.

And in verse 6:

“Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the Lord’s sight; so the Lord put him to death” (Genesis 38:6–7).

Wow. That’s a little shocking. We don’t know what sort of wicked this Er was, but for all the things that God doesn’t take a man out for—Er must have been some kind of bad.

And watch what happens next. Verse 8:

“Then Judah said to Onan, ‘Sleep with your brother’s wife and fulfill your duty...’”

Say what? Sleep with who?

A little explanation. There was a custom—later a rule in Deuteronomy—that if a married man died without kids, the widow remarried his younger brother.

Why? Two big reasons: 1) Provide for the widow—very important to God. 2) Provide a family heir—accounted to the older brother. This particular bloodline is important. So—agree or not—that’s the idea.

Verse 9:

“But Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother’s wife...”

I... don’t want to read the rest of that sentence. I warned you! Suffice it to say, Onan had sex with her, but made sure they had no kids.

Verse 10:

“What he did was wicked in the Lord’s sight; so the Lord put him to death also” (Genesis 38:10).

Wow.

Now—historically, some teachers have used this story to say that God is against contraception.

I don’t see that. The issue here isn’t so much contraception—as it is deception. Selfish. Lying. Onan stepped in—and instead of caring for the widow and raising a child—he used her for sex. “Sure—I’ll sleep with my brother’s widow—but she doesn’t get a child.” No love. No sacrifice. No providing. Just sex.

You know, sex is a tricky subject, and the Bible has some strong warnings. But read carefully. In the Bible, sex is not bad—but it is dangerous. Sex is not dirty—it is holy. Holy means set apart—for a special place and special purpose. It’s like a fire—great in the fireplace, deadly outside of it.

So Judah has now lost two sons—both wicked. And he tells his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Live as a widow in your father’s household until my son Shelah grows up.”

But the truth is—Judah thinks Tamar is bad luck, so he gets rid of her.

A long time passes, and Judah’s wife dies. He grieves for a time—and then heads out on a trip with his old friend Hirah. That trip just so happens to take him through the town where Tamar lives once again. Tamar hears that he’s coming—and also hears that son number three is all grown up—and not marrying her. So Tamar hatches a plan.

Verse 15:

“When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, ‘Come now, let me sleep with you’”
(Genesis 38:15–16).

What?

Now keep in mind—he doesn’t know who she is. Her face is covered—Judah thinks she’s any old prostitute. And hey—he’s single now—a widower.

He gets what he wants—she gets paid—nobody’s hurt, right?

Wrong.

Stepping into the present—the reality of prostitution is serious. It is a huge industry—built on human trafficking, kidnapping, forced drug addiction, and much worse. Pornography is no better. When you watch—you support it—with

more dollars than the movie industry. It's horrific—and you can no longer claim ignorance. Jesus set prostitutes free—and His people do the same today.

More thoughts on prostitution and porn—on the B-side, but back in our story:

Judah wants to hire a prostitute. He doesn't know it's Tamar. So Tamar asks what he'll pay. He offers a goat—only he doesn't have it with him. So she wants a pledge—a guarantee he'll send it.

In verse 18, she takes his seal—with the cord, and his staff. The seal represented identity. The staff—authority.

“So he gave them to her and slept with her” (Genesis 38:18).

(Pause)...

And Judah moves on. Finish the trip, carry on. No harm done.

Remember—ethical pragmatist. Reason it through—“I didn't hurt anyone.” He keeps his word—sends his friend to deliver the goat and pick up the pledge he gave her.

But his friend can't find her. In verse 21 he asks around about the “shrine prostitute”—but they tell him there is no shrine prostitute there.

So—she can't be found. And Judah says—“Let her keep it. After all, I did send the goat.” Practical as always.

And that's it. Only that's *not* it. Sex doesn't work that way. There is no just move on.

Three months later—Judah gets news:

“Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result—she is now pregnant” (Genesis 38:24).

And the plot sickens! Judah still doesn't get that Tamar was his prostitute. And he's indignant.

“Bring her out and have her burned to death!” (Genesis 38:24).

Wow. Ain't no hater as hateful as a hypocrite.

But Tamar's not done. She sends a message to Judah:

“I am pregnant by the man who owns these,” she said. And she added, “See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are” (Genesis 38:25).

Busted! And Judah knows it.

“She is more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:26).

I want you to see something here. Judah treated sex as something to be paid for—and walk away. “That's worth a goat.” But sex always costs you more than that.

He lost his seal—his identity. Sex affects your soul—and casual sex will rob your identity. It takes a piece of you. You think you can just take it back—but it's gone.

And Judah lost his staff—the emblem of his authority. Back in the present—how many men have destroyed their family—their reputation, lost respect, lost jobs, destroyed ministries—and lost all authority? Christian leaders. And all—for sex.

Fools. Standing at the point of temptation—risking everything—lying to themselves—and imagining they can just send a goat and get it all back. I'm talking to you—don't believe your own lies. It won't work.

And there is a balance here. It's important that we don't get weird. Historically, the church has added all kinds of rules to sex that are not in the Bible—about contraception, positions—and added a sense of guilt to sex that does not belong in marriage.

God made sex good, and He made it for marriage. Sex is for procreation, it's for pleasure, and it's for unification. The two become one flesh.

Hebrews says that marriage should be respected by all—and the marriage bed kept holy—set apart.

What that means is—sex is set apart for marriage. And within marriage, it's all good—there's no guilt. But outside of marriage—when the two aren't committed to stay one—sex destroys. And it's a sin.

In a marriage—sex is like fire in the fireplace. Outside of marriage—it's like fire in the rafters, and it will destroy.

But also remember—that Jesus forgives sin. And He heals. He forgave the adulteress—and set her free. And He takes the broken—and makes them whole again. And our amazing God, in His amazing grace—will even use what is broken—for good.

Tamar gives birth—to twins—Perez and Zerah. And you will find their names again—along with Judah and Tamar—in the book of Matthew, in the bloodline of Jesus.

Amazing. Jesus can redeem even a story as crazy as this one.

They say that redemption is the scarlet thread that weaves through the whole Bible. And guess how chapter 38 ends? A little baby—with a scarlet thread tied on his wrist. And his name—means risen.

Read chapter 38. And for more thoughts on the meaning behind the scarlet thread—and on contraception, prostitution, pornography, and other stuff that I'd really rather not talk about except it's really important—check out the B-side.

Genesis 38 B-Side | Healing for Life's Big Messes

Welcome to Genesis 38, the B side.

Now, today we have a little extra because we brought up a few subjects that are, well, a little controversial and also not appropriate for kids. This one is PG-14. Kids—again, hit the stop button. Now let your parents check it out first. Waiting. Waiting. Come on, kids.

All right. Now, that doesn't mean that kids shouldn't hear about this stuff. It just means that there's a right time for it. And it's the parents' responsibility to determine when that is. But teenagers need to hear good wisdom and have healthy and balanced conversations about sex. And they need help understanding what the Bible says about it.

But too much information too early can just mess with a kid. So, parents, I'm leaving that decision to you.

Now where do we begin? Contraception. Prostitution? Porn. This is a rough one.

First off, I just want to recognize—this story is messed up. Judah hires a prostitute who, it turns out, is the widow of two of his sons. That's just flat-out sick. How did we get here? And can God possibly redeem it?

First off, how'd we get here? The story is about Judah. He's not the main character, but his story is important. And there is a fascinating arc to his life story.

Back in chapter 37, we got some insight on Judah's character. He wanted to save his little brother's life, and he did save Joseph by convincing the other

nine brothers that they could make a profit selling him into slavery. It's not exactly good, but relatively speaking, it was better than murder.

Judah's ethics were relative. He was the practical one. Why not make a few shekels? But where does that philosophy lead? Well, take a look at his sons.

Er was so wicked that God just took him out. Then Onan was told to father a child. And he kind of went along with that. But not really. He was supposed to father a child, but all he wanted was the sex. No responsibility. And God took him out.

And we're only a couple generations down from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But something was lost in Judah's practicality and flexible ethics. He lost the fear of God. So his kids were downright godless.

Now, on to tougher subjects.

The Onan story is at the heart of no small biblical controversy about contraception. Is it a sin? Is God against family planning, or at least against condoms or other things that allow sex but prevent pregnancy?

Depending on your church, this either sounds like a ridiculous question, or it's a source of a great deal of controversy and challenge for you. Primarily, it's a Catholic question, because popes in the past have used these verses to say contraception is a sin.

It's also a question of tremendous social impact in parts of the world that have a large Catholic population. It affects population, disease control, health, education, health insurance. It's pretty big.

I want to add my thoughts on this while making it clear that mine is not the final say. I am not an authority on the matter. I'm also not Catholic, nor am I

anti-Catholic. I have great respect for Catholics, including friends who are genuine believers.

So I won't address the issue of whether or not you should respect the Pope's edict. That one is out of my realm.

What I will share is what the Bible says and what I think it does or does not imply. What the Bible says here—let's read it directly.

“But Onan knew that the child would not be his. So whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death also” (Genesis 38:9–10).

First of all, gross. But second, exactly what was so wicked?

Onan had sex with Tamar multiple times, and every time he prevented pregnancy. Is that always wrong? Well, it doesn't say exactly. But we do see that Onan was told to have a child for his brother's family line. That was the whole purpose in this story.

You can read Deuteronomy 25 for more on that law. It was a very big deal to carry on the family line. It was also a way to provide family for the widow.

Onan refused all of that part. He simply used the opportunity for sex.

So is that enough to say that God is against all contraception? I don't think so. If God wanted to say He's against all contraception, I think He would have said it directly.

Seeing as God did not give us clear instruction in the Bible on this particular matter, it calls for wisdom. There are some matters for which God has set clear and precise boundaries and laws.

The Ten Commandments are pretty straightforward. For the Jews, He gave the full law. But those rules were for those people in that time. The New Testament declares clearly that Christians are not under the Old Testament law, and there is freedom in that.

But it also says that we are under the law of the Spirit. That means that the Spirit will guide us as we navigate the challenges and complexities of right and wrong in the modern world. We're also called to wisdom.

So use wisdom about these things. Think it through. Pray. Talk with people that you trust and respect.

The Bible does say that sex outside of marriage is a sin. It's the word *fornication* or *porneia* in Greek, and the ban is repeated throughout the New Testament. But marriage is different.

“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure”
(Hebrews 13:4, NIV).

The NIV says the marriage bed should be kept pure, but the original language literally says the marriage bed *is* pure. It's undefiled. Husband and wife—your bed is pure.

Don't defile it with porn or adultery, but also don't add any unbiblical guilt trips over what you can and cannot enjoy together. God made sex for marriage, but I don't think that He made it fun by accident. That's part of what bonds a husband and wife together.

And as I read the Bible, it's just fine for a husband and wife to use contraception.

Over the years, the church has added a lot of unnecessary rules to life that have come and gone, but the Bible has stood the test of time. It's actually quite remarkable.

Now, that being said, a little balance is needed. I do not believe that we should be strictly practical in our approach to sex. Some say limiting sex to marriage just isn't practical. People are going to have sex anyway. Better to educate them to do it safely.

I get that, and I agree to an extent. The practical matters absolutely should be considered and dealt with realistically and compassionately. But practicality should never move us away from a healthy respect and fear of God.

That is exactly what happened to Judah. And it got bad fast.

If God's rules don't seem practical to you, check yourself. Fear God and keep His commandments. You'd also know that when His commands don't give clarity, He also calls us to use some practical wisdom.

Now back in the story in Genesis 38. There is no happy marriage here. There are wicked men and a deceptive woman. And this is where the topic of sex gets difficult.

Paul tells Titus:

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure” (Titus 1:15).

So sex is messed up because people are messed up. Dirty jokes aren't dirty because they're about sex. Their crime is taking something as pure and good as sex and dragging it through the disgusting mess.

Whatever your feelings about the morality of sex, we should all respect its power. It creates human life. It can communicate love in a profound way, or it can communicate hatred with painful scars.

And here in chapter 38, we see something else. Remember the deal that Judah made with the prostitute in verse 18?

“He said, ‘What pledge should I give you?’ ‘Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand,’ she answered” (Genesis 38:18).

A man’s seal was used to mark an agreement like a signature. It represented a man’s identity. I believe there’s some symbolism here.

In a marriage, there is also sharing of identity. Marriage is a union, and sex is part of that. *The two become one flesh* is both a spiritual statement and a sexual one.

Sex bonds a husband and wife together and seals their new identity as one. But outside of marriage, sex can steal your identity. Just like Tamar stole Judah’s seal.

You lose a part of who you are, and you have less of you to give your spouse. And yet, also remember that Jesus restores identity—as He did for the woman caught in adultery, and for thieves and prostitutes and sinners of all kinds.

Back in our story, Judah also lost his staff. The staff represented his authority, and adultery will rob you of your authority—in the house, at work, in ministry.

Too many men. Too many women have lost their family, lost respect, lost everything to adultery.

