

# Sermons on Genesis-Pt2-Lowell Johnson

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### **The Death of a Princess Genesis 23:1-20**

King Solomon said, "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death, than the day of one's birth"; (Ecc. 7:1). He did not say that death was better than birth; for, after all, we must be born before we can die.

Solomon's point was that the name given you at birth is like fragrant ointment, and you must keep it that way until you die. When you received your name at birth, nobody knew what you would make out of it, but at death, that name is either fragrant or putrid. If it is fragrant at death, then people can rejoice; for after death, nothing can change it. So, for a person with a good name, the day of death is better than the day of birth.

We have been privileged to walk with Abraham and Sarah through the peaks and valleys of a life well lived. In Genesis 22, Abraham reached the pinnacle of faith and obedience as he takes Isaac to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him there. Now in Genesis 23, Abraham goes into the depths of the shadow of death as we watch him say goodbye to his wife, Sarah.

Sarah had been a good wife to Abraham and a good mother to Isaac. Yes, she had her faults, as we all do; but God called her a princess (17:15) and listed her with the heroes and heroines of faith (Heb. 11:11). The Apostle Peter named her as a good example for Christian wives to follow (1 Peter 3:1-6), and Paul used her to illustrate the grace of God in the life of the believer (Gal. 4:21-31).

Abraham and Sarah had been married for some seventy years. She was the mother of only one son, Isaac.

Sarah is the only woman in all of the Bible whose death and whose age is recorded in the scripture. We have no idea how old Eve was when she died, or Rebecca, or Rachel or Deborah or Ruth or Bathsheba or Mary or Martha or Lydia, but we know when Abraham's wife died and where she died.

She was a loving mother to her son, Isaac, for 37 years. She had fought for her boy Isaac, that he would receive ALL his inheritance, and not Ishmael. She was not Ishmael's mother. Isaac was the one to receive the land as an eternal inheritance.

Sarah died contented.

I want us to see four things in relation to Sarah's death.

#### **I. Abraham's Tears – Genesis 23:1-2**

Sarah was 127 years old when she died. She died in faith, but she died. Scripture says that “it is appointed unto man once to die” (Heb. 9:27). The word “appointed” means “ordained”. All of us have many appointments we keep every week. Sometimes we may be late for an appointment or we may miss it altogether. Sometimes we even forget we have an appointment. Things like that happen in a fallen world. But there is one appointment you and I will never miss – our appointment with death.

Most folks don't like to think about their appointment with death. If we talk about death at all, it is often done in a joking way. I'm sure you've heard the old joke that goes, why do they build fences around cemeteries? Answer: Because people are just dying to get in. Sooner or later we'll all spend time in the graveyard.

Abraham loved his wife, and her death was a painful experience for him. He showed his love and his grief by his weeping. These are the first recorded tears in the Bible, and tears will not end until God wipes them away in glory. Sarah died in faith, so Abraham knew that she was in the Lord's care. Notice that Abraham did not feel that his tears were an evidence of unbelief.

We are told that “Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.” I appreciate this fact because it is sometimes suggested that Christians should not weep at the death of a loved one.

-Abraham believed Sarah died in faith. He believed that she was then in God's care. He believed in the resurrection. But his heart was still broken because he loved Sarah.

-This is the only time we are told that Abraham wept. No doubt, God was especially close to His friend at that time, and yet he wept. There is Christian pain at the absence of the one you love.

Sometimes people say that once you know that something is the will of God, it's easy. Well, it was God's will that Sarah should die, but it wasn't easy for Abraham. It broke his heart. Abraham didn't weep when Sarah was taken from him to a harem in Egypt; he didn't weep when God told him to sacrifice his son Isaac, but when Sarah died, the tears flowed.

Sorrow and tears are proper. The loss of a spouse may be the single greatest loss a man can experience. If the loss of a spouse is not the greatest loss a man can experience, the the loss of a child may be. There is no escaping death. All the world is a hospital and every person in it is a terminal patient.

## II. Abraham's Testimony –Genesis 23:3-6

“Abraham stood up from before his dead”. This means that when the mourning period was over, Abraham moved on with his life. You see, grief is a normal part of living, but there is a time when grief must reach an end. Sorrow over death is natural, but sorrow that does not end is unnatural.

A woman told her pastor that she had been grieving for her parents for over 15 years. Folks, that is not godly sorrow. Paul said concerning those who have died, “I don't want you to be ignorant concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” We need to learn to rejoice over our loved ones who have entered the realms of light, knowing, one day, we will join them there.

We cannot mourn over our dead forever; there comes a time when we must accept what has happened, face life, and fulfill our obligations to both the living and the dead.

A soldier's wife was contacted by the army and was informed that her husband had been killed. She wept with her mother as she held the telegram in her hand, and then she told her mother that she was going up to her room and she didn't want to be disturbed. Her mother called her husband to break the news to him and he came home immediately. He wanted to see his daughter. He went upstairs and quietly opened the door. He saw his daughter kneeling by her bed, the telegram spread before her with the news of her husband's death. She was saying, “Oh, my heavenly Father...oh, my Father...my heavenly Father.” He quietly closed the door and went back downstairs. “How is she?” asked his wife.

“She's in better hands than mine,” he simply said.

Abraham wept over Sarah's death, and that showed how much he had cared for the one God had given him. But Abraham moved on with his life. Abraham married again. Remarriage was no betrayal to Sarah. Abraham married Keturah and they had six sons, but he would thank God every day for his first wife, Sarah, and the life they had known together.

Abraham had to request a place to bury his wife. God had promised the whole land to Abraham, but he owned none of it. After 42 years in Canaan, Abraham didn't own any part of the Promised Land and called himself an “alien and a stranger,” because after all those years, that's how he felt. Abraham had not put any roots down. He was just one passing through. What a lesson to the children of God! As long as our roots do not go too deep in this world, we will not become entangled in its affairs. May we never forget our identity! We are pilgrims and strangers (1 Peter 2:11) in this world. Let us live that way and not settle down, but keep

traveling til we reach our heavenly home.

### III. Abraham's Tact – Genesis 23:7-16

Sarah had to be buried soon. We are given 18 verses describing Abraham's quest for a grave for her. In the East in that day, most business transactions were carried on at the city gate (v.10) with the people as witnesses (v.7). Arriving at a final price for a piece of property usually involved a great deal of bargaining, but Abraham was open and honest in his request: He wanted to buy the cave of Machpelah from Ephron, who was in the crowd at that time.

At first the Hittites offered to give Abraham their choicest cave as a gift since he was “a mighty prince,” but Abraham refused, partly because he understood that in Middle Eastern terms, the offer might have been expected hospitality with the proper response being, “Oh no, let me pay you for it.” More than that, Abraham wanted a plot of land he owned so that he could lay Sarah to rest in peace and dignity.

I would point out that Ephron took advantage of Abraham in his grief and knowing that Abraham had to bury Sarah soon. He owned the land that Abraham wanted, and he knew it. He asked Abraham four hundred shekels of silver. It was a rip-off. To give you some idea of the exorbitance of this price, later David paid only an eighth of that, 50 shekels, to buy a site on which the mighty Jerusalem temple was erected.

Have you considered where you will be buried? Have you drawn up a will? Do your loved ones know your wishes? These questions are important and ought to be discussed openly.

The writer of Genesis wants to stress that Abraham bought the land legally. It was his -lock, stock, and barrel. The last few verses read almost like a deed of purchase – giving the exact location of the cave (in Machpelah near Mamra), the agreed – upon price (400 shekels of silver), the precise dimensions of the property (the cave, the field, and the trees in the field), and the witnesses (all the Hittites who watched this transaction). Only then does Abraham bury Sarah.

### IV. Abraham's Tomb

Why was all this so important to Abraham and later to Moses who wrote Genesis 400 years later?

1. We are considering Sarah as to her body – Genesis 23:17-20

This is not some decaying flesh you can play around with. This is Sarah's body. Her soul is in the presence of the Lord, but her dust is here, and that is precious to the Lord and to us.

-When Mary went to the garden and discovered that the tomb in which Jesus was laid was empty, she thought someone had taken the body of Jesus away and she wanted to know where His body was. Abraham was conscious that this was the body of Sarah and it needed to be shown respect and love. She must have a proper loving burial.

2. Burial plans ought to matter to the people of God.

3. Burying his wife was also a declaration that some day Abraham's descendants would possess the land.

When you die, the only piece of property you will own will be a plot in a cemetery. Everything else will belong to someone else. You get a shroud, a wooden box and a piece of dirt. That is it and the rest is divided up.

Abraham owned the whole land, but the only piece of property that was legally his was his tomb. If the Lord does not return to take us to heaven before we die, the only piece of property each of us will own in this world will be a plot in the cemetery! We will take nothing with us; we will leave it all behind (1 Tim. 6:7). But, if we are investing in things eternal, we can send it ahead (Matt. 6:19-34). If we live by faith, then we can die by faith; and when we die by faith, we'll have a wonderful future.

## **Finding A Bride For Isaac Genesis 24:1-19, 22-28, 57-67**

Genesis 24 is the longest chapter in the book of Genesis – 67 verses. Why so many verses? What is Genesis 24 dealing with that is so important? After all, Genesis 1 deals with the creation account and has 31 verses. Genesis 24 has more than twice as many verses.

Well, Genesis 24 deals with picking the right mate to marry. Let me just mention a few characteristics that are found here when picking a good mate.

1.The first requirement is a spiritual requirement. If you are a believer, there is to be no marriage with an unbeliever. Second Cor. 6:14 says that believers are not to be yoked together with unbelievers, whether it be in business, religion, or marriage.

-Abraham viewed with horror what he saw all about him in Canaan. The daughters of Canaan were wicked and worldly, with no knowledge at all of the true and living God. They were involved in the worse forms of pagan idolatry, and there could be no thought of Isaac marrying one of them.

-Someone told of seeing a camel and a donkey harnessed to the same plough. The poor donkey had a terrible time of it and the camel didn't like being so closely tied to the donkey. The poor little donkey had all the weight of the yoke leaning on it's shoulders. Neither one nor the other could get in step. So it is when a Christian marries a non-Christian. Mixed marriages are a nightmare for both parties. It is not going to be a happy marriage.

2.The servant of Abraham prayed for God's guidance in finding the right mate for Isaac. The providence of God is seen everywhere in the selection of the mate.

3.The servant looked for a lady who was reliable, faithful, dependable and submissive. If these qualities are not found in a person BEFORE marriage, they will not be there after marriage.

4.The servant looked for one who was morally pure. Genesis 24:16 gives a double testimony: She was "a virgin" and "neither had any man known her."

5.She had good manners. She was kind, thoughtful, courteous, and respectful to others. She had a good spirit and a good attitude about life.

6.She took pride in her appearance. Lack of good habits regarding one's appearance speaks volumes about a person. If the wife looks like a hag and the husband looks like a bum, that marriage will have problems.

Notice Genesis 24:1 The Jews divided old age into three stages. From sixty to seventy was what they called "the commencement of old age", from seventy to eighty was what they termed "hoary-headed age" (or white-headed age), after eighty a man was said to be "well-stricken in years" or "well-advanced in age."

For Abraham, Sarah's death was a fresh awakening to his own advanced age and his responsibility to make sure his forty – something son, Isaac, would marry well and produce heirs.

In paradise, God looked everywhere and saw that everything was very good, but there was yet an imperfection. It was not good that Adam should be alone, and so God created Eve for Adam. The creation of Eve was an improvement of paradise. Wives are an improvement to paradise. From Eve would come one who would crush the serpent's head.

The marriage union is at the heart of God's covenant of grace. God's covenant with Abraham begins the first promise of the seed of the woman. For the line of the covenant to continue, Isaac must have a bride.

Just as Abraham wanted a bride for his son, so God the Father elected to provide a bride for His beloved Son. This chapter on finding a bride for Isaac gives us a picture of the Heavenly Father getting a bride for His Son (Matt. 22:1-14). Why? Not because Jesus needed anything, for the eternal Son of God is self-existent and self-sufficient and needs nothing. The bride is the Father's love gift to His Son. The church is compared to a bride (2 Cor. 11:2-3; Eph. 5:22-33); and during this present age, the Holy Spirit is calling people to trust Christ and to be "married to Him" (Rom.7:4). The Bible begins with the promise of the conquering seed in Genesis three and ends with the marriage of the Lamb in Rev. 22.

Isaac needs a bride if the covenant promise is going to be fulfilled, and Abraham does not sit and wait for a wife to be lowered from the skies by angels. He will exercise his faith and dependence on God in search for a wife for his son.

We are told in Genesis 24:2 that Abraham calls for his oldest or chief servant for the task of finding a bride for Isaac. We presume that the servant was Eliezer of Damascus. If he was the servant, he would have received all Abraham's wealth if he had no son; yet when Isaac was born, the inheritance became Isaac's. So, not only had he loyally served his master despite having been displaced by another heir, but he also faithfully served that heir.

The servant put his hand under Abraham's thigh and swore by the Lord three things: (1)He would not select a wife for Isaac from among the Canaan women; (2)he would choose her from Abraham's relatives; and (3)he would not take Isaac back to Abraham's former home.

#### I. Rebekah was a Sought Out Bride – Genesis 24:5-21

What a great responsibility this servant had! Isaac was the covenant Son of the Father of the Faithful. Now, Abraham asked him to

find, not just the right woman, but God's choice for Isaac, seeing that from her would come the Messiah. What trust Abraham has in God's providence. Abraham is totally convinced that God is going to provide not only some wife, but the right wife for Isaac. He's so convinced of that, that he refuses to compromise. Abraham refuses to lower his standards; Isaac is not to be married off to a Canaanite.

In Genesis 24:5, The servant asked, "What if the woman will not come back with me? Does that mean I need to take Isaac to her?" Abraham said, "No! You must not take him back to where I came from. God spoke to me and swore to me that this land would go to my descendants and I believe God!"

Abraham promised his servant two things: 1. God will send His angel before you. He will prepare what is needful for you; 2. If the woman will not follow you back, you are released from your oath (Genesis 24:7-9).

Notice in Genesis 24:10-11 That the servant took ten of Abraham's camels with him to the land of Mesopotamia,, suggesting that there were many that he left behind. That is quite significant because camels in that day was a sign of wealth and station. He needed camels because it was a 400 mile journey across the wilderness.

Notice also that Abraham gave his servant the direction he was to go in search of Isaac's bride. He was to go in the direction of the land where Abraham had come from. If he had not known the direction to go, he might have headed off in the opposite direction.

The servant knew he was going to need God's guidance and help. This unnamed servant is the first person described in scripture to ask for divine guidance through prayer.

-Notice the servant's prayer in Genesis 24:12-14. This is not a fleece. The servant did not ask that the normal effects of nature be suspended. He simply asked that the right woman would voluntarily give him water to drink; that she would water his camels; and that she would be kind, generous, and industrious. This servant placed himself totally in reliance upon God. Only the God of providence could provide such evidence.

Notice Genesis 24:15. It's reasonable to conclude that Rebekah had left her house BEFORE the servant began to pray. As the servant humbly prayed, God directed him to ask for specific providences that God was at that same time working toward as Rebekah arrived at the well.

Rebekah volunteered to water his ten camels. To grasp what a wonder this was, we must understand that the ancient well was a large, deep hole in the earth with steps leading down to the spring water- so that each drawing of water required much effort. Also, a camel typically would drink about twenty – five gallons of water, and an ancient water jar held about three gallons of water. This means that Rebekah made between eighty to one hundred descents into the well. Rebekah's labors filled one and one half to two sweaty hours. All without any help.

## II. Rebekah was a Taught Bride – Genesis 24:22-28

The servant could hardly wait for Rebekah to empty her last jar of water. Both God and the unseen angel had been guiding him and now it was time for the servant to reveal his mission to Rebekah.

-The servant gives her gifts and he makes sure he knows that God has directed the whole thing (Genesis 24:22-28, 49).

It is important to note that the servant revealed repeatedly to Rebekah about the mission. He talks often about God, about Abraham, and about Isaac.

In Genesis 24:29, we are introduced to Laban. Yes, this is the same Laban who deceived Jacob and made him work fourteen years for Rachel. He was not interested in the spiritual mission, but he was interested in the gold jewelry the servant gave Rebekah (Genesis 24:29-31). When Rebekah agreed to go with the servant to be Isaac's bride, Laban tried to delay them for ten days, hoping to get more gold from the servant (Genesis 24:49-59).

## III. Rebekah was a Brought Bride – Genesis 24:61-67

For four hundred miles Rebekah asked questions about Isaac and the more she heard of her bridegroom, the more she wanted to see him and meet him in person. She could hardly wait!

As they got closer and closer, Rebekah began to look to see if she could spot Isaac. The first time she saw him, he was meditating in the field. Isn't that a wonderful place to see your husband for the first time, while he is praying!

Isaac heard the sound of the caravan returning and saw the camels coming. Genesis 24:64 describes the first smoker in the Bible. The KJV says that Rebekah "lighted off the camel". She "dismounted" the camel, covered her face with a veil, a sign of betrothal as it identified her to Isaac as his wife to be.

Rebekah was taken into the tent of Isaac's dead mother. This indicated to everyone that she was now the mistress of this household, the woman that God had appointed as matriarch in this family.

"So she became Isaac's wife, and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (v.67). Abraham may now depart in peace. The covenant has been handed down. The hope of the world now rests on Isaac and Rebekah.

## **Abraham: Gathered To His People**

### **Genesis 25:5-10**

We come now to the last chapter of Abraham's earthly life. He draws his last breath at age 175.

Three times Abraham is called the "friend of God" in the Bible (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23). Notice that all three times that Abraham was called the friend of God, it was hundreds of years after his death. I point that out because as we have studied the life of Abraham, we find that he fails God time and again, but his falls did not destroy God's love for him.

I point out again, that God and Abraham are vastly different from one another. God is infinite, eternal, unchangeable and utterly free from sin, full of holiness and love, the creator of the cosmos. Abraham is one of us, a fallen son of Adam, marred by sin, weak, inconsistent, a man of like passions to ourselves, whose only hope lay in the promises of God. God addresses Abraham as His friend.

-There was a day when Jesus assured His disciples that He would no longer call them His servants, but His friends. The God who made this vast universe is a personal God; He has a loving relationship with those who trust and obey Him. They are His friends who do His will.

It is so important to emphasize that you don't have to be perfect to be a friend of God. Of course, we can grieve our friends by the hurtful things we do, but they remain our friends. Abraham was capable of deceiving, blaming others, loving himself, giving into temptation and turning away from the truth. God still remained his Friend. I see myself in Abraham! Without the grace of God, Abraham would have lived and died in Ur a slave to the idols that filled that city. But today, I, like Abraham, am a friend of God because the Lord is so compassionate and forgiving, uniting me to His Son.

Notice Genesis 25:1 After Sarah's passing, Abraham married Keturah and had six other sons by her. Some Bible students believe that it was about twenty years after Sarah's death that he married Keturah. That means that Abraham had eight sons in all – six by Keturah, Ishmael by Hagar, and Isaac by Sarah. Here is the man who said at age ninety-nine that he was too old to have children (Genesis 17:17).

When God renewed Abraham's natural strength for the begetting of Isaac, He did not take that strength away; and Abraham was able to marry again and have another family. However, God made a distinction between these six new sons and his son Isaac; for Isaac was God's choice to carry on the covenant line. Keturah's sons received gifts, but Isaac received the inheritance and the blessing of the covenant.

What about these six sons? We know very little of them with the exception of Midian.

- The Midianites were famous traders, moving between Gilead and Egypt outside the Promised Land. One day, hundreds of years later, Jacob's sons will sell their brother Joseph, to some Midianite slave traders who will take him to Egypt where Potiphar will buy him.

- Again, four hundred years later, the Midianites are still around because Moses will marry a Midianite woman, and Moses will be greatly helped by his Midianite father-in-law, Jethro.

- Yet, the Midianites will also exert bad influence over the sons of Abraham, and lead them astray during the exodus years. Through them the children of Israel will start to worship false gods and that brings God's wrath down upon them.

- Gideon will defeat the might of the Midian army a hundred years later with a night victory and without bow and spear.

After a person dies, we read the obituary; and after the burial, we read the will. Let's do that with Abraham.

#### I. Abraham's Obituary – Genesis 25:7-8

Abraham was seventy – five years old when he came to the Promised Land and he lived there for exactly one hundred years. He had lived in Canaan longer than anywhere else. He had traveled all over it, but he owned just a well in the south and the cave where he and his wife were buried. Those two places were the pledge God granted him, assuring him that that land was going to be his and his descendants forever.

He died “in a good old age” as the Lord had promised him (Genesis 15:15). He had walked with the Lord for a century (12:4) and had been the friend of God. Old age is “good” if you have the blessing of the Lord on your life (Prov. 16:31). In spite of physical deterioration and weakness, you can enjoy His presence and do His will until the very end (2 Cor. 4:16-5:8).

-Like Sarah before him, Abraham “died in faith”. As an old man Abraham knew what lay beyond death. He did not die in terror, full of guilt and memories of the people he had hurt. Abraham's hopes were all in the mercy of God and the promises of God.

He also died “full of years.” The Hebrew simply says, “full.” This suggested “satisfied with life.” Abraham died as a man at peace with himself, at peace with God, and at peace with man. He was content with all that God had done with him and for him. “It was well with his soul.” The God who had walked with him and guided him for a century would not forsake him at the very end.

What does it mean when it says that he was “gathered to his people?” It certainly denies annihilation. Abraham did not cease to be. Rather, it declares that at his death he went on and joined the living family who had preceded him, the household of faith and the people of God.

One day, you and I will be “gathered to our people”. If God's people were our people in life, then we will be with them after death in the home that Jesus is now preparing. If the Christian family is not your “people” , then you will be with a crowd that is going to hell. You had better make the right choice now, because eternity is forever.

## II. Abraham's Will

Abraham left his material wealth to his family and his spiritual wealth to the whole world, all who would believe on Jesus Christ.

A. Abraham left us a clear witness of salvation through faith – Rom. 4:1-5

Abraham could not have been saved by the ritual of circumcision because God declared him righteous long before Abraham was circumcised. Like everybody else who has ever been saved, Abraham was saved by faith and by faith alone.

B. Abraham left us the example of a faithful life.

James used Abraham to illustrate the importance of proving our faith by our works (James 2:14-26). Wherever Abraham went, he pitched his tent and built his altar; and he let the people of the land know that he was a worshiper of the true and living God. When he offered Isaac on the altar, Abraham proved his faith in God and his love for God. He was not saved by works, but he proved his faith by his works.

C. From Abraham, we learned how to walk by faith.

True, he had his occasional lapses of faith; but the general manner of his life evidenced faith in God's Word. “By faith Abraham...Obeyed.” True faith is our obedient response to the Word of God. God speaks, we hear Him and believe, and we do what He tells us to do.

D. Abraham gave the world the gift of the Jewish Nation.

It is through the Jews that we have the knowledge of the true God through the Word of God. It is through the Jews that our Messiah came. It is through the Jews that we have a Savior.

Today, you and I are writing our obituary and preparing our “last will and testament” as far as our spiritual heritage is concerned. Today, we are getting ready for the last stage of life's journey.

- Are you making good preparations?
- Are you living by faith?

## THE BIRTH OF A HEEL-GRABBER

### Genesis 25:19-26

Isaac was the son of a famous father (Abraham) and the father of a famous son (Jacob), and for those reasons he is sometimes considered a lightweight among the patriarchs. Compared to the exploits of Abraham and Jacob, Isaac's life does seem commonplace. Although he lived longer than either Abraham or Jacob, only six chapters are devoted to Isaac's life in the Genesis record, and only one verse in Hebrews 11 (verse 9).

Yet, God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. On no less than thirty occasions in Scripture, this trio is



mentioned together. Of the three men it was Isaac who lived the longest, 180 years, five years longer than his father Abraham (175), while his son Jacob lived until he was 147 years of age. While Isaac lived the longest, least is known about him. There is more than a century during which time we know absolutely nothing of what he did, decade after decade.

Isaac was a quiet, passive, meditative man (Genes 24:63), who would rather pick up and leave than confront his enemies. During his long life, he didn't travel far from home. Abraham had made the long journey from Haran to Canaan, and had even visited Egypt, but Isaac spent his entire adult life moving around in the land of Canaan.

If there had been an ancient Middle East "jet set," Isaac wouldn't have joined it. However, there are more Isaacs in this world than there are Abrahams or Jacobs; and these people make important contributions to society and to the church, even if they don't see their names in lights or even in the church bulletin. Furthermore, Isaac was a living part of the divine plan that eventually produced the Jewish nation, gave us the Bible, and brought Jesus Christ into the world.

Isaac wasn't a failure, he was only different. After all, the people in each generation have to find themselves and be themselves and not spend their lives slavishly trying to imitate their ancestors. Discovering our uniqueness and using it to the glory of God is the challenge that makes life what it is.

There is only one chapter in Genesis devoted solely to Isaac and his own individual experience. For the overall view we might divide Isaac's story as follows:

1. Isaac and his brother (Ishmael)    Genesis 25:12-18
2. Isaac and his boys                    Genesis 25:19-34
3. Isaac and his behavior                Genesis 26:1-35
4. Isaac and his blessing                Genesis 27:1-46

The birth of Isaac's boys is the first record in the Bible of twins. There was nothing identical about these twins, either about their looks or their likings. In fact, it would be difficult to find a greater contrast than that which existed between Esau and Jacob. Here are two boys, born at the same time, born in the same place, of the same parents, to the same advantages and opportunities.

Two things I want you to see from these verses:

#### I. The Sterile Wife    Genesis 25:19-21

Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah and 60 years old when Jacob and Esau were finally born. Verse 21 tells us that "Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren." It's different in our day, but in Isaac's day the worst thing that could happen to a woman was to be childless. It was taken as a sign that you were outside God's favor. Also to be childless meant you had no one to take care of you in old age.

So Isaac prayed for his wife. Not once, but again and again he begged God to open Rebekah's womb. So far as I know, this is the only time in the Bible where a husband is specifically said to have prayed for his wife. I'm sure it must have happened often, but this is the only time it is directly mentioned.

Rebekah's inability to give birth presented Isaac with a dilemma. After all, God had promised Abraham that his "seed" would become a great nation. In Genesis 22 that promise was repeated to Isaac. But how would it happen unless Rebekah becomes pregnant?

One year passes; then two, then five, then ten and no children. Where is God? Has He forgotten His promise? Has He changed His mind? So Isaac prays harder. The word means "to entreat" or "beg." O God, remove the shame. O God, keep your promise. Give us a child!"

With great skill the Holy Spirit weaves spiritual truth into the most ordinary and the most usual of natural events. This account about Isaac and Rebekah illustrates the relationship between the believer and Christ. Rebekah was united to Isaac in the most intimate and sacred union. Yet, she was barren. The fact that she had given herself to Isaac did not guarantee fruitfulness any more than accepting Christ as Savior guarantees spirituality and fruitfulness for God. There are many Christians, truly saved, truly linked in saving faith to the Lord Jesus, who remain spiritually barren and who never bring forth any lasting fruit for God.

Now the barrenness was not in Isaac; the text makes that perfectly clear. The trouble lay with Rebekah, not with Isaac. If we are to trace the problem of our spiritual barrenness to its proper source, we must acknowledge that the problem lies in us and not in Christ. He is all that He should be. Our failure to bring forth fruit cannot be laid at His door, it must be laid at ours. Rebekah, even in her relationship with Isaac, could not bear fruit of herself. A miracle had to take place in her life before she could bring forth new life.

The flesh never becomes anything except flesh. Isaac knew the problem and he initiated the solution by interceding for Rebekah. He did not blame Rebekah, for while the fault lay in her, it was not really her fault at all. She had inherited death in her womb. Just so there is nothing in human nature that can bear spiritual fruit; we have inherited barrenness along that line. But, just as Isaac

interceded for Rebekah, so the Lord intercedes for us.

Why did Isaac and Rebekah have to wait 20 years for an answer? What was God doing during those 20 years of waiting? Let me suggest three answers:

1. He was developing Isaac's faith.
2. He was teaching Isaac patience.
3. He was arranging the circumstances so that when the answer finally came, God alone would get the credit.

Those three points help us understand why God's answers are often delayed. He wants to develop our faith, He wants to develop our patience, and He wants to make sure that He alone gets the credit when the answer finally comes.

Let me share one more insight before we leave this point. Abraham had children from three women, and Jacob had children from four women; but Isaac had one wife, his darling Rebekah. He was the only patriarch who was monogamous, though they were to have no children for the first 20 years of their marriage. He would not take a concubine from his wife's servants. He would wait on God to answer his prayers.

Isaac was not a perfect man, any more than Abraham was. In fact he repeated two of his father's other mistakes. He lied about Rebekah saying that she was his sister, out of fear to that old king Abimelech. He also displayed favoritism between his two sons and strove with God that God's special blessing would fall on Esau rather than Jacob. But God had explicitly rejected Esau.

## II. The Secret War Genesis 25:22-26

When Rebekah finally gets pregnant, she has a very rough time. I'm sure that at first she and Isaac had a great celebration. But as the weeks passed, the babies began to "jostle" inside her. The word is stronger than that; it means to "go to war." Her babies fought each other inside the womb. That frightened Rebekah, so she asked God, "Why is this happening to me?"

Imagine Rebekah's surprise when she learned that the two children would struggle with each other all their lives! Each child would produce a nation, and these two nations (Edom and Israel) would compete, but the younger would master the elder. Just as God had chosen Isaac, the second-born and not Ishmael, the firstborn, so He choose Jacob, the second-born, and not Esau, the firstborn. That the younger should rule the elder was contrary to human tradition and logic. But the sovereign God made the choice (Romans 9:10-12).