“With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life”
(Proverbs 7:21–23).

Now I also want to step out of this story and into today for a second, to understand the reality of prostitution. It is never as simple as a financial deal between two people.

Those dollars pay a pimp. Those dollars pay criminals to kidnap young girls, to target runaways. They don't pay to provide for her needs. They pay for the drugs used to keep her addicted, to keep her in bondage.

The same is true when you watch porn.

The porn industry is huge—more money than the movie industry. And the dollars you provide by watching the ads fund human trafficking. Human slavery worldwide.

Watch porn and you are funding kidnapping, rape, and slavery. It's all part of the industry. It's horrific. And you can no longer claim ignorance.

The term *shrine prostitute* in verse 21, by the way, refers to prostitutes who sell sex at the shrines as part of pagan worship to honor their gods. The prostitution racket in their day was part of religion. It happened around the world. Still happens today. And it's wicked.

And one last note on this sordid chapter. In verse 28, when Tamar gives birth to twins, one of them put out his hand, and the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, *“This one came out first.”*

It's a funny little story. One hand comes out, then his brother came out before him. But I believe there's more here than just an odd story.

The color scarlet in the Bible is symbolic, and here, in one of the Bible's most sordid stories, there is the scarlet thread of redemption.

Bible scholars speak of the scarlet thread that weaves the whole Bible together and carries redemption even through—well, even through stories like this.

Amazingly, Judah and Tamar and their twin boys are listed in the genealogy of the Savior of the world. Jesus descended from Perez, whose name means *breach* or *breakthrough*, and Jesus broke through all the mess of sin in our world to reach us.

And the brother who stuck out his hand—Zerah—means *risen*. And only in the resurrection of Jesus our Lord do we truly find redemption.

Jesus, who forgave sinners, who restored the woman caught in adultery and told her to sin no more. Jesus is risen, and in Him we are risen. The old is gone. The new has come.

Maybe your story is already twisted. Maybe it's as sordid as Judah and Tamar's. But don't underestimate the power of God's redemption. Turn to Jesus and find healing and hope and restoration—and purity again.

And that's it for Side B.

Thanks for hanging with me. And chapter 39 will be better—I promise. Oh wait... Potiphar's wife. Oh man.

Genesis 39 | Accused

Welcome back to *Through the Word*. Genesis 39 today.

Have you ever had a dream—about your future—a vision of God’s plans for you—somewhere between crazy long-shot hope and unshakable destiny? And just when you thought things were happening, you arrive at a place where everything comes together in violent opposition to that dream?

If so, you’re in good company. Can you think of a Bible hero who didn’t go through it? Moses, Elijah, David, Daniel, all the disciples—Jesus. And here, Joseph. The dreamer. Dreamed of something great. And it’s not as if Joseph invented the dream—God gave it to him. He doesn’t know exactly what it means at this point. All he knows is that life is definitely not headed in the direction of his dreams. He just got sold into slavery—by his own brothers. Not exactly greatness.

Joseph’s story is a phenomenal illustration of Romans 8:28—God works all things together for good for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. It’s also a powerful picture of Jesus. The one destined to save the world—was sold for a few shekels of silver.

But Joseph doesn’t know all that yet. All he knows is he has a new master—in a new country.

“Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him...”
(Genesis 39:1).

Potiphar. Powerful man in a powerful country. As captain of the guard, he’s basically Pharaoh’s secret service chief.

“The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master” (Genesis 39:2).

Now this is amazing. God was with Joseph. What strikes me is what is *not* recorded here. We have no account of Joseph’s trauma—of shackles, of being treated like property, of losing his family. In Egypt, not a single person knows his face from Adam. But the story doesn’t dwell there. Joseph gets sold into a lousy job—and he gets to work. Like he’s working for God or something.

And don’t miss the connection to Jesus. Joseph went from favorite son to unknown servant. Imagine that—grasp it. Then remember Jesus—who went from His Father’s side—to being born in a feeding trough to a poor family, to be a servant to all.

As for Joseph—he never dwelt on his hardships. He refused the life of self-pity. He just got to work.

“When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned” (Genesis 39:3–4).

Now that is remarkable. Remember—this kid is seventeen. But he works hard—he’s industrious, diligent, obedient, creative. He just worked. In the worst of situations, he did his best.

And God honors hard work. When God blessed the work, Potiphar noticed—and put Joseph in charge.

But consider what Joseph is learning here. He's a leader—who is first—a servant. He has great responsibility—but it's not his stuff. He's a steward. He is entrusted.

Let that sink in for anyone to whom God gives power or money or authority. It's not your stuff. You are entrusted, and a servant must be found faithful.

And indeed Joseph was.

“So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate” (Genesis 39:6).

So things are going pretty well. But watch out.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome (Genesis 39:6).

Pause there. Turns out Joseph's a good-looking lad. Hey—hard work makes you attractive. And there are benefits. Joseph is a favorite everywhere he goes. He's just one of those guys who has it. But there are also challenges to beauty. Joseph was favorite in a very unwanted and dangerous way.

“And after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’” (Genesis 39:7).

Whoa—red alert. Danger Joe Jacobson. This is Potiphar's wife. Mrs. Potts. And my guess is that she was considerably more attractive than an old teapot.

Joe's in trouble. Temptation. That starts with T and rhymes with P and that stands for POTIPHAR! Who will kill you—if you do this.

But Mrs. Potty could kill you if you don't.

Notice here—the trials of beauty. Good looks can open doors—but many of those doors are traps. People who love you for your looks—offer an empty and dangerous love.

“But he refused. ‘With me in charge,’ he told her, ‘my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?’”
(Genesis 39:8–9).

Joseph. My man. I like this guy.

Joseph has just been propositioned by a beautiful woman. He is young and single, good looking and strong. Now let’s be real about this—that’s gotta be tempting.

But also get real—about the stakes. Everything is on the line.

And that goes for you listening. Some of you are at the place of temptation. Some of you are staring adultery in the face—and she’s looking pretty cute. Or he.

But measure carefully—what is at stake. Your marriage, your children, your ministry, your calling—all hang on this—on you, and your response. If you’re single—the stakes are no smaller. Your entire future is on the line.

It is no coincidence that some of the Bible’s greatest names are made or broken in the moment of sexual temptation. David, Samson, Solomon—all failed. You can throw away forty years in a few minutes.

So—what are you gonna do?

Joseph—refused. Plain and simple. And watch his response: “My master has entrusted me with everything.” Joseph honors trust. And he says, “you are his wife.” State the truth out loud.

But although he acknowledges the practical wrongness of it all, his refusal is founded on one thing: the fear of God.

“How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”

(Genesis 39:9).

Memorize that verse. Write it on a card and keep it in your pocket. Teach your kids. I taught mine—when they just barely hit puberty. We call it a shield of faith verse. Shield—as in save your life.

“And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her” (Genesis 39:10).

Now there is wisdom. Keep your path far from her. If you don’t want to fall into sin—quit hanging around the trap doors ya dummy. Not even a hint of sexual immorality.

But sometimes, temptation comes after you.

“One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house” (Genesis 39:11–12).

Oh boy. Run, Joseph, run. When sin comes knocking—run! Don’t stop to reason. Reason is done. Just get out! And God promises—there is always a way out. Walk away—and go talk to someone godly—now.

Joseph is out—but Mrs. Potts has his cloak. Oh no. Not the cloak. What is it with Joseph and his outerwear? First the coat—now this. Don't miss the connection—Jesus had a garment taken from Him too.

So she takes the cloak—and accuses Joseph of attacking her. When she tells her husband, he burns with anger.

And Joseph goes to prison. No trial. No due process—can't even make his case. Just prison.

Stinkin' outerwear.

But then something amazing happens.

“But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there”

(Genesis 39:20–22).

Wow.

And the chapter ends with the phrase that pervades this whole story: **the Lord was with Joseph.**

Awesome.

Story's not over yet. Read chapter 39, and I'll meet you right back here for what happens next.

Genesis 40 | Forgotten

Genesis 40 on *Through the Word*, and we left off with our hero, Joseph, in jail—locked up for a crime that he didn't commit.

It's been years since he saw his father, brothers, or anyone he knows—and by this time he's got to be wondering, "Did they just forget about me?" God was very clearly with him, but why wasn't he rescued?

Do you know what it's like—to feel forgotten? As if there was once a plan for you—but somehow that plan is gone now?

For Joseph, there was a plan—God's plan. He had dreams—back when he was seventeen. But that was long ago. So how long should he hold onto the hope that God still has a plan for his life?

Joseph is in jail—but amazingly, the Lord is with him—yet again. In the worst situation, the Lord stays with Joseph and shows him kindness, grants him favor, and the warden of the prison gives Joseph responsibility—and more responsibility—until Joseph, the prisoner, is in charge of the entire prison. And the prison is run so well that the warden pays no attention.

Time passes, and we come to chapter 40, verse 1:

“Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined” (Genesis 40:1–3).

So Joseph finds himself in charge of two of Pharaoh's chief men—both in trouble. More time passes, until one night, each of the two men has a dream. Joseph finds them the next morning looking dejected. “Why do you look so sad today?”

In verse 8:

“We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.”

Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams” (Genesis 40:8).

Now there's an interesting turn. Two men had dreams—and Joseph tells them, “Interpretations belong to God.” I wonder how many times Joseph himself wondered about the interpretation of his own dreams. But his words here are telling.

If you pay attention to Joseph's words throughout these stories, you'll find that he brings God in on just about every conversation. Facing temptation, interpreting dreams, naming kids—Joseph always brings up God.

Amazing. It started when Joseph was a slave, his world upside down, and he was propositioned by a married woman. “How could I sin against God?” From there forward, it's as if Joseph can't put together a complete thought without God in it. The awareness of God in all things—will change the way you look at life.

Verse 9:

“So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, ‘In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, and on the vine were three branches.

As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand.'"

"This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer.

But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison" (Genesis 40:9–14).

Don't miss Joseph's plea here—"Remember me." Joseph is making the most of prison—but he wants freedom. He wants justice. And don't miss the fact that unjust suffering happens to God's people.

So next the baker shares his dream:

"On my head were three baskets of bread. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head" (Genesis 40:16–17).

The meaning of this dream—is not so good. You can read it. In three days—no more baker.

And just as Joseph told them—both dreams came to pass—in exactly three days. The cupbearer got his job back, and the baker was—well, not baking anymore.

Now before you get the wrong idea—I'm not telling you that your every crazy dream or wild idea is from God. Some ideas are from God, and some are just

your imagination—runnin' away with you. It's on you to discern the difference—with the Spirit's help.

And sometimes it's the very things that seem to work *against* the dream, that ultimately drive you to figure out if it really is from God.

Funny story—I actually wrote half the script to this guide about five years ago, back when I started Genesis. Back then, hardly anyone knew *Through the Word*. I was plowing ahead on a crazy idea from God that I just couldn't shake. We had no funding, my house was in foreclosure, my family on the edge of homeless, and I had to write these guides after I finished up my other two jobs that still didn't pay the bills.

And check out what I wrote—I'm reading from the old script:

“If you are weary—if you are losing heart—I want to encourage you—not to chase foolish dreams, but to trust God's plans and God's promises. Hey—if you're listening to this—if ever these audio guides make a real difference in the world—it's only after years of perseverance, struggle, desperation, hope, opportunities found and opportunities lost, so much possibility and so much frustration, determination, and an absolute conviction that with God for us—nothing can stand against us.”

Well, those words waited five years for me to finally record them for you. I'm not trying to compare myself with Joseph—I'm just saying—we all go through it.

For me—all the crazy trials pushed me to prayer: “*God—I need to know if this is your plan.*”

And—they humbled me.

Joseph had his dreams—dreams of greatness. But that’s a dangerous dream. If it’s selfish—if it’s Joseph’s desire to be great for his own sake—it’s the recipe for a tyrant.

So what does it take—for someone to be great—for others’ sake? Well, sometimes you gotta learn to be nobody before you can truly be somebody. I think that’s part of the “last shall be first” stuff.

And that—reminds me of Jesus. In fact, this whole story does.

Think about it. Accused of things He didn’t do. Suffering for the crimes of another. And there in His suffering—there were two others. Remember the cross—between two convicts. And yet one found salvation—the other condemned, hung on a tree. And both—after three days.

And look deeper still. A baker—bread. A cupbearer—wine. The two elements of communion, of which Jesus said, *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”* What does Joseph say here? **“When all goes well with you, remember me.”**

But why? Why would God make Joseph’s life point to Jesus with so much detail? Don’t forget—Jesus said that all the Scripture is about Him.

It’s a little bit like—have you ever seen an M. Night Shyamalan (*Sh-yeah-mah-lahn*) movie—the second time—and everything makes more sense because that one thing at the end explains every step that led up to it?

Well, in the Bible, that one thing—is Jesus. You might miss it the first time, but wow does it make more sense when you see Jesus from start to finish.

And for me, seeing the connection between Joseph and Jesus—really helps me humanize Jesus' suffering. It helps me relate. He was sent by the Father—to help. But He was betrayed, accused, and numbered with transgressors. But it was for good—for our good.

And as I read about Joseph and consider my trials, I relate—to him, to Jesus, and I feel that fellowship of suffering.

Last verse—verse 23:

“The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him” (Genesis 40:23).

Oh man. Forgotten—again.

Do you know what that's like?

Or maybe you relate to the cupbearer—forgets the one who saved you. A lot of us do that to Jesus—get out of trouble, then forget about Him. If that's you—maybe it's time to remember—with the bread, and the cup.

Time to take communion.

Read chapter 40, and we'll meet right back here. Don't worry—Joseph's not going anywhere fast.

Genesis 41 | Found Faithful

Genesis 41 on *Through the Word*—beginning at verse 1:

“When two full years had passed...” (Genesis 41:1).

That’s—two—*full*—years. You and I left this story yesterday. For Joseph, he’s counting 700 more notches on his cell wall.

Do you know what it’s like—to wait? Wait for God’s plan, wait for someone to remember you, wait for something, anything. Joseph has been waiting.

Two years since the guy he helped out forgot him. And thirteen years since he last saw his dad—or brothers—or home. He left at seventeen, now he’s thirty. Can you imagine losing your 20s to prison—on a false accusation?

But he kept busy. He’s a prisoner, but he’s also in charge—again. And Joseph worked hard. Diligent, faithful, industrious—Joseph was good. And God was with him. But still—waiting.

And then, something happened.

Pharaoh had a dream. This dream is crucial to the story—so I want you to picture it in full color. Back in verse 1:

“He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up” (Genesis 41:1–4).

“He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream” (Genesis 41:5–7).

“In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him” (Genesis 41:8).

So Pharaoh is stuck—disturbing dream—no one to interpret. And then the cupbearer remembers what he forgot. That young Hebrew in prison—he could interpret dreams.

So Pharaoh sends for him. And just like that, Joseph is shaved, dressed—out of the dungeon—and standing in front of Pharaoh.

“Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.’

‘I cannot do it,’ Joseph replied to Pharaoh, ‘but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires’” (Genesis 41:15–16).

You gotta admire that humility. And honesty!

Pharaoh just gave Joseph the opportunity of a lifetime. He’s a slave—a prisoner—and Pharaoh says, “I heard that you can interpret dreams.” But Joseph refuses to take credit for God’s work—even if it’s through him. And who would have known?! God—that’s who.

And God honors that humility. Don't miss that. There are many lessons we should take from Joseph: perseverance in trials, integrity in temptation, and God's faithfulness to keep promises.

But do not miss this simple truth: **God honors humility**. He resists the proud—and exalts the humble.

Joseph has been a living example of Proverbs 3:5, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart*"—but now he is 3:6:

"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths."

So Pharaoh tells Joseph the dream—seven fat cows, eaten by seven scrawny. Then seven healthy grain—swallowed up by seven withered. Verse 25:

"Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine'" (Genesis 41:25–27).

So the dreams foretell of seven years of abundance—and seven of famine—so severe it will ravage the land, and the abundance will not be remembered.

So Joseph proposes a plan. Verse 33:

"And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over

the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance” (Genesis 41:33–34).

And in verse 36:

“This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine” (Genesis 41:36).

Now there’s a guy who knows how to put together a plan—on the spot. And why not? Joseph has been given responsibility for thirteen years—working, planning, preparing, delegating, proving faithful. By this time, making a plan is second nature.

And Pharaoh takes notice. Verse 37:

“The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, ‘Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?’” (Genesis 41:37–38).

Notice—Pharaoh sees more than just wisdom—he sees the Spirit of God in Joseph.

“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.’

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt’” (Genesis 41:39–41).

Whaaaaat—just—happened?

Joseph—slave. Joseph—prisoner. Joseph—is in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Pharaoh gives him his signet ring—the seal of his authority. And he dresses him in a robe of fine linen. The outerwear is back! Now there's some irony.

And it also reminds me of someone. We've been making connections between Jesus and Joseph all throughout. But did you remember—that Jesus was given a kingly robe—and mocked with it? Like Joseph's first robe, it was stained with blood.

But Jesus will return—in Revelation 19—with another robe, embroidered with the words: “**King of kings and Lord of lords.**”

In our story, Joseph rides in a chariot as second in command—as people shout “Make way!” “Bow down!” Which also reminds me—that *at the name of Jesus*, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess, “Jesus is Lord.”

Back in our story, Joseph is now running one of the greatest nations in history. Is he ready for this?

Well, think about what he's been doing. He's been in charge—leading—as a servant. And he was faithful. That's the key.

Jesus reminds us to be faithful with the little things—because the one who is faithful with little, will be faithful with much. *And do not despise the days of little things* (Zechariah).

And true enough, Joseph was faithful in the big things too. The seven years of abundance came—times of plenty. And Joseph got to work.

“Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure” (Genesis 41:49).

Then verse 50:

“Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household’” (Genesis 41:50–51).

At long last, life is good—and Joseph is content—to forget the hard days.

“The second son he named Ephraim and said, ‘It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering’” (Genesis 41:52).

It is so good—to finally see fruit coming from your life. And again we see that Joseph can’t do anything without giving God the credit.

Reminds me of Ecclesiastes:

“When times are good, be happy, but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other.”

I think Joseph understood that.

And verse 53:

“The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food” (Genesis 41:53–54).

So the famine hit—and hard. And Joseph saved—everyone. And all the countries came to Joseph for grain.

Which included...

Well, we'll find out in chapter 42.

Genesis 42 | When Your Past Comes Back

Genesis 42, and boy has our story changed.

After thirteen years in slavery and prison, Joseph is on top of the world. For the last decade, he's been second in command over all of Egypt. Wife and two sons. Named his first son *Manasseh*—a spin on the word *Forget*—because God made him forget all his trouble. And his next son *Ephraim*—twice fruitful.

Fruitful is a beautiful thing. A life that matters, that makes a difference. The famine is serious now—and Joseph was saving lives!

But forget? Forgetting the past—forgetting his father's house—may not be so easy. We've been following Joseph in Egypt for twenty years. But in chapter 42, we come back to the land of his childhood. Canaan.

“When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, ‘Why do you just keep looking at each other?’ He continued, ‘I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die’” (Genesis 42:1–2).

Jacob. Don't forget about Jacob. We've been following his kids a while, but Jacob was our main character long before Joseph. He may be old, but his story's not done—not in God's book.

For the last twenty years, Jacob has believed a lie—that his son Joseph is dead. He believed it—because his ten older sons told it. And for two long decades, they lived in that deception.

Do you know what that's like—to live a lie?

You know, as we follow this story, it is tempting to only relate ourselves to Joseph—unjustly wronged, maintaining integrity, serving faithfully. But let's be real. We're not always Joseph.

Most of us, if we're honest, fit the brothers' shoes more than we'd care to admit. But that's just it—are we honest? Will we admit it? And will they?

Well, twenty years gone—and they haven't yet. What does it take for a liar to get honest?

Right now, there's a famine.

“Then ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him” (Genesis 42:3–4).

So ten go—but not Benjamin. See, Ben was the youngest—the only one younger than Joseph—and the only other son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife.

“Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.

‘Where do you come from?’ he asked.

‘From the land of Canaan,’ they replied, ‘to buy food.’

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him” (Genesis 42:6–8).

Oh, Nelly.

After twenty long years, Joseph is going about his work, and ten brothers—show up! But they don't recognize him. A man changes a lot from 17 to 37. And he's speaking another language. And he's not a slave—he runs Egypt! Plus—their faces are bowed to the ground.

Speaking of which, verse 9:

“Then he remembered his dreams about them” (Genesis 42:9).

(Remember the sheaves—bowed to the ground?)

“And said to them, ‘You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.’

‘No, my lord,’ they answered. ‘Your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies’”

(Genesis 42:9–11).

Now that one—had to get Joseph. *“We are... honest men.”*

That's easy to claim—harder to live.

“Trust me, I'm honest.” You know who says that? Honest people—or—liars pretending to be honest. How do you tell the difference?

Well—you test them. With the truth.

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

But what truth?

At the moment, these ten brothers are telling the truth—so far as it's been asked of them. But they have lived—a lie. That lie held them; the guilt dug into their wrists like shackles—for years.

Or at least—I'd like to think so. But maybe it didn't. Maybe some people can just lie and move on. Maybe they can disconnect from conscience and human compassion. Maybe.

And I'm guessing that's exactly what Joseph was wondering about.

His brothers sold him. And here they bow, they swear—*"We are honest men."*

So Joseph presses them, and they respond:

"Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more" (Genesis 42:13).

Well, there's some honesty. But Joseph has to wonder—why is Benjamin not with them? Did they sell him too? Or maybe they let him die in that old pit.

So Joseph puts their words to the test:

"Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth" (Genesis 42:16).

And so—he locked them up for three days.

Little Bible hint: always pay attention to the third day.

"On the third day, Joseph said to them, 'Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households'" (Genesis 42:18–19).

So Joseph softens—he lets all go but one.

Why?

Because he fears God.

The presence of God in Joseph's thoughts, his decisions, his responses—is pervasive. And here—it changes the way he treats those who wronged him.

And I think his brothers were affected by this reminder—of the fear of God. Joseph is using an interpreter—but the fear of God speaks in every language.

“They said to one another, ‘Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us’”
(Genesis 42:21).

Guilt—is a powerful force.

Twenty years later, it hasn't left them. Guilt will not let you get away without some form of punishment. Our conscience—and our sense of justice—and the fear of God remind us—that our sin will find us out.

“Reuben replied, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood’”
(Genesis 42:22).

Oh man. That one hits Joseph. They don't know he can understand—but he understands. He turns to hide his tears.

They do remember—they do feel it. Reuben actually seemed to care.

But a little regret is not the same as repentance. *Sorry you're caught* is not the same as *sorry you did it*. Joseph wants to know if their hearts are changed.

He commands his guard to take Simeon—and bind him before their eyes.

“Remind you of something, brothers? Do you care this time? Will you come back for him?”

“Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey” (Genesis 42:25).

So there’s a trick. Everything they paid—is returned—but it’s hidden in their sacks, so they’ll find it later.

Remember the last time they left Joseph? They had some extra silver in their sacks that time too—because they sold him for it.

“My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. “Here it is in my sack.”

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?” (Genesis 42:28).

And the silver brings the guilt.

The kindness of Joseph—brings the fear of God.

Interesting—Romans 2 tells us that **God’s kindness leads us to repentance.**

And *repentance* is what this story is about.

Have they repented?

I don’t think so. Not yet.

They return home, tell Jacob the story, and Jacob is upset. No way he's sending Benjamin back with them.

Then they unpack—and discover that *every one* of them has their silver back. And they—were—frightened.

“Their father Jacob said to them, ‘You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!’” (Genesis 42:36).

And he refuses—to send them back.

Genesis 43 | Responsibility

We left off with our old hero Jacob—stuck—between bad and worse. Risk losing another son—or starve to death. At the end of 42, he declares, *“Everything is against me!”*

Ever felt like that? Like you can’t win for losing?

I’ve been there. I spent a few years there. Not starving—but stuck—with no opportunities. And to be honest—I hope you go through it too. Because as much as I would not have chosen the experience, I’m so glad that God chose it for me. Seriously. I wouldn’t be where I am without it.

Actually—check that. I wouldn’t be *who* I am without it.

You know that old saying, *“when God closes a door, he opens a window?”* I don’t know about that. Sometimes the door closes—and I’m just stuck. But maybe—God’s not just about doors of opportunity—maybe he’s focused on me—my character, faith, love. Maybe those things grow—through trials.

Consider Jacob’s son Joseph: slavery—then jail—with no open doors—or windows to escape for seventeen years. He was given authority—but my guess is that’s not the window he was hoping for. I think Joseph wanted home.

Speaking of home—Papa Jacob sent ten sons to buy grain in Egypt, and for the second time in his life, his sons returned—one short. Now Simeon is locked up—and they won’t get him back unless they send Benjamin.

Jacob is stuck. No window, no door—no food. And every option looks bad.

But what about Romans 8? What about everything working together for our good? What about *“if God is for us, who can be against us?!”* Actually—this story is about that very thing. Romans 8 is about God working through trials. And when God works all things for good—it’s not talking about our success—it’s our character. It’s about becoming more like Jesus. And that happens—in our joys and especially—in our trials.

Alistair Begg commented:

“Into every life, some rain must fall. Because if all you have is sunshine, all you have is desert. And the desert flowers only bloom—after the storm.”

Look back over our story. God didn’t force the events—but He did use them.

Joseph’s predicament is not good. It’s bad. It is cruel. It is sin—committed against Joseph and his father—by his brothers—and by slave masters, and by the political system that supported slavery—and robbed Joseph of justice for so many years.

It was all bad—but God would use it all—for their good.