Now for the spiritual truths: Rebekah had two nations (natures) within her, and those two natures were at war. In her barren condition there was no such struggle, but the moment fruitfulness began, the struggle began. It is a common enough spiritual experience. Those whose lives are most fruitful for God are most aware of the struggle between the two opposing natures within.

The existence of the natures is first experienced, then explained, and then exposed. Step by step, Rebekah's actual physical experience is designed to teach spiritual truth. Her experience is a type of the Romans 7 experience of the believer, and should be regarded in that way.

When the babies were finally born, Isaac and Rebekah received another shock. The first baby to come out was red, "and his whole body was like a red garment." That is, his body was covered with red hair – almost like a wild animal. They named him "Esau," which means "Red" and can also mean "Hairy."

But that wasn't the only surprise. As Esau came out, a little white hand was clutching his heel. So they kept on pulling and out came the second boy. They named him "Jacob" which means "Heel-grabber." Years later the name came to mean "supplanter" and "cheater."

None of this happened by accident. The way these boys came into the world reveals something of their character and destiny.

Esau will become a successful hunter; Jacob will become a cunning businessman. Esau will feel most at home in the outdoors; Jacob will spend his life trying to push and pull his way to the top. Esau will build a mighty kingdom; Jacob will live by his wits. Esau will have a fiery temper, but will quickly get over his rage; Jacob will have a long memory and his guilty conscience will plague him for years.

You and I were born into this world with a sinful, fallen nature. When we are saved, we are given a new, spiritual nature. The old nature is never eradicated when we trust Christ, nor is it canceled when we yield to Him for fruitfulness. It is an ever present foe, bitterly hostile to any work of the Spirit in us, and quick to contest every Spirit-born effort toward fruitfulness for God.

Of course, we have had our old sinful nature much longer than we have our new, spiritual nature. Our old nature is older and strong and will not yield to the new spiritual nature without a fight and struggle. The way to win spiritual battles is to feed the new spiritual nature and starve the old sinful nature.

Which nature within you wins most of the battles in your life?

## WHAT WOULD YOU GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR SOUL?

### Genesis 25:27-34

We have just been told in Genesis 25 about the birth of twin boys – Jacob and Esau. The writer of Genesis has skipped over many years to focus on an incident that happened when the boys were in their late teens or early twenty's. Jacob and Esau were two very different people, with very different values, and those differences now become evident.

#### I. Esau's Dilemma     Genesis 25:27-28

We are re-introduced to Jacob and Esau. "The boys grew up. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man (a plain man, a quiet man), dwelling in tents."

Let's examine these two young men.

#### A. Esau

Esau was a man's man. He was strong, athletic, and agile. He loved the outdoors. He liked to hunt. Genesis 27:27 says that Esau smelled of the field. He was the prototype of a mountain man or a Jeremiah Johnson. You might not hear him coming, but you could smell him!

Esau was a robust, brawny man who was indifferent to getting ahead. He was also frank and guileless. Years later, when Jacob returned from his miserable experience with Laban, and Esau had him at his mercy, Esau was astonishingly kind and generous to Jacob. "But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept" (Genesis 33:4). Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself" (Genesis 33:9).

It is probable that Esau was more likable than Jacob. At the same time, he was immoral and unholy.

Hebrews 12:15-17: "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Thomas Carlyle has this to say about Esau:

"He is the kind of man of whom we are in the habit of charitably saying that he is nobody's enemy but his own. But, in truth, he is God's enemy, because he wastes the splendid manhood which God has given him. Passionate, impatient, impulsive, incapable of looking before him, refusing to estimate the worth of anything which does not immediately appeal to his senses, preferring the animal over the spiritual, he is rightly called a "profane person."

Esau was a shallow man, governed by his feelings. His motto was, "Hey, you only go through life once, and you've got to grab all the gusto you can! Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

#### B. Jacob

In Genesis 25:27 we are told that Jacob was a "plain man" (KJV) or a "mild man" (NKJV). We must not get the idea that Jacob was a weakling; he was anything but that. The Hebrew means "solid, sound, level-headed, complete, competent."

At his best, Jacob was toughly dependable, introspective, a thinker, a man of intellect and insight. At his worst he was a rascal, cheating, opportunistic, self-seeking, self-serving, ambitious, grasping, scheming, heartless and a formidably cool opponent.

Quite frankly, the exchange of birthright leaves neither Jacob nor Esau in a positive light, though in some respects Esau is more likable than Jacob.

We need to understand one bit of biblical background in order to fully understand this story. To the oldest son, the birthright was his most prized possession. In those times the oldest son was accorded two distinct honors by virtue of his being the first-born:

1. He was given a double inheritance.
2. He was considered the head of the family after the death of the parents. The birthright could be transferred or sold, but only for something of great value. Normally a first-born son would never consider selling the birthright because it guaranteed both his future security and his future leadership of the family.

This is one of those defining moments in life. Both Esau and Jacob would be changed forever because of a bowl of lentil stew.

I've already said that Esau was the hunter, but in this story the hunter becomes the hunted as Jacob springs the trap on his

unsuspecting brother. Please note something. There are no heroes in this episode. No one looks very good. There are moral problems on every hand. The Bible puts the emphasis on Esau's worldly decision, but that doesn't make Jacob look any better.

It happened so quickly that Esau doubtless thought little about what he was doing. One day he went out to hunt, he was famished after a long day of chasing game in the fields. His hunger was genuine and his request for the red lentil stew was sincere.

#### Esau's Demand

Although one fact is not specifically spelled out in the text, we have to assume that Jacob had been scheming in his mind, looking for an opportunity to dupe his brother out of his birthright. I don't think the thought just popped into his mind when he saw Esau coming from his long hunting trip. This was a premeditated idea, waiting to come to fruition at just the right moment.

One thing is clear, Jacob took advantage of Esau's weakness to get from him something he couldn't have obtained any other way.

"But," you say, "didn't God promise to bless the youngest over the older?" Yes, and God had told Rebekah that before the boys were born. But that's what makes this so heinous. If God had promised it, then Jacob didn't need to trick Esau out of it. God doesn't need that kind of help. He can find a way to give the birthright and the blessing to Jacob in His own time.

### III. Esau's Decision      Genesis 25:29-34

It's hard for me to understand verse 30. In our family if something has been cooked, I just go get some of it. I just help myself.

What did Jacob do when Esau said, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew. I'm about to starve!" ? He pounced on him and said, "Sell me your birthright now!"

The way Jacob responded suggests a well-set trap: "Sell me your birthright now!" In no way was Esau about to die. He was just hungry and in a defiant disrespectful and insulting manner told Jacob to give him a bowl of stew. Jacob was not taking advantage of Esau. The problem was with Esau. We are told that he "despised his birthright."

The word "despised" means "to count as nothing, to treat with contempt." Esau treated with contempt his important possession. It meant nothing to him.

What can we say about Esau?

1. He is impulsive.
2. He lives for the moment.
3. He demanded immediate gratification.

Someone said that we've got time and eternity all mixed up. Most of us live as if time is going to last forever and eternity is going to be very short. That's backwards. Time is very short, but eternity lasts forever. The only purpose for time is to get ready for where we're going to be for all eternity.

There are some things in life that are more important than other things. So many of us spend our days trading away the things that really matter for things that amount to nothing more than a bowl of "red stuff."

We're not left to wonder about what this story means. Hebrews 12:16 tells of God's divine judgment on what Esau did. "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." The KJV uses the word "profane" instead of "godless."

Read Genesis 25. See if you can find a single place where Esau acts like a godless or profane man. He never curses. He doesn't blaspheme God. How in the world can you call Esau "godless?" All he did was make a deal for a bowl of stew. He ate it, got up, then he went on his way. What's the big deal? What's so profane about a bowl of stew?

Answer: In the Bible profanity is an attitude, not just an action. Profanity is treating lightly that which God says should be taken seriously. You are godless when you treat lightly the most important things of life.

You don't have to swear to be profane. You don't have to be an atheist to be godless. You can be godless and come to church every Sunday.

Why is this story in the Bible? Because all of us are like Esau. This story is the flip side of the words of Jesus: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul (Mark 8:36). All of us stand in the place of Esau every single day. We face repeated temptations to sell that which means the most to us for that which is worth so little.

What are you willing to trade in order to get what you want in life? Your family? Your marriage? Your integrity? Your purity?

Esau stands forever as a man who threw it all away for one bowl of stew and never got another chance. Don't let that happen to you.

Have you despised (counted lightly) God's gift of salvation? Maybe you've said, "Later, Jesus. I've got my own life to live. Later, Jesus, later. It's not convenient right now." What if "later" never comes?

What will it take...What will God have to do to wake you up to the most important things in life?

## LIKE FATHER LIKE SON

### Genesis 26:1-33

Isaac was the ordinary son of a famous father (Abraham), and the ordinary father of a famous son (Jacob). Isaac was a man who lived in the shadows. He lived his life first under the shadow of his great father, Abraham; then he lived his life in the shadow of his great son, Jacob.

Abraham is the star of some 14 chapters of the Book of Genesis and Jacob is the central figure of another 12 or so. Although Isaac lived longer than Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, Isaac's life is pretty much covered in one chapter in Genesis (26) and the most exciting feature is some squabbles over some wells. Yet God used him to work out His covenant promises. God blessed Isaac because of His covenant promise with Abraham. Notice:

#### I. Isaac's Reasoning Genesis 26:1-6

In 26:1 we are told there was a famine in the land. Which land? The Promised Land! The land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants, later described as flowing with milk and honey. There was a famine in that land!

That phrase, "Now there was a famine in the land," sets the context for everything that happens in the rest of this chapter. This famine was serving as a test in Isaac's life. True faith is always tested, either by temptations within us or trials around us (James 1:1-18), because a faith that can't be tested can't be trusted. God tests us to bring out the best in us, but Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us. Trials are the normal experience of God's people.

When the famine came, Isaac had ordinary fears. What do ordinary people do when trials hit? They panic. What did Isaac do? He panicked. It would be wonderful to read, "There was a famine in the land, so Isaac sought the Lord." But the text plainly states, "So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines." And it's clear that he wasn't planning to stop there. He was heading toward Egypt when the Lord intercepted him at Gerar and told him not to go to Egypt.

In Genesis 26:2-5 God confirmed the covenant promise with Isaac that He had made with Abraham. As far as we know, this is the first time that God had spoken directly to Isaac. God also gave Isaac a warning and directions. He says do not go down to Egypt, but stay in the land.

It's interesting that when you look at Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of them were faced with the problem of famine in the Promised Land.

- When Abraham was faced with that problem, God did not tell him what to do, and he went down to the land of Egypt, and God blessed him and brought him out.

- When Isaac was faced with the problem of famine, God told him not to go down to the land of Egypt, and he didn't. He stayed in the land and God blessed him.

- When Jacob was faced with famine, God told him to go down to the land of Egypt, and God blessed him and brought him out.

In 26:5 God says that the reason He is making the covenant promise to Isaac is because Abraham fully obeyed Him. That's grace. God told Isaac this to spur Isaac on to obedience.

#### II. Isaac's Reproach Genesis 26:7-11

After Isaac's great act of faith and his great act of trust in God, he immediately imitates his father's cowardice, and he earns the reproach of pagans. Even the Philistines see the inappropriateness of what Isaac has done once he is discovered.

In 26:1-6 Isaac had trusted in God's providential care even in difficult circumstances. Now, in 26:7-11, he doesn't trust God's providential care in another difficult situation. One minute he's trusting God and the next minute he turns around and attempts to find a way to help himself and in doing so he violates God's law.

When the fear of the men of Gerar overtook Isaac, he sinned and lied (verse 7). Remember: Fear and faith are opposites. Because of his feeble faith, Isaac put his wife and the promise in harms way. Just like his father, Abraham, before him (who did it twice), Isaac lied about his wife to protect his own hide and was rebuked by a pagan king.

Now look at Genesis 26:8. The KJV says that Isaac was "sporting with his wife Rebekah." The NKJV says Isaac was "showing endearment to Rebekah his wife." Other translations say that he was "caressing his wife." Howard Hendricks said, "Whatever this sport was, it's obvious that you don't play it with your sister."

Would you notice that Abimelech's respect for marriage shows us the power and the reality of the light of conscience. Abimelech didn't have a Bible. He had no weekly worship service where the law of God was taught. But Abimelech knew that marriage was a sacred relationship and it ought not to be violated. And he was afraid that his people might violate it.

And so he calls in Isaac and he rebukes him. In Romans 2:15 Paul says that God has written His law on our hearts. That's exactly what we see in Abimelech. He says to his people, "If you so much as touch Isaac or Rebekah, it's the death penalty for you." He builds a hedge around them.

One thought before we move on. There is nothing in this passage to indicate it, and this is perhaps a bit of speculation, but it's very clear by Genesis 27 that Isaac and Rebekah's relationship has drifted apart. The initial closeness that seems to be there in Genesis 24 is no longer there. I wonder if this incident in Gerar could have been the beginning of the distance which seems to be apparent later in this relationship which began as a great love story. If so, it is yet another example of the consequences of sin.

### III. Isaac's Reward Genesis 26:12-14

God blesses Isaac in the midst of the famine condition, but the Philistines envy him. God caused Isaac to reap a hundred fold in his crop in the midst of a famine year. He becomes rich in the midst of famine. Everyone else have had bad yields, but Isaac comes rolling in with 100 times the yield that he would have expected. The Philistines understand that God's hand of favor was upon Isaac. But, the Philistines were jealous.

### IV. Isaac's Rejection Genesis 26:15-19

The jealous Philistines come and stop up the wells of Isaac. They dig other wells, and they stop them up also. It was a clear violation of the covenant which they had made with Abraham, a covenant of friendship. Isaac very quickly re-digs these wells and names them by their old names.

Isaac doesn't stand on his rights. He doesn't threaten. He just moves farther away from them until he finally finds peace. Notice that in 26:22 Isaac credits his peace to the Lord's providence. He doesn't say, "Well, finally, my plan worked." He says it is the Lord who gave them peace.

Isaac was a peace-maker. Romans 12:18 says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

### Isaac's Reminder Genesis 26:23-25

God comes to Isaac a second time and recommits Himself to the covenant promise.

Isaac believed God with all of his heart and in Beersheba he built an altar, called upon the name of the Lord in worship, and pitched his tent, and Isaac's servants dug a well (verse 25). That sounds like Abraham!

Another well! Another landmark of blessing in enemy country, in a dry and barren land! They were just adding to what Abraham had done so long ago.

## A SHADY WAY TO GET YOUR BLESSING Genesis 27:1-46

When we first read of Isaac and Rebekah, we can envision a happy, spiritual couple. After all, Isaac was a dedicated man who had put himself on the altar in obedience to the Lord (Genesis 22). He trusted God to choose his wife for him (Genesis 24); and the wife God sent, Isaac loved dearly. Both Isaac and Rebekah knew how to pray and seek the mind of the Lord for their home (Genesis 25:19-23). What more could a married couple want?

But in spite of these advantages, the family self-destructed rather quickly. It began when Isaac asked Rebekah to lie to Abimelech and tell him that she was his sister so that his life would be spared because he thought Abimelech would kill him so he could take Rebekah as his wife. The trust and respect factor was broken. Both members substituted scheming for believing and trust so they could each have their own way.

The result was a dysfunctional family. A working definition of a dysfunctional family is one in which there has been a major breakdown in the basic relationships within the family so that the family itself no longer functions properly.

Here are five symptoms of a dysfunctional family:

1. Estrangement: Family members who avoid other family members.
2. Anger: It may be expressed or repressed anger.
3. Lack of Trust: Seen in faulty patterns of communication.
4. Deception: Inability to speak the truth to other family members.
5. Unhealthy Secrecy: Refusal to face the truth.

You may find one or more of these traits in healthy families from time to time, but dysfunctional families adapt these traits as a normal pattern of life.

Dysfunctional families are not something new. They go back to the beginning of time. The real cause of being dysfunctional goes back to the entrance of sin into the human race. Every since Adam and Eve disobeyed God, every family has been dysfunctional to one degree or another.

- Consider the first family: Adam and Eve blamed each other for their own disobedience.
- Consider their children: Cain murdered his brother, Able.
- Consider Noah's three sons: Ham disgraced his father by uncovering his nakedness.
- Abraham lied about his wife, Sarah, calling her his sister.

Look around you. How many families do you know, including husbands and wives, parents and children, or siblings, have had or now have family problems.

Now look at Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau. All four are presented in a negative light in this chapter. These four people never appear together at the same time.

Chapter 27 is one of the saddest chapters in Genesis. Everybody is doing the wrong thing – especially Isaac as one of the outstanding types of Christ in the Old Testament. And so he was in Genesis 22. But Isaac is no type of Christ in Genesis 27. If he is a type of anything here, he is a type of the back-slidden, worldly, carnal Christian.

It is a sad fact that while we at one stage of our lives mirror the beauties and graces of the Lord Jesus, we may at another stage reflect the exact opposite. Once Isaac was a Christlike man. Once he became obedient unto death on Mount Moriah. Once he was a well-digger, leaving behind him a trial of blessing and refreshment for others. But that was a long time ago. He had now become sadly unspiritual.

My prayer is, "Lord, help us to finish well." A good beginning doesn't guarantee a good ending. That's one of the repeated lessons in Scripture; and it's tragically confirmed in the lives of people like Lot, Gideon, Samson, King Saul, King Solomon, Demas, and now you can add Isaac to the list.

Let's study each family member and see what they contributed to the problem or to the answer.

#### I. Isaac's Decline Genesis 27:1-4

The story begins with Isaac believing that he is about to die. Isaac was 137 years of age. His stepbrother, Ishmael, had died at that age and that, perhaps, is what made Isaac think he was about to die. He was mistaken. He lived another 43 years (35:28), dying at the ripe old age of 180. Still, Isaac's thoughts were full of death.

Two things occupy Isaac's mind:

1. He wants to enjoy a good meal of venison cooked by his favorite son, Esau.

When Abraham prepared for death, his concern was to get a bride for his son, Isaac, and maintain the covenant promise. When King David came to the end of his life, he made arrangements for the building of the temple. Paul's burden before his martyrdom was that Timothy be faithful to preach the Word and guard the faith.

But Isaac, the man who meditated and prayed in the fields at evening (24:63), and who petitioned God on behalf of his wife (25:21), wanted a savory meal of venison. Instead of seeking to heal the family feud that he and his wife had caused by their selfish

favoritism, Isaac perpetuated the feud and destroyed his own family.

2. Isaac's fondest dream was to insure that before he dies, his son, Esau, obtains the cherished blessing. He sends Esau out to hunt some game so he can bless him before he dies.

What's wrong with that? Ordinarily, nothing would be wrong with it. But before the boys were born, God had told Isaac and Rebekah that Jacob, the younger son, was to receive the covenant blessing (Genesis 25:9-23); yet, Isaac planned to give the blessing to Esau. Surely Isaac knew that Esau had despised his birthright and sold it to Jacob and that Esau had disqualified himself by marrying heathen women.

None of this matters to Isaac. He wants his favorite son to have the blessing, and if he has to connive to make it happen, that's exactly what he will do. If he has to deceive his wife and his other son, then so be it. Did Isaac really think he could fool God and give the blessing to worldly, unbelieving Esau? Isaac was in deliberate defiance of God's will.

## II. Rebekah's Deception Genesis 27:5-17

Sir Walter Scott wrote in a poem: "O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive."

Isaac's plan didn't work out because Rebekah was secretly listening to Isaac and Esau (more deception, more secrecy). She then repeats to Jacob what she overheard, and then she cooks up a scheme of her own (still more deception, more secrecy). Her plan is simple: Jacob is to go kill two choice goats and Rebekah will cook up a tasty meal for Isaac. Jacob will serve it to his father while pretending to be his brother, thus tricking Isaac into giving him the blessing (sounds like "Days of our Life!").

It's tragic when a husband and wife, once so dedicated to the Lord and each other, have excommunicated each other and no longer discuss God's Word or pray together.

Knowing that Jacob was chosen to receive the covenant blessing, Rebekah immediately took matters into her own hands to make sure her favorite son got what the Lord had promised him. Had she and Jacob talked with Isaac while Esau was out hunting, perhaps he would have seen the light and agreed with them. Instead, Rebekah chose to control Jacob and deceive her husband.

Jacob's concern wasn't, "Is it right?", but, "Is it safe?" "What if I get caught?" Notice Genesis 27:11-12 – Jacob said, "I would APPEAR to be deceiving him." Wrong! He wouldn't appear to be deceiving him, he would be deliberately deceiving him. There's a vast difference between appearance and reality when deception is involved.

Rebekah's philosophy was, "The end justifies the means." She couldn't trust God to fulfill His plan; she had to help God out because it was for a good cause. But there is no place for deception in the life of the believer; for Satan is the deceiver (2 Corinthians 11:3), but Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6). "Blessed is the man...in whose spirit is no deceit" (Psalm 32:2).

All down the chapter we see Isaac being deceived by his senses. His sight has failed him; he was blind. His smell deceived him; he thought from the earthly smell of the garments that Jacob was Esau. His taste failed him; he thought goat was venison. His feeling failed him; he thought a goat's skin was Esau's hairy arm. His hearing rang true, but he couldn't believe what he heard.

We have the sorry spectacle of a wife deliberately setting out to deceive her husband, having first persuaded herself that it was right and proper for her to do so. She would pay the price, of course, in the end. God does not permit His people to get away with that kind of thing. Before that day was over, her beloved Jacob would be fleeing for his very life to far-off Padan-aram, and She would never see him again.

## III. Jacob's Defense Genesis 27:18-29

In cooperating with the scheme, Jacob was only obeying his mother, but he could have refused and suggested that they just face the situation honestly and confront Isaac. But once Jacob put on Esau's clothes and took the savory meal in his hands, the die was cast and he had to play the part successfully. Notice how one lie lead to another, for deception only can be defended by more deception.

### A. Jacob lied about his name Genesis 27:18-19

Jacob was an accomplished liar. "Who are you?", demanded the blind old man. "I am Esau (deliberate deception and lie number one); your firstborn (lie number two); I have done just as you told me (lie number three); please arise, sit and eat of my venison (lie number four), that your soul may bless me." Four lies in a single breath!

### B. Jacob lied about the food and the Lord Genesis 27:19-20

He claimed to have obeyed his father's wishes (lie), and he called the goat's meat "my game" (lie). He even gave credit to the Lord



for helping him to find the venison so quickly (lie number five). He not only lied about himself, but he also lied about the Lord. He added the name of the Living God to his deception to give it added acceptability. To use the Lord to cover up sin is a step toward blasphemy.

#### C. Jacob lied again about his identity and about his love Genesis 27:21-27

Poor old Isaac was still not convinced. He sensed something was wrong. He asked again that Jacob come near him so he could feel of him again. He asked again, "Are you really my son Esau?" He said, "I am" (lie six). How tragic it is to see a son so dishonor his father! After Isaac had eaten the meal, he asked Jacob to kiss him, and that kiss was the seventh lie, for it was hypocritical. How could Jacob claim to love his father when he was in the act of deceiving him? The stage was now set for the giving of the blessing.

In essence Jacob now received from Isaac the blessing revealed in the Abrahamic covenant. The blessing basically involves three things: Personal Prosperity (verse 28), Pre-eminence (verse 29), and Protection by God (verse 29).

One other note. In this scenario, who is deceiving whom? On one hand, Jacob is definitely deceiving his father, Isaac. However, Isaac, because he thinks Jacob is really Esau, thinks he is deceiving Jacob by giving the blessing to Esau. Both intend to deceive the other; only Jacob succeeds.

The most amazing point is that through this act of deception, God's will was done! Why? Because God's choice (Jacob) did, in fact, end up with the blessing. That doesn't justify the deception, but it does demonstrate how God works through the weakness of sinful man to accomplish His purpose.

This story, seen in that light, is a story of the sovereignty of God. It reminds me of the words Joseph speaks many years later: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Both Isaac and Jacob had less than pure motives, but God overruled their bad motives to insure that His will was ultimately done.

As Jacob left Isaac in his tent, I think both men were satisfied in a job well done, pleased with themselves that they had outwitted the other. Isaac even thought he had outwitted God!

#### IV. Esau's Despair Genesis 27:30-40

It didn't take long for Isaac and Esau to discover the conspiracy, but each man responded differently.

##### 1. Isaac trembled greatly Genesis 27:30-33

Why was Isaac so agitated? Because he knew that the Lord had overruled his own selfish plan so that his favorite son did not receive the blessing.

##### 2. Esau wept and begged for a blessing Genesis 27:34-40

Before you feel too sorry for Esau, remember that the problem ultimately started because Esau despised his own birthright. If he had properly valued the birthright, things would have been different.

The man who despised his birthright and married two pagan women now wept and cried out for his father to bless him. Hebrews 12:16-17 is God's commentary on this event. Esau tried to repent, but his own heart was too hard; and he couldn't change his father's mind.

Esau's tears were not tears of repentance for being an ungodly man; they were tears of regret because he had lost the covenant blessing. Esau wanted the blessing, but he didn't want to be the kind of man whom God could bless!

#### V. Jacob's Departure Genesis 27:41-45

Esau has it in his heart to kill Jacob. At this point Rebekah steps back into the picture. She's in charge again. She tells Jacob to flee to visit his uncle (her brother), Laban in Haran (about 500 miles away), stay with him for a few days until Esau cools down, and then return.

She told Isaac that Jacob had gone to look for a bride; another act of deception. These "few days" turned into twenty years and Rebekah never saw her son again.

I'll say it again: "O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive."

## JACOB'S LADDER

Jacob had just deceived his blind, old father, Isaac, and defrauded his brother Esau. Rebekah had heard Esau say, "As soon as I bury my father, Isaac, then I'll bury my brother Jacob."

Rebekah tells Isaac that Jacob needs to go to Haran to find a wife among her kin. Rebekah told Isaac that when Esau married pagan women, it just about killed her and if Jacob married pagan women, her life would not be worth living, so send him to Haran. Of course, she was wanting to get Jacob as far away from Esau as possible and as quickly as possible. Isaac gives Jacob an additional blessing and sends him away.

We are about to see the great turning point in Jacob's life as he come to Bethel. It is at Bethel where Jacob had his Divine dream which causes a great change in his heart and life. Bethel was to Jacob what the burning bush was to Moses, what the vision of holiness was to Isaiah, and what the encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus was to Paul.

Jacob would travel many days by foot from Beersheba to Haran, a trip of about 500 miles.

### I. Jacob's Departure Genesis 28:10-11

Jacob left Beersheba all alone. It was a hurried departure, escaping his brother Esau's murderous intentions. Little did he know that ahead of him his uncle Laban, a merciless man, prepared to trap him and suck the life out of him. Jacob was going from a death camp to a hard labor camp.

Remember, Jacob had been the home boy. It was Esau who had been the rugged outdoors hunter. Now Jacob would be driven from his comfort zone, away from his beloved mother, with no possibility of going back to her if things didn't work out.

On the evening of the second day, as the sun was sinking, Jacob stops for the night. He is on the outskirts of a city called Luz, a place filled with strange and dangerous people. Jacob was so fearful of the people of Luz that he dared not enter the city at night. Outside the town was a hillside strewn with rocks and boulders; there Jacob made his bed. He finds a flat rock to use as a pillow.

For the first time in his life, Jacob was truly alone. I imagine he had a hard time sleeping that night. He was homeless, penniless, helpless and alone. As Jacob lay there, he thought about his aging father; he remembered his mother waving good-bye; he thought about Esau's pledge to kill him.

I wonder if he said to himself, "How did this ever happen to me?" He had only himself to blame. He did it to himself. Jacob got what he wanted, but now he was paying the price.

### II. Jacob's Dream Genesis 28:12-15

Jacob was not seeking a holy place. This was not the most likely place where a man would go to have an encounter with God. In fact, it's the kind of place you might go if you were running from God. Finally, he drifted off to an uneasy sleep. While he slept, he had one of the most famous dreams in history.

God had never spoken directly to Jacob before. God had spoken to Abraham and Isaac, but not to Jacob. For his whole life he had lived on the borrowed faith of his father and grandfather. He was raised in their faith, was taught their faith, knew their personal experience with the God of his father and grandfather. To Jacob it was all second-handed reality.

The amazing point is that God now speaks to Jacob at the moment of his desperation. Now that he is running for his life, now that he is leaving the Promised Land, now that he has disgraced himself, now that he finally reached the bottom. At that exact moment, God speaks to Jacob and it happens in the form of a strange dream.

What did he see in the dream? The KJV says that he saw a "ladder." It could better be translated a "stairway." The key point is that Jacob sees that stairway resting on the earth right where he happened to be. On the stairway Jacob saw the angels of God going up and down the stairs.

It's worth noting that not many people in the Bible ever saw angels. Most people lived their lives and never once saw an angel. But here and there, at critical moments in history, God allowed a few people to see His angels at work. It's as if God would draw back the curtains at a crucial moment to let someone see the angels of God at work behind the scene. Jacob is one of those blessed few.

What are the angels doing? They are taking messages from earth up to heaven and messages from heaven down to earth. They are heavenly couriers who report to God concerning the situation on the earth. They also carry out God's will – answering prayers, giving guidance, providing protection, fighting for the people of God, fending off Satan.

At the top of the stairway stood God Himself. Jacob at the bottom, God at the top; a stairway filled with angels in between. What

does it mean?