But for now, He’s still working on their faith.

“Now the famine was still severe in the land. So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, ‘Go back and buy us a little more food’” (Genesis 43:1–2).

Jacob has waited as long as he can. But the food supply is out. He says go back.

Judah—ever the realist—reminds his dad why it won’t work:

“The man warned us solemnly, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you’” (Genesis 43:3).

The man insisted on seeing Benjamin. Jacob will not take that risk:

“Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?”

But what else could they do? The man asked—they answered.

“Then Judah said to Israel his father, ‘Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him’” (Genesis 43:8–9).

Don’t miss that—Judah takes responsibility. That’s manhood. And it’s also a big step towards repentance. But will he take responsibility for his past?

Finally, Jacob listens to reason—but he gives some instructions:

“If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift—a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds” (Genesis 43:11).

Funny—kinda reminds you of Jacob some decades ago—when he faced Esau. He’s always trying to buy favor. If only he knew—he already has favor.

So Jacob sends them off—with a hope and prayer:

“And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man” (Genesis 43:14).

So there is a glimmer of faith in Jacob. And the men head back to Egypt.

“When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, ‘Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal; they are to eat with me at noon’” (Genesis 43:16).

So the brothers are in for a feast. You know how good a feast is when you’ve gone hungry for a while. Only when they show up—they’re afraid.

“We were brought here because of the silver... He wants to attack us and overpower us...”

Funny how a guilty conscience just can’t enjoy a gift. *“It’s gotta be a trick.”*

So they explain to the steward before going in—they didn’t steal the silver. They don’t know what happened.

“It’s all right,” he said. “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver” (Genesis 43:23).

I love this story. The boys show up apologizing all over themselves—but it’s okay.

God gave you treasure. You didn’t deserve it. You didn’t earn it. He’s just good to you.

It’s a perfect picture of grace. God is just good to you.

You don’t deserve it! He’s just good to you!

He’s kind to sinners. He gives them good things!

And remember—it’s His kindness that leads—to repentance. And that is what our story is all about.

So the brothers are welcomed—and Simeon is released, and they all get cleaned up for a feast.

Joseph asks about their father. *“He’s alive and well.”*

And they bowed low to Joseph.

And Joseph saw—his brother Benjamin. He was only a kid when Joseph left.

His only kid brother—the only one who wasn’t in on the betrayal.

“Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there” (Genesis 43:30).

He washes up, and comes back—and the men have been seated in order of age.

I love the hint dropping here. If one of them knew a little probability—he’d calculate a one in 3 million shot at getting ten in order by accident. That’s—ten factorial, for you checking my math.

“When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s” (Genesis 43:34).

Now what is Ben gonna do with five times the food?

But more importantly, what will the brothers do—when their younger—is treated like a favorite?

The test is still on.

It’s a good test for you and me, too.

You know it’s easy to weep with those who weep—but do you rejoice with those who rejoice?

What if someone who you think is lesser—gets more than you?

And the chapter ends:

“So they feasted and drank freely with him” (Genesis 43:34).

And so they enjoyed—God's grace.

After all that fear. After all that waiting and starving at home.

God had a feast for them.

And I think that a lot of people find the same with Jesus.

They wait in fear, nearly starve—afraid to go back—afraid He's ready to pounce as soon as they walk into church.

But Jesus isn't like that. He's good.

Good to sinners—even while they're sinners—He gives His own life for us.

That—is grace.

And grace should be enjoyed.

Read Genesis 43, and consider this:

If Joseph pictures Jesus—what about Jacob—and the brothers?

For more on that—check out the B-side, for some thoughts on Israel today, prophecy, 7 years of trouble and tribulation, and a return to Jesus.

And I'll see you back—in 44.

Genesis 43 B-Side | Israel & the Return of Christ

Hello and welcome to Genesis 43, the B-side on Through the Word. All the good stuff we couldn't fit on Side A.

Or is it all the secret stuff that the other guys couldn't handle? Probably the first one, but no matter.

Genesis 43—a powerful story for me. And as compelling as Joseph's part in all this is, I'm really intrigued by Jacob. The patriarch. The old man. The one who wrestled with man and with God so many years earlier, and wouldn't let go without the blessing.

Jacob, who is convinced that everything is against him.

And what I want to consider briefly here is *typology* in our story. Typology is Bible symbolism or foreshadowing—characters and stories in the Old Testament that give us pictures and hints of New Testament truths.

There are lots of them, and the New Testament explains some. Most importantly, there are a lot that foreshadow the Messiah, Jesus. John 5 tells us that the entire Old Testament is about Jesus. Hebrews explains a lot of those pictures, but there's a lot more left for us to search and find.

Now, some balance is required with typology. We know it's in the Bible, but I don't think it's there to teach us new truths about God. Rather, it illustrates truths that are elsewhere stated clearly.

But the symbolism still helps.

For example, Joseph is a powerful picture of Jesus. He was betrayed, accused, suffered, and yet ascended to rule. And God used all the wrong done to him to save many people.

That's a clear picture. I already knew those things about Jesus, but following Joseph's story—I relate more. I connect and understand.

So if Joseph pictures Jesus, what about Jacob and the other sons?

Well, in sending Joseph, I'd say Jacob pictures God the Father. But keep in mind that Jacob is also called Israel—that's his new name. And his sons and their descendants will become the nation of Israel, the Jewish people.

And after all, Jesus' family on earth was Israel—the Jews. God sent a Savior for the world as the Jewish Messiah.

Now think about this. When Jesus came to save, He was sent by the Father to the Jews, just as Joseph was sent by his father to his brothers. Jesus was betrayed for shekels of silver, just like Joseph. Jesus was turned over to the Gentiles, just as Joseph was sold to Gentiles.

They were both falsely accused and suffered as innocents.

But what about Israel in Jesus' story? Did God give up on those who rejected Jesus? Many Jews are convinced to this day that Jesus is still dead—just as Jacob thought Joseph was dead for two decades.

Two decades. Two millennia. Maybe a coincidence.

But now watch this. What drives Jacob and the brothers back to Joseph, even though they don't know he's there? A famine in the land—for seven years.

In prophecy, what will it take for Israel to return to Jesus? It will take the tribulation. Seven years of trials.

If you know prophecy, you'll remember that the tribulation is the 70th week in the prophecy of Daniel 9, and it is a time when God works through Israel once again. In Jeremiah, the tribulation is called *the time of Jacob's trouble*.

The age of the Gentiles comes to an end, and God focuses on bringing the Jews back to Jesus.

“They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son” (Zechariah 12:10).

I believe that's talking about the Jews finally opening their eyes to see Jesus.

Back in our story, we have ten brothers who thought they did away with Joseph a long time ago—but God's not done with them. In fact, God has a plan for Joseph to save his brothers and the world.

But first, the brothers are going to have to reckon with how they treated him so long ago. So as you read on, pay attention to that—to that picture.

And there's a few more little things to watch.

Joseph's steward, for example, in verse 23—the one who welcomes the brothers back and reassures them:

“Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure” (Genesis 43:23).

Now, first of all, that had to be a little stunning. What does this Gentile know about *their* God—the God of their father?

But think about typology again. Joseph has an unnamed servant who delivers this message of grace. Who could that picture?

Listen to the way that Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in John 16, and tell me if it sounds like Joseph's steward:

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you” (John 16:13–14).

Now maybe it's a stretch. I don't know. But I think it's a pretty good fit.

And what's the steward's job? Deliver gifts. Reassure them of grace.

And speaking of grace—that brings me to one more important picture here. Joseph invites his brothers to a feast. It's all free. It's all grace.

But the brothers just can't seem to enjoy it at first. In fact, they're so caught up in trying to give gifts—as their father Jacob insisted—hoping their gifts will be enough to cover up their apparent guilt with the silver.

Interesting when you consider the gospel of grace.

Grace can be hard to accept. That God just loves you—because He loves you. That He offers salvation for free.

It's especially hard for religious people—like the Jews. It's hard to believe that Jesus just forgives you. That you don't have to bribe God with the best of your works. That He just loves you.

But in the story, Joseph provides for his brothers, helps them—even before they repent. He cares for them.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

He died for the ungodly.

Well, that should be plenty for you to chew on in this chapter. Watch for the typology here—and as we move ahead.

And if you want to know more about God's plan for the Jews now and in the future, a great place to start is Romans 9, 10, and 11.

And one last thing. I've been trying to find a place to share this poem that I heard from another pastor who was teaching through the story of Joseph. I couldn't find the right place for it, so I thought this would work.

It's a poem by Robert Browning Hamilton:

*I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chatted all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she;
But oh, the things I learned from her,
When sorrow walked with me.*

That's it for the B-side on Genesis 43.

We'll see you back here in 44. Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time.

And remember:

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word.

Genesis 44 | Repentance

For the moment, all seems to be well. Ten brothers returned to Egypt in great fear to buy grain and rescue their jailed brother Simeon. They feared—because all the silver from their first purchase—wound up back in their sacks, and they thought they would be accused of stealing. But they weren't accused—they were welcomed. They were shown grace. Simeon was set free, and all were treated to a feast.

So now—all is well—they buy their grain again, and load up to head back—with all eleven brothers.

Only all is **not** well. All has not been well for twenty years. Because brother number twelve is still missing—and the original ten—have not yet repented.

Don't lose track—**repentance** is what this story is about.

To repent—is to turn. Picture your life as a path you're walking—only you've chosen the wrong path. Two choices—you can keep plowing ahead, or you can stop, recognize your mistake, and change your direction. That's repentance.

Changing direction sounds easy enough, but it requires a change of mind first, and taking responsibility for the sin that got you there in the first place.

That's the rub.

Ever seen a person who refused to change direction?

Ever *been* that person?

I have.

So what does it take?

Romans tells us that **God's kindness leads us to repentance.**

But how does that work?

In our story, Joseph has been kind to his brothers. Extraordinarily so. But they still don't know who he is, and they're still heading back without any effort to go find their lost brother. So Joseph comes up with a plan—to give them one more chance—to save a little brother.

“Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: ‘Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.’ And he did as Joseph said” (Genesis 44:1–2).

So—the men head out—unaware that they once again have all their silver back.

If you're keeping score, the brothers have not yet paid a single dime for the grain that is saving their families.

And they never will.

There's a lesson here.

You cannot buy God's grace.

They gave some gifts—but gifts and pay are not the same, and the gifts don't earn them any favor. In fact, the only pay that goes down in this whole story—is what they're paid for selling Joseph.

Because **sin has wages.**

The wages of sin—is death,

but the free gift of God is eternal life—in Jesus.

They head out—but the steward catches them just outside the city, and accuses them:

“Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination?” (v. 5).

The men are stunned. *“Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from us...”*

So he searches.

“Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. At this, they tore their clothes” (Genesis 44:11–13).

Now—pay attention to the story here—but also watch the symbolism—the prophetic foreshadowing—of end times prophecy.

Joseph pictures Jesus—and his brothers picture the nation of Israel—who will return to Jesus in the seven-year Tribulation.

More detail on yesterday’s B-side.

But what will drive Israel back?

Zechariah 12 says, **“I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of trembling—or reeling.”**

In end times prophecy—Jerusalem will be the problem that no one can solve. The issue that makes people tremble and drives Israel back to Jesus.

And did you realize that today—2,500 years after that prophecy—as of the last few decades, **Jerusalem is in fact the world’s unsolvable**

problem—the cup of trembling. World leaders tremble. One city—could start world war.

And did you know that **Jerusalem is in the land of Benjamin's tribe?**

Back in our story—the cup—that makes everyone tremble—that forces them back to Joseph—is with Benjamin.

Interesting.

And maybe—there's a cup in your life—that exposes your guilt—that drives you back to Jesus.

So they load up their donkeys—and head back.

Joseph is waiting for them.

“What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?”

I think he's trying to set a little fear of God in them.

Now watch the response from Judah.

“What can we say to my lord?” Judah replied. **“What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt”** (Genesis 44:16).

Did you catch that? Did you hear Judah?

“God has uncovered our guilt.”

He owns up.

He's not guilty of *this* one—but no matter—he knows—they're guilty.

And he knows—that God knows.

And he doesn't blame anyone, and he doesn't minimize.
He takes—**responsibility**.

Back in verse 16:

“We are now my lord’s slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.”

“But Joseph said, ‘Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace’” (Genesis 44:17).

Joseph presses it.

Don't forget who he's talking to.

It was Judah—back at the pit—his voice that twenty years earlier said,

“What will we gain if we kill our brother...? Come, let's sell him... After all, he is our brother.”

I wonder if Joseph heard it.

I wonder if he remembers it now—as Judah steps up—and Joseph offers an easy way out.

“The youngest is the guilty one—he stays. The rest of you—go back in peace.”

Because that's what they did—**isn't it?**

Twenty years ago—they left their younger brother—and just went home.

So—here they are again—the offer is on the table.

You all can leave. Just go on with life—and little brother will be a slave.