First, God wanted Jacob to know that He was not some far-off God who was unconcerned about what was happening on earth. God wants Jacob to know that He is near him. Although God is in heaven and he was on earth, He wanted Jacob to know that Jehovah God is the stairway, the mediator between God and man, and that His angels are constantly watching over him, ready to protect him and provide for him; and that Jacob could never go beyond God's keeping.

Fellow believers, this is all grace! Jacob, the conniving believer who was outcast and alone due to his own sin, who merited nothing from God, was met by God in his misery with an unparalleled revelation of God's care and assurance for the future. Jacob was not seeking God. He was fleeing the consequences of his deception. He was not expecting grace. But grace was unleashed upon his soul, and with not even a word of reproach. The Vision and the Voice of God only bore assurances.

Second, God told Jacob that he would be the third patriarch. God had become the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and now the God of Jacob. This was the divine title that God would now bear throughout the Scripture.

Third, God would reaffirm the covenant promise with Jacob: "I will give you this land (13), your descendants will be like the dust of the earth (14), All peoples on earth will be blessed through you (14), I will watch over you wherever you go (15), I will bring you back to this land" (15).

This was a solution to Jacob's guilt, fear, and anxiety. God promised that in every situation of life, He is already at work before he gets there. God is not only with me now, He's already way up the road ahead me. He is at work in the future while we live in the present.

### III. Jacob's Deliberation Genesis 28:16-17

Jacob was saved from that moment on. For Jacob, when he awoke, he was filled with a mixture of Amazement, Fear, Terror, Adoration, and a stunned Awe. He discovered the omnipresence of God.

God is everywhere. Wherever you are, there is God. And wherever God is, there is a stairway to heaven reaching down from God to right where you are.

You don't have to have a "holy place." Any place can be a "holy place" if you stop and listen to God's voice speaking to you.

- God is with you whether you feel it or not.
- God is with you whether you know it or not.
- God is with you whether you see it or not.
- God is with you whether you sense it or not.

Notice the tense: "Surely the Lord IS in this place." "Is" not "was." "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

It's been my observation that very few people meet God on Sunday morning. You are much more likely to meet God on the bed of affliction, or when you lose your job, or when your children are sick, or when your marriage collapses. You are much more likely to meet Him in the hospital than in the sanctuary.

Not because God is not here. He is here, and not just on Sunday either. Our problem is, God speaks but we do not listen. It takes tragedy, or failures, or financial setbacks, or illness – then we look up to heaven and say, "Surely, the Lord was in this place and I knew it not."

### IV. Jacob's Dedication Genesis 28:18-22

When Jacob poured oil on his stone pillow, he demonstrated his love and devotion to God and consecrated the spot as holy to God. And by calling the place "Bethel" ("house of God"), he gave it a

name that superseded the city's ancient name, Luz.

Notice Jacob's vow in Genesis 28:20-21. The word "IF" should be translated "since." Jacob is not bargaining with God. He is saying that since God will do this, then I will make God my God.

Because of what God had done for Jacob he worshiped God and gave Him a tithe.

## THE DECEIVER DECEIVED

### Genesis 29:1-30

There are many ways in the English language to express the idea of retribution. For instance, we say:

- “Everything that goes around, comes around.”
- “Things have a way of evening out in the end.”
- “The chickens come home to roost.”
- “The skeletons are rattling out of the closet.”
- “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).
- “Be not deceived; God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Jacob has been sowing for a long, long time. Reaping day has come. He has been sowing the seeds of deceit, and the harvest is about to come.

When we last saw Jacob, he was just awakened from a hard night's sleep on a rock outside the city of Luz. During the night he had had that strange dream about a ladder stretching from heaven to earth. In that dream the Lord Himself had spoken to Jacob – reassuring him that if he went to Haran, God would go with him.

If your Bible has margin notes, perhaps you see the phrase “went on his journey” rendered “lifted up his feet.” In Hebrew, the literal idea is that of “happy feet.”

In Genesis 28 we saw the true conversion in Jacob's life and it was reflected in his walk. He was walking some 500 miles and there was little more than dragging of his feet. When he dreams of the ladder reaching from heaven to earth, a change takes place in this man's life. In other words, there is a new vitality about Jacob after Bethel.

After you're saved your steps seem lighter. He now walks with “happy feet.” He walks with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm simply means “full of God.” An encounter with God – the Giver of joy, the Source of all true happiness – manifests itself in a changed walk. Jacob has been saved, but it is one thing for a person to be saved; it is another thing for him to be subdued.

The subduing process would take up the next twenty years of Jacob's life. How slow we are to learn even the basic elementary truths of the life of faith.

Three things I would call your attention to from this chapter:

#### I. The Direction of God Genesis 29:1-11

When Jacob finally arrived on the outskirts of Haran, the first thing he saw was a well, with a herd of sheep nearby.

Jacob knew by heart the story of how his mother, Rebekah, had been revealed to Abraham's servant, Eliezer, when he arrived in Haran and how Rebekah volunteered to water all ten of his camels – just as he had prayed she would do if she was the appointed wife for Isaac (24:10-27). Jacob knew this providence took place at a well.

Wells had also been significant places in his father Isaac's life where important events had occurred (26:17-33). Jacob's expectation must have risen, because the first thing to meet his eyes was a well. Would God now be pleased to bring about the answer to the promise made to him in Bethel?

All that happens here occurs by the providence of God:

1. God's providence for Jacob guided him day by day for 500 lonely miles to this appointed place.
2. Three flocks of sheep were lying around the well along with their listless shepherds. Jacob asked them where they were from. When they said the words, “of Haran are we,” it must have been music to Jacob's ears, for he had finally reached his destination.
3. Jacob asked them if they knew Laban and they said, “Yes.” It was a short reply. “Do you know Laban?” “Yes, we know him.” There was a wealth of hidden meaning behind their short response. Everybody for miles around knew Laban, and before long Jacob would know him too – know him at his great cost!
4. Almost in the same breath, the men said, “Yes, we know Laban, and there comes his daughter now, walking right toward you.” It was more than a coincidence, it was actually the providence of God. They said that the beautiful young lady walking toward the well “happens” to be Rachel, Laban's daughter. What a confirmation of the providence of God in his life. Jacob must have been thinking, “Jehovah, God of providence, is doing it again!” He remembered the stories his mother had told him about how God brought her and Isaac together and now he's thinking, “She must be the one God has chosen for me!” This is no “chance” meeting, this is the Providence of God.
5. Jacob kissed her on the cheek and wept aloud. Anyone who has ever experienced the providence of God will understand the weeping of Jacob. Clearly Rachel doesn't mind the kiss because she runs to tell her father, Laban, and Laban hurried to meet him. But Laban remembered the gold Eliezer paid for his sister and thought he was about to see more gold from Jacob.

#### II. The Disclosure of Jacob Genesis 29:12-14

Don't miss the little phrase, "And Jacob told Laban all these things." Laban thought he had a gold mine in Jacob, until Jacob told him "all these things."

Jacob had lived with Laban a month and he gradually told him "all these things." He was not rich. He was alone and penniless and at Laban's mercy. Things are about to change. Jacob is about to meet the "Real" Laban!

### III. The Deception of Laban Genesis 29:15-30

Up until this time Jacob had been the number one con-man. Always winning, always landing on his feet, but things are about to change! Jacob is finally going to meet his match.

Uncle Laban slyly raises the subject of wages so that he sounds magnanimous: "We can't have you working for us for nothing, can we? You tell me what you think your wages should be."

What was wrong with that? Well, until then Jacob had been like a son in the house. He had rights to the food, the servants, and the profits from his labors. Now it is all put on a different foundation. Laban is in effect making him another servant. He starts to barter with him, and he is shrinking Jacob to the status of a hired hand. He is cheating Jacob out of what he appeared to offer him when he'd said to him, "we're family. Surely you're my bone and my flesh." Laban is now dismantling that special relationship and turning Jacob into a servant.

Jacob goes along with this. He wants to marry the boss's daughter and so he specifies his wages – a verbal agreement to work seven years to marry Rachel. The going dowry price for a bride was three to four years.

Laban actually had two daughters. Leah's name means "cow" and Rachel's name means "ewe." Leah is not as attractive as Rachel. Her eyes in particular are singled out as being "weak," which means that she was plain looking or dull in appearance. Her eyes lacked the sparkle. She had not had many young men calling on her. Rachel, on the other hand, was beautiful in form and face (verse 17).

At the end of the seven years, Laban was holding out on Jacob. Jacob demanded of Laban, "Give me my wife" (verse 21). Not "Please give." "Give" is the language of grievance. Seven years was a great proof of Jacob's love for Rachel. Love took him through each day. Rachel was always there to talk to.

Now we come to the wedding night. There was a huge feast in honor of the happy couple that took most of the day and night. The bride entering the festivities would be veiled. Jacob had no reason to believe that behind that veil was anyone other than his beloved Rachel. Evidently Laban used the veiling of the bride, the lateness of the hour, and, likely, too much wine to effect the switch – and it worked perfectly.

We don't know how Laban restrained Rachel. Leah had to be a willing bride who likely loved Jacob and despised her beautiful sister.

When Jacob woke up and saw Leah's face instead of Rachel's, well, what he said to Leah we can only image. He may have whispered Rachel's name all night and Leah must have played the part of her sister well.

Jacob knew Laban was behind it all. The KJV says that Jacob asked Laban, "What is this you have done to me?" Somehow I don't think it was said in a calm voice!

At last Jacob knew what it was like to be on the receiving end. Now he understood Esau's pain.

Laban rather coolly replies that he was forced by custom to give Leah in marriage first because she was the firstborn (verse 26). This is the second direct hit by God. Jacob had dishonored the principle of the firstborn by cheating his brother out of the birthright and the blessing. Now God forces him to honor the principle he had violated by marrying Leah first.

And who had Jacob deceived? His father, Isaac. Now the deceiver is deceived by his father-in-law.

Did you notice that Jacob was deceived by Leah's father in a similar way as Jacob's deception of his father Isaac? He goes into Isaac's tent, disguised as the firstborn, Esau. Father Isaac is in the dark; his eyesight gone and he doesn't know who has come into the room. Then seven years later, Leah goes into Jacob's tent disguised as Rachel.

**BIRTH WARS!**  
**Genesis 29:31-30:24**

Our text is a major seed plot of the Bible, for it records the birth of eleven of Jacob's twelve sons (Genesis 35 records the birth of the twelfth son). The significance of these sons is that they are the beginning of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The twelve sons' names according to their order of birth are Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Nephtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

These twelve names will appear throughout the rest of the Bible right into the final book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, and nearly to the last chapter of Revelation where the Bible says that the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem will have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them (Genesis 21:12).

Another message that is strongly and clearly given along side the records of the birth of these sons has to do with the curse of polygamy.

The creation account's explicit record that God created only one wife for Adam made it clear for all who would follow that anyone who takes an extra wife is going beyond what God intended. The polygamous marriages in Genesis were darkly cast.

- Lamech's chest-thumping sword song before his wives Ada and Zillah exuded polygamous brutality (4:29f).
- Abraham "listened to the voice" of his wife (an echo of Adam listening to the voice of his wife at the fall) and took Hagar as his wife.
- Ungodly Esau married two Hittite women (26:34) and added a third by taking an Ishmaelite wife (28:6-8).
- Jacob was duped into polygamy and the results were disastrous.

He had a wife to whom he was not attracted and did not love who had masqueraded as her sister, that he did love, on her wedding night and sexually engaged her groom. In this household of three, the sister-wives were both sharp-tongued. Leah used the birth of her children as an opportunity to gloat. This was messy: multiple wives, multiple births, sister hatred, brother hatred.

The first eleven sons of Jacob were born in a period of less than seven years. This is confirmed by the fact that Joseph, the eleventh son, was born at the end of Jacob's fourteen years of service to obtain Laban's daughters as his wives (Genesis 30:25). Remember that four women were bearing children for Jacob. Having six sons meant that Leah was pregnant most of the seven years.

Note Genesis 29:31. We must understand that Jacob did not hate (KJV) Leah as we normally use the word. "Hated" here means "unloved." But despite the sin and polygamy that had engulfed Jacob's marriage, the Lord had begun to work out His own purposes. God Himself closed beautiful, much-loved Rachel's womb and opened the womb of her unloved sister.

It is a sad record. Jacob's home became a battlefield where two embittered women fought and struggled for Jacob's affection. Jacob was always torn between his devotion to Rachel and his desire for sons with Leah. Unloved Leah hoped that giving Jacob sons would cause him to love her. Leah was desperate for love; Rachel was desperate for children.

Let me introduce Jacob's sons:

#### 1. Reuben: The child of Affection Genesis 29:31-32

The name Reuben means "look, a son." "Now my husband will love me." Notice that Leah gave the Lord credit for the birth.

Our text makes it plain why Leah was capable of bearing children: God "saw that Leah was hated." The word "hated" does not mean an ardent dislike, but can mean a lesser degree of affection. That Leah was not hated is proven by the number of children she gave Jacob. But Leah was not loved nearly as much as Jacob loved Rachel.

No husband loves two wives equally, which is an argument against polygamy. Because he loved Rachel the most, Jacob kept company primarily with Rachel, not with Leah. God saw this situation and balanced the burden for Leah by giving Leah children.

Leah longed for more of Jacob's affection, but did not have it, for Rachel had his affection. It hurt Leah but she could not complain because of her part in deceiving Jacob at the wedding. Often when we use evil means to get something we want badly, when we get it we discover it has problems which become great burdens to us.

#### 2. Simeon: The child of Answer Genesis 29:33

The name Simeon means "the Lord has heard." Leah hoped this little boy would melt Jacob's hatred into love, but it did not. But God did answer her prayer by giving her another son.

#### 3. Levi: The child of Attachment Genesis 29:34

Leah was hoping for less when this son was born. The word Levi means "joined" or "attachment." If she cannot have Jacob's love, maybe she can at least feel his attachment to her. Jacob's lack of affection for her was some of the reaping she had to do for her

sowing.

#### 4. Judah: The child of Adoration Genesis 29:35

The word Judah means "praise." Here Leah made no pleas for love or improved relationships with her husband. She had given up. Though she might not ever enjoy Jacob's love, God had given her four sons, and she had to be thankful for that.

If Leah could have seen down the generations, she would have seen how blessed she was in her last two sons, Levi and Judah, for Levi would father the Priestly tribe and Judah would father the Kingly tribes. Leah's blood would flow in the veins of Moses and Aaron, as well as King David and Christ the Messiah.

#### Bilhah's Boys Genesis 30:1-8

Rachel's barrenness became progressively intolerable with each of Leah's birth. Rachel was humiliated. Rachel wanted what Leah had and Leah wanted what Rachel had.

In 30:1 we read that "Rachel envied Leah." Probably for the first time in her life, Rachel envied Leah. She was jealous of Leah's childbearing. That meant trouble, for envy always stirs up trouble. "Where envying and strife (contention from rivalry and selfish ambition) is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). Envy is grieving at the good of another and no sin is more offensive to God nor more injurious to our neighbor and ourselves.

Envy is the opposite of contentment. Envy ignores the blessings it has and focuses only on what it does not have. Rachel had much going for her. She was beautiful and had Jacob's love, but envy caused her to forget her blessings and only complain about her lack.

Rachel was wrong in demanding children of Jacob. To start with she spoke to the wrong person. She should have spoken to God, for Jacob had not closed her womb. She blamed Jacob for her barrenness, but it clearly wasn't his fault for he already had four sons by Leah. She was really complaining about God's conduct, because it was God who controlled who had children.

She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." She did die giving birth to her second son.

In Genesis 30:3-4 Rachel schemes to have children by proxy through her maid, Bilhah. Rachel complained of the way she was being treated, now she treats others even worse. Sin is selfish and doesn't consider others. Did she consult Bilhah as to her desire in regards to this scheme? Did she think about the immorality of the situation? The scheme revealed that Rachel was more interested in what people thought of her than what God thought of her.

#### 5. Dan: The child of Support Genesis 30:6

The word Dan means "Judged" and is used in the sense of vindication. Rachel declared that God was beginning to set things right for her. Vindication at last!

#### 6. Naphtali: The child of Struggle Genesis 30:7-8

The word Naphtali means "Wrestling." The thought expressed here is that Rachel is in a great contest with Leah over having children; and now with the help of God, Rachel is overcoming Leah by having children. For Rachel, having children was simply a contest to see who will gain the honors of the world.

#### Zilpah's Sons Genesis 30:9-13

Leah concluded that she was no longer going to have children, so she decided to use the proxy method to gain more children. She copied Rachel's conduct. Rachel had set a poor example and her conduct had influenced Leah to sin also.

#### 7. Gad: The child of Good Fortune Genesis 30:9-11

The word Gad is actually the name of a Babylonian god (Isaiah 65:11) and means "good fortune."

#### 8. Asher: The child of Happiness Genesis 30:12-13

"O happy day, Rachel! I'm leading 6 to 2!"

#### Leah's Latecomers Genesis 30:14-21

Reuben was about five years old at the time he arrived home with the mandrakes. Mandrakes were a small herb which, according to ancient superstition, aroused sexual desire and promoted fertility. They were called "love apples" in that day. They were a love potion. Solomon makes mention of them in Song of Solomon 7:13. Could the baby wars get any worse? Well, they did! And it gets ugly!

Leah knows she has the upper hand on Rachel and she speaks of Jacob as “my husband” (Genesis 30:14-16).

Notice the hypocrisy of Leah in 30:15. Leah had it all backward. Rachel did not take Jacob from Leah as Leah complained, but Leah took Jacob from Rachel by deceiving Jacob on what was to be Jacob and Rachel's wedding night.

It seems that Rachel controlled which wife or slave-wife slept with Jacob and when. The deal takes place because both women are desperate for children. Leah gets her night and Rachel gets her mandrakes. The Bible makes it clear the mandrakes played no part at all, because Rachel, who has the mandrakes, remains childless for three more years. So much for the mandrakes!

9. Issachar: The child of Payment Genesis 30:14-18

Issachar means “pay” or “wages.” Leah acknowledges God in the birth of Issachar, wanting it to be known that the mandrakes had no part in her new fruitfulness.

10. Zebulun: The child of Presence Genesis 30:19-20

Zebulun means “dwelling” or “habitation,” but Leah never did persuade Jacob to come and live permanently with her.

Dinah: The child of Silent Dignity Genesis 30:21

11. Joseph: The child of Sweet Devotion Genesis 30:22-24

The first thing Rachel said at the birth of Joseph was that “God hath taken away by reproach.” She wisely credited God with removing it.

Joseph's name means “The Lord shall add to me another son,” and He did. But sadly, Rachel died at his (Benjamin's) birth (Genesis 35:18).

Jacob's greatest son was Joseph. He was worth more than all the other sons put together. Better to have one son like Joseph than a hundred sons without good character.

## **THE CASE OF THE SPECKLED SHEEP**

### **Genesis 30:25-43**

Jacob and Laban were two of a kind. Both were shrewd bargainers. A person doing business with them needed to keep both hands on his wallet.

- The shrewdness of Jacob was illustrated in his bargaining Esau out of his birthright.
- The shrewdness of Laban was seen in his bargaining Jacob into working an extra seven years for Rachel.

In our text a need has arisen for the two of them to bargain with each other for a new contract for Jacob to stay longer in Haran. This bargain will again illustrate the shrewdness of them both. Like union and company officials, they both come to the bargaining table with gentlemen courtesies and an outward appearance of concern for the others well-being. To the casual observer it would appear the two men wanted to be friendly and fair with each other. But the truth of the matter was that inwardly neither man trusted the other or cared for the other and each was trying to outfox the other. And after the contract, they both set about to cheat the other as much as they could.

I. The Cause of the Bargaining Genesis 30:25-28

Two conflicting requests were made. Jacob requested from Laban permission to leave Haran with his family to return home to the land of Canaan. Laban requested just the opposite. He requested that Jacob stay in Haran.

Jacob's request came after he had served Laban for fourteen years for Leah and Rachel as his wives. Now that his commitment is complete, he wants to go home to the land of Canaan. Laban was already delinquent on his work contract for his wives.

Laban was the kind that would make certain Jacob worked every hour he owed him. The contract had expired, but Laban never brought the subject up. Every extra day of service he got from Jacob was free labor for Laban, and Laban was not above taking all the free labor he could get.

Jacob didn't make his request until Rachel had borne Joseph. According to Genesis 31:41, Jacob worked a total of twenty years for Laban, with the first fourteen years being for his two wives and the next six years being for his livestock. That means that Joseph



was about six or seven when Jacob left Haran to return to Canaan.

Notice how Jacob felt about Canaan. He said, "Send me away to MINE OWN place and to MY COUNTRY." Canaan was the Promised Land and that's where Jacob wanted to be!

Greed caused Laban to do all he could to get Jacob to continue to work for him. Laban had "learned by experience" that Jacob was the cause of blessing in his life.

Laban said, "Name your price, Jacob. How much is it going to cost me to keep you here working for me?" Laban wanted detailed specifics; nothing general that would give Jacob any advantage in the deal. Laban was the kind that didn't trust others. He knew what was in his own heart and thought others thought the same way.

"Name your wages" sounded charitable and liberal, but it was neither. It was a selfish offer, for Laban knew by experience that Jacob would probably be modest in his demand, but liberal in his performance, for that's the way he was in the past. Laban didn't want to pay more than he had to pay, in fact he wanted to pay less than was right.

Laban had deceived Jacob too many times for too many years, but now God is going to balance the ledger sheet.

## II. The Contract From the Bargaining Genesis 30:29-35

Before Jacob tells Laban what he wants as wages, he reminds Laban that he is a good worker who provided good care to Laban's livestock and that he was a trustworthy worker. He also told him that he had brought Laban much profit because the Lord had blessed him. Jacob gave God credit and praise for the blessing Laban had experienced since his coming.

What a deal Jacob made to Laban in Genesis 30:31-34. Normally shepherds contracted to shepherds for 10 to 20 percent of the flock as payment as well as a percentage of the wool and milk products. But, this was extraordinarily generous, and a little stupid! Most sheep were all white and most goats are all one dark color, black or brown. Speckled or striped sheep and goats are rare.

Incredibly, Jacob offered to remove the few multicolored sheep from Laban's flock. "Laban, deal or no deal?" Laban jumped on the offer! Likely, when he got out of Jacob's sight he began to smile, then chuckle, then roared with laughter! He inwardly sneered at the fool, Jacob.

## III. The Cheating After the Bargaining Genesis 30:36-43

As soon as the contract for Jacob's services was signed, the cheating began. Laban removed "that day" all the sheep and goat's that were not solid colored, sent them away on a three-day journey to be kept by his sons.

Jacob had stipulated in the details of the contract for his services that he would pass through the flocks that day and remove all the livestock designated for his pay in the work contract (verse 32). But Laban ignored that part of the contract and separated the livestock himself so Jacob could not get his designated share.

Laban stole the first part of Jacob's pay. Laban did not want Jacob to have any possibility of using these animals for breeding purposes to increase his flocks.

Jacob was no saint either. He also cheated by using several methods of prenatal influence upon the livestock to cause them to reproduce livestock that had the markings and color Jacob desired. The main method Jacob used was to put peeled sticks or tree branches by the watering troughs so they would breed there. So they would see the peeled sticks and that would supposedly influence them to bare offspring that had the color and markings stipulated in the contract.

Today we know that Jacob's scheming methods of prenatal influence was nothing more than superstitions, much like the mandrakes were. Jacob's methods were not what caused the streaked, speckled, and spotted livestock to be born, but rather God was working on Jacob's behalf to bless Jacob according to the promise of the covenant given to him earlier (Genesis 28:4).

It seems that Jacob was promoting the growth of his flock, but not the flocks of Laban. Jacob did give God credit for the success of his efforts (Genesis 31:7,9).

Notice 30:43. Jacob increased exceedingly, and had much cattle and maid-servants and men servants and camels and donkeys. Jacob's shrewdness helped, but more than anything else, God prospered Jacob; and because God chose to bless him, he soon became a very wealthy man.

## JACOB'S SEPARATION FROM LABAN

## Genesis 31:1-55

As shrewd and crafty and with no love lost between them, one could predict that sooner or later Jacob and Laban would part ways. The surprising thing is that it took them so long to do so.

The way Laban had mistreated Jacob about his wives was enough to make Jacob leave for Canaan. Jacob ended up spending 20 years in Haran: seven years for Leah, seven years for Rachel, and six years building up his flocks. But now the time has finally come to go home.

The turning point came when Jacob heard that Laban's sons had grown envious of his prosperity. He also realized that Laban had slowly changed his attitude toward him. The two daughters of Laban also wanted to part company with their father and go to Canaan with Jacob.

### I. The Prompting of the Separation Genesis 31:1-3

Three things occurred to let Jacob know the time had come for him to leave:

#### A. The Conversations of Laban's sons Genesis 31:1

Laban's sons didn't try to conceal their conversations from Jacob. In fact, they most likely said what they said in Jacob's hearing with the design to irritate and trouble him. They spoke their words to Jacob, but they did it by speaking to others in earshot of Jacob. It was meant as a jab to Jacob to hurt him.

It was a hypocritical charge, because these sons of Laban had earlier shepherded a flock which Laban had stolen from Jacob (30:35). Jacob had taken no animal from Laban. Jacob's flocks simply outgrew Laban's flocks in numbers.

When the sons spoke of Jacob's taking honor from their father, they spoke of the honor that comes from having wealth. It is the wealthy who are esteemed by the world.

#### B. The Countenance of Laban Genesis 31:2

The EYE, which saw the countenance of Laban, as well as the EAR, which heard the conversations of Laban's sons, told Jacob trouble was brewing for him in the camp of Laban. The hostility of Laban and his sons indicated it was time for Jacob to return to Canaan.

#### C. The Command of God Genesis 31:3

God's command was clear: The Place: Canaan; The People: thy kindred; The Parting: get out of the land of Haran and I'll be with you. What an encouragement!

### II. The Persuading for the Separation Genesis 31:4-16

Once Jacob decided to separate from Laban, he shared his plan with his family.

Jacob sent for Leah and Rachel to meet him in the field where he was shepherding the flocks. He did not want Laban to see him making plans to leave because he would try to stop them.

Jacob told his two wives about the countenance of Laban's face and the many times Jacob had cheated him in his wages. He also reminded them that he had been a hard worker for Laban. He also spoke of God's presence and prosperity.

Both wives responded in a positive way. Both told how their father had mistreated them. Look at their complaints:

#### A. The Inheritance of the Daughters Genesis 31:14

Laban cut both of his daughters out of his will. There was no inheritance for them. He did this so Jacob would get none of his money or flocks.

#### B. The Indifference to the Daughters Genesis 31:15

Laban gave them No affection; he treated them as strangers.

#### C. The Inferiority of the Daughters Genesis 31:15

"For he sold us." They were being made inferior to all but slaves.

#### D. The Injustice to the Daughters Genesis 31:15

Though Jacob sold them for wives to Jacob, they got nothing and Laban kept it all for himself.

Jacob encouraged his wives to submit with him to God's command.

### III. The Parting in the Separation    Genesis 31:17-21

Jacob's two wives were in unity and oneness with God's command, for "then Jacob rose up and took his family and flocks and began the trip to Canaan."

These verses tell us that everything (all) Jacob had was committed to obeying the Lord. He held nothing back.

Notice the care Jacob took with his family. He put his sons and his wives on camel backs. They were going on a 500 mile trip back to Canaan. The oldest son was about eleven and the youngest, Joseph, would be about six.

Jacob did not know at the time of leaving Haran, that Rachel had stolen the "gods" from her father. She took what was not hers. She was not completely trusting Jehovah God.

We are told Jacob "set his fact" toward Mount Gilead. This shows the spirit of determination and dedication Jacob had. There would be no turning back.

### IV. The Protesting in the Separation    Genesis 31:22-42

Once Laban found Jacob gone, he began to chase after them. Laban and his men were stopped by God from doing evil to Jacob (verse 24).

Jacob and family had been gone ten days when Laban caught them (about 300 miles). That God had to give the mandate to Laban not to hurt Jacob shows that Laban did have evil intentions in his heart to harm Jacob.

When Laban catches Jacob, he makes four charges against Jacob:

#### 1. You have stolen my daughters    Genesis 31:26

This was a ridiculous charge. Jacob didn't take Laban's daughters away as captives, forced by a sword. They came voluntarily and enthusiastically. Laban had treated his daughters badly and they were not captives, but co-conspirators against Laban.

#### 2. You have stopped me from showing affection to my family    Genesis 31:27-28

The truth is Laban had no affection for his daughters. Laban had treated his daughters like strangers, cut them out of his will, sold them like slaves, and sold and spent their dowry.

#### 3. Laban told Jacob that he disrespected his power or he would not have dared to leave Haran Laban was trying to intimidate Jacob.    Genesis 31:29

#### 4. Laban charges them of stealing his gods.    Genesis 31:30-37

How foolish! To call those idols gods that could be stolen. Laban couldn't expect protection from his gods if they could not resist nor discover their invaders. Here is a man seeking his lost gods!

Jacob calls Laban's bluff. Laban had no evidence of Jacob's wrongdoing, so Jacob backs him into a corner and shames him in front of his "brethren."    Genesis 31:36-37

In fact, Jacob tells Laban that HE is the guilty one. He had changed his wages ten times. "Ten times" is a figure of speech meaning many times. We would say something like "umpteenth times."

Jacob mentioned seven situations to show that Laban cheated him in his wages:

#### 1. The care of his flock    Genesis 31:38

"Thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young." Jacob was a very caring shepherd. The extra special farmer will be present when his livestock are giving birth in order to give assistance if necessary to assure that the births are successful. Not all farmers do this. Such good shepherds ought to be paid extra, but Laban didn't.

#### 2. The consumption of the flock    Genesis 31:38

"The rams of thy flock have I not eaten." Jacob did not butcher any of Laban's flock to get some extra meat on the side.

#### 3. The covering of the injured    Genesis 31:39

"That which was torn of beast I have not brought to you; I bare the loss of it." Jacob paid out of his own pocket for such losses.

#### 4. The charge for the stolen    Genesis 31:39

"Of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night." Laban blamed Jacob for any loss. He had to

compensate for the injured and the stolen.

5. The commitment to work    Genesis 31:40

“Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.”

He was a hard worker and dedicated worker.

6. The changes in the wages    Genesis 31:41

“Thou hast changed my wages ten times.”

Laban didn't raise his wages, but adjusted them so Jacob was deprived of gain and Laban would get more gain.

7. The conniving to empty Jacob    Genesis 31:42

Jacob told Laban to his face that they both knew what he was saying was true. He intended to send Jacob away empty. God has seen it as well.

V. The Peace for the Separation    31:43-55

Laban proposed the covenant because Jacob had shown that the evil done was Laban's and not Jacob's. Laban went to save face and since he could not dispute one single word, he proposed a peace covenant.

All Laban says here is twisted and perverted, but Laban wants to make the peace covenant to assure that Jacob would be a good husband and that both Laban and Jacob would be good neighbors.

What Laban says in verse 50 was a backhanded slap at Jacob, implying that he was evil to his wives. The truth is that only Laban had been evil toward his wives.

In verse 52 Laban is again slinging mud at Jacob. Again, the problem was with Laban; not Jacob.

Notice the pledges to conform to the covenant of peace:

1. Stones    Genesis 31:45-46

Stones speak of the importance and the duration of the covenant. Stones endure for ages.

2. Sacrificing    Genesis 31:54    Notice it was Jacob doing the sacrificing, not Laban.

3. Supping    Genesis 31:54    Eating together speaks of friendship and fellowship.

4. Swearing    Genesis 31:51, 53    Both swear by God not to violate the terms of the covenant.

5. Signifying    Genesis 31: 47-49

## JACOB'S PREPARATION TO MEET ESAU

### Genesis 32:1-23

We have already seen that Jacob wanted to get away from Laban after twenty years of serving him. It was the Lord Himself who told Jacob to return to Canaan. Jacob gathered his wives, his family, his flocks, and all that he had and left Laban's house secretly while Laban was away shearing sheep (Genesis 31:19).

They had gone a three days journey before Laban returned home. When Laban realized what Jacob had done, he got some men together and went after Jacob. They would catch up with Jacob on the tenth day, but the Lord came to Laban in a dream and warned him not to harm Jacob or anything that was his. When Laban confronted Jacob, Jacob made it clear to him that he would not return to Laban's house because the Lord had told him to return to Canaan.

With a sigh of relief Jacob saw Laban, his sons, and his servants disappear finally over the distant horizon. But Jacob had not forgotten the unbrotherly and unscrupulous way he had dealt with his brother twenty years ago. No only had Jacob not forgotten, neither had Esau forgotten and neither had God forgotten.

Many commentaries make it seem as if Jacob and Esau just happened to meet as Jacob was returning to Canaan, but I believe this was a heart-necessity because it was not a geographical must. Esau did not block his way, for he had settled far to the South of Mount Seir in Edom. Thus it was the Spiritual necessity of making things right with his brother that drove Jacob.

Bethel was in the North so there was no geographical reason for Jacob to go through the territory farmed by Esau. They might have

never bumped into one another again, but Jacob had other reasons for taking this route.

Jacob had to face in full the long account he had run up with his brother so many years before. It is always that way. God cannot possibly bless us with spiritual blessings until we face our trespasses and put right, where it lies within our power, the wrongs we have done. God's dealing with old guilt in Jacob's life reminds us He will deal with it also in ours.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:23-24), Jesus said that if you are on your way to offer sacrifice to God, but then remember that your brother has something against you, that first of all you go and are reconciled with your brother. Apologize; make restitution; humble yourself before him and beg his pardon, then go on and worship God.

That is exactly what Jacob was doing here. The fact that Jacob was thinking like this shows us that his twenty years working under Laban had not been a spiritually barren time. Jacob had grown. Pleasing God was more important to him than twenty years earlier when he had left the Promised Land.

As Jacob started to move out toward Canaan, God commissioned some of His angels to go and meet Jacob and his family and to encourage them; telling them that they would be with them (Genesis 32:1-2).

Even after the promise that angels would be with Jacob, you still see some of the old Jacob, because he began scheming and planning again as he tried to think of ways to overcome Esau's fiery rage. Before he could hope to live in peace and prosperity in the Promised Land, he must do something about Esau.

Jacob Tried Negotiation    Genesis 32:3-8

Jacob sent messengers to meet Esau and to tell him two things:

First, they were to tell Esau where Jacob had been for the last twenty years. He has been with Laban.

Then, second, they were to tell Esau of Jacob's wealth with his flocks and servants. He is not bragging, but he is letting Esau know that he is not returning to Canaan as a beggar looking to Esau to provide for him for the rest of his life.

His desire to make contact with Esau and be reconciled to him has no ulterior motives of gain. Jacob wanted to show Esau that he was a changed man and changed for the better.

Notice particularly his language: "My lord" this and "My lord" that; "your servant Jacob" this and "your servant Jacob" that. He is humbling himself before Esau. Jacob takes the servant position. If a soft answer can turn away wrath, Jacob was certainly going to give it every opportunity.

Notice Jacob's new attitude in verse 5: "that I may find favor in your eyes." He was humbling himself before Esau because he had humbled himself before the Lord. He had changed; the old conniver had changed. Grace had made him a new man, and now he is asking Esau that he would show grace to him.

Notice Esau's grim reply:    Genesis 32:6

The reply suggested that Esau had not forgiven his brother for his deceit, that he was still resentful, and that it was payback time. No "Welcome back, brother!", but rather the frightening news that Esau was coming with 400 men. If they drew their swords against Esau, there would be a bloody massacre with no survivors.

What is more, Esau is now on his way to meet him. He had learned by the grapevine that Jacob had arrived in the area and immediately the army had been assembled and the time was drawing near.

II. Jacob Tried Intercession    Genesis 32:9-12

It was the prayer of a desperate man, a man who realized that "it doesn't all depend on me" at all; it all depends on God!

Dividing the people and flocks into two camps was wise strategy. It made it more difficult for Esau to destroy the entire camp (verses 7-8). God expects us to use our common sense in conducting our lives.

If danger is present, He expects us to take due caution.

The point of this passage is that God often uses our circumstances to grow our faith. God grows our faith, not by removing the threat or the trial, but by strengthening us as we face what we fear. Jacob prays in desperation.

What were Esau's purposes in coming to Jacob with 400 men? We won't know in this life whether Esau intended to kill Jacob on the spot, but that then as Jacob prayed, Esau softened on the way. We don't know. Or was Esau already soft to Jacob before he ever crossed the brook? Was Esau hoping for reconciliation, but being cautious?

We won't know in this life, but whatever was the case, in the end it turned out that Jacob's fears were bigger than the reality that he was facing. How often is that the case? Our fears about the health of our loved ones, the sale of our house, the termination of our jobs and so on – our fears about such things are often bigger than the reality of what is to take place. All things work together for our good.

Jacob reminds God of His covenant faithfulness. He even reminds God that He brought him there and now he is facing an army because of doing His will.

Verse 10 is one of the greatest statements ever recorded of Jacob. It gives great honor to the grace of God, for it says Jacob recognizes that all his blessings are a result of the grace of God. Jacob did not believe he merited even the “least” of God's blessings. That should be the attitude of us all.

In verse 10 we see the Providence of God. Twenty years before he had come that way with nothing but a staff in his hand and now, in the providence of God, he had become a wealthy man; not because he deserved it. On the contrary, God had given him both enrichment and enlightenment far beyond anything he could have thought.

In verse 11 Jacob asked for God's Protection. Jacob could imagine his camp turned into a killing field, strewn with the dead. He could see Rachel dead, Leah dead, the slave-wives dead, Judah dead, Joseph dead. He pleaded the protection of God from the violence of Esau.

In verse 12 Jacob pleads the Promise of God.

### III. Jacob Tried Conciliation Genesis 32:13-23

After praying, Jacob got busy putting together a gift for Esau. Prayer does not eliminate our work and service. Prayer is not done so we can sit and do nothing while God does it all for us. That God would put on Jacob's mind a gift that would help “appease” (verse 20) Esau can be just as much an answer to Jacob's prayer as if God performed a miracle to stop Esau.

Jacob prepared: 200 she-goats and 20 he-goats; 200 ewes and 20 rams; 30 camels together with their colts; 40 cows and 10 bulls; 20 donkeys and 10 donkey colts. The total of the animals was 580.

Then Jacob separated the various classes of animals into five droves and sent them off to Esau with respectable distance between each. He wanted to keep bringing before Esau his sincere hope of reconciliation. Jacob sacrificed much of his own wealth for family reconciliation and peace.

The principle of the appeasement lay behind the trespass offering. The word “appease” means to cover or atonement. It is hope for acceptance. If a man wished to get right with God, then he must necessarily get right with the person he had wronged. He must make restitution and add more than he stole.

Jacob is not sending people ahead thinking that they would get wiped out, and that he would be spared. In fact Jacob probably thought the other way around, that by sending the others in droves ahead of him, he hoped he could spare those people. Esau had no argument with them, and he would face Esau's wrath alone.

It was both caution and courage that Jacob would cross the brook Jabbok at night. The Jabbok is about 30 feet wide and at most about hip-deep. There was greater possibility of Esau attacking them in the middle of the brook in the day than in the night.

It also took courage, for it meant that Jacob was proceeding on to meet Esau and his 400 men. Jacob would not run; he would face Esau. It was the path of obedience which God has ordered.

Jacob is growing in his faith and he has come a long way. That is what God wants of us!

## WRESTLING WITH GOD

### Genesis 32:22-32

Let me introduce you to two boys. These two boys are brothers; in fact, they are twin brothers. But they are nothing alike. The name of one boy is Jacob. If I were to compare him to someone in our day, it would have to be Richard Simmons. He was a mommy's boy. He liked to cook and hang around the tent. But he was a con artist, a trickster, a deceiver, one who trips people up.

Even at his birth, his brother, Esau, was going to be born first, but Jacob grabbed his brother's heel, trying to trip him up so he could be born first. When Esau was born and they saw Jacob holding to his brother's heel, they called him Jacob, or heel snatcher.

The other brother, Esau, was right the opposite from his brother. If Jacob could be compared to Richard Simmons, Esau could be compared to Arnold Schwarzenegger. He was big and strong; a man's man! He loved to hunt wild game. He was an outdoors man. He was called Esau because he was covered with red hair.

Some 20 years before we come to Genesis 32, Esau came in from hunting one day and he was exhausted and hungry. Jacob had just made some stew. When Esau asked Jacob for some of the stew, Jacob said that the only way for him to get any of his stew was to sell him his birthright, which meant that Jacob would get the blessing of the first born instead of Esau. Because he was so hungry, Esau agreed.

Later, as Isaac, the father of Jacob and Esau, was old and nearly blind and thought that he would soon die, he called for Esau and asked him to go deer hunting and bring him some venison, cooked and prepared just the way he liked it and afterward, he would bless him as the firstborn. Rebekah, the mother of the boys, heard what Isaac had said to Esau.

While Esau was hunting, Rebekah told Jacob to kill one of the penned-up kid goats, put the skin of the goat on his arms, hands and neck and the smell and the hairy feel would make his father think it was Esau and he would get the blessing from his father. The trick worked, but when Esau found out what happened, Esau went into a rage, said he would kill Jacob, and Jacob ran for his life.

Jacob ran as far as Bethel. It was night, so Jacob found a flat, smooth stone to put his head on for a pillow, and laid down to sleep for the night on the rocky ground. That night Jacob had an encounter with God through a dream.

That night he dreamed of a ladder that reached from Heaven to earth with angels descending and ascending between Heaven and earth and God Himself standing at the top of the ladder in Heaven. It was there that Jacob experienced God for the first time and became a true believer in God. God promised him the covenant blessing and promised him that he would always be with him.

Jacob journeyed on to Haran where he would meet and fall in love with Rachel. Laban, Rachel's father, was a con-man like Jacob and the two of them spent 20 years trying to out fox each other. After 20 years, Jacob has two wives, two maidservants, eleven sons and huge flocks. It was then that God told Jacob to take all that was his and go back to Canaan.

Jacob and all that he has now comes to the brook Jabbok; and it is night.

Jot down this phrase by Jacob's name – “unfinished business.” Long years ago Jacob had cheated his brother. Long years ago he had caused the break-up of his family. Although there were 20 years of hard times since he ran from his brother, Jacob has grown rich and prosperous, He left penniless, but he returns a man of means, of influence, of substance. There was only one nagging detail from his past that still haunted him – Esau.

Now that Jacob has come home, he has to face his brother. And Jacob is worried. Read Genesis 32 and you will know why he is worried!

Several days earlier Jacob had sent messengers to meet Esau with gifts and a message of peace and reconciliation, but here is the report they brought back: “We went to meet your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you – and 400 men are with him!” How would you feel?

Unfinished business. Most of us know all about that.

- Maybe it was a broken relationship that you thought time would heal.
- Maybe it was an unkind word you said and you hoped the person would forget about it.
- Maybe it was a promise that was not kept, a job unfinished, a task left incomplete, a lie that you hoped would never catch up with you, a sin that you hoped would never be uncovered, or a betrayal you have to face up to.

Mark it down. Sooner or later you and I have got to go back and confront our past. We've got to face the people we've hurt. We've got to come clean about our mistakes. We've got to own up to what we did. We can't just go through life hurting people left and right. Life doesn't work that way.

We have a conscience and memories of the past that float back to condemn us, and maybe fears of what will happen when it all catches up with us. What is your unfinished business?

There is The Setting; now I want you to see:

## II. The Solitude Genesis 32:24

Jacob has had one encounter with God at Bethel. Every one of us need to experience that first encounter with God where we receive Christ in salvation and become His child. However, many never go beyond that experience. They get saved and that is as far as they go. They never seem to produce anything for the glory of the Lord. While we must have a Bethel experience if we

expect to go to Heaven, we also need a Jabbok experience if we ever hope to be useful to the Lord.

Notice the phrase: "Then Jacob was left alone." "Alone at last!"

God has at last gotten Jacob exactly where He wants him. It's just Jacob and God. Everyone else is on the other side of the brook. Everything that was dear to him was on the other side of the brook and Jacob was by himself without possessions, without wives, without family. Now God is ready to speak to Jacob.

When was the last time God spoke to Jacob in a deep way? Twenty years earlier – at another point of crisis – when he was fleeing from Esau. Back then he was scared to death, and he was all alone. Twenty years later, he is still fleeing from Esau, but this time there is no place to run and hide. And in that desperate moment of loneliness, God begins to deal with Jacob.

The greatest problem God has with most of us is getting us to slow down long enough to hear His Voice. We're constantly going through life in high gear. God's great problem is getting us alone to have our undivided attention. I've been in homes where they have two TVs and a radio on at all times because they can't stand the silence.

So what does God do? If we won't slow down on our own, He'll step in and slow us down; with a midnight phone call, or a visit to the emergency room, or a family crisis, or a financial crisis. Or a thousand other crisis that breaks into our little routine and forces us to stop what we're doing and begin to listen to God.

That's what's happening to Jacob. There's unfinished business and God needs to speak to Jacob, so God kicks away every prop holding up Jacob and he is left alone with the unfinished business and with God. **JACOB MUST FINALLY FACE UP TO HIMSELF!**

You and I were born alone and one day we will die alone. One by one we will breath our last. One day a box that fits one body only will be lowered alone into a narrow grave. We are individuals in the sight of God, we will die as individuals in the sight of God, and we will stand at the bar of God's judgment as individuals.

### III. The Struggle Genesis 32:24

What Jacob experienced is what Bible students call a Theophany – a pre-Bethlehem appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hosea 12:3-5 makes this clear.

What a strange scene. Jacob is alone with his thoughts when a man suddenly appears before him. Who is He? Jacob doesn't know and the man isn't saying. Suddenly the man grabs Jacob and begins to wrestle him to the ground. Jacob fights back desperately, thinking it might be a bandit or possibly an assassin sent by Esau. On and on they wrestle – grabbing, struggling, rolling in the dirt, always aiming for some advantage, looking to pin the other man to the ground. Do they talk to each other?

Hours pass as neither man is able to gain an advantage. Wrestling is a demanding thing. It is a physical, emotional, mental, and , yes, a spiritual thing. Wrestling means resistance and struggle. It is power against power, strength against strength, endurance against endurance. This is winner take all.

Hours pass as neither man is able to gain an advantage. Jacob is exhausted but he dare not stop or show any sign of weakness. What time is it? One o'clock passes, then two o'clock, then four o'clock. Sunrise is not far off.

Notice that we are told that "a man wrestled with Jacob;" not Jacob challenged the man. God took the initiative! God started it!!! And it lasted all night long – six or seven hours!

Why did the wrestling match take place at night? First, the darkness would hide the identity of the adversary. Jacob would have recognized His authority and power if he had seen Him in the daylight. Then, night is particularly associated with self-examination. It is the time fear grips a person.

At this point in time, Jacob represents the fleshy nature of man – our old sinful nature that is constantly fighting against the Lord. Our old natures are stubborn, unyielding, fighting and self-sufficient. That is everything the saint of God should not be.

The fact is, many of us are just like Jacob! We fight the Lord at every turn in our lives. God will tell us something is wrong and the old nature rebels against the Lord's truth.

Do you constantly find yourself fighting against the Lord? How long have you been wrestling with God over something? Maybe a salvation decision, maybe a sin problem, maybe a family issue, maybe yielding to God's will about something?

### The Submission Genesis 32:25-28



You cannot wrestle with a man and stand six feet from him. You have to get right in there and come to grips with your opponent, and the quicker you get in and do that, the better your chances of survival and victory.

To be a good wrestler you need courage and concentration and energy.

Jacob was in the grip of God's relentless grace. Like Jacob, we may not realize at first who we are wrestling against. We think we've struggling with problems or hurts or failures, but really, it's God.

Jacob would not yield so God touched the hollow of his thigh, the hip joint, and knocked it out of joint and he was crippled. The purpose of wrestling is not so much to hurt someone, but to make them say "uncle" or "I give up" or "I surrender."

With just a lite touch, God dislocated his hip and disabled him. A wrestler depends upon his thigh. Every throw that a wrestler uses is a throw that centers around the pivot of his thigh. If you want to destroy the power of a wrestler, injure his thigh, and he is finished.

But the Lord used an outside force. He used His omniscience to dislocate Jacob's thigh. Did God win unfairly by using supernatural power?

Sometimes it seems that God is unfair in the way He treats us in allowing us to go through hard times or when life crumbles around us. Is God unfair? And the answer comes from the Almighty, "My child, I'm not playing by your rules." He is willing to do things in your life that may appear to you to be unfair. His ways are not our ways.

The one True, Living God doesn't play by your rules or mine. That is why things happen in your life that on the surface appear to be unfair, but God is never unjust or unrighteous in anything He does. Our Lord who sees the end from the beginning accomplishes His own great purpose, even when it appears to us to be unfair.

Who but our God can we always count on to do what is right? Let me tell you something else that seems unfair to us. It seems unfair to us that God made His Holy Son, who is blameless of any sin whatsoever, that God would make His Son sin and to judge Him as sin for us in His death and that He would see us as righteous and cleansed by His blood.

So, in Jacob's losing, he won. The same is true of us. In losing, we win!

The Lord asked Jacob, "What is your name?" Jacob had been asked that question before by his father and he said, "I am Esau, your firstborn."

"Jacob, are you ready to admit who you are? Are you ready to face up to yourself?" That's the hardest thing for us to admit. "I am just an old sinner saved by grace."

Then our Lord gave him a new name, Israel – Prince with God.

The Song Genesis 32:26b, 29

"I will not let you go unless You bless me... And He blessed him there."

What is the blessing of God? It is not some high "feel good" thing. That's what folks think of so often. How much "feel good" was there when Jacob wrestled with the Angel? Nor is it some high emotion. Then what is the blessing of God?

It is a new assurance that when we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins. It is the Lord's word coming to us, edifying, educating, correcting us, instructing us in righteousness, making His way clear to us, encouraging us. It is that deep fellowship with Him as He conforms us into His image.

Genesis Genesis 32:31-32 – Jacob calls the name of the place Peniel – "The Face of God." In the darkness Jacob wrestled with God and in deep fellowship has seen the face of God.

Job wrestled with God and he shared the result of being blessed by God – Job 19:25.

God wants us to experience His blessing – Numbers 6:24-26

God's blessing will be experienced by every redeemed saint of God – I John 3:2

We will see Him as He IS; not as He was. On earth He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but we shall see Him as He is, transfigured and glorified.

## HEALING THE HURTS OF THE PAST

### Genesis 32-33

Jacob has just wrestled with the Angel of the Lord all night. He was tired; he had had no sleep the night before; and now it was early the next morning.

As Jacob went over Jabbok, his wives and children saw him coming, but there was something different about him. He was limping. His attitude and spirit and speech were different. He was a broken man now, but he was also a blessed man and a man with a new name and a new nature now in control.

Genesis 33 is the account of the meeting of Jacob and Esau. The story is told from the standpoint of Esau rather than that of Jacob.

#### I. How Esau Found Jacob Genesis 33:1-3

Esau had come up from Edom with 400 men at his back. If there was any renewed hostilities with Jacob, Esau was ready. Of course, Esau knew nothing about Jacob's angelic escort and nothing of Jacob's encounter with the Lord the night before and nothing of Jacob's changed heart. He didn't know if Jacob had more tricks up his sleeve or not.

I don't think Esau was expecting what he saw in his twin brother, Jacob.

##### A. He Found a Cautious Jacob Genesis 33:1-2

Jacob put the more expendable ones up from where they would be first to meet any hostile intent on the part of Esau. That would give the others, especially his beloved Rachel and Joseph, a chance to get away.

That blatant favoritism of Joseph could not have done much to defuse the hatred the other brothers were generating toward him.

##### B. He Found a Courageous Jacob Genesis 33:3a

Jacob was no coward. He "passed over before them." That is, Jacob went on ahead of them, putting himself in the place of danger.

In the modern Israeli army a strict code of courage is enjoined on all officers, all of whom must take commando training. The words "Forward March!" have been expunged from the Israeli military vocabulary and have been replaced by the words "Follow Me!" In the Israeli military code, unless an officer is prepared to put himself up front, in the place of danger, he simply does not qualify to command other troops. Thus Jacob put himself up front. It was the act of a courageous man.

##### C. He Found a Contrite Jacob Genesis 33:3b

What a scene it must have been. There was Esau, a wild, hairy man sitting on his swift Arab horse, gazing down at his brother. There was Esau's escort, a band of unruly ruffians such as Jacob had not seen all his life. There was the little group of wives and children, still arranged as Jacob had placed them, looking with scared eyes, first at Esau and then at Jacob.

But watch Jacob. He would take a few paces and bow, take a few more paces and bow again. Jacob looked like a cork on the waves, bobbing up and down; bowing and scraping, bowing, and advancing and bowing again.

#### II. How Esau Forgave Jacob Genesis 33:4-11

Genesis 33 is a great commentary on the reconciliation of brothers. If you have offended a brother or sister, it is useless to go to him or her with a contentious spirit or in a spirit of self-justification. The way to come is with a readiness to amend the hurts and in a humble and contrite spirit. That spirit disarmed Esau on the spot, and he forgave Jacob fully, freely, and forever.

Which is more difficult? To forgive or to be forgiven? You could argue either way.

If you say it is more difficult to forgive, you are right. When you forgive someone, you are doing at least two things:

1. You are Choosing to overlook the pain of the past.
2. You are Choosing to give the offender another chance.

Or you might say that it's more difficult to be forgiven. In which case you would be absolutely correct, because whenever you decide to be forgiven, you are doing at least three things:

1. You are admitting your guilt.
2. You are accepting forgiveness.
3. You are implicitly agreeing to a new course of action.

Which is more difficult – to forgive or to be forgiven? That all depends on your point of view – and whether you are the offender or the victim.

One thing we can agree on: Whether you are forgiving or being forgiven, the goal is always the same – Healing...Reconciliation...Reunion...Restoration...Tearing down the walls that separate us.

Remember that back in Genesis 32:9-12 is the first recorded prayer of Jacob.

1. First, he recalls the promise God made to Isaac and to Abraham (verse 9).
2. Then he confesses his unworthiness (verse 10).
3. Then he declares God's undeserved goodness to him (verse 10).
4. Then he prays for deliverance from Esau (verse 11).
5. Then he states his fear that the mothers of their children will be attacked (verse 11).
6. Then he reminds God again of His promise to bless him (verse 12).

Jacob's prayer is one of honest humility and deep trust in God.

Then Jacob offers gifts to Esau to turn away his anger (32:13-28). This is a classic example of propitiation – which means “to turn away wrath by offering a gift.” Husbands do this all the time when they stop to buy flowers when they are coming in late from work.

There is nothing wrong with that. Propitiation is the whole idea of giving a gift to turn away wrath. Propitiation is one of the Greek words used to describe the death of Christ (Romans 3:24-25; I John 2:2). By His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus “turned away” the wrath of God.

After the introductions of the wives and children, Esau asked, “What do all these animals mean?” Jacob very clearly says, “I give them to you to buy your favor.” Esau says, “I have enough animals, keep them yourself. You can't buy my forgiveness.”

Let me pause to talk about a problem that many people have with this passage and with God. When you look at these two men, Jacob and Esau, Esau is the finer person in so many ways. Esau seems generous, likeable, noble, more willing to forgive than Jacob is to be forgiven. Jacob looks and acts like a guilty man. Esau is the one who runs to meet Jacob and throws his arms around his neck.

Robert Laidlaw gives this explanation: “A Christian is not different by DEGREE from the non-Christian, he is different in KIND, just as the difference between a diamond and a cabbage is not one of degree, but of kind. The one is polished, the other is crude; the one is dead while the other is alive. Therefore the one has what the other has not in any degree whatsoever—life! And such is the difference God sees between a Christian and a non-Christian.

That is the essential difference between Esau and Jacob. As a man, Esau was a far more open, honest, out-going person than Jacob. He was a very fine fellow, but he was spiritually dead. Jacob was a natural-born schemer and a man with many glaring faults, but he had spiritual life. It was a difference of KIND, not DEGREE.”

Which one was the son of promise? Jacob

Which one was chosen by God? Jacob

Which one knew the Lord? Jacob

### III. How Esau Favored Jacob      Genesis 33:8-11

Esau said, “What are all of the animals for?” Jacob said, “These are to find grace in your sight. Years ago I cheated you, Esau. I deeply regret it now. I would like to make restitution. I want you to know that my regrets go far deeper than mere words.”

At first Esau refused the trespass offering, but later he received it. In the East, the acceptance of a present is the equivalent to a bond of friendship, and Jacob wanted to make sure that his old guilt would never be raised again against him.

Notice the difference between the two men. Both men said, “I have enough,” but Jacob made mention of God and Esau did not; Jacob had a testimony and Esau had nothing.

### IV. How Esau Frightened Jacob      Genesis 33:12-20

Even though Jacob is saved and God's chosen, he is still both Jacob and Israel. There is one final deception. Esau offered to accompany Jacob, offering him the courtesy of his PRESENCE (33:12-14) and his PROTECTION (33:15-16).

Esau begs Jacob to come with him to his home in Seir. Jacob reluctantly agrees and promises to follow him to his home, but when the time comes, Jacob goes west to Succoth.

What's going on here? Jacob's old nature comes to the surface again and causes him to deceive Esau one more time. Think about it. Even after forgiveness and after reconciliation; after the gift has been accepted and the hugs and kisses; after all that, and with the best motives, Jacob still can't quite believe that everything is okay between him and his brother. So he tells one final lie and goes on his way.

We don't know why Jacob did as he did. Perhaps he feared being together would risk a revival of their rivalry. The truth is there are some people who can be better friends if they don't see them more than once a year.

Esau will make a brief appearance for Isaac's funeral (Genesis 35:29) and in his genealogies (36), but that's all.

Jacob goes to Succoth. There he worships God, praises Him for His goodness in bringing him and Esau to restoring their relationship. There he builds an altar.

## **BRUTAL BEHAVIOR**

### **Genesis 34-36**

After the wrestling match between the Lord and Jacob, God instructed Jacob to go to Canaan. Jacob crossed the brook Jabbok where he met Esau and the two brothers were reconciled. Jacob promised Esau that he and his family would follow him to his home in Seir, but Jacob deceived Esau again and did not keep his word.

You would think after Jacob's great encounter with the Lord where God changed his name from Jacob (Deceiver) to Israel ("Prince with God" or "he struggles with God"), that Jacob would fully obey the Lord, but not so. Instead of going to Canaan, Jacob stopped just short of the Promised Land and settled in Succoth. Jacob was still a man who did things his own way. For this, Jacob and his family would pay dearly.

Jacob did not go to Bethel as God had commanded, but in half-way obedience, settled in Succoth, built a house for himself and sheds for his flocks and herds. Jacob, being a pilgrim, was suppose to live in a tent as heirs of the promise (Hebrews 11:9).