“Then Judah went up to him and said: ‘Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word...’” (Genesis 44:18).

And Judah proceeds—to tell the story. He’s still talking through a translator—still doesn’t know who he’s talking to.

He goes back to their first meeting. I’ll summarize:

“You asked about our family. We told you. Father—two other brothers—one dead, one at home.

You said, bring the brother from home. We said—he can’t leave his dad. Dad won’t let him go. But you said bring him.

We told dad—dad wouldn’t let him go. But we had to go. But if he doesn’t come back—dad said, ‘you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.’”

Then watch verse 32:

“Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!’” (Genesis 44:32).

Judah is keeping his word—he’s taking responsibility for his brother.

He is his brother’s keeper.

Judah—who got it so wrong—the one who talked his brothers into selling Joseph—Judah changed. He turned.

He repented.

And he not only takes responsibility—he takes the punishment.

“Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father” (Genesis 44:33–34).

Boys—there's a lesson here in manhood.

If you're called to lead a family, you're called to take responsibility—for your actions—and for *their* actions.

Brothers—there's a lesson in brotherhood.

You cannot leave one behind.

Everyone—there's a lesson in love.

No greater love has anyone than this, that they lay down their life—for another.

You may have gotten it very wrong in the past. Judah did.

But you can change. You can take responsibility.

You can—repent.

But back in our story—will it be received?

Will Judah's words move Joseph's heart?

Read Genesis 44, and we'll meet you back here—in 45.

Genesis 45 | Restoration

Genesis 45 today, and we arrive—at *the moment*.

There are moments in life—turning points—when nothing will ever be the same again. Joseph could see it coming. His brothers—don't have a clue. His dad—couldn't possibly imagine.

It has been twenty-two years since ten brothers threw their pesky seventeen-year-old snitch of a brother into a pit, and since Judah talked them out of murder—and into selling him. It's been two years since the famine hit, supplies wore out, and scarcity and hunger drove them into Egypt for grain.

Now they are in Egypt—the second time. A powerful man, the governor of all the land, has shown particular interest in them. They still don't know his real identity.

But the moment has arrived—to know the truth, and for that truth to set them free.

What they do know—is they were caught. At least—Benjamin was apparently caught—stealing. How the cup got in his sack—they don't know, but they have figured out, as Judah said, that “*God has uncovered their guilt*”—a guilt that festered under the skin of their conscience for two decades.

And when the man who held their fate—declared justice on Benjamin—Judah stepped up, took responsibility, and offered to take his little brother's place. Judah—was a repentant man.

The Bible tells us just two things that God asks from us to find forgiveness: **repentance, and faith.** Neither of them are works. We're saved by God's grace, but that grace is received through faith.

Now in chapter 45, Joseph listens to Judah—until he can take no more.

“Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, ‘Have everyone leave my presence!’ So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it” (Genesis 45:1–2).

Twenty-two years of pent-up tears do not fall quietly.

“Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still living?’ But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ When they had done so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!

And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping.

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God!” (Genesis 45:3–8).

Joseph's words—are stunning. After years of slavery, dungeon, chains.

The injustice of it was staggering. He had twenty-two years—to plot revenge.

And now he has power. No one would stop him—no one would blame him.

But there's no anger. No vengeance.

There is only—forgiveness.

He didn't forget. He even reminds them—*you sold me*.

But he does forgive.

How?

Forgiveness—is a powerful force—a force strong enough to break chains and open shackles. Forgiveness can release captives and unite broken families.

It is your only hope—against the unrelenting powers—of guilt and grudge.

Forgiveness—is freedom.

But how on earth did Joseph do it?

Watch—his words. In verse 5:

“Do not be angry with yourselves... it was to save lives that God sent me...”

Joseph knew—that his pain had a purpose: **to save lives**—and that he had a choice: **resent the sacrifice—or man-up to the mission.**

And watch the phrase that Joseph repeats—three times in four verses:

“God sent me.”

This has been Joseph's MO all the way through. He always—unceasingly—acknowledged God. In all his ways. And it made all the difference.

And the Lord directed his paths.

Joseph could look over his entire story—and see God.

The dream—God gave it.

The coat—God used it.

His dad's fateful decision to send his favorite son—God worked in it.

His wicked brothers. The heartless slave-traders—who paid silver for his life—God used them.

Potiphar's devious wife, with evil intent and malicious accusations.

The cupbearer who forgot him.

The seven years of plenty and seven of famine.

The powers of man and powers of nature.

God—is greater. God is for me. And God—sent me!

And watch Joseph's character here. In spite of his trials...

Check that—not *in spite of*... I believe **Joseph's trials refined his character**, tested his faith and deepened his trust.

And you may say, "That's a Bible story. People don't live like that now."

But they do.

Read the story of John Bunyan—spent twelve years imprisoned for preaching—separated from his wife and four kids—and wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, one of the best-selling books of all time.

Read the story of Richard Wurmbrand—imprisoned in communist Romania for fourteen years—with months of solitary confinement, with torture—whose Christian love and forgiveness changed the world.

Better yet—watch the new movie *Tortured for Christ*.

There are countless stories—of lives changed—of believers who found forgiveness greater than sin, who found a purpose greater than pain—because **God sent Jesus “to save our lives by a great deliverance.”**

And don't forget that picture.

Joseph's life is a picture of Jesus.

And his brothers? Let's read on.

“Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.

You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have.

I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come” (Genesis 45:9–11).

So Joseph tells them—go get dad. Tell him the story—tell him—what God has done.

Bring him down—and I will provide.

And keep watching the end-times foreshadowing here.

In the midst of the seven-year tribulation, when God sets Jesus upon the throne—Revelation 11—in that time God will bring Israel back—to Jesus the King.

Well Joseph finishes speaking, and the brothers are stunned.

“Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping.

And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him” (Genesis 45:14–15).

So the brothers finally find words again. And you gotta wonder what that conversation was like.

News travels quickly, and when Pharaoh finds out that Joseph's brothers are there, he rolls out the red carpet:

“Load your animals, go back to Canaan,” and in verse 18, *“bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.”*

Now that's not just mercy, that—is **abundant grace**.

Joseph gave them carts, he gave them provisions for the journey—he gave them new clothing.

These are the same guys who tore his clothing from him.

And with all that grace, he sends them away in verse 24 with one last direction:

“Don't quarrel on the way!”

I love it. I think that's a word to us.

Jesus has been so good to us. His mercy—His grace is so much—what business do we have arguing?

Standing up for our rights—for what we deserve?

We already get so much better than we deserve from God—so forget about the quarreling.

So the brothers go back to their father. And I love how the chapter ends:

“They told him, ‘Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.’ Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them.

But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

And Israel said, 'I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die'" (Genesis 45:26–28).

Genesis 46 | I Am With You

Genesis 46 today, and our grand story once again changes focus. We've followed Joseph, we've followed his brothers, but today we come back to one of my favorite characters—their father, Jacob. Jacob is old, well over a hundred years now. But his story isn't over, and his journey today will take him back.

I love how the chapter begins, *“Israel set out.”* I imagine this final journey brought back memories of his first—when he left home with nothing. Jacob's story is a long one. We've been so wrapped up in Joseph's story, it's easy to forget that Jacob's is unfinished. He's been sort of a supporting character for some time now. But his story is not yet over. His journey with God has more to tell.

We are prone to forget sometimes that our parents and grandparents are not merely supporting cast. They have a story of their own—much longer than ours. And one worth telling. One of the best things I ever did was ask my dad for his story. Parents can forget that their kids don't know their story. I was in my twenties when I finally heard Dad's.

So back in verse 1, Jacob—now Israel—*“set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.”* The name of the place is Beh-ehr-sheh-ba. But it's okay if you pronounce it the way it looks. Don't be surprised if your kids giggle when you say *Beersheba*. “Huh-huh—Dad said beer.” I said *kids* giggle. Not grown men. Settle down, gentlemen.

That location would bring back a lot of memories. Memories—and stories from his granddad. It was Abraham who named the place. It means, *“The well of the sevenfold oath.”* See—has nothing to do with beer. Settle down boys.

In chapter 21, Abraham made an oath with King Abimelech to deal truthfully as they settled a dispute over a well. Abraham planted a grove there, and he *“called upon the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.”* He later settled there—though he moved again. A generation later, in chapter 26, Isaac was moving from place to place as more disputes over well water arose, and he came to Beersheba, and there *“the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you.’”*

And he built an altar there. Most likely Jacob knew that altar, for it was in Beersheba that Isaac grew old, and Jacob and Esau grew up. It was there that Jacob deceived his father and stole his brother’s birthright. It was there that he left home—alone.

I wonder about Jacob’s thoughts now, many decades later. He went out alone. Now he has two generations with him—and they are leading him. So he stops there in the land of his youth. It is the southern border of the promised land. He’s about to enter Egypt. Surely he knew the stories of his dad and grandfather—who both made serious mistakes when they took this same journey out of the promised land.

So in verse 1, he stops, and he offers sacrifices—notice, *“to the God of his father Isaac.”*

Then verse 2:

**“And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, ‘Jacob! Jacob!’
‘Here I am,’ he replied.**

‘I am God, the God of your father,’ he said. ‘Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes’” (Genesis 46:2–4).

So God spoke—and called Jacob by name. And his words are reminiscent of what He said to Jacob’s father in this same place: *“I am God.”* It amazes me just how much meaning—and comfort—come to me as God speaks those three words, *“I am God.”*

But even more: *“I am the God of your father.”* I haven’t changed, Jacob.

“Do not be afraid to go.” I think that might be God’s most consistent command—to everyone He calls: *“No fear.”* Move forward. For Jacob, that means go to Egypt. Why? *“For I will make you into a great nation there.”*

God will keep His promise. He will do it. The location isn’t what you expected—but it’s God’s plan. And verse 4: *“I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again.”*

And there’s the crux. Just as *“do not fear”* is God’s consistent command, *“I am with you”* is His unfailing promise—the true source of all courage. And here—in Beersheba—the land of his youth, the land he left on his own, only to find God meeting him on the road. Here he is back again—and God reminds him. *I am with you. I will go with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes.*

Verse 5:

“Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel’s sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to

transport him. So Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt, taking with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan. Jacob brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters—all his offspring” (Genesis 46:5–7).

So Jacob took everything and everyone. Verse 8 begins a list of his children and grandchildren. I know, I know—your favorite part of the Bible, right? Oh boy—a list of names.

But try to read these as Jacob would have. The first time he left Beersheba, he was alone as can be. But he met God on that road, and God made a promise. That promise included descendants. Now he leaves the same place—and every name listed here are his kids—and grandkids.

Verse 8:

“These are the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob and his descendants) who went to Egypt:

Reuben the firstborn of Jacob.

The sons of Reuben: Hanok, Pallu, Hezron and Karmi.

The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin...” (Genesis 46:8–10)

Okay—I’m not actually going to read all of them. But the list is important. Twelve sons of Israel—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Perez, Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali—and just one daughter, Dinah. And all of their children listed as well.

Remember—these kids become the nation of Israel. And in Israel, genealogy is important—because all of them inherit God’s promise.

Then verse 26 tells us that Jacob's direct descendants who went into Egypt numbered sixty-six persons. Quite the caravan. With Joseph's family, the total is seventy.

And as Jacob counts the number of grandkids, and travels through the desert, I wonder if he remembers the words that God spoke to him the first time he left Beersheba:

“I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:13–15).

Well the road neared Egypt, and Jacob sent Judah ahead to get directions to their new home. And there in Goshen, Joseph was waiting.

In verse 29:

“As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept—for a long time. Israel said to Joseph, ‘Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive’” (Genesis 46:29–30).

At long last, together. His entire family. And God—the God of his father and grandfather, the God of all his wanderings—God was still with him.

Genesis 47 | The Days of My Pilgrimage

Genesis 47 on *Through the Word*, and it's time to meet the Pharaoh.

Joseph has been second in command to Pharaoh for about a decade now, and he is truly running the nation. And Joseph's family has now joined him in Egypt—even his aging father Jacob. Chapter 46 ended with Joseph preparing his brothers and father to meet Pharaoh, to stand before the throne. He told them:

“When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, ‘What is your occupation?’ you should answer, ‘Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.’ Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen...”

Now put this all in perspective. Jacob and his family are refugees at this point—desperate for help and fleeing a famine. Meeting the Pharaoh, the king of one of the greatest nations in antiquity, is a pretty big deal.

So—in verse 1:

“Joseph went and told Pharaoh, ‘My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen.’ He chose five of his brothers and presented them before Pharaoh” (Genesis 47:1–2).

Now the scene here is an interesting one. Five brothers appear before Pharaoh. Remember that through this whole story we've seen Joseph picturing for us the life of Jesus—a prophetic foreshadowing, you might say. And don't miss this one.

Joseph presents his brothers before the throne. And amazingly, he presents them as if they are fine, outstanding young men. He doesn't say a word about their betrayal—about selling him. He acts like it never happened.