As a result, God is not once mentioned in Genesis 34 and Jacob remains silent throughout the chapter, silent, that is, until the very end when it was too late. Jacob seems to have lost all control over the behavior of his children. When we disobey the Lord, we put ourselves and our loved ones in danger.

These chapters before us are filled with "Brutal Behavior."

#### I. The Causes of the Brutality    Genesis 34:1-4

There was only one girl among Jacob's children, Dinah, the daughter of unloved Leah. Leah's children, as compared to Rachel's were less favored by Jacob, and Dinah appeared to have been of little interest at all to Jacob. This, coupled with the fact that Jacob was not where God wanted him to be geographically or spiritually, left her particularly vulnerable. And so, here in Shechem, young Dinah was pushing the boundaries when she "went out to see the women of the land" (verse 1).

Girls of marriageable age were not permitted to leave the tents of their people to go about visiting without a chaperone. In fact the Hebrew term "went out" bears a sense of that which is not proper. Likely she went out behind Leah's back. And the worst happened! Dinah became the victim of violent rape.

Jacob was also to blame. Why would he allow his daughter such freedom in such a place? Perhaps he just had no idea who Dinah's friends were. A young person's peers very quickly become the most important opinion-makers in his/her life, and peer pressure, once established, is very strong.

Three words describe the aggravated rape and the progression of "brutality – Took (seized) her...lay with her...defiled (violated or humiliated) her." Look at the nature of the crime: Defiled (verse 2, 13,15); grieved and very angry (verse 7); disgraceful thing which ought not to be done (verse 7); and treat our sister like a harlot (verse 31).

The young prince claimed he loved her and wanted her for his wife, but committing violent rape and keeping the girl confined in a house (verse 26) was a strange way to declare his love. It's doubtful that he could distinguish lust from love. At least the young prince proposed a proper marriage.

But unlike the case of Amnon's rape of Tamar when afterward Amnon despised his victim, "so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her" (2 Samuel 13:15), Shechem became consumed with Dinah and his brutality was transmuted to tender affection.

## II. The Conspiring for the Brutality Genesis 34:5-24

As shocking as Dinah's rape was, we are equally as shocked by Jacob's none response. Some say that Jacob didn't respond because of fear. All of his sons were in the field and he could do nothing by himself. But when his sons came in from the fields and heard what had happened to Dinah, the boys acted themselves because they knew their father would do nothing.

But consider Jacob's passionate love for Joseph and Benjamin and his distress at their misfortunes. The truth is, Jacob never cared for Leah, and his attitude trickled down to her daughter and six sons. That's one reason Leah's less-loved sons would be at the forefront of selling his favorite son, Joseph, into Egypt.

Here Jacob's callous indifference toward Dinah and her brothers fueled his sons' fury (verse 7). The sons considered the rape of Dinah as a crime against Israel as a people, which it was.

Notice the pagan proposal: Hamor and young prince Shechem addressed Jacob and his sons without apology. This was a little matter for which they believed that they had a reasonable and generous solution that Jacob's family would like. BUT, they were careful not to mention two things: first, what Shechem had done to Dinah; and second, that they had had Dinah held in Shechem's house (verse 17, 26).

Notice 34:8-10 "No hard feelings. Let's all get married and be one happy family" – a thing Israel could never do. Hamor's offer was an economic appeal – property in Canaan, grazing rights, the freedom to travel and dwell anywhere. In other words, Hamor promised what God had promised Israel. It was a shortcut to the Promised Land!

Two brothers of Dinah took over the negotiations – Genesis 34:13-24.

The brothers said, "You're offering the wrong kind of currency. We won't do business that way. We are evaluating the wrong done to us not in terms of riches, but in terms of religion. You have done far more than defile our sister; you have dishonored and violated our religious convictions. We have no intention of marrying our sister to a pagan no matter who he is. Before we can consider a marital alliance with you people, you must accept our basic religious premise. You and all your clan must be circumcised. Apart from that there can be no further discussion. However, if you will accept our terms, we will accept yours."

That was the subtle dishonesty of Simeon and Levi. They had not the slightest intention of allowing Shechem to marry Dinah. What they really wanted would become only too plain before long.

I would point out that only two of Dinah's brothers would be involved in this massacre plot – Simeon and Levi:

- Reuben, the eldest, was the least murderous of the brothers, being the one who later convinced the others not to kill Joseph, but to sell him into slavery (Genesis 37:21-23).
- Judah's lack of participation remains a mystery, especially since he would show himself as immoral in the Tamar affair (Genesis 38:12-26).

Simeon and Levi pretended to seek peace with their neighbors and offered to do business together and to even intermarry. All that the men of Shechem had to do was agree to be circumcised.

The Canaanites saw this policy as an opportunity to absorb Israel and gradually possess their wealth and their people, but Jacob's sons used it as a means to weaken the men and get them ready for slaughter. Never suspecting the danger, the men of the city submitted to the surgery.

## III. The Casualties in the Brutality Genesis 34:25-31

On the third day after all the men of the city had been circumcised, these two cold and calculating brothers attacked the Shechemites, killing Hamor, his son, and all the males of the city. The third day after being circumcised would leave the men the most painful and the most incapacitated. The two brothers would go from house to house, shoving screaming wives and children aside and hacking their helpless victims to death. Then the blood-soaked brothers led their trembling sister out of the wailing town.

Then the remaining brothers swooped in like vultures descending on lifeless corpses (Genesis 34:27-29). Then they looted the city and took captive the women and children. It was an evil thing to do, and when Jacob heard about it, he was both angry and frightened. But during his lifetime, since he had done his share of scheming and fooled his father, he couldn't rebuke his sons without incriminating himself (verse 30).

By their deception and ruthless destruction, the two sons ruined Jacob's testimony before the people of the land. What good was it for Jacob to build an altar and worship the true God before his pagan neighbors if his children were going to act like pagans?

But there is also the abuse of the holy. Circumcision, Israel's most cherished symbol of faith, had become a tool of inhumanity. The desecration of the covenant sign as a means to gain revenge to the murder and plunder of a town, were crimes deserving condemnation.

In Genesis 35:16-20 we are told of the death of Rachel as she was giving birth to Benjamin.

In Genesis 35:27-29 we are told of the death of Isaac at age 180. Both of his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him.

## **Joseph: Favored Son, Hated Brother**

### **Genesis 37:1-11**

Joseph is one of the most Godly and one of the most gracious characters in all of the Word of God. Most of us know the story of Joseph well, but let me refresh your memory about some truths we find in Joseph's life.

Joseph is one of only two men, other than the Lord Jesus, that nothing negative is recorded in scripture. The other man was Daniel. Both Joseph and Daniel displayed the wisdom of God, both men interpreted the dreams of their Kings, both could not be compromised, both were jailed for their obedience, and both were made vice-regents of their adopted realms.

Nearly every person mentioned in the Bible has his or her dark side revealed. Noah got drunk after he was delivered from the flood. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all lied to save their hides. Moses committed murder. David was guilty of adultery. Peter cursed and lied. John the Baptist doubted Jesus. The pages of the Bible are filled with the sins of the people mentioned on its pages.

Joseph's name means "Jehovah has added." He lived 110 years and there is not a single sin attributed to him.

- Joseph endured trials and afflictions that most of us cannot even imagine and no where does the Bible ever hint that his faith in God wavered.

- Whether he was in the pit, the palace, or the prison, He was the same man.
- Hardships did not harden his heart. Riches and power didn't corrupt him.

A.W. Pink found over 100 ways Joseph is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- He was beloved by his father and obedient to his will.
- He was hated and rejected by his own brethren and sold as a slave.
- He was stripped of his robe. He was sold for silver. He was slandered and lied about.
- He was elevated from the place of suffering to a powerful throne.
- He was hated misunderstood, falsely accused, mistreated, and suffered unjust treatment, yet he never complained and he never compromised! There is not one recorded black mark on his character.

One of the greatest aspects of Joseph's life is how clearly the hand of God is seen in his life. Two things about God is seen throughout Joseph's life. The sovereignty of God and the Providence of God.

- God's sovereignty refers to God's ownership, His authority and His control. Our God is a big God and God is in control of everything. The story of Joseph is about God working His will through everyday events of life. There are no miracles, but God makes things happen. God's hidden hand arranges everything without show or explanation or violating the nature of things. God is involved in all events and directs all things.

The providence of God refers to God's execution of his plans perfectly in our lives. God took the darkest events and used them as stepping stones to move Joseph into position. Even when Joseph couldn't understand what God was doing, the Lord was still at work. God had been arranging the situation even when it seemed he was far away.

Genesis 39: 2,3,5

- 2 The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3When his master saw that

the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything that he did, 5From the time he put him in his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.

Genesis 45: 5,7

- 5 But don't be upset and don't be angry with yourselves, because you sold me here. God sent me ahead of you to save many lives.<sup>7</sup>But God sent me ahead of you to keep some of you alive on earth. He sent me here to save your lives by an act of mighty power.

Genesis 50: 19-20

- 19 And Joseph said unto them, "Don't not be afraid. Do you think I'm God?
- 20 You planned to harm me. But God planned it for good. He planned to do what is now being done. He wanted to save many lives.

In every event in the life of Joseph, God was busy fulfilling- Romans 8:28

Three things I want you to see as we begin our study of Joseph

## I. Joseph's Times

If anybody had bad beginnings, it was Joseph. His was a dysfunctional family. We are told that our backgrounds, especially in our early years, will determine how we will live.

To a certain degree we are all products of our upbringing. We are told that the influences of the home will determine how we will turn out. Thankfully, that is not true in every case. Joseph blows that theory out of the water. Joseph spent his formative years in a home marked by sin, sadness, strife and struggles. Yet, Joseph became a great man of God and was used of the Lord in tremendous ways.

### A. Jacob's Marriage

Joseph's father, Jacob, fell in love with a beautiful girl named Rachel. He promised her father, Laban, that he would work for him seven years if he would give him his daughter to be his wife. At the end of the seven years the weddings took place, but Laban and Leah tricked him. Leah, the plain looking sister, was substituted for Rachel. In the dark and with the veil covering her face, and maybe too much wine, Jacob couldn't tell the difference until the next morning. Jacob confronts Laban who agrees to let Rachel marry him in exchange for seven more years of work. Notice that Jacob didn't have to wait seven more years to marry Rachel, he only had to wait a week, but he had to work seven more years to fulfill his promise- Note Genesis 29:25-30.

In the meantime God opened Leah's womb. She gave Jacob seven children - six sons and one daughter, Dinah. But Rachel was barren. There was great tension and jealousy between Leah and Rachel. When Rachel couldn't have children she gave Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, to have children in her place. She produced two sons for Jacob. Not to be outdone, Leah gives Jacob her handmaid, Zilpah as wife, and she produces two sons. Now Jacob has ten sons and one daughter, but his beloved wife, Rachel is still barren.

- God in His providence hears Rachel's plead for a son and God opens her womb and Joseph is born. Then tragedy struck. Rachel died giving birth to her second son, Benjamin.

Tragedy strikes again. The only daughter, Dinah, is raped by the man of Shechem. Jacob is passive and did nothing about the rape of his daughter. Since Jacob did nothing to avenge the rape of Dinah, two of her brothers, Simeon and Levi tricked the man of the city and eventually killed them all. Jacob was concerned, not with his son's actions, but how their actions would make him look in the eyes of the town's people.

Another tragedy takes place. Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, committed incest with Bilhah, the wife given to Jacob by Rachel.

- Joseph's older brothers were all wicked and self-centered men. Jacob was a passive father who allowed them to do as they pleased with no correction.

Can you imagine a seventeen year old boy growing up in that kind of atmosphere of murder, rape, incest, treachery, jealousy, death and hatred? You could think a boy like that wouldn't stand a chance in life. But God was with him!

## II. Joseph's Test

Three times in Genesis 37 we are told that the brothers of Joseph HATED him (Genesis 37:4,5,8) Why? Because of his:

### A. Distinctiveness

Two things we are told: Joseph's father played favorites among his sons and Joseph was a godly, easy to raise young man, while his brothers were evil.

The brothers hated Joseph first of all for his purity. Purity was a keynote in Joseph's life. Purity always brings blessings and honor from God, but it also produced trouble and suffering from the ungodly. Every time you see Joseph, he is doing the right thing. Purity, integrity and a desire to do the right things at all times marked the life of Joseph.

Notice that though Joseph was Jacob's favorite son, Joseph was not permitted to sit around the camp in idleness but was put to work "feeding the flock with his brethren" While he was working with his brothers, what his brothers were doing so shocked Joseph that he came and told Jacob. This caused problems between Joseph and his brothers.

- This was not tale bearing or gossip, as some have accused Joseph of doing. Tale bears have a habit of telling the wrong person and telling evil things only to those who will spread evil, not stop it.

- Joseph had a responsibility to his father. Whatever his brothers were doing, it involved the flocks of Jacob; and it involved his good name in the area. He needed to know what his sons were doing. It would have been wrong for Joseph not to tell his father.

#### B. Dress- Genesis 37: 3-4

Favoritism had become a generational sin in Jacobs family. Remember, Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob and Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau and Jacob loved Rachel and her children more than Leah and her offspring.

- Jacob probably couldn't help his feelings of favoritism because Joseph was the son of Rachel, his deceased and never-forgotten first love, and Joseph had been born late in life. Add to that that Joseph was a Godly young man while his half-brothers were wicked.

Giving Joseph that coat of many colors showed all of his children that Jacob loved Joseph more than all of his other sons. Reuben had forfeited his rightful place as firstborn because of his sin of incest with Bilhah. The other nine were no better.

- Don't think of this coat of many colors as making Joseph look like a peacock walking toward the brothers. The Hebrew word means simply a tunic reaching to the extremities. Imagine a long white linen robe extending to the ankles and wrists, and embroidered with a narrow stripe of color round the edge of the skirt and sleeves, and you will have a fair concept of this famous coat.

- Now we can understand the envy of his brothers. This sort of robe was worn only by those who didn't have to work for a living. All working men wore short, colored garments that did not show stain or hinder the free movement of the limbs. That's the kind of garments Joseph's brothers wore. They had to wade through swamps, climb up hills, carry wondering sheep home on their shoulders, fight with robbers and beast of prey, but the robe Joseph wore declared he was free from such hardships. Their reaction was predictable. They hated Joseph. Truth is that Jacob did this to his own son. Showing a child favoritism or partiality does the child no favor.

Favoritism in a home is deadly. Each child longs for love from their parents. Even when children are grown, they still want approval and affirmation from their parents. How many would love to hear their parents say, "You know I'm proud of you."

- Some children feel inferior because they are step children. Others feel less valuable because they don't make high marks in school. Others feel like they can't measure up to what their parents want them to be or they feel like a disappointment. You can feel this way if you are an only child or if you are one of many.

- If you feel that way, let me tell you that God loves you!

#### C. Dreams Genesis 37:5-11

We can argue about whether Joseph should have shared the dreams with his brothers, but the fact remains that the dreams were a message from God and they were literally fulfilled in their lifetime. Joseph was given a clear vision of God's plan for his life and a great sense of purpose for his life. Joseph held on to those dreams and they sustained him through some trying times. When God births a dream in your heart, let nothing take it away.

#### III. Some Truths

Let me tell you how to build a dysfunctional home:

- Be less than truthful with one another
- Be jealous of other family members



- Demonstrate favoritism to your child
- Practice deception so you can get your way
- Operate outside of the will of God
- Live a life of anger, manipulations and control

Let me make some suggestions on how to convey your love to your children:

- Look for the praiseworthy attributes in your children and then spotlight and celebrate those traits. Talk about and be Proud of who God made your children to be and what they do well.
- Affirm a love that is unconditional and not based on whether or not your child produces. Get on your child's team and get off their backs.
- Be alert to the sensitive areas in your children and be careful not to attack them in those areas.
- Strive to be consistent from one child to the next.
- Tell your child often that you love them.

Which course are you on? Are you following the ways of the brothers or will you follow the example of Joseph?

## The Heartbreak of Shattered Dreams

### Genesis 37:12-35

Have you ever had your dreams shattered? I'm talking about Godly dreams. Maybe God has planted a dream or a desire in your heart to do something for Him and then some circumstance came that made it impossible to fulfill the desire of your heart.

- I think of King David. It was the desire of his heart to build a temple for the Lord. He thought about it, dreamed about it, even planned to build it, and talked to a prophet about it who told him to go through with his plans, only to have the prophet come back to him and tell him that God said, "No, you must not build Me a temple, for you have been a man of war and have shed blood". How disappointed David must have been.

God had given Joseph two dreams that both promised him the same thing: he would be a great and powerful ruler and that even his brothers and father would bow before him.

- Many bible students have suggested that Joseph revealed the dreams to his brothers that showed his ego or as a "in your face" kind of statement, and telling the dreams rightly provoked the brothers and his father.

- I believe it was very important for the dreams and the message of the dreams to be made public, for had Joseph not declared his dreams, then the fulfillment of the dreams would have had little or no significance in the minds of his family. But telling about the dreams as he did made the fulfillment of them a great vindicator of Joseph's person and of God's power.

If these verses teach us anything, they teach us that life can seem incredibly unfair at times. They teach us that our dreams can be put to the test. They teach us that life doesn't always go like we think it will. But these verses also remind us that even when our dreams are shattered, God is still in control. If God gave the dream to begin with, He is able to guarantee that it will become a reality.

#### I. Jacob's Demand- Genesis 37: 12-14

As rich as the pastures of Hebron were, they were not sufficient to support the great flocks and herds of Jacob. The sons were forced to drive the animals to the land of Shechem. Shechem would be a dangerous place because it was there that their sister, Dinah, was raped when her two brothers, Simeon and Levi had murdered the entire village to avenge their sister's rape.

- It was a 50 mile trip to Shechem or about a five days journey away. They had been gone for sometime and Jacob had not heard from them, so he was uneasy.

- We can understand Jacob's concern for his sons, but it's hard to understand why he would send Joseph to find them, dressed in his special coat, when he and Joseph both knew how provoked they were at Joseph.

## II. Joseph's Devotion Genesis 37: 13-17

Joseph obeyed without hesitation. He knows the risk, but his obedience was immediate. When he got to Shechem, his brothers nor the flocks were there. Joseph met a man who told him that his brothers had gone to Dothan with the flocks. Dothan was another 14 miles further North; that would place Joseph 65 miles from home and from his father's protective care.

When Joseph gets to Dothan, the bottom falls out from under him, but not the net of God's care.

## III. The Brother's Depravity Genesis 37: 18-30

### A. The Brother's plot- Genesis 37:18-20

One of the brothers noticed a figure approaching and the gait was familiar. They knew it was Joseph and he was wearing his special coat, and his father was not with him. There they were in the middle of nowhere, away from anyone who could witness their actions. It was then that they began to plot together what they would do. What they felt in their hearts was the equivalent of murder. Though they didn't actually kill Joseph with their hands, some of them had done the deed many times in their hearts.

- The brothers didn't have to be tempted to do harm to Joseph; all they needed was the opportunity, and it wasn't long in coming.

Which brother first suggested that they kill him? They said to one another, "Here comes that dream expert; let's kill him." Would they beat him to death? Or should one of them simply cut his throat?

### B. Reuben's proposal- Genesis 37:21-25a

Joseph would have been ruthlessly killed and his body thrown into some pit where no one could find him if it had not been for the merciful pleadings of Reuben, the eldest brother.

- Reuben tells the other brothers that they should not kill Joseph, but just throw him in a pit in the desert and let him die of starvation and thirst. Of course, Reuben is planning to rescue Joseph when the other brothers are not around.

On his dying bed, Reuben's father, Jacob, is going to describe Reuben as being like water, totally unstable. He is weak and vacillated from one position to another. If he had been the strong brother he should have been, he would have stopped the plot right there and corrected the other brother's thinking. He would have taken a stand for right.

- Have you ever been in a situation when you have taken a stand on some moral situation, suffered for doing right, and then had someone come to you afterward and say, "You were right in what you did and I admire you for it." But they did not stand with you when you needed it, when it might have made a difference.

Joseph's abuse is described as a brutal assault in verses 23 and 24.

- "They stripped him" is a term used to describe the skinning of animals. Like a pack of dogs, the nine brothers were upon him, ripping his coat from him and likely his remaining clothing, finally dumping him like a dead body into a pit so deep that he could not climb out.

- We get more details of what happened to Joseph in Genesis 42:21. This was a rough beating. Each one wanted to get his two cents worth in on Joseph. Joseph would fight for his life. He would beg them to stop; tell them that what they were doing would kill their father, and they would not hear.

So callous were they that they "sat down to eat," likely from the goods that Joseph had brought to them from their father. The brothers laughed and joked and feasted while they listened to the pitiful cries and pleadings of Joseph. I wonder if Joseph thought of the dreams God had given him while he was in the pit.

### C. Judah's plan- Genesis 37:25b-28

Apparently, Reuben had to leave and go elsewhere and while he is gone, some Midianites merchants pass by. They are heading to Egypt to sell their wares. Egypt was big in the international slave trade.

- Why not sell their brother? It would be an easy way of disposing of him. It would save them from killing him and having blood on their hands. So they sold him as a slave for the equivalent of nine dollars.

### D. Reuben's Panic- Genesis 37:29-30

When Reuben returns to find Joseph gone, he panics because he knows his father will blame him.

## III. Jacob's despair- Genesis 37:31-35

These brothers conspire together to deceive their father. They take the despised coat and dip it in the blood of a goat and take it home to Jacob.

- That coat has been at the heart of the story. The robe began in deep love. Then it is torn in deep hate. Now it is the main tool for a deep deception.

There is no compassion for their father in their words. They bring the bloodstained coat and they ask him to identify it. Jacob recognizes the coat and immediately assumes his son is dead.

- As tragic as this deception was, Jacob was reaping what he himself had sown. Years before, he had killed a kid in order to deceive his father; and now his own sons were following in his footsteps.

- Unwilling to confront their father personally, the brothers sent a servant to Jacob to show him the evidence and tell him the lie that they had concocted.

These hardhearted men revealed their hypocrisy by trying to comfort their father in his grief. Not a single one of these cowards had the courage to stand up and tell Jacob the truth.

- In the end, their father was in better shape than they were. He lived every day with grief; they lived every day with guilt. The knowledge of what they had done ate at them until they faced Joseph with the truth years later.

- That's the power of guilt! It will eat at you until the problem is dealt with. The best thing you and I can do with our wrongs is to make them right if we can. We need to apologize to people we've offended and restore what we have taken. We need to get honest about our sins. That is the only way to get rid of guilt ( 1 John 1:9, Proverbs 28:13).

## The Ugliest Chapter In The Bible

### Genesis 38

Genesis 37 introduced us to Joseph. He is seventeen years old when we meet him; the first son of Jacob and Rachel. He is the favorite son of Jacob and is given a coat of many colors. Joseph is also a dreamer and between the coat and the dreams, he becomes hated by his brothers. Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers and when he gets to them they strip him of his coat, throw him into a pit, and later sold him to Midianite merchants and they are going to sell him as a slave in Egypt. The brother soaked Joseph's coat in the blood of a kid and Jacob thinks his son is dead and their father refuses to be comforted because of Joseph's death. We would expect to read next about Joseph in Egypt, but not so. God interrupts the story of Joseph with another story that, seemingly, has nothing to do with Joseph.

Instead, God used a brilliant literary device to heighten the tension in the story of Joseph in Egypt. It helps create a growing concern of his plight. "What's happening to Joseph?"

- Genesis 38 is "a meanwhile back at the ranch" kind of device. You know, the heroine is tied to the train tracks, and the train is chugging nearer and nearer and at that precise moment the director of the film takes the audience somewhere completely different, maybe back to the ranch where her sweetheart cowboy is rounding up the cows. The filmgoers are left on the edge of their seats, wondering how the heroine can escape death on the track.

Well, why is this story here? Let me give you a couple of reasons:

1. To offer us a look at the providence of God. God is always in charge of things. He is working things out, maybe behind the scenes arranging events that we don't understand, but that further His purposes. For example, God wanted Joseph out of Canaan and into Egypt and we have seen how God got him there.
2. To show how the genealogical line runs all the way from Abraham to Jesus Christ, going through Judah, Tamar, and through their son Perez. Judah's name appears in the most important genealogical records found in Matthew and Luke. (Matt 1:3; Luke 3: 33-34)
3. That God should pick a man like Judah and make him a prince in Israel and then send His own Son into the world from Judah's line is nothing less than a miracle of grace.
4. Genesis 38 provides a dark backdrop against which we can measure the character of Joseph. Joseph's life, even in some challenging situations, is one of impeccable integrity. He maintains his purity and holiness. He has a forgiving spirit. Judah and his brothers, on the other hand were murderers, adulterers, and hypocrites. Judah willfully married an unbeliever and willfully sinned against God.

Genesis 38 is one of those Chapters of the Bible rarely read in public, for it contains the record of deeds of darkest shame. The story is so ugly that most children cannot understand it. This story is so nasty that most parents have not told it to their children because of kinds of sins that these people committed. I want to be careful not to tell you more than you need to know.

Three things I want to share with you:

#### I. The Sons of Judah Genesis 38:1-10

Joseph had been sold into slavery. It was Judah who suggested that Joseph be sold to the Midianite traders who were on their way to Egypt. Judah had pocketed his share of the loot, a paltry two pieces of silver. He looked day by day on his aging father's inconsolable grief until he could take it no more. He departed from his brothers, went to a foreign country, spent time with pagans, and there fell in love and married a Canaanite woman.

- All Jacob's sons had long known that both Abraham and Isaac had warned against marrying the daughters of the Canaanites. Judah, Jacob's fourth-born son, now occupied the place of birthright by virtue of his older brother's sins (Genesis 34; Genesis 35:22). He knew full well that he must not marry a Canaanite, but he did so anyway.

- Judah and his Canaanite wife had three sons who became the scourge of his life.

The Bible says that Judah's oldest son, Er, was so wicked the Lord had to kill him. (Genesis 38:7). Sometimes when people read a phrase like this, "and the Lord slew him," they say, "How brutal of God to slay a man for being wicked. But they fail to realize that a man can become so wicked, it is actually an act of mercy for the Lord to put him out of his misery. When the Bible talks about the sin unto death (1 John 5:16), it is not referring to a single sin, but rather to a life of sin. There comes a time when the Lord will put such a person out of his or her misery, and in so doing, protect others. You see, the problem with wickedness is that it is contagious. Wicked people draw other people into their depravity. So the Lord in His wisdom and mercy, deals with the problem decisively.

God had given His people a law called the "levirate marriage law (Deut 25:5-10). It was one of 34 O.T. laws which has its beginning in the book of Genesis. If an older brother died before having a child to continue the family name, it would be up to the next oldest brother to marry the woman and produce children. We don't know what sins Er committed to deserve divine judgment, but Onan's sin was his refusal to raise up a family to perpetuate his dead brother's name. The tense of the verbs in verse 9 indicate that when Onan went into his dead brother's wife, he would interrupt the act so she could not have a child. This repeated refusal to obey God displease the Lord, and God killed him as well.

At this point, Judah only had one son left, and he wasn't old enough to marry. Judah must have thought that Tamar was a black widow. Two of his sons were dead because they married Tamar, he thought. So Judah put off Tamar, the widow of two of his sons, saying, "Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up (11). But actually Judah had no intention of giving Shelah to her. "Lest he also die just like his brothers"(11). Judah believed Tamar was responsible for all that had happened and was sort of a lightning rod for God's wrath.

#### II. The Sins of Judah Genesis 38:11-24

Tamar knew that Judah's youngest son had grown up, but had not been given to her in marriage and that Judah had no intention to do so, so she crafted a plan. It was about this time that Judah's pagan wife died. Knowing the kind of man Judah was, she discerned that when he was comforted (v-12, meaning that the week's mourning was past), he would seek some female companionship. Tamar took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil, and sat in a place where she knew Judah would walk by.

It was sheep-shearing time, the time when all farmers and ranch hands threw a wild party. By the way, the place of the party was in Timnath, the place where Samson found his Philistine wife. Tamar disguised herself as a temple prostitute and when Judah propositioned Tamar, she seized the opportunity to produce a child for her departed husband.

Judah asked, "What is your price that I may come in unto you?" She said, A kid from the flock." Judah said, "I don't have any money on me right now, but I'll pay you later." Tamar said, "How do I know you'll come back and pay me? What will you give me that I can hold until you come back?":

- Judah was ready to give Tamar his most personal items, which declared his personal identity- in modern terms, his license and social security number. His "signet" was not a ring, but a cylinder carried around the neck on a cord, and it was printed with the distinct marks of the individual. The bracelets Judah gave her were probably similarly distinctive, and even the staff usually carried an identifying mark. Tamar kept them as evidence.

Tamar went home, finally pregnant with the heir she craved. Judah sent someone with a goat to her for payment, but she was long gone. Perhaps he thought that was the end of the story. He was wrong.

### III. The Seed of Judah Genesis 38:24-30

Three months came and went, and the incident faded completely from Judah's mind. Then came the startling news: Tamar is pregnant! When Judah heard the news, he said, "Bring her forth and let her be burnt!"

- Talk about a hypocrite! Talk about a double standard! The only difference between him and Tamar was that Tamar was a woman and he was man; that Tamar had been caught and he had not. "Let her be burnt!" Here was a golden opportunity to get rid of a woman he had come to dread and dislike. "Let her be burnt!"
- They drag her from her house and down the village street. "Hold everything," she cried. "I have a confession to make. I should like to name my partner in crime. I have the evidence right here!" Notice Genesis 38:25. What a breathless moment as Judah was forced to own that each item was his. His sin had found him out.

Then he said, "She is more righteous than I." "This immoral, pregnant woman is more righteous than I". He vindicated Tamar.

Then comes the bizarre moment some months later when Tamar has twins in her womb and she is in labor. The first child is about to be born and puts his forearm out and the midwife ties a scarlet thread around it, and immediately the hand returns inside. It is his brother that come out first. God determines who is esteemed in his sight. According to the midwife, Zerah was the firstborn, but God can choose whoever He wants, and it is Perez, and from Perez Christ will be descended. So, even though great wickedness, the line of Christ is preserved.

Here is the lesson I want you to see: People do change. When Judah publicly admitted his moral failure, he took a giant step in becoming what God wanted him to be. In fact, Judah would develop remarkably during the years leading up to Genesis 44, where Judah would act as a righteous man before Joseph, pleading for the welfare of Benjamin and offering his life as a pledge to save his little half-brother. For Judah, the effects of his deep sin, plus the example of others, plus the hidden hand of God, had been at work, so that at the end of his father Jacob's life, Jacob would confirm that from Judah would come the Messiah. By God's grace Judah had become the man God wanted him to be.

The same can be true of you and me. If we will let him, God can change us into the men and women he wants us to be. It may well begin when we admit and confess our sin before God and allow Him total control of our life.

### **The Lord was with Joseph Genesis 37:36;39:1-6**

When we left Joseph, he had been betrayed by his own brothers who sold him as a slave to some Ishmaelite merchants. They sold him for the price of a crippled slave! The Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt and put him up for sale in that land.

Try to put yourself in Joseph's shoes for a moment. You are seventeen years old. You are the favored son in a family of twelve sons. Your father has chosen you to be the head of the family and has given you a beautiful robe to symbolize this fact. You are on the path to power, influence, and prominence in your family.

Then in a moment of time, everything changes. You are sold as a slave and carried off to a strange land. Imagine the humility of being examined and sold in a slave auction. Imagine the lies Satan must have told him.

What will Joseph do? Will he become bitter? Have you become bitter when people you know well have treated you badly?

Would he turn away from God because he feels God has abandoned him. Will he get his feelings hurt and stop serving God because the circumstances seem unfair? I've known folks who have.

Joseph never thought he would be in this position. He never thought he'd be treated this way. He always had a positive outlook on life. He had a gracious spirit about him and always tried to do the right thing. Why this? He had such grand plans for his future!

- How about you? Did you have different plans for your life? Did you have different ideas about what you would be doing or where you'd be living or who you'd be married to?

Look at the grace of God! Five times in this chapter we are told that "the Lord was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2,3,5,21,23); and again in Acts 7:9, Stephen says that God was with Joseph.

- That is not a reference to God's omnipresence. The face of the Lord was turned towards him in a favorable way. God drew near to him like a loving Father in his hour of need. God took special note of him. God never puts his servants where he is not and where he cannot keep them.

- What was true for Joseph is also true for us. For Joseph, we have the words on the page assuring us that God was with him. But we have the living Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, who's name is Emmanuel, "God with us." God was with him, and that is grace.

Joseph chose to dwell on the character of God rather than on the pain of injustice.

Let me show you some ways that God blessed Joseph.

#### I. God Protected Joseph- Genesis 37:36

It seemed that all had fallen apart for Joseph; yet, if you will take a minute to examine the facts, it becomes clear the Joseph was in the hand of divine providence. How do I know? Because too many things "just happened" to fall in place for him. Consider:

1. The intervention of Reuben- Genesis 37:21-22. He persuaded his brothers not to kill Joseph.
2. Judah's idea to sell Joseph as a slave- Genesis 37:26-27
3. The Appearance of the Ishmaelite traders- Genesis 37:28
4. The fact that he was sold to Potiphar- Genesis 37:36

Potiphar is called "the captain of the guard". He was like the head of Pharaoh's secret police. In that position he would have been in contact with many dignitaries and public officials of Egypt to whom Joseph would have been introduced.

God set everything up just like it needed to be so that Joseph arrived exactly where he needed to be at the exact moment he needed to be there.

- Joseph might have been a slave, but he was safe in the arms of divine providence. While the events of Joseph's life appeared to be out of control, they were actually being controlled by God. You see, Joseph was being protected by the Lord.

#### II. God Prospered Joseph- Genesis 39:2-3

When Joseph arrived in Egypt, he no longer had his coat of many colors, but his character was very much intact! His master saw that there was something special about Joseph. He was a man of integrity. He was faithful. He could be trusted. He had good work ethics.

- This was not just "good luck". Luck had nothing to do with Joseph's success. Joseph prospered because God saw a man who could be trusted to do his will.

What I want you to see here is this: Joseph was in a bad situation, but he still lived a life that was blessed by the Lord.

- Just because you are going through trials and problems does not mean that God is not blessing you. You might not see Him moving in your life, but just trust Him and in His time, He will show you what He has done in your life.

#### III. God Promoted Joseph-Genesis 39:4-6

Potiphar, the pagan Egyptian, saw something different in the life of Joseph. Joseph didn't have to blow his trumpet and tell Potiphar what a great believer he was. The life he lived proclaimed the glory of his God and Potiphar saw for himself the influence of God in the life of Joseph. The touch of God on his life opened the door for Joseph to share his faith with Potiphar.

The same thing ought to be said about us. The life we live should be different from those around us- Matt 5:16.

If we are faithful in the small, the slave task, God will be able to trust us and promote us to greater service.

God used the sorrows of Joseph's life to shape him into the man he desired him to become. A.W. Tozer once said, "It is doubtful that God ever used anyone greatly without first hurting them deeply."

We want to be used by God, but we don't want the heartaches that often comes first. I'm afraid we can't have one without the other. They seem to go hand in hand.

Here is a final word of encouragement. No matter how hard the way of life becomes, if you are saved, the same thing that was said about Joseph is true about you.

"The Lord was with him." We do not face trials alone. We do not walk through the valleys alone. Every step we take we are in the

path of divine providence and God is in the business of protecting us, prospering us, and promoting us for His glory!

## Fatal Attraction: The Test of Purity

### Genesis 39:7-23

Ten years have passed since we first met Joseph in Genesis 37. He was seventeen years old when his brothers sold him into slavery; now he is twenty seven.

What a roller coaster Joseph has been on. It seems that Joseph was always someone's favorite- first his fathers, then Potiphar's, and now Potiphar's wife. But being the favorite also brought him problems. His brother's hated him and sold him as a slave. From that low position as a slave he came back up to a successful servant, then he came down again as an accused felon and is now imprisoned as a criminal. But Moses assures us eight times in two chapters that "the Lord was with him." In all that happened to Joseph, he remained a man of faithfulness and integrity.

- Joseph had suffered in a pit because of the hatred of his brothers, but now he would face an even greater danger and the pit of prison because of the lust of an evil woman. "For a harlot is a deep pit, and a seductress is a narrow well" (Proverbs 23:27, NKSJV).

Joseph was tempted. Temptation is inevitable part of our fallen world. We cannot escape it. And there is not a single person who has ever lived except Christ, who has not yielded to temptation at one time or another and suffered the consequences.

Temptation wears many faces:

- There are material temptations, or the lust for things. It may be something as big as a house or as small as a ring. It might be as bright and dazzling as a brand-new Lexus or as dull and dusty as an antique roll-top desk. All of us have felt the burning passion of lust for things.

- There are personal temptations, or the lust for fame or power or control over others. It might be as simple as lust for a title, like "CEO" or "doctor" or "boss". Now there's nothing wrong with those titles unless your heart and motivation is wrong.

- Then there is sexual temptation, or lust for another person, or in reality, lust for another person's body. It is a desire to have and enjoy that which is not one's own, either legally or morally.

Since Joseph is engaged in a battle with sexual temptation, I want us to see how he faced his temptation and how he gained the victory over it.

#### I. The setting

Joseph had been a faithful son when he was at home with his father, Jacob. He had been a faithful worker when he tended his father's flocks. He was a faithful servant when he was sold to Potiphar. Because he had been faithful, God blessed everything he did.

That speaks a word to us today. God wants us to be faithful. He expects no less from us as He did from Joseph. Let's not disappoint Him.

Joseph's work and faithfulness didn't go unnoticed. He advanced to Potipharr's personal attendant and then to overseer. And in promoting Joseph, Potiphar became the unwitting beneficiary of the promise made to Abraham- "I will bless those who bless you" (Genesis 12:3). The more favor he showed Joseph, the better things got for him. Joseph became manager of all Potiphar's affairs except for his food and his wife.

Genesis 39:6 adds that "Joseph was a Godly person and well favored"(KJV). Other translations say that "Joseph was handsome in form and appearance."

- He was handsome, extraordinarily handsome. It was in the genes. The same phrase is used of his lovely mother, Rachel. Only three other men in the Bible are called handsome- Saul, David, and Absalom. Being physically good-looking and well-built can be both a blessing and a curse. It can bring great temptation. It did for Joseph.

#### II. The seduction of Joseph Genesis 39:6b-9

Joseph was tempted because he was tempting. A man who committed adultery with a number of women tried to excuse his actions by saying, "But you don't understand, women are attracted to me. They often make the first move."

## A. The Power of Temptation

Look at this temptation:

### 1. It was a Surprise Temptation

Often temptation comes when we least expect it. It catches us by surprise. This temptation came on the heels of a big promotion. It would do us well to remember that we are never more vulnerable to temptation than when we have just enjoyed a great victory. When we have been a part of a great victory, we seem to feel like we can do anything. In those moments, temptation and failure are more real than ever.

### 2. It was a Sustained Temptation

There wasn't simply one proposition that could be brushed aside, but regular propositions that came day after day. She no doubt gave Joseph certain looks and subtly words, hinting to him that her offer was still open. Many who resist temptation at first will yield in the end. Their resistance is broken down by persistence. But Joseph continued to resist her temptation.

### 3. It was a Secret Temptation

No one would know except her and Joseph. She would not tell, for to do so would mean her life. Our enemy is a master at setting things up. He will make sin look so innocent and easy. He will make it seem that we are fools to refuse him. There was no physical reason why they should not or could not commit adultery. The only thing that stopped them was Joseph's integrity.

### 4. It was Sensible Temptation

It was a temptation to fulfill a natural and legitimate need. God made us sexual beings and many believe they have the right to satisfy their sexual desires in any way they choose. God has a different opinion. Any sexual expression that takes place outside the boundaries of the marriage relationship is either fornication or adultery. Either one is a sin against God, your spouse, your future spouse or yourself.

Mrs. Potiphar was surely a beautiful woman. Egyptian women were renowned in that day for their physical beauty. Surely she would have appealed to the male in Joseph. And had he given into her advances, no doubt it would have been an enjoyable experience.

- However, Joseph was interested in more than simply gratifying his flesh. He was determined to be faithful to God regardless of the personal cost. It was a decision he made long before he arrived in Egypt, and it was a decision he was determined to stand by. Joseph had some convictions and he had drawn himself some boundaries.

## B. The Power Over Temptations

Let me give you and me some suggestions on how to handle temptation:

### 1. Deal with temptation Immediately

Nip it in the bud! Don't underestimate the power of temptation. There are those who say, "I would never.." and then they yield.

- We have a tendency to get as close to sin as we can before we get away from it at the last minute. But the longer we wait to say "No", the harder it gets. Instead of acting decisively, we flirt and we see how far we can go without getting into trouble. How foolish. The moment we do that we give the devil a foothold.

Romans 13:14

### 2. Deal with Temptation Ruthlessly

Joseph tried to avoid any contact with her. He didn't go looking for trouble. Joseph was smart enough to know that no matter how strong he was, he couldn't constantly invite temptation without putting himself at risk. If you know that something will be a situation that will tempt you; stay away! "He who would not fall down should not walk in slippery places!"

Strength is not merely in the ability to resist temptation; true strength lies in refusing to go where you know temptation will be.

I read a story of a man who saw a rattlesnake on a snow-covered mountain. He started to kill it, but the snake said; "I won't bite. It's too cold for me to bite. Put me inside your coat and take me to the valley where I can be warm and live." When he reached the valley, he pulled the snake from his coat and the snake bit him. The snake said, "Why do you look surprised? You knew I was a rattlesnake all along." How often we flirt with sin and then yield and suffer the consequences. We know it was sin all along. The best time to eliminate a rattlesnake is when it is still an egg, before it hatches.



Dr. Ed Young: "The best safe-guard against sexual affair is the first time you sense there is the slightest spark of chemistry between you and a member of the opposite sex, put up boundaries then and never allow yourself to be alone with that person."

### 3. Deal with Temptation Realistically

Joseph gave Mrs. Potiphar some good reasons why he would not yield to her temptations.

A. It was a violation trust. Potiphar trusted him and was so kind to him. If he yielded to her, his credibility would be gone. His character would be destroyed.

B. It was a violation of marriage. She was married and that settled the issue. It was not even open to debate.

C. It was a sin against God. Immorality is wrong. He would obey God's law. He would not bring shame and hurt to his God.

### 4. Deal with temptation decisively. Joseph said "no" and he meant "no!"

### III. The Steadfastness of Joseph 39:10-12

Self-control is an important factor in building character. There are times that fleeing could be a mark of cowardice, but there are times when fleeing is evidence of courage and integrity.

2 Timothy 2:22- "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

1 Corinthians 6:18- Flee sexual Immortality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immortality sins against his own body.

This is the second time in his life that Joseph lost his coat; but as the Puritan preacher said, "Joseph lost his coat but he kept his character."

### IV. The Scandal against Joseph Genesis 39:13-20

Mrs. Potiphar was in the habit of getting what she wanted. There was a struggle as Joseph sought to free himself. She didn't get Joseph, but she did get his coat.

Mrs. Potiphar was a skilled liar. She immediately began her work of injustice by slandering Joseph. In her vengeance, his coat gave her ammunition to attack him.

- Her tongue revealed the kind of woman she was. Her tongue was a tool of the devil and she used it effectively against Joseph. She even tells Potiphar that the attack ( which never happened) was his fault because he brought Joseph there.

Here is a great warning. We must be careful about believing the accusations made by the ungodly of the godly. We can't trust the mouth of corrupt people to speak the truth. They will lie about anything! Joseph is framed!

Notice 39:19 Who was Potiphar angry with? Joseph? I don't think so. Himself? Maybe. Mrs. Potiphar?

- Surely, Potiphar could see inconsistencies in her story. For instance, why would Joseph have left the incriminating garment when he fled? Hadn't Joseph proven himself to be a faithful servant who was above reproach year after year?

Most of us would defend ourselves and declare our innocence. There is no record that Joseph opened his mouth. Sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes defending ourselves against injustice and false accusations do more harm than good.

### V. The Secret of Joseph Genesis 39:20-23

Sometimes when you do right, things go wrong. It happened to Joseph when he carried provisions to his brothers and they threw him in the pit. It happened to him again when he refused Mrs. Potiphar's temptations.

As far as we know, Joseph was never cleared of the charges made by Potiphar's wife. The only ones to clear Joseph's name are those who read the Bible.. And God!!

I suspect that one look at Joseph's face told Potiphar all he needed to know.

Often when we try to do right and are treated unfairly and unjustly, we say, "What's the use? I've been faithful and still trouble comes. I might as well give up and quit on God."

But Joseph was faithful; and in verses 21 and 23 we are told that "the Lord was with Joseph." Joseph's Lord is our Immanuel, "God with us."

Verse 22 tells us that Joseph found favor again in prison. In God's providence, He always works in our best interest.

## **Godly Detours**

### **Genesis 39:20-23, 40:1-15, 23**

Of all the road signs that causes us to groan, none causes louder groans than detour signs. You're driving along a familiar road and suddenly you come upon a sign that says, "Detour." You half-way want to ignore the sign and go on down the familiar road. And sometimes you go on down the road anyway, only to find that the sign was right, so you have to retrace your steps.

Detours are often rough, uncertain, and always an inconvenience yet, if we fail to take the detours, we are headed for danger.

Christians meet spiritual detours. We are going along the road of life and all of a sudden, God puts a detour sign in front of us.

Three things I would say about spiritual detours before I get into the heart of the message:

#### 1. Detours are necessary

James 1:2 "Count it all joy when (not if) you fall into divers test."

1 Peter 4:12 - Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you'.

Expect trials. God uses trials, detours, and problems to develop our character.

#### 2. Detours are scheduled by God

Psalms 139:16 (LB) "You were there when I was being formed. You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breath. Every day was recorded in your book!"

#### 3. Detours are purposeful in the life of the believer

God is concerned about developing your character. God is more interested in what you are than He is in what you do!

There is a great deal of difference in character and reputation. Joseph had lost his reputation because of the false accusation, but not his character

- Reputation is what others suppose we are; character is what we really are.

Reputation is what men think we are; character is what God knows we are.

I dare say that the test of lost reputation was harder for Joseph to face than the prison cell. One other thing I would point out. Many Bible students believe that Potiphar, himself, was the head of Pharaoh's prison. You remember that I told you that Potiphar didn't believe his wife's story about Joseph. I believe that Potiphar took Joseph from his house (as the head over his house) and put him in his prison so he could be overseer of the prison.

• Note Genesis 39:1 and 40:3-4 "The captain of the guard" Three times in 39:21-23 the "keeper of the prison" seems to be the "captain of the guard."

Ultimately, Joseph is going to be second in command in Egypt. His brothers are going to bow down before him, so God must prepare him for the task before him. He does this through "Godly Detours."

#### I. The Reasons for Detours

##### A. For God's Pleasure

Isaiah 55:8-9 There is vast difference between "My thoughts" and "your thoughts".. "my ways and "your ways". Our human ways are based on what seems fair. We firmly believe that when someone does what is right, rewards and blessings result. When someone

does what is wrong, there are serious consequences, even punishment. But that's "our way" not necessarily God's way- at least not immediately. He has been known to allow unfair treatment to occur in the lives of some absolutely innocent folks for reasons far more profound and deep than we could imagine. Sometimes God allows detours for His pleasure and delight, for He delights to see His character formed in us. He wants to conform us to His image.

## B. For our Preparation

God is preparing Joseph to be prime minister of Egypt. He needs to build some character traits into the life of Joseph. If you were God and you were going to build some character traits into a young man, how would you do it. What tools would you use? God used trials and suffering!

## II. The Riches of Detours

God wanted to perfect five character traits in the life of Joseph

### 1. Humility

Joseph is going to be 30 years of age when he becomes prime minister and he is going to need humility of spirit if he is going to carry out his responsibilities in a godly way. What does God use to build humility in Joseph! Physical suffering.

- Psalm 105:17-20 Genesis doesn't tell us how Joseph suffered in prison, but Psalms does. ( Feet bruised in shackles; neck put in an iron collar (v.19). The Lord was testing him. Few things are more humiliating than shackles on your feet and an iron collar around your neck.

We don't know how long God left him in that situation, but we know He didn't leave him there longer than necessary. God knows our load limit. He tests us just long enough to strengthen us, but not so long as to tear us down.

- Proverbs 24:16 "A righteous man may fall seven times, but he will rise again." Like a "weeble wobble" toy, you may knock him down, but he'll bounce back up. That was Joseph.

### 2. Integrity

Joseph is going to have great administrative responsibilities. He is going to control the food supply and the purse strings of the entire nation. He must be a man of integrity.

### 3. Sensitivity Genesis 40:5-13

Joseph was hurting; yet, he ministered to others who were hurting. He interpreted the dream.

### 4. Courage Genesis 40:16-17

It took courage to deliver the bad message, but Joseph told him the truth.

### 5. Patience Genesis 40:14-15,23

Forgotten! Where was God? He was with Joseph (39:21,23). He never left Joseph. How we respond to disappointment says a lot about our character. With Joseph, he never became bitter or resentful. His trust in God remained strong.

When I think about responding to disappointment, I think about Bob Weiland. Bob Weiland, who had both of his legs blown off when he stepped on a mine in Vietnam, eventually trained himself to lift weights. Four times he won the national bench press competition. But his wins were disputed because the rules required that participants must wear shoes! After four wins, he received a phone call from one of the judges. Bob thought for sure the message would be that they decided to change the rules so that he could legally be acknowledged as the winner. But it was not to be. The decision was to disqualify him for life because he couldn't wear shoes! Rather than become bitter with such mistreatment, he responded, "Whether you give me the award or not, it's ok by me, because the fun was in the journey!"

With Paul, Joseph learned to say, "I have learned to be content whatever circumstance I'm in." God sends detours because He's preparing us.

## III. The Response to Detours

Joseph had no bitterness or resentment. He turned his trials into greater trust of God! It would not be long until Joseph's character would be tested, for he would be prime minister, and would even be over Potiphar and his wife. How would he respond to them?

Corrie ten Boom was giving a message on forgiveness in 1947 to some of the people in Holland who were victims of Nazi brutality.

Her sister, Betsie, had died at their hands. She said, "We must forgive our enemies." At the end of the message, a man that she recognized was coming down the aisle-one of the most cruel guards in the camp. He extended his hand and said, "God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there. Will you forgive me?" She prayed to herself, "Jesus, you forgave me." You said if we do not forgive men of their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses. "Jesus, help me to put my hand in his hand and from my heart tell him I forgive him." She lifted her hand, put it in his hand, and said, "I forgive you, brother! With my whole heart." ("Joseph", Getz p.80-83) Detours come to prepare us.

When a grain of sand intrudes the body of an oyster, it can have two attitudes toward the intrusion: endure it or seek to transform the distressing thing into a beautiful pearl.

## **Joseph: Remembered and Promoted**

### **Genesis 41:1-8, 14-16, 25-33, 39-41**

The last time we saw Joseph he was in an Egyptian prison. He was in prison, but he had broken no laws. He was in prison because he had done the right thing and honored God in his life. He was in prison because he had refused the advances of a wicked woman.

The last time we saw Joseph he was in a place of hardship, but he was still faithfully serving the Lord. Wherever Joseph was, he could be counted on to be faithful to God.

The last time we saw Joseph, he was waiting for outside help from Pharaoh's chief butler. Joseph had interpreted his dream and told him that he would be restored to pharaoh's favor. Joseph asked the butler to remember him when he was restored and do what he could to have Joseph released, for he had done nothing wrong. The butler assured Joseph that he could count on him to do so. But he immediately forgot all about Joseph, 40:23.

For 13 years Joseph had experienced one trial after another. The thing that makes Joseph such an inspiration to us is that he faced the same kind of test we face- AND TRIUMPHED! There was the test of:

- Rejection and Mistreatment by his brothers.
- Humiliation when stripped of his coat and sold into slavery.
- Sexual temptation of a beautiful woman
  - False accusation because he resisted the woman's seduction. Yet, he never defended himself; nor did he try to discredit or defame the woman.
  - Physical suffering; yet, he showed no hint of bitterness or resentment.
  - Depression, when he was forgotten and left in prison for two years without a word from the butler.

Notice the way Moses puts it in Genesis 41:1 "And at the end of two full years." What was going on in Joseph's life during those two full years? Nothing! Nothing that you could see from the outside. But God was working on the inside of Joseph and He was working behind the scenes to accomplish His eternal purpose.

It's amazing how many things God did behind the scenes to make sure His work would go forward.

He made sure that Joseph would become a slave and that he would be bought by Potiphar.

- He made sure that Potiphar's wife would accuse him and that he would be put in prison rather than killed.
- He made sure the keeper of the prison would like Joseph and that he would run into two state officials who would both have dreams that Joseph would rightly interpret.
- He made sure the King would have a dream that no one would know the meaning of and that the one person who knew that Joseph could interpret the dream was standing next to Pharaoh when he called for someone to interpret his dream.

God's timing was perfect. God could have sent the dreams to Pharaoh at any time, but this was His time and so was His tactics. How would God get Pharaoh to listen to Joseph. God had prepared Joseph and now He must prepare Pharaoh to move Joseph from the prison to the place as Prime Minister?

The turning point is about to come in Joseph's life. Three things are involved in his turning point:

## I. The Interpretation

I don't know how often Pharaoh's chief butler dreamed in the two years since his release from prison, but if he dreamed, he didn't think of Joseph who had interpreted his dream. But when Pharaoh dreamed a dream that no one could interpret, God brought Joseph to his mind.

When Pharaoh's wise men couldn't interpret the dream of Pharaoh, the butler approached him and said, "I do remember my faults; my shortcomings, this day." The butler replayed the events for Pharaoh and Pharaoh sent for Joseph.

Notice Genesis 41:14 Egyptians liked clean shaven men. Sometimes the men even shaved their heads. Hebrew men all had beards. The matter didn't make a difference to Joseph, so knowing the traditions of the Egyptians, he shaved both his head and his beard so that there would be no unnecessary offence or barrier between him and Pharaoh.

As Joseph stands before Pharaoh, Pharaoh says, "I have had a dream. No one could interpret it, but I understand you can."

- Listen to Joseph's humility-Genesis 41:16 "Understand, Pharaoh, that I have no ability in myself to interpret dreams. I am the servant of the only true God. God is not only the revealer of dreams, He is the one who ordains the future. He alone knows what is going to happen because He has ordained what is going to happen. Even the mighty nation of Egypt is under the control of my God and not Pharaoh. But God wants Pharaoh to know what He is going to do."

Pharaoh had a dream about cows and corn. The wealth of Egypt were wrapped up in those two things. Joseph tells Pharaoh that the two dreams were one in that they mean the same thing. There will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph did more than give an interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, he also gave wise counsel, telling the King what to do about the coming problem.

### 1. Select a faithful administrator- Genesis 41:33

Pick someone with discernment (one with insight into the situation) and one of wisdom (one who will act wisely to meet the situation).

### 2. Set up regional Administrators- Genesis 41:34

Gather 20% or one-fifth of the bumper crop produced during the good years and save that to be used in the lean years.

### 3. Build large storage places to keep the grain in and put them in the major cities- Genesis 41:35

### 4. Put guards over the storage areas- Genesis 41:35

Of course, this plan did not originate with Joseph. The Lord put it into his heart and he shared his heart with the King.

The point Joseph was making is that God was in control of everything- the weather, the growth of the crops, the birth of the cattle, the salvation of the people in the land.

## II. The Elevation Genesis 41:37-44

Notice Genesis 41:41 Pharaoh put Joseph over all the land of Egypt because he saw gold in Joseph. You might think that Joseph was canvassing for the job, but I don't think so. I don't think he had any idea he would be chosen for that position. Joseph simply offered the wisdom of the Lord to him and it was God who really put him in the position.

J. Oswald Sanders said, "Not every man can carry a full cup." Sudden elevation ruins some folks, because it often leads to pride and a fall.

- Here's the secret of success: In poverty or in prosperity, make sure God is Lord of your life. Be content in both poverty and prosperity.

Notice Genesis 41:42 Pharaoh gave Joseph:

- A robe. Joseph had the robe given to him by his father ripped off of him. He left his slave robe with Mrs. Potiphar. This robe identified him as the ruler of the land and he held on to this robe for 80 years.

- A gold chain. This chain told everyone who saw it that Joseph was a man to be revered and respected. As he rode through the land, a rider would cry out, "Bow the knee!" I think that humbled Joseph all the more and even embarrassed him.

There are at least three reasons Joseph triumphed in the midst of prosperity:

### 1. The training and test he endured for the past 13 years

2. He recognized that God was in control of all that had happened in his life.

3. He was careful to give glory and honor to God for everything.

### III. The Illumination Genesis 41:45-52

The turning point in life comes when you can see where you have come from and where you are going. You see that the events of your life- particularly the painful ones-make sense for the first time. You begin to see that God has been at work in your life even when you didn't realize it.

Remember the poem, "The Weaving"

My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me;  
I cannot choose the colors, He worketh steadily.  
Often times he weaveth sorrow, And, I, in foolish pride,  
Forget He sees the upper, And I, the under side.

Not till the loom is silent, And the shutter ceases to fly,  
Shall God unroll the canvas, and explain the reason why.  
The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand,  
As the thread of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.

God begins from this point to heal Joseph's emotional hurts. Look how He does it. He gives Joseph:

- Freedom: Release from prison and without bitterness and resentment for those who hurt him.
- Respect and honor from the whole nation.
- Success: He is now second only to Pharaoh.
- Understanding: He now knows why God allowed the trials to come in his life.
- A new name (45) Zaph-Nath means "God speaks and lives." Although Pharaoh did not know the true God, he knew enough to see that God had His hand on Joseph's life.
- A wife: Ase-nath. She was the only woman in Joseph's life. Unlike Abraham and Jacob, his marriage was monogamous. Only he and Isaac had only one wife among the Patriarchs.
- She was special to him- supportive, caring, willing to talk with him and listen to him. It had been 13 years since he had an intimate relationship with anyone, and then it was with his father.
- Two sons He gave them Hebrew names.  
"Manasseh" means "to forget". He forgave, for you cannot forget the pain, the sting, or the hurt unless you forgive. Someone said, "Carve your blessings in stone; write your hurts in dust." Only God can do that in your life. Many people remember what they should forget and forget what they should remember.

"Ephraim" means "Twice Fruitful." He was fruitful in his position and accomplishments and in his wonderful family.

J. Vernon McGee called Joseph's two sons Ambrosia (fruitful) and Amnesia (forgotten).

May we produce these in our lives!

## Resurrecting a Dead Conscience Genesis 41:53-54,57;42:18

A little over 20 years have passed since Joseph was sold by his own brothers into slavery. He is now between 37 and 40 years of age. There have been many valleys and trials. There have been many mountain tops and victories as well. The boy has become a man. The slave has become prime minister.

Just as Joseph had predicted, there had been seven years of plenty, and now they are going into the seven lean years and the lands around Egypt are running out of food, including the land of Canaan.