And guess what Jude says about Jesus:

“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—” (Jude 24).

Jesus will present us to God—faultless. Justified. *Just as if we'd never sinned at all.* How does He do that? Grace. Saved by grace—washed and clean.

Interesting—Joseph presents five brothers, and in the Bible, five is the number of grace.

Back in our story—verse 3:

“Pharaoh asked the brothers, ‘What is your occupation?’

‘Your servants are shepherds,’ they replied to Pharaoh, ‘just as our fathers were’” (Genesis 47:3).

They ask Pharaoh to allow them to settle in Goshen, which is located in the northeast of Egypt. It'll help you to look at a map from Bible times. The Nile River flows north through Egypt—through the capital in Memphis—up towards the Mediterranean, very close to that small stretch of land that connects Africa with the Middle East.

But just before the Nile hits the sea, it splits into several offshoots and forms a large delta, where sediment is deposited and outstanding farmland is formed. If you live in the American South, you know the Mississippi River Delta is

important. Goshen is in the Nile Delta—very good land, and much closer to the Promised Land.

If you look at a satellite image, it's a triangle of lush green in a vast desert of brown.

It was excellent land for grazing—but the Egyptians didn't keep much livestock. They had mostly populated the South and West. And so—Pharaoh agrees. In verse 6:

“The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock” (Genesis 47:6).

Hey—a faithful worker is hard to find. And Pharaoh says if your brothers are as good as you are, Joseph—they can take care of my livestock.

So the brothers receive grace and land. And seeing as how Memphis was a capital in Egypt, I really need an Elvis joke here, but for the life of me I can't think of one.

Anyway, verse 7:

“Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked him, ‘How old are you?’

And Jacob said to Pharaoh, ‘The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers’” (Genesis 47:7–9).

I am fascinated here by the words that Jacob uses to describe his life. 130 years—*few*—and *difficult*. Wow. And he calls them “*the years of my pilgrimage.*”

Now there’s a good word. And it is the perfect word—for the walk of faith. Remember how Hebrews 11 describes it?

“By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country.”

In other words, like a *pilgrim*.

Jacob understood that. This was his calling. And his days were not easy. “*Few and difficult,*” he calls them.

Now difficult does not mean bad. Life can be rough, but that doesn’t make it wrong, and it doesn’t mean God left you. In the next chapter, Jacob will say:

“God has been my shepherd all my life to this day!”

He gets it. He understands that “*God with you*” does not mean “*easy life,*” and that the hard road—may be God’s path for you.

He also calls his years *few*. 130 is long to us—but it was indeed shorter than the generations before him.

Now—side note on science. 130 seems old, because we’ve generally heard that historically people lived much shorter than us. Well, in recent history—life spans were shorter, yes. And today, sanitation and medicine help us live longer. However, the Bible records very long life spans before and for some time after the flood.

In fact, similar long life spans are recorded in ancient Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese literature. Why is that?

Well, we can only theorize—but it does bring up some interesting science to ponder.

Some theorize that ancient diets were much better—more nutrients in the soil. Or perhaps environmental changes after the flood caused radical changes—such as reduction in oxygen. Those theories have to stretch pretty far though.

One of the most intriguing theories is about genetics—DNA changes. The gene pool would hit a bottleneck at the flood, and some theorize that natural mutations caused human DNA to lose code that had helped humans live longer.

Now if you're interested—we'll dive in just a little more on the B-side. It actually brings up some really good questions about whether human DNA is gaining or losing information with time.

Okay—end side note.

Jacob ends his meeting with Pharaoh, and the chapter goes on to describe the rule of Joseph as the famine continues. As the people return to Joseph year after year for grain, they run out of money—then pay with land—run out of that—and offer to pay with their own servitude. Hey—they're starving! And Joseph helps them. In verse 25 they tell him:

“You have saved our lives” (Genesis 47:25).

Joseph provides seed so the people continue farming, but he adds a 20% tax across the board. Way lower than modern governments, and not bad historically either.

Now some scholars see in this rule of Joseph a picture of the Millennium—when Jesus will rule and provide for everyone. I don't know—but it's interesting to think about.

And the chapter ends some seventeen years later, with Jacob at 147, and drawing near his time to die. He calls for Joseph and has him make a solemn oath in verse 29:

“Promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.”

“I will do as you say,” he said.

“Swear to me,” he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff” (Genesis 47:29–31).

Genesis 47 B-Side | 147 Years Young?

Hello everyone—welcome to the b-side for Genesis 47. Dying young at 147? Today I want to provide a little more food for thought on the interesting issue of people living to very old ages in the book of Genesis—and of those ages shortening over time. Here in 47, Jacob breathes his last at the age of 147. And he calls his years *few and difficult*.

And if you look back in his lineage, his ancestors lived a great deal longer! Close to 1000 in the earliest people, down to 600 around the flood—and then the numbers drop pretty quickly from there. Down to 147 here, and even shorter later. So the question: how did people live longer—and why did lifespan shorten? Well—two questions. Or maybe the first question—did it really happen at all?

You might be prone to just reject it as myth—because people can't live that long. But writing off data as wrong just because it doesn't match your expectations makes for very bad science. You'll never learn anything new if you ignore any evidence that contradicts your assumptions. And since records of very old ages can be found in ancient histories outside the Bible—Roman, Greek, Indian, Chinese—it's a topic worth looking into.

Now—just to clarify—I was an engineer before I was a pastor. Got my degree in science and worked for Boeing designing rockets. Yes, they worked, and no, they were not powered by faith. They used rocket fuel, thank you. And I do not believe in separating faith and science. Faith and reason must work together if either of them are going to make any sense.

So I'm not a biologist, but I do know enough science and history to ask questions and dig around for answers. And this question on very old ages—is interesting. In the main study, I mentioned a few theories about diet and the environment before and after the flood—and those may have played a role. But I am most intrigued by the genetics questions.

At the heart of that question: is human DNA evolving to make us live longer—or can it in fact work in the other direction? Can our DNA devolve to make people live shorter? I think sometimes that we can mistakenly assume that modern humans are superior—simply because we've accumulated more knowledge—and we pass that on and add to it. But as for our DNA, we're only just beginning to understand how it works, and how it changes generation to generation.

Many good scientists believe that human DNA is losing information through mutations and adaptations over time. After all, random mutations are shown to be generally harmful, not helpful. Now I recognize that I'm picking a fight on a much broader topic—which is evolution. And you may have assumed that since I'm a Bible guy—I'm anti-evolution.

Well, don't assume things. As a believer in science and the scientific method, I find the evolutionary theory fascinating. However, evolution theory is massive in its breadth. Many parts of it—I believe in and agree with. All the elements that can be readily tested and demonstrated. Genetic adaptation, mutation, natural selection. But I separate those elements from the parts that are not tested—and not proven: the origin of life, speciation, monkeys to humans. I don't write them off—but I also don't trust them without proof.

I just read a great book by the way—*Evolution 2.0* by Perry Marshall. I don't necessarily agree with everything he said—but I learned a lot, and I love his approach. I think he asks the right questions.

Anyway—here's something to consider on the old age question. At the heart of the evolution issue—is mutation and adaptation. Scientists on both sides of the evolution/design argument agree that mutation and adaptation occur, and we're also pretty well agreed that the engine that drives that—is in the DNA. DNA is a code-block inside every living cell—that maps out the design of the cell, and of the whole body.

DNA copies and reproduces—with minor changes—creating new generations of living things. In humans, the DNA from a male and female combine to form a new DNA. It is all incredibly cool. And it brings up an essential side question: where did that language of the DNA code come from?

There is no law in physics or chemistry that even begins to explain—how non-living materials—can form code—without a language already existing.

But that's a tangent. Back on human DNA. We know it changes from generation to generation. Mutations.

However, do we know—that those mutations—are random? Darwinian evolution—says they are—random. But did you know—it is scientifically impossible—to prove that anything is random? And moreover, every programmer in the world will tell you—random changes to code—do not help. Ever. Mix random characters in code—and you get noise. And computer bugs.

You try making random changes to the code in your computer, and tell me if it helps.

So—the random part cannot be proven. Also—the concept of junk DNA—is entirely unprovable. In fact, a lot of evidence shows that DNA content previously thought to be useless—is in fact very useful.

But what about the improving part? Is DNA getting better—or worse—with subsequent generations? In particular—human DNA.

I certainly don't have a definitive answer—but here's some food for thought. We know that there is a danger in limiting the gene pool—in too many people marrying relatives in a small town, right? It can lead to birth defects. Why is that?

Well, it's believed to be associated with DNA—as generations pass, DNA copies and loses some information generation to generation. You can guard against that—by expanding the gene pool—marry someone not closely related—both DNA cover for what's missing in the other's. And the negative effects of lost DNA info are covered.

Now back that up a couple hundred generations. In this way of looking at things—the original human DNA—had all the information necessary—to make all the diversity of humans. As generations passed, adaptation and survival of the fittest put people fit for their climate in different locations—but mutations led to information loss—not gain.

And anywhere that the gene pool gets too small—that information loss accelerates—and causes problems.

Remember—this is theory—but a plausible one based on what evidence we have, and an interesting one to consider. So if the original DNA had a lot more info—perhaps it helped people live much longer. A major bottleneck in the

gene pool at the time of the flood—would cause a great loss of genetic info—leading to shorter life spans.

Again—theory, but interesting. You can dig around for more information. Trying to wade through arguments on the internet—can make your head spin. I'll recommend a couple sites that I like—not that I agree with everything on them—but good places to educate yourself: *Answers in Genesis* or *Institute for Creation Research*.

If you're interested in the argument about DNA being a code—the book I noted earlier is *Evolution 2.0*—really enjoyed this one. You can find that in bookstores—or at cosmicfingerprints.com.

And that's it for the b-side. I hope it was worth the extra time. See you in 48!

Genesis 48 | The Blessing

Genesis 48 today—which begins with some hard news in verse 1:

“Some time later Joseph was told, ‘Your father is ill.’”

Live long enough in this world, and you know what it’s like to get news like this. Dad is sick—and it’s not going to get better. Joseph’s father is of course Jacob, or Israel as God has renamed him. And Jacob is old. A lot of life to look back on. But over the next two chapters, we find Jacob not looking back—but forward. Unusual, but fitting for a pilgrim like Jacob.

At the end of chapter 47, Jacob gave Joseph instructions—made him take an oath to bury him where his forefathers were buried. After seventeen years in Egypt, his heart was still set on the Promised Land. And I love the picture there—of Jacob worshipping—as he leaned on his staff. Jacob is old, and has worn the injury of his wrestling with God many decades now. So he leans. His strength is failing, but in his weakness, he worships.

And that’s the walk of faith—it looks forward, even as this life approaches the finish line. Hebrews 11 lists Jacob among the heroes of faith, and describes them this way:

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own... a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:13–16).

Now in chapter 48, Jacob shifts focus to his legacy—his kids and grandkids. Joseph comes to visit him, and brings his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. When they arrive, verse 2 says, **“Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed.”** Amazing how much difference a visitor can make.

Verse 3:

“Jacob said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you’” (Genesis 48:3–4).

This is important. Jacob is passing on the covenant. And this marks something new. For three generations, the Lord appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and affirmed the covenant directly. But now, it is passed on from father to son. And there’s an important lesson for us. We too have a covenant with God, and it is our responsibility to pass on that covenant—and to tell our kids the story—of how God made Himself known to us.

However, it is interesting to notice what Jacob left out—listen to the b-side for more on that.

Then Jacob continues in verse 5,

“Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine.”

Now don’t get confused, Jacob is not adopting Joseph’s boys—they’re grown men. What he’s saying is that Joseph’s sons will each get a full share of the inheritance—and each will be considered a full tribe of Israel—with a full

portion in the Promised Land. That—is big. And for the rest of the Bible, Ephraim and Manasseh are counted among the twelve tribes.

Only—hold on. There were already twelve. Add two and we have fourteen! How's that gonna work?

Well, here we begin a fascinating and rather curious practice in the Bible—wherein the tribes of Israel will always list twelve—by leaving two out, but not always the same two. More on that—in the b-side as well.

For now—this is a huge blessing. And it reminds me of a question I was challenged with some years ago. Would I rather—make my greatest impact on the world—through my life—or through my kids? That's one to ponder.

Back in our story—Jacob goes on, and tells Joseph—about the place where his mother is buried—beside the road—to Bethlehem. Interesting.

Next, Israel sees Joseph's boys and asks, "Who are these?" Now the boys are adults, and he's met them before—but he's getting old. And he is intent on giving his grandsons—a blessing.

That's an important Bible word—**blessing**—and it will be the focus of the next two chapters.

Today we use *bless* to mean—wish someone well, or do something good for them. But in the Bible—blessing is something that God does—or something that a person calls upon God for. So to say that a person blessed another—is to say that they brought God into their life in some way—by helping, comforting, or speaking a word—calling upon God's good plan for their life, or even speaking prophetically about their future.

Interesting—the Hebrew word *bless* is the same word for *kneel*—as in—dad knelt down, and humbly asked God to bless his kids.

And that’s what we have here—a grandfather blessing his kids. Pay attention parents—kids need your blessing. In this case, the blessing will be prophetic—words from God about the future.

Jacob asks Joseph to bring the boys closer, and he hugs them. Now Joseph places his oldest son, Manasseh, at Jacob’s right hand—to receive the blessing of the firstborn, and Ephraim on his left. But Jacob reaches his right hand across to bless Ephraim—the younger, and puts his left hand on Manasseh—the older. Criss-cross!

Verse 15:

“Then he blessed Joseph and said, ‘May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth’” (Genesis 48:15–16).

The words here are beautiful. What a picture. He calls upon—the God of his forefathers, he recalls their faithful walk, and he recalls the faithfulness of God in his own life. “God who has been my shepherd—all my life to this day.”

Jacob—who previously described his days as “few and difficult”—says now that God was his shepherd through it all.

When he was a deceiver—and when he was deceived. When he found love—and when love got complicated. When his son was lost—when his son was found. Jacob, who lived his life as a shepherd, who wrestled with God and walked away with a limp, declares that through it all, God was his Shepherd, the Angel who delivered him from all harm.

It is the Bible’s first mention—of God as a shepherd.

And then Joseph speaks up—he’s concerned about the criss-crossed hands. “Dad—it’s right hand older, left hand younger! We’re not playing twister here!”

But Jacob insists—he knows what he’s doing. Both will be blessed, but the younger will be greater. And history would bear it out. Centuries later, when Israel split into two kingdoms—the ten tribes to the North—were sometimes called “Ephraim” because their leaders were Ephraimites.

It seems to be an ongoing theme—the younger over the older. Now the Bible makes it clear that God doesn’t play favorites—but it’s also clear that God is not constrained by man’s tradition and order. It was man’s tradition after all, to place the firstborn as the head—and there were valid reasons for that—responsibility, leadership, providing for the family. But God has a way of making the last first, of exalting the humble, and blessing the least.

Then in verse 21, Jacob—Israel—turns back to Joseph:

“I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers...” (Genesis 48:21).

And so—dad gives to Joseph—the very heart of the covenant. God will be with you. He will keep his promise—He will finish His work—He will bring you back.

Genesis 49 | 12 Blessings for 12 Brothers

Genesis 49 today—the final words of one of the Bible’s greatest characters.

Jacob, the young deceiver; the lone wanderer—who found the God of his father on the desert road. Jacob, who worked seven years for love and found himself deceived. Jacob, whose whole life was struggle—who wrestled God and wouldn’t let go, who walked in Jacob and walked out Israel—and bore a limp the rest of his days.

Jacob—Israel—has reached his final day.

Verse 1 begins:

“Then Jacob called for his sons and said: ‘Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come’” (Genesis 49:1).

He calls all twelve sons together—to tell them “what will happen to them”—and the last phrase here is important: *“in days to come.”* Also translated *“in the last days.”* It is used fourteen times in the Old Testament—this is the first. And it always refers to prophecies of the future—usually extending into end times.

What follows is an extensive prophecy about Jacob’s sons, and about the nation of Israel as a whole. And with that—we get some hidden gems of Bible prophecy—and God’s plan for the world.

Now all this prophecy is delivered through a father’s blessing. That’s an important Bible concept—and a foundational element of culture and tradition historically. A father looking at his children and speaking what he sees in them and what he sees ahead for them—a blessing.

We don't have quite the same practice today, but you can look across culture and across time—and see that there is something essential to life—in what a father sees in his children, and the way he speaks over their lives—a blessing. And when we don't have it, we struggle; we search for a mentor or father-figure—or for God himself to speak blessing into our lives.

Well, we begin in verse 2:

**“Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob;
listen to your father Israel”** (Genesis 49:2).

**“Reuben, you are my firstborn,
my might, the first sign of my strength,
excelling in honor, excelling in power.
Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel,
for you went up onto your father's bed,
onto my couch and defiled it”** (Genesis 49:3–4).

So Jacob speaks first to Reuben—the firstborn. Tradition would give him the greatest blessing—more inheritance—and more responsibility to lead the family. And indeed, Reuben excelled in honor and power, but—

Reuben blew it.

He had every opportunity to succeed—and to lead his brothers. But he threw it all away—when he got in bed with his father's wife Bilhah in chapter 35.

A. Gross.

B. Wrong.

And C. Costly.

The immediate consequences were not much. But Reuben ruined himself that day. He was first—but look to his descendants: not one judge, nor priest nor king nor prophet would come from his line. The first became last, because one sexual sin can destroy a legacy. Count—the—cost.

Verse 5:

**“Simeon and Levi are brothers—
their swords are weapons of violence”** (Genesis 49:5).

Recall that it was Simeon and Levi who attacked the Shechemites after the rape of their sister Dinah. A horrific scene, and Jacob did not forget.

Verse 7:

**“Cursed be their anger, so fierce,
and their fury, so cruel!
I will scatter them in Jacob
and disperse them in Israel”** (Genesis 49:7).

Fast-forward to the Promised Land, and these two tribes were indeed scattered—Simeon’s land was surrounded by Judah, and Levi was dispersed throughout.

Now—as we read chapter 49, some scholars see a secondary fulfillment to this prophecy. Prophecy often works that way—having fulfillment in two stages. Here—the more immediate fulfillment will be in the future of each tribe—the descendants of each son. But the secondary fulfillment—will be seen in the full timeline of the whole nation of Israel—from its beginning at Mt. Sinai all the way to end times.

For that, I invite you to listen to the b-side audio.

For now, brother number 4 is in verse 8:

**“Judah, your brothers will praise you;
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;
your father’s sons will bow down to you”** (Genesis 49:8).

Judah is an interesting character—the man of bending morals. He sold Joseph, had wicked sons, hired a prostitute. But we saw Judah’s repentance—and redemption—as he laid his life down for Benjamin.

And Judah’s legacy would be a great one. From Judah comes the humble shepherd king—David—and the entire line of Kings. Indeed his “father’s sons (would) bow down.” Judah’s line would rule—and when the nation split, the southern kingdom would be called—Judea—and the people—Jews.

So that’s where we get the word *Jewish*.

In verse 9:

“You are a lion’s cub, Judah” (Genesis 49:9).

Remember that the line of kings leads to Jesus—the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

Then verse 10 is fascinating:

**“The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until...”** (Genesis 49:10).

A *scepter* is a sign of rule—held by the king—and that scepter would be held by the line of Judah—by the line of kings from David. Back in verse 10:

“...until he to whom it belongs shall come.”

So the prophecy says—the line of kings under Judah shall remain—until *he* comes. Who's *he*?

The Hebrew word here is *Shiloh*—and scholars say it's hard to translate. But the Jewish Talmud records many ancient rabbis who interpreted this *Shiloh*—as the Messiah. And they believed that the line of David's kings would rule—*until* Messiah appeared.

Mind you—they said this *before* Messiah.

Well, David ruled in about 1000 BC, and his line carried the scepter through to the exile in 600 BC. And even though they were greatly weakened—no longer called kings—the rule remained in the house of Judah through the exile and return, and even under attacks and occupation by the Greeks and Romans. For a full millennium, they still held some self-rule—until the year 7 AD.

At that time, Rome occupied Judea—and the historian Josephus records that in 7 AD, Caesar Augustus removed the Judean ruler named Archelaus and replaced him—with a Roman. And he took away the Jews' right to execute capital punishment.

You may recall in the Gospels that the Jews had to go to Pontius Pilate—a Roman—for permission to execute Jesus. In other words, the scepter—the right to rule—had passed from Judah.

And the prophecy here tells us—that would not happen—**until Shiloh arrived**—the Messiah.

And guess who was a young boy in 7 AD...

Back in the prophecy, Jacob says of this Shiloh:

"...and the obedience of the nations shall be his" (Genesis 49:10).

Jacob moves on. I'll let you read through Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, and the rest—and we'll dig in more on the b-side.

But I want to skip ahead to verse 22, as Jacob turns to his son Joseph—our hero in this story:

**“Joseph is a fruitful vine,
a fruitful vine near a spring”** (Genesis 49:22).

Fruitful is truly a blessing. To bear fruit—to do something worthy for God—and provide for others. And that was Joseph's story.

**“With bitterness archers attacked him;
but his bow remained steady,
his strong arms stayed limber,
because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob,
because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,
because of your father's God...”** (Genesis 49:23–25).

This is beautiful.

Jacob, who for so long talked about “the God of Abraham”—“the God of Isaac”—looks at his son and sees God's faithfulness—and he understands that it was:

“The Mighty One of Jacob”

“The Rock of Israel”—

that God was *his* God, *his* Rock—and that his God had truly blessed his son:

**“with blessings of the skies above,
blessings of the deep springs below”** (Genesis 49:25).

Again—there is so much more here—please read it through.

And when it's all done, Jacob gives his sons a command:

“I am about to be gathered to my people.

Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron” (Genesis 49:29).

And with his final request, Jacob delivers a reminder to his kids—that Egypt is not their home.

**“When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons,
he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last—
and was gathered to his people”** (Genesis 49:33).

Genesis 49 B-Side | Prophecy Timeline

Welcome, my friends—to Genesis 49, the B-side.

Chapter 49 is Jacob's blessing and prophecy over each of his twelve sons. The sons would become the twelve tribes of Israel. There is a lot here, so we moved many of the details to side B.

And also, as I noted on side A, many scholars see a secondary prophecy here. Remember, prophecy often has fulfillment in two stages. As we saw, the more immediate fulfillment was in the future of each tribe. Here on the B-side, we'll dive into what some believe is the secondary fulfillment of this prophecy—in the full timeline of the whole nation of Israel. If you follow these prophecies, you can see a timeline of Israel from its beginning at Mt. Sinai all the way to end times.

To be clear, the prophecy does not claim to be dual in fulfillment, but it is pretty compelling. I'll give you an overview. For more detail, I recommend Jon Courson's commentary.

We begin back at verse 2:

**“Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob;
listen to your father Israel”** (Genesis 49:2).

It's interesting here to see Jacob using both of his names. “Jacob” is his old self—Israel is the new. And notice he calls his boys “sons of Jacob”—the old—but tells them to listen to their “father Israel”—the new man, changed by God. It's a subtle encouragement to be like Dad—and let God work His change in you. And we will see that change through the history of the entire nation.

Also keep in mind in this chapter—the importance of blessing. Remember when Jacob fought Esau for their father’s blessing? That blessing was the first recorded prophetic word from God speaking through man in the Bible, and this one is the second. Both prophecies—in the context of the father’s blessing.

Now, in verse 3, we saw Reuben, the firstborn—who was given every opportunity for power and prestige—but he threw it away in adultery.

How does that match up with this timeline of Israel prophecy?

Reuben represents the beginning. Israel was founded as a full nation at Mount Sinai around 1300 BC. There God gave them a law—through Moses. That is generally considered the birth of the nation. So that’s the starting line. But right from the start, the Israelites turned to idols—the golden calf. And the Bible often compares idolatry with adultery—it’s cheating on God. And they would continue to cheat on God with idols for several centuries.

So Reuben’s adultery could be seen prophetically as a picture of Israel’s idolatry—right from the first. And in that idolatry—a missed opportunity to be truly set apart as a light to all nations.

Then Simeon and Levi—violent men. Fast forward the nation of Israel to the 600s BC, and read the prophecies of Ezekiel and Isaiah—as God detests the violence in the land—and He responds by dispersing them. In the prophecy here, Simeon and Levi were scattered in the land—in Israel’s history, God scattered the nation into exile.

Next up is Judah—a lion’s cub, the ruler who holds the scepter. We saw already that Judah’s line bore the kings—from David all the way down to Jesus—the lion of the tribe of Judah.

So the timeline of the nation moves us forward to the arrival of Jesus—the Messiah—or Shiloh.

No surprise that Judah's prophecy is longer—and a number of elements hint at Jesus. The lion. The obedience of the nations shall be His.

And notice verse 11:

**“He will tether his donkey to a vine,
his colt to the choicest branch;
he will wash his garments in wine,
his robes in the blood of grapes”** (Genesis 49:11).

Donkey and colt—vine and branch—all have strong Jesus connections.

Washed garments. Interesting—Jesus uses that very picture to describe the righteousness He will give us. Washed in the blood of grapes.

Interesting, right? Do I understand every subtlety? No. Do I see clear connections? Yes.

Also, on that story of Judah—and that prophecy about Shiloh—when the Jews lost the right to self-rule in 7 AD. I want to mention—there is a story often told by pastors—that the Jewish priests lamented in the streets on that day when the scepter was taken away. Great story. However, I was not able to verify its validity. The sources I tracked down didn't check out. So I didn't tell it in the A-side audio.

It's also a reminder to pastors—when you hear stories that sound good—check your sources.