The spirit- directed camera of the Holy Spirit leaves Egypt and zooms in on Hebron in Canaan. Jacob and his eleven boys and their families have run out of food. He turns to his sons and says, “Don’t just sit there until we all die! We’ve heard there is grain in Egypt. I’m going to keep Benjamin with me, but you other boys get down to Egypt and buy us some grain!”

Although it had been over 20 years since they had sold Joseph to the folks going to Egypt, the very mention of Egypt pricked their conscience. As they go down the road in Egypt, they see the slaves working along the road. They must have wondered if one of them was Joseph, or was he dead!

I believe that from the time Jacob mentioned Egypt until the time they stood before the governor of Egypt, who, unbeknown to them, was Joseph, their conscience began to work on each of them.

Let’s first talk about what the conscience is. The dictionary defines conscience as “the inner sense of what is right or wrong in one’s conduct or motives and urges one toward right action.” The conscience is a gift from God to all men and gives mankind the power of moral judgment.

In his book, “The Vanishing Conscience,” John MacArthur says,

“The conscience entreats us to do what we believe is right and restrains us from doing what we believe is wrong. The conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God. It is a human faculty that judges our actions and thoughts by the light of the highest standard we perceive. When we violate our conscience, it condemns us, triggering feelings of shame, anguish, regret, consternation, anxiety, disgrace and even fear. When we follow our conscience, it commends us, bringing joy, serenity, self-respect, well-being, and gladness.”

So, the conscience acts as a rudder for the soul. It is not a guide, but it is an early warning system, which tells us that danger is ahead. When we go against the warnings of our conscience, it punishes us with feelings of guilt, shame, and regret. When we honor the conscience, it rewards us with feelings of peace, happiness, and joy.

Regardless of how it may seem at things, everyone has a conscience. If this is true, then why can some people do the things they do and have no shame, guilt, or remorse for their actions? For instance, how can some Muslims destroy innocent life in the name of their God? How can some women abort a baby with seemingly no remorse?

Listen again to John MacArthur: “The conscience, however is not infallible. Nor is it the source of revelation about right and wrong. Its role is not to teach us moral and ethical ideals, but to hold us accountable to the highest standards of right and wrong we know.”

Thus, the conscience can only react to what it knows and what it has been taught. If the conscience is taught that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is the supreme standard for right and wrong, the conscience will react when there is any deviation from the teachings of the Word of God. If the conscience is taught that Islam, Mormonism, or some other cult is the truth, it will react when those standards are about to be violated. If the conscience is taught that cursing, drinking, and wicked living are right, the conscience will have no problem with those things. Do you get the idea?

J. Oswald Sanders said, “Every conscience needs instruction. Its delicate mechanism has been thrown off balance by the fall. So, correct moral judgments are delivered only when the conscience is correctly aligned with the scriptures.”

That’s why it can be very dangerous to let your conscience be your guide. That might be a good practice if the conscience has been trained in the right way. If, however, the conscience has been given a false standard of truth, it will guide you in that direction and you will be led even deeper into error.

That having been said, the conscience is still a great gift from God. Most people are born with some sense of what is right and what is wrong. This is because God has written His law into the heart of man (Rom 2:15). The conscience has been called “God’s watchdog.”

Joseph’s brothers had long ago silenced their conscience, but God is about to bring to life that which they longed to kill.

The brothers of Joseph had an:

#### I. Abandoned Conscience

Paul gives us some interesting truths about our conscience:

The conscience can be defiled

Titus 1:15-

The conscience can be seared.

As the brothers sold Joseph as a slave and watched his captors haul him away, it must have tugged at their hearts, at least a little. When they lied to their father and saw the grief and anguish on his face, and as they lived with that grief year after year, it must have touched them on some level. But, as time passed, the feelings of remorse and guilt were all but silenced. After a while, they probably thought of Joseph less and less. They may have even come to the place where they believed their own lies. These brothers seared their conscience! They came to the place where their hearts stopped speaking to them about their guilt.

In 1984 an Avianca Airlines jet, flying over Spain, crashed into a mountain. Everyone on board the jet died instantly. When investigators found the “black box,” they were amazed as they listened to the cockpit recording in the minutes just prior to the crash. The plane’s collision avoidance system began to speak to the pilot, warning him of an object that was in the flight path of the plane. The computerized voice of a female speaking English was heard to say, “Pull up. Pull up. Pull up,” over and over again. After a few moments of this, the pilot was heard to say, “Shut up, Amigo!” And with that, the pilot turned off the system. He just ignored the warning, flipped the switch and a few moments later, everyone was dead.

That’s what happens when the conscience is ignored. When we start to do something we know is wrong, the conscience tells us to “Pull up. Pull up.” If we hear the voice and pull up, all is well. If we ignore that voice and do as we please, we begin the process of searing the conscience. The next time, the voice of the conscience will not be heard as loudly or as clearly. If we continue to ignore our internal warning system, the conscience will eventually stop warning us at all.

Every time we ignore the voice of the conscience, we are re-training the conscience. We are teaching it that things which it believed were harmful are now alright. When we do that, we’re headed toward a crash. We need to be very careful how we treat the conscience!

I heard about a family who had an old lab. They kept that dog in their yard and they used one of those invisible fences to keep the dog in. Those things work by inflicting an electrical shock through a collar on the dog’s neck when he gets too close to the fence. Before the dog gets a shock, however, he gets a series of beeps. These beeps are a warning sign that the dog needs to turn around or he’s going to get in trouble. Well, this old dog knew what that fence could do, but if he saw something outside that yard that he wanted, he would still go get it. That dog would back away from the fence, bare his teeth, and start to run toward the fence. Before he got to it, he would start to howl and then run right through the pain. That dog learned that if he ran far enough, he would get beyond the range of the fence, the pain would stop, and he could go where he wanted.

People who ignore the warning signals in their conscience are doing the same thing. They ignore the pain in their heart and keep running until the signal stops. That’s a dangerous game!

Be careful that you do not “sear” your conscience. The word “sear” gives us our word “cauterize”. When a wound is cauterized, heat is used to seal off blood vessels to stop bleeding. The word originally meant to brand. Branding causes a scar and a scar has no nerve endings; it cannot feel! A conscience that becomes seared is a conscience that ceases to feel! Don’t let that happen to you!

## II. Awakened Conscience

God has a way of awaking our conscience; often through hard times. When Jacob mentioned “Egypt” it awakened the son’s conscience. The name of the place pricked their heart.

- Is there a person or place that, just to mention it, pricks your conscience? Maybe you remember some experience or some sin or some offense you caused, and when that person or place is mentioned, your heart is pricked and stirred.

What were these brothers thinking when they saw all those slaves working as they entered Egypt?

Don’t misunderstand what is about to happen here, for this is not revenge on Joseph’s part, but wisdom. One of the tools God uses to awaken our conscience is the Law of Association.

### Gen 42:6-8

When the brothers arrive in Egypt, Joseph recognizes them right away. He had probably been waiting and watching for them to show up. They did not recognize him. Why should they? He is now a man; not a young boy. He had adopted Egyptian dress and appearance. The Hebrews dressed in long robes. The Egyptians wore short ones. The Hebrews wore beards. Egyptian men shaved both their faces and their heads.

“He spoke roughly to them.” They had spoken roughly to him when he was home. We are told the brothers could not speak a peaceable word to Joseph. Again, the Law of Association was being used.

### Gen 42:8-13



The brothers had accused Joseph of spying on them for their father so he could give his father an evil report concerning them.

Gen 42: 14-16

The brothers refused to listen to Joseph's plead; Now he refuses to listen to theirs.

Gen 42:17

Joseph put them in prison for three days. Joseph leaves his brothers alone with their conscience in the quietness of seclusion.

Gen 42:18-24

It's working! The brothers began to take personal responsibility for their sin and guilt. They didn't try to justify their wrong or blame others or make excuses. They said, "We are guilty concerning our brother."

Joseph heard them as they spoke, and he wept!

### III. Alarmed Conscience

At first Joseph said he would keep nine brothers in prison and send one brother back to get Benjamin, but he decided to keep one brother in prison and send nine back home; and to send them back with money in their bag.

Gen 42:25-29

You would normally look upon this money in the sacks as a blessing, but to them the money was like a cobra in the sack. They saw clearly that God was involved! A secret that has remained buried for 20 years bubbles to the surface.

You need to know that if you really belong to the Lord and you have hardened your heart, God will not allow you to remain in that condition forever. He will come and get you and He will use whatever it takes to awaken your conscience. It may take 20 years, but He'll come. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

If we can take anything away from this chapter today, it is the truth that the conscience can be cleansed. IF you have allowed your conscience to become dirty and defiled, it can be restored to purity. How?

#### 1. Confess and forsake all known sin

1. Seek forgiveness and reconciliation for all those you may have wronged. Before we can be right with God, we must be right with our fellow man.

3. Make restitution to those you have wronged if possible.

4. Don't wait to do what you know you ought to do. Do it now!

Your conscience can be like an Albatross around your neck or you can bring your guilt and shame to the Lord and let Him deal with it and make things right.

## Judah Grows Up Genesis 43:1-10

Judah has experience God's training camp. If God is going to put him second in command of all of Egypt, He must teach Joseph some important lessons. God has already used the tool of rejections and injustice in Joseph's life. He was lied about and suffered imprisonment. Then in prison Joseph interpreted the butler's dream and told him he would be restored to his former position. The butler promised to remember what Joseph had done for him and to do all he could to have Joseph released, but once he was out and back in his former position, he forgot about Joseph. It was not until the Pharaoh had a dream about the coming economic situation that the butler remembered Joseph. Joseph said there would be seven years of plenty in Egypt and provisions needed to be made to save one-fifth of the produce for the lean years. The first seven years are now over and seven lean years have begun. Joseph has done well as Prime minister in Egypt. He knows the famine was felt also in Canaan. I think he was waiting and watching for his family to come from Canaan. Ten of his brothers came. Joseph recognizes them, but they do not recognize him. Joseph accuses them of spying and sends them home without Simeon. He tells them they will get no more grain unless they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin with them next time when they come for more grain.

Now we come to Genesis 43:1-10. There is discussion between Judah, the fourth oldest son of Jacob and himself. Judah is trying to convince his father that they have no choice but to return to Egypt, with Benjamin, to get grain. Jacob is afraid his youngest son will be killed if he lets him go, but Judah tells him that he and they will die of hunger if he does not let him go.

What we see in these verses is the rebellious Judah is beginning to grow. God has been using the events in Judah's life to bring him maturity. God uses these events in Judah's life to shape him into the leader he will one day become.

God does the same thing in your life and mine. He desires that we reach a place of maturity in our life.

Eph 4:13-15- until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

2 Peter 3:18- 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Three things I call your attention to:

#### I. Judah's Problems- Genesis 43:3

Let's take a moment to remember what kind of man Judah was.

In Gen 37:26 Judah is the one who talked his brothers out of killing Joseph and into selling him instead.

Gen 37:31-35 Judah was part of the lie that broke Jacob's heart when they told him Joseph was dead.

In Gen 38:1 When Judah sought a wife, he went to the gentiles and married an unbeliever.

Gen 38:7-10 Judah raised two sons who were so evil that God killed them both.

Gen 38:12-16 Judah was a man controlled by fleshly lust. His wife died and he sought female companionship in the bed of a woman he thought was a harlot.

Gen 38:12-23 Judah was guilty of committing incest with his daughter-in-law. She tricked him, but he was still responsible for his actions.

Gen 38:24-30 Tamar, his daughter-in-law, became pregnant through their incestuous relationship, and Judah was so judgmental that he ordered her to be burned for her infidelity. She exposed him for the hypocrite he was. Their relationship produced twin boys, one of whom became a distant ancestor of the Lord Jesus. Matt 1:3.

We look at a man like that and say, "He'll never amount to anything! God can't use a man that wicked." The truth is, God had big plans for Judah. God worked in his life and heart to transform him into a leader among his brethren.

There may be people in this room right now and you are ashamed of your past, and rightly so. But never think for an instant that God can't bless you and use you. If you have been saved and washed in the blood of the Lamb, His precious blood has neglected your past. Every stain has been washed away and you are clean in His sight.

- Praise the Lord that He is the "Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29.

#### II. Judah's Plea Genesis 43:3-7

Judah states the simple truth. They cannot return to Egypt to buy more grain unless they take Benjamin with them. So, he begs his father to allow them to return with Benjamin to buy more food. It's clear that Judah is making spiritual progress. Let me show you why.

- Judah is no longer concerned about himself. His primary focus is no longer what he wants, how he feels, or what he thinks.

- Judah is concerned about the rest of the family. He knows they must have food or they will all starve. He's concerned about the future of the family.

- He was concerned about Simeon. Judah knows they cannot bring Simeon home without going back to Egypt with Benjamin.

- Judah is now concerned with doing things the right way. This has never been a priority before. Up to now, he only cared about

himself. He is finally growing up!

The progress hasn't been over night. It has taken many years and many trials to bring about these changes in Judah. By the same token, the Lord's work in your life and mine has not been accomplished overnight. If we are growing as we should, we are closer Him today than when we got saved. He has been in the process of developing us since we were saved by His grace, and He's not through with us yet!

God has plenty of time and He is willing to do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to accomplish His eternal purpose in us. The Lord's shaping ministry is a powerful thing. It is something every saint goes through. God's desire is to take us like He finds us and then develop us into a vessel of honor for His glory.

### III. Judah's Pledge Genesis 43:8-10

Judah promises to trade his life for Benjamin's should anything happen to the boy. Judah is willing to lay down his life for the good of the family.

- This is a good sign that Judah is truly maturing. He is no longer self-centered, living only for himself. He is emerging as a leader among his brethren.

Soon Judah will bow before Joseph and offer himself as a slave, 44:33. Soon Judah will openly confess his sins before Joseph and make things right with him, 44:16. Soon this self-centered man will humble himself before Joseph and will speak for the whole group, taking blame for their actions.

Do you want to know whether or not you are making progress as a Christian? Do you want to know whether or not you are maturing in your faith? It's real easy to tell! Just look at the place hold in your list of priorities. When we reach a place of spiritual maturity, we will find that we will consistently begin to place others ahead of self.

A sure sign you are still a baby in Christ is when you are still number one in your life. When we grow up, our priorities will become vastly different when we grow up, Jesus will come first, others will come next, and self will come last. If everything revolves around you, you need to grow up.

Years ago, some tourists visited a well known mountain village. They asked one of the locals, "Were any great people born in this village?" The local said, "Nope, just babies were born in this village, but some developed to become great."

The same is true in the family of God. None of us are born great Saints in the kingdom of God. We are all born as little spiritual babies. But what a shame it is when we stay babies.

- Judah grew up, Have you?

## **Be Extra Nice To Folks**

### **Genesis 43:11-14**

Joseph's brothers have made one trip into Egypt to buy food. While they were there, they came face to face with their brother, Joseph. He recognized them, but they did not recognize him.

In an effort to awaken their dead consciences and to get them to acknowledge their sins, Joseph accuses them of being spies and imprisons Simeon. They are told to return home and bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, to Joseph to prove to him they were telling the truth about having a family back in Canaan. Joseph already knew the truth; he was merely trying to get them to face the truth.

At first, Jacob refuse to let Benjamin go to Egypt with his brothers, but after a long speech by Judah, Jacob gives in and allows Benjamin to accompany his brothers to Egypt. Before he sends his sons away, Jacob commands them to carry with them some gifts.

### I. The Instructions Concerning the Gifts Genesis 43:11-12

Jacob says to his sons, "If this the way it has to be, then do this:

1. "Take some of the best fruits of the land."

"Take the best." Don't just take any old thing to present to the ruler; take the best." Don't think that this is a small or simple thing for

Jacob and his family. This was a significant present because they had little left. It would be a great sacrifice on their part. If they sent the best to Joseph, what they had left would be second rat.

2. "A little balm"- made from the roots of certain plants and used as a medicine to bring soothing to the flesh. Most likely, these roots were not found in Egypt.

3. "A little honey" something sweet delights the taste buds.

4. "Spices" to put in food to give it flavor.

5. "Myrrh" was a substance like gum that brought healing.

6. "Nuts" refers to pistachio nuts.

7. "Almonds"

And take double the money you carried the first time you brought grain, plus the money that you found in your socks.

These were delicacies or niceties not found in Egypt, but Joseph would remember that as a boy he enjoyed them all.

## II. The Intrigue of the Gifts

It is interesting that the Holy Spirit took time to tell us what the Ishmaelite traders were carrying on their donkeys to Egypt when they stopped to buy Joseph from his brothers. Genesis 37:25 tells us they were carrying "spices, balm, and Myrrh," some of the very things Jacob said to carry the ruler in Egypt. I wonder if the brothers even thought of that at the time.

## III. The Inspiration for the Gifts

What motivated Jacob to send the gifts with his sons?

Was he just being Jacob? was he helping to soften Joseph up and cause him to treat his sons in a more pleasant manner than he did the last time they were in his presence?

There is an old saying that you can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar. Is that what he was trying to do?

I cannot read the motives of Jacob's heart, but I would like to think that behind what Jacob did was evidence that he was beginning to grow in the Lord. I would like to think that all the work the Lord had been doing in his life was transforming his heart into Christ-likeness.

God desires that we be extra nice to folks, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. The child of God is to be concerned with our vertical relationship with God, and our horizontal relationship with our brothers and sisters

A little girl prayed a mouthful when she prayed, "Dear Lord, Help all the bad people to be good and help all the good people to be nice."

- That was the problem with the elder brother. He was good, but he was not nice. That was the problem with the Pharisees. They were good people, but you couldn't stand to be around them. Do you know folks like that?

Eph 4:32- Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Who should we be extra nice to?

### A. Our families

If there is anyone we ought to be extra nice to it is the members of our own family; yet, sometimes the folks we ought to be the nicest to, we are the meanest to. We use kinder words to those we work with than we do our own family. We are more patient with strangers than we are with those we live with.

What extra nice things should we share with our families?

1. Pleasantness: What makes folks grumble, grip and say critical things to those they live with. Why do we want to fuss and argue and talk down to each other? Why can't we be pleasant to each other?

Some time ago my sister and I were having lunch together and the Sheriff, who knew us both, came over to us and said, "Now there is a strange sight. A brother and sister having lunch together acting like they enjoy it. You'd never see me having lunch with my sister!"

- The fruit of the spirit is love, peace, gentleness, kindness.

2. Understanding: An old proverb says, "To know all is to forgive all." What we are not up on, we are often down on. Understanding all the facts and circumstance would help use to be more understanding.

3. Appreciation: No one expressed appreciation to others like Jesus. While others criticized the women who anointed his feet, Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She has done what she could."

When Peter declared that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, "Blessed are you Simon Peter." There is nothing like the appreciation and approval of Jesus!

4. Generosity: I'm not talking her about generosity with your money, though that's a good thing too. You can be generous with others with your time, with you deeds, with your support.

#### B. Our Foes

Jesus said, "You have heard it said, but I say to you... Do good to them... Pray for them. Don't give evil for evil."

#### C. Our Friends

Be extra nice to your friends. Don't take them for granted.

Jacob had his sons to be extra nice to the man in Egypt. He never dreamed that man in Egypt was his own son!

Please, be extra nice to folks. You never know the influence and the impact you may have on their lives.

## Swimming In A Sea Of Emotion Genesis 43:15-34

For the second time, ten of Jacob's sons leave Canaan to make a trip down to Egypt to buy grain. These are not the same ten sons who made the first trip. Joseph kept Simeon in an Egyptian prison and told the brothers that they could buy no more grain, nor would their brother be released from prison, unless Benjamin came with them.

The first time the brothers went to Egypt, Joseph knew exactly who they were, but they did not recognize Joseph.

Verse 15 tells us that they took Joseph a present; double the original money; and Benjamin. But don't miss verse 14. Before his sons leave, Jacob prays a special prayer for them that they probably didn't remember him praying, but his prayer was answered. Jacob calls upon the name of God Almighty-El-Shaddai- the God who makes things happen by His majestic power and might. Jacob prays that El Shaddai would change the heart of "the man" so he would show mercy releasing Simeon and not hurting Benjamin. His prayer was answered.

These verses describe a scene that is filled with emotions. Fear, relief, gratitude, and joy all mingle together in this emotional reunion between Joseph and his brothers.

Emotions are something we deal with every day of our lives. They are powerful and they can control our lives if we allow them to. Some emotions are good and right and need to be expressed other emotions need to be checked and controlled because they are against the word of God and those feelings or emotions tend to lead us astray.

In this passage these 12 brothers are swimming in a sea of emotions. The brothers face three difficult problems. They had to explain why the money they bought the grain with on their first trip was found in their sacks of grain. Then they had to make sure that Simeon was released from prison. Then they must protect Benjamin from harm.

It is likely that some of Joseph's servants saw the brothers entering the city and quickly informed Joseph of their arrival. When Joseph sees Benjamin with his brothers, he arranges for his brothers to be carried to his house.

#### I. The Brothers and their fears Genesis 43:18-24

The word "afraid" means "to be filled with dread." When the men were told to go to his house, the brothers were terrified. They felt they were in real trouble, probably about the money that was found in their sacks. They were convinced that they were being lead into a trap. They are sure that Joseph is going to arrest them and put them in prison. They might be punished, made slaves, or

killed.

When you are in a situation like this feeling you are going to be falsely accused and punished, you look for the nearest mediator and try convince him of your innocence.

After all, with multiplied thousands of foreigners seeking provisions, why would the Prime Minister single them out for special attention unless he had something evil in mind? The brothers were sweating. Notice how nervous they are.

Gen 43:18-22- 18 Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, “We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys.”

19 So they went up to Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. 20 “We beg your pardon, our lord,” they said, “we came down here the first time to buy food. 21 But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. 22 We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don’t know who put our silver in our sacks.”

But the brothers were in for a surprise, because the steward knew more about the money than they did, and he assured them they had nothing to fear. In fact, the steward comforts them the best he could when telling them that God was looking out for them in all their troubles.

1.The steward greets them with a word of peace- Genesis 43:23

Shalom was offered from the Egyptian. Mercy was beginning to flow.

2.The steward told them that their God had directed them to put the money in their sacks.  
The steward said that he was the one who put the money in their sacks.

3.The steward had Simeon released from prison and brought to them.

Simeon had been a hostage for two years. His presence spoke of forgiveness. The charges of theft had been dropped.

4.Water was brought to the brothers to wash their feet, a sign of great respect.

5.Feet was given for their animals, a sign of hospitality.

There were two emotions at work in the lives of these brothers. They were afraid and they were being eaten alive with guilt.

Fear is a terrible emotion. Fear has a paralyzing effect on our lives. Fear renders us incapable of trusting the Lord. The opposite of fear is faith.

The real reason these brothers were so overcome by fear is because they were filled with guilt. They knew that they had wronged their brother, they lied about it, and they are convinced that God is out to get them.

Guilt can be a healthy emotion. The Lord uses it to awaken us to our sinful condition and to show us our need of Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross for us, He literally took our sin and our guilt upon Himself and became our sins. He was judged in our place and we are forgiven when we trust Him by faith.

II. Joseph and His Feelings- Genesis 43:25-30

His brothers present their gifts to Joseph as they bow before him. Joseph immediately asks them about their father, Jacob, and they assure him that he is doing well.

Joseph looks at Benjamin, the only full brother he has, and he pronounces a blessing on his brother. Joseph is immediately overcome with emotion. He has to step outside so he can break down and weep.

Contrary to what you might have been taught, there is no shame in being overwhelmed by your circumstances. When a loved one is taken in death; when a deadly disease strikes the one you love; when your family is ripped apart; when your heart is broken, it is not hard to be overwhelmed.

May I tell you, God cares about the things you and I face in this life.

1 Peter 5:7-7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Psalm 34:1- 1 I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.

Psalm 142:4-5- 4 Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. 5 I cry to you, Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

Matt 6:26- 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

### III. The Family and their Feast- Genesis 43:31-34

When Joseph comes back, he has gotten his emotions under control again. He commands the servants to serve the meal. He is seated by himself because he is the ruler. The Egyptians are seated at another table, because their religion forbids them from eating with shepherds. When the brothers of Joseph were seated for the meal, they are seated in their birth order, from the oldest to the youngest. They are amazed!

Joseph even sends them food from his table, and when he did, he sent five times as much to Benjamin. Joseph wanted to see what they would do with such favoritism. They would show no animosity or envy.

Mercy is written over this account from beginning to end. What words could we write over this account? Words like responsibility, honesty, unity, belief, and gratitude.

Don't miss the last sentence! They were all "merry" together! They all experienced the emotion of joy. I suppose that joy is the favorite emotion we humans share. We all like to be happy. We all love that feeling of contentment and joy we get when everything in life is just like it ought to be. That's a great feeling!

You see, these men were guilty. No one would have blamed Joseph if he had thrown them all into prison or even enslaved them. But, Joseph forgives them and welcomes them into his own home. He invited them to eat with him at his table and he shares with them the very best he had.

That is a picture of what the Lord Jesus did for us! We were guilty and worth of judgment. We deserved far worse than prison or slavery. We deserved death and Hell! But, He loved us in spite of our condition. He saved us from our sins. He brought us into His family. He feeds us with the best things from His table. He is even preparing a place for us in Heaven!

He has taken away our guilt and our past. He has healed our wrecked and ruined spiritual condition. He has replaced our guilt with His peace. He has given us His spirit! He has filled us with the capacity for genuine joy in the Lord. Praise His name!

Am I happy? Do I have joy? If I don't it's my own fault! I have been given every ingredient needed to true happiness, true joy and true rejoicing. Praise the Lord!

## Joseph's Brother's Final Test Genesis 44:1-34

It had been 22 years since Joseph's brothers sold him to the Ishmaelite's who would in turn sell him as a slave in Egypt. Genesis 39 tells us repeatedly that God was with Joseph, but God was also with his brothers, though in a very different way. God never gave their consciences rest. When at the end of those two decades the brothers traveled to Egypt for their encounters with Joseph, God was with Joseph in his brilliant handling of his brothers and He was with the brothers as they came to terms with their guilt.

During their first visit (Genesis 42), God graced the brothers with guilt, fear, and sorrow. I say graced because they knew they were guilty, their fear was a godly fear, and they mourned over the effects of their sin. Then, during the first day of their second visit to Egypt (43), the brothers' experienced an unexpected shower of mercy as Joseph's steward greeted them with peace/Shalom, assured them that the money in their bags was from God and released Simeon to them.

Now in Genesis 44 we will witness a transformation of the brothers. Under God's direction, Joseph had one more piece in his wise plan to bring his brothers to repentance, and this price would involve Benjamin. Once the brothers had faced their sins and repented, Joseph could reveal who he was and they could be reconciled.

### I. The Conspiracy Genesis 44:1-9

When the eleven brothers left Joseph's house, they had every reason to be joyful. They had convinced the Prime Minister of Egypt that they were not spies. They had not been arrested for stealing the grain money, Simeon had been released from prison, Benjamin was safely traveling with them, and they were about to return home with more grain for the family, all their money and, most importantly, they are returning home with Benjamin, just as Judah had promised his father. No doubt they were congratulating

themselves over their successful mission in Egypt.

But they didn't know God was working behind the scenes to bring them face to face with their 22 year old sin.

While the brothers are preparing to leave, Joseph tells the steward to prepare the grain, "as much as they can carry." Then Joseph tells the steward to do something very strange. He tells him to take his personal cup and place it in the sack that belonged to Benjamin. Shortly after the men set out for home, Joseph sent the steward to stop them and to confront them about the cup in Benjamin's sack.

The brothers must have been surprised when they saw Joseph's steward and his guard following them, little realizing that their sins were about to catch up with them. The brothers were certainly stunned when the steward accused them of rewarding evil for good.

This may seem like a strange way for Joseph to treat his brothers, but God is using Joseph as His instrument to draw these men to a place of repentance and restoration. Joseph conspires against them, but unlike his brothers, Joseph is not conspiring in an effort to harm them. He is conspiring for their good.

Sometimes we sin and are not immediately found out of our sin. After a while we can grow use to sins presence to the point where it no longer bothers us. We may even come to think that we have gotten away with some sin or another because we have not faced judgment or chastisement over that sin. The fact is, God knows exactly when and how to speak to our hearts. When the time is right, He will touch all the right buttons to humble us to the place of repentance.

Sometimes like Adam and Eve, we think we can cover up our sins with the flimsy fig leaves of our own making, but God will settle for nothing less than total confession and repentance. Or , like Achan, we think we can hid our sin, but God knows where all of our skeletons are buried and He will uncover them in His time.

The best thing a believer can do with sin is to get it out into the open as soon as possible. The best thing we can do with sin is to hate it, forsake it, and confess it to Him. If we refuse to, there will be a higher priced to pay for our disobedience.

These men defend themselves and declare that they are all innocent. So confident are they of their innocence are they that they would volunteer an extreme punishment on themselves (Genesis 44:9).

## II. The Confrontation Genesis 44:10-13

The sacks are opened and searched. When the steward searched the sacks, he heightened the tension by working his way from the eldest to the youngest (Genesis 44:12). Once again, each man's money was found in his sack, but nothing special is said about this in the text.

Reuben's sack was opened first and the steward found nothing. Reuben must have drawn himself up, crossed his arms, and with a grin said, "I told you so." Levi and Judah opened their sacks and when nothing was found, Judah might have said, "Take that, Mr. Steward!" But when they opened Benjamin's sack, the cup began to gleam in the sun! It was a horrifying moment. The brothers couldn't believe their eyes! Benjamin must have defended himself by saying, "I had nothing to do with that cup being there."