Nonetheless, the story of this prophecy is still quite amazing.

So in the progression of prophecies, Judah represents the first coming of Messiah. But the story's not over.

We move to verse 13:

“Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon” (Genesis 49:13).

That prophecy came to pass as the tribe of Zebulun dwelt in the land between the Mediterranean and the Sea of Galilee. As for future prophecy—it may picture the dispersion of Israel that took place after Jesus' time. The Romans pushed them out—scattered them.

Then in verse 14:

“Issachar is a rawboned donkey” (Genesis 49:14).

A donkey is a strong but docile work animal. Issachar's tribe would become strong—the third largest in the census in Numbers. But once in the land, they were often attacked and oppressed by foreign armies who put them in servitude.

**“When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land,
he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor”**
(Genesis 49:15).

And that is exactly what happened. They had good land, and they submitted to forced labor.

Now, looking at this in the timeline of Israel, this might picture the time that Israel returns to its homeland in the 20th century. The reference to “how good

is his resting place and how pleasant his land.” Israel is a beautiful land, but even now, back in their land, Israel is continually burdened and pressured as the nations of the world argue over it. It’s not exactly forced labor—but it is quite a burden.

Moving on to verse 16:

“Dan will provide justice for his people” (Genesis 49:16).

Interesting—Samson was a judge from Dan’s tribe, and he brought justice—to an extent.

But look at verse 17:

**“Dan will be a snake by the roadside,
a viper along the path”** (Genesis 49:17).

Providing justice—but a snake? Dan was indeed a snare to the nation. It was Dan’s tribe who introduced idolatry in Judges 18. In 1 Kings 12, Jeroboam set up a golden calf in the land of Dan, which led to generations of idolatry.

Now—pause a moment—to consider the big picture. Jacob spoke all of this to his sons—who represented families. The tribes would come centuries later. The fulfillment of all this was way out in the future.

But God knew—the whole timeline. God holds the future—He knows the end from the beginning.

Take a moment—and let that truth sink in.

Now—back to Dan—in the extended timeline of Israel. We’re just about up to the present. And this moves us into the end times—the Tribulation.

In end-times prophecy, the one who will provide justice for Israel is Antichrist—the fake Christ. Hero at first—providing justice and even peace in the Israel conflict—but deceiver in the end. A snake along the path.

And some believe—based on Daniel 11:37 and Jeremiah 8:16—that the Antichrist might come from the tribe of Dan. That’s speculation, of course.

And here—Jacob’s prophecy pauses briefly—for a short prayer to God in verse 18. Check it out:

“I look for your deliverance, Lord” (Genesis 49:18).

This verse is curious. Jacob, speaking between prophecies, says he looks for “deliverance” or “salvation” from the Lord. The Hebrew word is *Yeshua*—which happens to also be the name Jesus. “I look for Yeshua”—the Lord’s salvation—for Jesus.

Why did Jacob—Israel—pick that moment to say this—to look for the Lord’s deliverance?

Now—put this back into the timeline of Israel. We’re at the Tribulation—the deception of Antichrist—and in that time, the nation of Israel will finally look to Jesus for deliverance. A huge revival among the Jews.

Now I should point out here—that the Bible never says that this prophecy is meant to predict the full timeline of Israel’s future. But there are many compelling connections.

I’ll also point out—that from our perspective—we’ve moved from past to future—from matching history with prophecy to matching prophecy with other prophecy.

And the next three do match up with Tribulation prophecies in the books of Revelation and Daniel.

“Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels” (Genesis 49:19).

The tribe of Gad was attacked and oppressed in Jeremiah 49. Looking ahead to the Tribulation—the Antichrist, who will at first bring justice, will turn on Israel and attack.

“Asher’s food will be rich” (Genesis 49:20).

The tribe of Asher would occupy a bountiful land. Fast forward to end times—as Israel must run from the Antichrist—God promises to protect Israel and provide food for them in the desert.

“Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns” (Genesis 49:21).

The translation here is tricky—and it could also say, “he utters beautiful words.” Centuries later, the land of Naphtali included the area near the Sea of Galilee—the region where Jesus spoke so many of His beautiful words.

In the Tribulation picture, this could be a picture of the Jews in the Tribulation—now following Jesus—proclaiming the gospel in Revelation 11. Beautiful words.

And what comes at the end of the Tribulation? What is it all leading up to?

Jesus comes back.

And—sure enough—the next son is Joseph—who has pictured Jesus for us all through his story.

“Joseph is a fruitful vine” (Genesis 49:22).

Jesus said that He is the vine—and we as branches bear fruit.

“With bitterness archers attacked him;

they shot at him with hostility.

But his bow remained steady,

his strong arms stayed limber,

because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob,

because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,

because of your father’s God, who helps you,

because of the Almighty, who blesses you

with blessings of the skies above,

blessings of the deep springs below,

blessings of the breast and womb.

Your father’s blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains,

than the bounty of the age-old hills.

Let all these rest on the head of Joseph,

on the brow of the prince among his brothers” (Genesis 49:23–26).

Now—in the long timeline—fast forward to Jesus’ return. Revelation tells us of a final battle—as the world gathers against Christ once more—but Jesus will prevail.

The abundant blessings here could picture the Millennium—when the world will be blessed and Jesus will reign—just as Joseph is called:

“the prince among his brothers.”

And last up, verse 27:

**“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
in the morning he devours the prey,
in the evening he divides the plunder”** (Genesis 49:27).

The Benjamites would indeed be a fierce people. The prophet Ehud, King Saul, and even the Apostle Paul—remember what he was like before he met Jesus. And Judges 19 paints a violent picture of Benjamin’s tribe.

Back in the big timeline—this might foreshadow the final battle after the Millennium, as Satan will be released to gather forces for one final showdown against Jesus.

It will end—quickly.

Okay—there was a lot there—definitely requires deeper study to really think this one through. I will commend you to that. You can find good commentaries and resources from our friends at blueletterbible.com.

If you’re wondering why—why does prophecy matter?

Well, in Isaiah, the Lord reminds His people that He is the one who knows the end from the beginning. That should keep us in awe.

But why is it cryptic?

Proverbs reminds us that it is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings to search it out.

I would encourage you to approach with balance. Prophecy is meant to be studied and understood, but we should not set the full weight of our faith on one particular interpretation or another of cryptic verses like these.

Approach with balance.

The hidden things belong to God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children—that we might live by them.

In other words—dig into prophecy, try to understand—but keep your focus on the stuff that's clear: love God, love one another.

Nothing cryptic there—just gotta live it out.

And that's it for the B-side. One chapter to go—we'll see you back here in chapter fifty.

Genesis 50 | Forgiven

The final chapter. The dramatic end to an epic story. The last days for two of the Bible's most intriguing characters. And a powerful lesson—on accepting forgiveness.

We left off as the old patriarch Jacob drew his feet into bed, and breathed his last.

Now in chapter 50, **“Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him.”**

Joseph mourns deeply, and arranges for the embalming process. Fascinating historical fact—the patriarch of the Jewish faith was embalmed by the Egyptians, the masters of mummification. Just don't get any weird movie ideas in your head.

As per Jacob's request, his body is carried all the way back to the Promised Land—to Canaan.

So Jacob's whole family, accompanied by “all Pharaoh's officials,” made the journey to Canaan.

And we too say goodbye to Jacob—the young deceiver, the wandering pilgrim, the man who wrestled with God and wouldn't let go, the desperado who came to his senses.

Jacob was a changed man—with a limp to remind him with every step.

He called upon the God of his fathers, and found the Mighty One of Jacob, his own Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.

And much, much later, Jesus reminds us that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of the living—not the dead.

This is not the end of Jacob's story.

But why was it so important to Jacob—to be buried in Canaan?

Perhaps it was a statement—to all his descendants.

A proclamation of faith: “God promised us a land. Trust in God’s promise—even if you don’t live to see it.”

Well, the funeral is over.

And you know—it’s often after the funeral that family dynamics get dicey.

You hold back and keep civil for a time—but when that time is up... Well, let’s see what happens to Jacob’s family. Verse 15:

“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?’”

Now this is a serious turn.

The brothers don’t believe that Joseph’s forgiveness is real.

“Sure, when Dad said he had to—he let it go. But with Dad gone, no way he forgives us.”

So is it true—is this the end of their innocence with Joseph?

Now put that in perspective.

Joseph forgave them **17 years ago**.

He laid it out, put their sin in the past, embraced them—even presented them to Pharaoh and provided for them.

He poured out grace—and never wavered.

After 17 years, they still wonder if Joseph holds a grudge.

It amazes me—how hard it can be to accept forgiveness.

To really believe it.

Some of us can spend years walking with Jesus—He took us back, put our

sin in the past, He embraced us, presented us to the Father, provided for us—poured out grace—and yet still we question,

“What if He holds a grudge? What if He pays me back for my sin?”

If that’s you, read this chapter well. It’s no small matter.

One of these nights, you need to accept God’s forgiveness.

Jesus forgave you for a reason: to restore you—to restore your fellowship with God, and to remake you into someone who loves and forgives.

Understand—that the extent that you limit God’s forgiveness toward you—is the extent that you limit your fellowship, your love, and your forgiveness to others.

Jesus said, “The one who is forgiven much—loves much.”

But if you don’t believe you’re forgiven—you won’t love. Not the way you should.

So it doesn’t just affect you—it hits your spouse, your kids, your friends, your ministry. So you gotta deal with it.

Well, Joseph’s brothers doubt—and in verse 16, they send word to Joseph about some instructions their father gave—that Joseph should forgive them. Now I don’t know if the story is genuine. Knowing the brothers, they could have concocted this one. People come up with all kinds of stories to justify their own forgiveness.

“Dad said you have to.”

“Well, I said the right prayer ten times.”

“I followed these steps.”

Take it easy—you don’t need a story. You just need Jesus.

Notice—that the brothers place forgiveness under human authority, under Jacob. Let's see what happens. Back in verse 17:

“When their message came to him, Joseph wept.”

It is the second time we see Joseph weep. He was human—same as us. His tears rolled just as slowly as yours or mine. And this one hurt. Behind those tears are years of struggle.

Don't imagine that Joseph didn't face that battle between vengeance and forgiveness. But in his heart, grace won. God's mercy ruled the day. And to hear this now—17 years later—that his brothers didn't believe it...

“His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. ‘We are your slaves,’ they said.

But Joseph said to them, ‘Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them” (Genesis 50:18–21).

Wow. Those words are worth repeating. How does Joseph do it? How does he forgive so much—so well?

Watch his words: **“Am I in the place of God?”**

He recognizes his place—and God's place in the realm of justice, vengeance, and the heart of the matter: forgiveness. **“Vengeance is mine,”** declares the Lord.

Now that doesn't mean we give up on justice. In fact, God calls us to do justly, and calls human government to provide justice—that's Romans 13. But vengeance is different from justice. Vengeance is payback.

I heard a great analogy for unforgiveness:

You sit across the table from your enemy—a glass of poison between you. You pick it up—and drink it down—then wait for your enemy to drop dead. But that unforgiveness is eating away at your insides—not theirs.

But Joseph knew his place, and he knew God's.

He forgave—and enjoyed the freedom—of a heart unburdened by grudge or vendetta.

Why? Because his theology was right.

Apart from Christ, forgiveness has no foundation.

You can't accept forgiveness—because you did wrong—and apart from God—nothing can cover that.

But Jesus—Jesus forgives.

He paid the price in full for every sin.

And by faith in Him, now, **“If we confess our sins, and turn away from them, He is faithful—and just—to forgive.”**

Whether you need to forgive—or you need to accept forgiveness—know your place.

If God declares it forgiven, it's forgiven.

And God does more than just forgive.

He works it for good.

Look at verse 20:

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.”

Joseph doesn't sugar-coat it. They sold him into slavery.

But he fixes his eyes—on God's plan.

God used it for good.

And then, verse 22 fast-forwards several decades, until Joseph is one hundred and ten—and a great-great-grandfather. And Joseph's final words are words of faith in God's promise:

“I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Genesis 50:24).

So he gives instructions—to move his bones—and bury him in the Promised Land. And Joseph died. And that—is Genesis.

To you believers—who still doubt God's forgiveness. Stop.

God declares you forgiven.

The blood of God's Son washes you clean.

The resurrection of Jesus proves His power, His faithfulness, His truth.

And if you are in Christ, you are a new creation. Behold, the old has gone.

And the new is here.

You are set free. Now walk in that freedom.

Thank you for joining us for Genesis.

I want to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who made it possible—to our Through the Word team, to our friends at YouVersion, and very importantly to everyone who donated.

Thank you so much for believing in us—we do this work together.

And to all you listeners—time for the next book!

Thanks for the journey.

Can't wait to see you on the next one.

What?..

How many Don Henley songs did I hide?

That's crazy... I wouldn't do that...

But if I *did*, there would be five.

Well... technically four, 'cuz Glenn Frey wrote *Take It Easy*.

But I wouldn't do that.