· Notice Genesis 44:13

## III. The Confession Genesis 44:14-34

Since Judah was responsible for Benjamin, no doubt he was preparing his appeal and perhaps praying that God would give him success. He has decided to tell the truth and confess his sins and the sins of his brothers concerning what happened to their brother 22 years ago. These men don't know it, but they are about to reveal to Joseph what kind of men they have become. They are finally ready to do the right thing.

The phrase "Judah and his brothers" (v.14) alerts us that Judah was now the spokesman for the family. True, it was Judah who suggested they sell Joseph (37:26-27), and it was Judah who unwittingly committed incest with his daughter-in-law (38), but by the grace of God, people can change and make new beginnings. Let's remember Judah for his courageous and compassionate speech and not for his foolish sins.

When the brothers arrive back at Joseph's palace, they find him still there. No doubt Joseph was waiting to see who would show up. Would it be Benjamin alone, or would the rest of the brothers be with him?

As the brothers stood before Joseph, their clothes were newly torn to shreds. One could wish that Joseph had seen them tearing them. That would have been a revealing sign that they were not the heartless men they used to be. That would have confirmed to Joseph of the growing spiritual change that had taken place, but Joseph had not seen it and now he was relentless.



Judah says that he will not even try to defend them. He admits they are great sinners.

The phrase “God has found out the iniquity of your servants” (Genesis 44:16) doesn’t refer only to the grain money or to the silver cup, but to their hidden sins, the way they had treated Joseph and their father 20 years ago.

Before telling them who he was, Joseph wanted to discover their attitude toward Benjamin. He announced that Benjamin would remain in Egypt as his slave while the rest of the men returned home. It was then that Judah comes to the defense of Benjamin in the longest speech by a human found in the book of Genesis. Eight times in this defense, Judah called Joseph “my Lord” and thirteen times he uses the word “Father”. Little did Judah realize that each time he used the word “Father” or referred to his brother Benjamin, he was reaching the heart of Joseph.

Verses 18-34 are at the heart of Judah’s tearful, emotional speech. Joseph is going to gain some vital, heretofore, unknown information. For the very first time Joseph learned what had happened at home 20 years earlier when his brothers returned without him. He learned of his father’s heartbroken cry-“surely he has been torn to pieces”- and that it still echoed in the conscience of his brothers. He also learned that his brothers spoke differently about the favoritism shown to Rachel and her two sons. Judah quotes the words of their father that his father would hold him accountable Benjamin’s death as his gray hair would go to Sheol in sorrow.

Judah reminds Joseph that the only reason Benjamin came with them was because Joseph demanded it. He respectfully implicates Joseph for Benjamin even being there.

He tells Joseph it would kill his father if anything happened to Benjamin. Again Judah tells Joseph that if his father dies because Benjamin is not with them, it will be his fault.

Then Judah offers to take Benjamin’s place as his slave if he will let the boy go back home.

This is the major turning point in the story. When Joseph hears Judah’s confession and sees his love for the family in action, it is more than he can stand. In the next chapter Joseph will reveal his identity to his brother.

Real salvation brings transformation. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. All things have become new.” You and I cannot be truly saved without a change taking place in our lives. The grace of God is power to save and to change even the vilest of sinners.

## **I Am Joseph Genesis 45:1-15**

Every story has a climax. Every book that is written and every movie that is made has a climax. There is a moment in the story when everything comes into focus and the story begins to make sense. The story of Joseph has a climax as well, and we just read about it. In these verses the moment we have been building towards takes place. Joseph reveals his true identity to his astonished brothers.

I see a parallel with how Jesus reveals Himself to those He would save by His grace. You see, the real climax of any life is not when we reach the pinnacle of success. It is not when our children are born, or when we become grandparents. The real climax of any life is that moment in time when Jesus Christ reveals Himself to a lost sinner and saves that sinner’s soul. Everything in a child of God’s life leads up to and flows from that moment.

Twenty- two long years had passed since Joseph was separated from his family because of the hostility and jealousy of his brothers. During that time Joseph has endured many test, but “the Lord was with Joseph” and now he is the Prime Minister of Egypt. When his brothers come to Egypt to buy supplies, Joseph recognizes them but they do not recognize him. Joseph has just tested his brothers to see how they felt toward Benjamin by arranging for Benjamin to be caught with Joseph’s cup in his sack. When the brothers come face- to- face with Joseph and reveal their concern of Benjamin, Joseph sees that their hearts have in fact been changed. Now, Joseph decided to reveal himself to his brothers.

### **I. The Revelation Genesis 45:1-8**

As we look at this scene, realize that it is the spirit of Jesus in Joseph that gives him the grace to forgive his brothers unconditionally for all they have done to him.

Joseph evicts all his servants and personal assistants out of the room. I think there are two reasons for doing so.

1. He does so in order to protect his brothers. You can imagine what might have happened if word got back the Pharaoh that the

reason Joseph was in Egypt was because of what his brothers had done to him. Joseph was Pharaoh's favorite. He had saved Egypt and was the ruler of his land, and his personal counselor.

2. This needed to be a private, intimate moment between Joseph and his brothers. Joseph could control himself no longer, and when the servants left and the doors were closed, Joseph broke down and all his pent-up grief flowed out. He wailed so loudly that the Egyptian servants heard it outside the room. Joseph "made himself known to his brothers."

"I am Joseph" The brothers were shocked, dumbfounded, and stood mute in speechless terror. Through his tears, Joseph saw their paralyzing terror, so Joseph said to his brothers, "Please, come near to me." How gracious Joseph was! "Please!" He wanted to calm their fears. Put yourself in their place for a moment. What would he do to them? How could he respond to the very men who had sold him like an animal?

What a powerful moment! Joseph doesn't rebuke them. He never points his finger and says, "Now I'm going to get even!" He doesn't give any cause for them to think he might be angry with them. His entire speech is couched in terms of concern for his brothers.

Joseph asks whether his father is still alive (v.3). Joseph has already asked this question of his brothers and they had assured him that he was alive. In fact, Judah has mentioned his father no less than 15 times in his 17 verse speech. But Joseph doesn't want to know whether his father is breathing. The life he asked about was not just about having a heart beat. Life is being abundantly alive. Joseph is asking about the well-being and vitality of his father. Is his dad senile now? Would his father recognize him? Is his father strong enough to make a journey down to Egypt to see him?

One of the greatest assets Joseph had was his sensitivity and ability to see through his circumstance and find God at work behind the scenes. He understood the concept Paul wrote about in Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good to those who love God." Joseph always seems to be conscious of God in his life. He refused the invitation of Potiphar's wife because he knew that it would be "a sin against God." He refused to exalt himself when he interpreted Pharaoh's dream, insisting that "God shall give Pharaoh an answer." Now he refuses to take vengeance upon his brothers for selling him as a slave, since he knows the Lord had it in mind all along. Joseph made God part of every aspect of his life. He understood God wanted to use him in Egypt. Rather than being angry, Joseph is rejoicing in the Lord that he has his family back.

If we can come to the place in our spiritual walk where we can see God at work in both our triumphs and tragedies, we'll find new peace in our souls. We don't always understand or particularly like what God arranged, but we understand that He is in charge, and we bow to His sovereignty. That's called living with an eternal perspective, and that's exactly what Joseph does in chapter 45. He has confidence that God is at work on His master plan.

Notice the passion of Joseph. In Genesis 45:14 he "fell on his brother Benjamin's neck, wept, and kissed all of his brothers." It's amazing to see how many times Joseph wept in scripture. He wept in the pit, he wept when he was sold, he wept when he heard his brothers talking about their sin, he weeps over Judah's selfless speech. Later he weeps when he sees his father and again at his father's funeral. We are told today that we should be "macho" and never reveal emotion, but Joseph was always willing to reveal himself. It's alright to cry.

I remind you that Jesus wept.

## II. The Reconciliation

The reconciliation was with all of his eleven brothers. There was confession, weeping, forgiveness. All the guilt was gone!

At least four things come as a result of being reconciled.

1. There was Peace. Joseph was finally at peace with himself and with his brothers. There was peace in the heart of everyone involved.

2. There was Protection. The brothers come fearful of Joseph and what he might do to Benjamin, but as soon as Joseph revealed himself, all fear disappeared.

3. There was Provision. Joseph was in charge of all the provisions and he promised his entire family would be taken care of.

4. There was a new Proximity. Joseph invited all his brothers to come near to him. He hugged and kissed them. There as fellowship and oneness. He was going to move the whole family into his back yard so he could take of them.

## III. The Responsibility Genesis 45:9-11

"Hurry... do not tarry...Hurry" Joseph had given his brothers a task to accomplish.

Joseph wants his brothers to tell his dad that God was in all that had happened for the last twenty-two years. Let him know the living

God has been in control of everything.

Why did Joseph want his father to know that the Living God was in control of everything? He wanted to strengthen his father's tried faith in sovereign in the lordship of God over Joseph's life and over his own life.

The sincerity of Joseph's forgiveness was seen in his wanting them to live near him.

In verse 13 Joseph tells his brothers to tell his father about his rule and glory in Egypt. Why? Is Joseph proud? No. It's because he wants his father to remember God's revelation in the dream. God had said that He would exalt his son and that God had brought His promise to pass. It was not brought to pass in the way he expected, but then our ways are not God's ways. God's ways are always best!

## **It is Enough**

### **Genesis 45:25- 47:7**

We reached the climax of the story of Joseph in the first half of Genesis 45, when Joseph identified himself before his brothers. Joseph now sends his brothers to go get his father and bring him to Egypt where they can live close together. Joseph gives a parting shot to his brothers as they leave Egypt and head to Canaan to get their father. In 45:24 he tells his brothers, "See that you fall not out by the way" (KSV); See to it that you "do not quarrel on the way"(ESV). He knew his brothers pretty well. "Don't argue and quarrel about who did what when you wronged me all those years ago. Don't place blame. Don't accuse. Don't try to pass the buck. Just cool it. I want this to be a joyous time. Don't mess it up by fussing!"

Notice Genesis 45:25-28. "It is enough." At first Jacob didn't believe his sons. Then the sons showed Jacob the carts or wagons which most likely had an Egyptian seal on it. Then Jacob said, "It is enough" evidence. I'm convinced! Joseph is alive and I want to see him!

We have been looking at Joseph, but in this message, I want us to focus on Joseph's father, Jacob. In many ways, Jacob's life has been a sad life, but now he is going to experience victory.

The life of Jacob has been A Tale of Worries, A Tale of Wagons, and is going to be A Tale of Worship.

#### **I. A Tale Of Worries- Genesis 45:25-26**

The life of Jacob has been a life of struggles and heartbreaks.

- He grew up in a home where there was turmoil between himself and his brother Esau.
- He had to leave home after he helped his mother deceive his father and after he stole his brother's birthright.
- Jacob spent the next twenty- plus years working for his Uncle Laban. He and his Uncle worked as hard as they could to trick and deceive the other.
- Finally Jacob leaves Laban's house to return to the land of his fathers. On the way home, his beloved wife, Rachel, dies.
- Later, his favorite son, Joseph, goes missing and is presumed dead. That is a thumbnail sketch of Jacob's life, but it sets the stage for the old man he has become. Let's watch Jacob in action in these verses.

Notice Jacob's Disposition:

From an early age Jacob has been taught to expect the worse. He has been trained to be a doubter and a worrier. Notice the events that made him this way.

#### **II. A Tale of Wagons- Genesis 45:26-28**

Jacob's sons give him concrete evidence that they are telling him the truth. They have a bunch of empty wagons and they have ten donkeys loaded with the best of the land of Egypt. Watch as this meeting between Jacob and his sons unfold.

##### **A. The Wagons came with Problems**

"They told him all the words of Joseph." Let that sink in for a moment. For twenty-five years these men have allowed their father to believe Joseph had been killed by wild animals. For twenty-five years they had deceived their father and deprived him of the companionship of Joseph.

Now, they stand before him and everything comes out. They tell him about all the lies and cover-ups. They tell him how Joseph worked with them until they made a full confession. They tell him that Joseph is now governor of all the Egypt. It's more than he can grasp.

The old man is more confused than ever as he hears his boys tell their story. He might have also been angry as they told him how they lied to him and caused him to hurt and grieve for all those years. On the other hand, hope is beginning to take root in his heart.

1. His mother contributed to his Disposition.

She lead Jacob to believe that his father loved Esau more than he loved Jacob. Then she convinced Jacob that his brother Esau was out to kill him and that he should leave home, Genesis 27.

2. His Uncle Laban contributed to his Disposition.

Laban deceived Jacob when he gave Jacob Leah for a wife instead of Rachel, Gen. 29:16-30. Laban also deceives Jacob when he made him work all those years for his wives Gen.30.

3. Jacob's wives contributed to his Disposition.

Leah accused Jacob of not loving her, Gen 29:32; and Rachel blames Jacob for her failure to conceive children, Gen 30:1.

4. His sons contributed to his Disposition.

They came to Jacob with Joseph's coat smeared with goat's blood, which left Jacob thinking his Son was dead, Genesis 37:31-35.

It seems that many events in his life trained Jacob to be a doubter and a warrior.

B. The Wagons came with Proof.

Jacob wanted to believe, but could he believe anything his sons told him? Then the boys showed Jacob the wagons with the markings of Egypt on them and Jacob said, "It is enough! I'm convinced!"

C. The Wagons came with a Purpose.

Gen 45:19 tells us the wagons were sent to carry Jacob and his family to their new home in Egypt.

Throughout these chapters Joseph is a constant picture of the Lord Jesus. We see Jesus in Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers; in his role as the Savior of life; in his suffering; in his righteousness.

Just as surely as Joseph sent wagons to carry Jacob safely into Egypt, our Savior has given us some very precious blessings that help us make it through this world. The wagons Joseph sent were empty; but the promises we have received from Jesus are filled with blessings, life, and hope. Let me share a few of our "heavenly wagons" with you.

1. His Spirit- John 16:13; 14:-18- The Holy Spirit of God indwells us, fills us, guides us, and uses us.

2. His Presence- Matt 28:20- He has promised to be with us every step of the way.

3. His Provisions- Phil 4:19- Our Lord has promised to meet every need in our lives for His glory.

4. His Word- Ps. 119:105- His Word feeds us and guides our steps.

5. His Salvation- Eph: 2:8-9 - His salvation is perfect, complete, and endures forever.

6. His Return- John 14:1-6- He promised to come for us one day and to carry us to our Heavenly Home.

III. A Tale of Worship- 46:1-7

Did you noticed the change in names? In Genesis 45:25-27 his name is Jacob. That is his fleshly name that means Schemer, trickster, deceiver. But his name was changed when he wrestled with the Lord all night near the brook Jabbok. When faith reacted in his heart, Israel, the new man, believed God and followed Him confidently.

We are told that Jacob came to Beersheba and he offered sacrifices to the Lord there. When a person came to Beersheba, which was at the very southern end of Canaan, once he passed Beersheba, he left the Promised Land behind. Before Israel leaves Canaan, he pauses to worship God.

There God assures Jacob that going to Egypt is in His will and that He would protect him. God also promised him that Joseph would

take care of him when he dies. God gives Jacob the green light to go to Joseph.

You and I can have confidence that God will be with us all the way to Glory!

## **Joseph and Crisis Management**

### **Genesis 47:13-26**

(The verses we are about to read will give us an idea of how severe the famine was in Joseph's day and how devastating it was in the lives of the people. These verses will also give us an insight into the wisdom God gave Joseph during this time as he ruled Egypt.)

The story of Joseph is one long study in crisis management. First he had to deal with personal crisis, like the death of his mother at an early age and jealousy of his brothers. Then he had to deal with the crisis of other people, like these experiencing the life threatening famine that swept over the land.

For the last little while in our study of Joseph, we have been looking at the details of Joseph's relationship with his brothers and his father. Those events are the primary emphasis of the previous chapters. It's easy to forget that while Joseph was dealing with his brothers, he was also managing a crisis in Egypt. In every crisis he faces, Joseph displayed exceptional wisdom and faith.

The famine had grown to full height, and the Egyptians realized that there was no hope apart from Joseph. They were willing to submit to him at all cost and on any terms. Egypt was bankrupt and its situation hopeless, so Joseph offered the best solution. He brought everything under the authority of the throne as the only safeguard for the future. Joseph became the savior of the world in the physical realm, just as Jesus is the savior in the spiritual in the physical realm. And Joseph's solution of bringing everything under the King's throne to save the people is paralleled to Christ's solution. The Lord Jesus brings all those who are willing under His throne of grace, and they are saved for all eternity.

You can see this played out in these verses.

#### **1. Joseph took control of their Purses- Genesis 47:13-14**

Joseph begins by moving everything under the authority of the King. Joseph took control of all the money in the land. People could no longer trust in their money, because they no longer had any. They had used every last cent to buy bread. All the people were placed on the same level. There was no longer rich people and poor people, there were just people. Every dime was brought under the control of the throne.

We should strive to bring every cent we possess under the control of the Lord. Let Him use it in His work as He sees fit.

#### **2. Joseph took control of their Possessions- Genesis 47:15-17**

The very wealthy might have been able to hold out a bit longer, but eventually everyone gave in. The people traded their livestock and their possessions for food. Everything they possessed was brought under the control of the throne. Everything we possess should be dedicated to the glory of the Lord. If you possess anything that cannot be dedicated to the Lord to be used for His glory, it has no place in your life.

#### **3. Joseph took control of their Property- Genesis 47:18-20**

When their money was exhausted and their possessions were all gone, they gave Joseph their land and put it under the control of the throne.

#### **4. Joseph took control of their Person- Genesis 47:19,21**

When their money, their possessions, and their property was all gone, they willingly gave themselves to be servants of Pharaoh, in exchange for food to eat. God wants us to present ourselves to Him. Roma. 12:1- We are His servants and we belong to Him. We really have no say in where we go and what we do.

#### **5. Joseph took control of their Production- Genesis 47:23-26**

Everything in Egypt was now under the control of the throne. He graciously gave the people seed to sow on the land and allowed them to keep 80% of everything they raised and everything they produced was subject to a 20% tax.

God doesn't ask His people to give Him 20%. He doesn't even ask us to give Him 10%. He graciously asks us to give Him 100% of

everything we have. “What did he say?” When we do give Him 100%, He will show us how much of that 100% that He wants invested in His work and how much of that 100% we can keep for our own use. Our checkbooks need to be brought under His control.

In this passage, Joseph is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same advice that Pharaoh gave to Egypt regarding Joseph was given to us regarding Jesus ( John 2:5,” His mother said to the servants, whatsoever he says to you, do it”).

That was the introduction. Usually, there will be a short introduction and a long message. Today, there will be a long introduction and a short message (you hope).

There are a few principles that make all the difference when a time of crisis comes into our lives:

#### I. Crisis Are No Respector of Person

When the famine came to Egypt, it came to everyone. The poor, the rich, even royalty were all affected by the crisis of the moment.

Job 14:1 “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.”

This life is filled with crisis moments. No one gets out of this world without facing moments of crisis.

#### II. Crisis Causes Us To Rethink Our Purposes

When this crisis came to Egypt, the people were told to do one thing, “Go to Joseph and do what he tells you to do” (Genesis 41:55).

Sometimes it takes a crisis moment in our lives to remind us of our purpose in life. If we are saved, our first and foremost duty is to do exactly what the Lord tells us to do. When we come to the end of life, no one wants to say, “I wish I had lived my life another way. I wish I had done something else with my life.”

#### III. Crisis Causes Us To Reevaluate Our Priorities

When the crisis came to Egypt, suddenly, things like money, possessions, lands and power meant nothing. What good is money, power, and stuff when you are starving to death? Those people wanted to survive and they knew their possessions would not see them through. They needed help they could only get from Joseph.

Sometimes people focus on things that really don't matter. They put their jobs ahead of their families. They put recreation ahead of their marriages. They put their plans ahead of God's plans for their lives.

A crisis has the power to cause us to rethink how important family is. When crisis come, we are reminded how valuable our spouse is; how important our church family is; how important the Lord is.

Why wait for a crisis? Look to what we give priority to today. What really comes first in your life and mine?

#### IV. Crisis Causes Us To Reestablish Our Principles

In Egypt all the land came under the authority of the throne. Every saint of God should submit himself to the King of Kings who sits upon the throne.

We are to build our house upon the rock so that when the storms and crisis of life come, we will be able to stand firm. That way, we will not be shaken by the winds or assaulted by the waves or frightened by the lightening and thunder. Some lose everything in the storms, but it does not have to be when we build upon the rock!

Someone said that “ the hardest part of the Christian life is living it.” Sometimes it's a struggle to keep our priorities in line with what the Lord wants us to be and to do, but it is worth the effort.

God lead Joseph in the crisis times of his life and I'm convinced that He can do the same thing for you and me.

## Reflections of a Life

### Genesis 48:1-22

The Book of Genesis is a book of life, but it is also a book of death. In many ways, the Book of Genesis is a graveyard. It tells us how death started. We are not in the Book of Genesis long until we see Adam and Eve fall into sin. God had warned that to disobey

Him would mean death, or as Paul put it, “the wages of sin is death.” Only a few verses later we see the mutilated body of Able. Then, all but eight souls would die when God sent a flood of destruction because of sin. Every one of the heroes introduced in Genesis, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, also died in its pages. It is a book of death.

We don't like to talk about death. We do our best to avoid the subject, but death is stalking each of us, and one day, we will leave this world (Heb.9:27).

I believe the death of Jacob gives us some direction as to how we can best prepare for our own deaths. I also believe the words of Jacob on his death bed can help us know how to live our lives, knowing death is coming.

There are only a few death bed scenes recorded in the Bible. Most often we are told that so -and- so lived so many years and then he died. In most cases, we don't know about any last words that may have been spoken.

In light of that, it is fascinating to note how much space is given in the Book of Genesis to the death of Jacob. Abraham's death is described in seven verses (25:5-11), Isaac's in three verses (35:27-29), and Joseph's in five verses (50:22-26). By contrast, Jacob's death covers about 73 verses. The story begins at the end of chapter 47, covers all of chapters 48 and 49, and the first half of chapter 50.

Jacob's death is recorded in four scenes:

- 1.Jacob meets with Joseph and makes him promise to bury him in the Promised Land –14:28-31.
- 2.Jacob blesses the two sons of Joseph – Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48).
- 3.Jacob blesses his own children (Genesis 49:1-28).
- 4.Jacob again asks to be buried in the Promised Land and then he dies (Genesis 49:29-33).

It's a beautiful and moving story and one cannot help thinking, “That's the way I would like to die someday – having lived many years, still in my right mind, full of faith in God, with my family gathered around me.”

#### I. Jacob Reflected on the Past

Jacob knew he was nearing death. He is an old man. The long years have taken their toll on his body. He is barely able to stand now, unsteady, leaning for support on top of his staff.

Jacob was not afraid to die. He saw the moment coming and made preparations for his own burial. He had only one request to make of his son, Joseph - “Don't bury me in Egypt, but bury me with my fathers.” This is not just a sentimental request. This is a wonderful statement of Jacob's faith in God. God had promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. In faith Abraham and Isaac believed God and settled in Canaan. Jacob also believed his people, his family, his descendants would return to possess the land and he wanted to be there, too. Being in a foreign land and knowing that he would die in a foreign land, he wanted to make sure he would be buried in the Promised Land. It was his way of saying, “My burial place will be a testimony that God's promises are still true.” (Genesis 47:29-31).

Look at 48:1-2, Jacob was at the point of death, but when he was told that Joseph and his two sons were coming to visit him, suddenly he felt better. We are told that Jacob “strengthened himself” or collected his strength and sat up and began to talk.

When Sherry's mother was dying, she wanted to see her son, Michael, before she died and she “willed” herself to stay alive until he got there to see her. You have heard of folks wanting to hang on to life long enough to see a loved one one last time. That's what's happening here.

It's interesting to see what occupied his mind as he was nearing death. He remembered three high places.

##### A. He Remembered A Spot – Genesis 48:3-4

Jacob remembered when he met God at Bethel (Luz). In a dream he saw a ladder that reached from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending and there he remembered the covenant the Lord made with him. Even as he was dying, Jacob remembered the time and the place he met God.

Do you have a spot? Do you have a place in your past where you met God? Can you go there in your mind and remember that place right now? That spot will become more and more important to you as the moment of your death draws closer.

If you don't have a spot, come and get one today! Let this place, the date this hour be the spot you remember as the moment you met God and received Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.

##### B. He Remembered A Spouse – Genesis 48:7

Jacob remembered the greatest love and the greatest heartbreak of his life. He thought of his beloved wife, Rachel. He remembered

how he felt when he first saw her. He remembered their love. He remembered how he had to work fourteen years just to have her as his wife. He remembered all the happy years they shared together. He also remembered how she died; his great loss. She has been dead for two decades, but Jacob has never forgotten her.

Do you have someone special in your past? Do you have someone in your life right now? Take the time to tell them what they mean to you. Take the time to praise the Lord for giving you those special people.

#### C. Jacob Remembered a Spirit – Genesis 48:16

Jacob remembers a divine encounter that changed his life forever as he wrestled with the Lord. In Gen. 32, God changed Jacob from “the trickster” to Israel, “the Prince of God”. He walked differently the rest of his life.

-As we live right and honor God, we will be able to see how God has shaped our lives into a kinder, gentler, more understanding old person.

### II. Jacob Reflected on Providence – Genesis 48:15

Jacob thanked God for his godly heritage. The Lord had walked with his father and grandfather, and now He is walking with Jacob. How blessed he was to have Abraham and Isaac in his family line.

God “fed me all my life long to this day.” Jacob had experienced all kinds of troubles in his life and he had had many disappointments, but he was able to look back and see how God was walking with him all the time. When we are passing through the trials and difficulties of life, it is not always easy to see the hand of God. Life is never going to be one long parade of happy experiences, but with the Lord we can look back in gratitude for what He has done in our lives.

### III. Jacob Reflected on the Present

As Jacob was dying, he knew that all his blessings were not in the past. The Lord had placed some things right in front of him that reminded him of God's blessings today.

#### A. The Evidence of Grace – Genesis 48:8-11

Jacob embraces the two sons of Joseph. There was a time when he thought Joseph was dead and that there would be no offspring from that son. Now, by the grace of God, Jacob not only sees Joseph again, but he also sees Joseph's two boys. That's grace in action!

Can you see the evidence of grace around you today? I can. I can see His grace in my family and in the ministry. I am experiencing things I never could have imagined when He saved me.

#### B. The Expansion of Grace – 48:5-6

Jacob adopts the two sons of Joseph and gives them an inheritance among Joseph's brothers. He is, in effect, giving Joseph the double portion of the firstborn. When the inheritance of the nation of Israel was given out many years later, there was no tribe of Joseph, but there were the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim.

Just as Jacob handed down his blessings to his children and grandchildren, we ought to hand down the gifts of God's grace to those who follow after us. Parents have a holy obligation to pass on a grace blessing to their children and grandchildren.

#### C. The Economy of Grace – Genesis 48:14,17-20

Jacob now blesses the two boys of Joseph. According to the custom of the time, the primary blessing should have gone to the older son, Manasseh. But that's not how it worked out. When Joseph brings the two boys forward, he puts Manasseh in front of Jacob's right hand and Ephraim in front of his left hand. But Jacob crossed his arms, placing his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. Thus the younger son got the primary blessing and the older son got the lesser blessing.

On one level, this is the sovereignty of God at work. He had chosen Ephraim over Manasseh and although Joseph protested, he could not change the plan of God.

Jacob is following a pattern of his life. He, being the younger, had been chosen over Esau, the older.

Later on, Jacob preferred the younger Rachel to the older Leah. Now, he blesses the younger over the older.

In blessing the younger over the older, Jacob teaches us that God exalts those who honor Him regardless of their background or their birth order. Very often it is through the “overlooked” people of the world that God does His greatest work.

### IV. Jacob Reflected on the Promise



Jacob restates the promise that God would bring the Jews back to the Promised Land, so he says for the second time that he is to be buried in the Promised Land as a testimony that he never stopped believing God.

Genesis 47:31 says that Jacob “worshiped as he leaned on top of his staff.” That is, Jacob praised God as he was dying. Interestingly, that is what Jacob is praised for in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 11:21). It is always good to praise God, but it is especially meaningful to stand at the end of a long life and say, “God has been good to me.”

So Jacob dies with his sons gathered around him. Then, the Bible says he was “gathered to his people,” a reference not simply to death, but to reunion with his loved ones after death.

With Pharaoh's permission, Joseph and his brothers led a large funeral procession from Egypt to Canaan where they buried Jacob in the cave of Machpelah alongside his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham.

The God of Jacob is our God, too. The same God who led Jacob is the same God who leads us today. Do you know that God? If not, you are not prepared to die.

## **Confronting the Problem of Sin**

### **Genesis 49:1-12**

The time has come for the old Patriarch Jacob to die. His 147 years have been eventful and difficult, yet they have been blessed. Before he leaves this world, he gathers his sons around his bedside to speak to them one last time.

In these verses Jacob addresses his sons in light of the future. He tells them what will come their way “in the last days.” This is a reference to the kingdom years of Israel.

The details of Jacob's prophecy to each of his sons, as they stood around his bedside, were amazingly accurate. In fact, this passage has been a favorite of Bible critics. They cannot believe that these words were uttered before the events they described took place.

These prophecies, and their accurate fulfillment, stands as one of the greatest proofs of the inspiration of the Word of God. How did Jacob know things that would take place hundreds of years after his death? The Holy Ghost told him!

As we examine these words of Jacob, we do not have the time in this message to preach about what Jacob had to say to each of his sons. By way of introduction, a quick overview of this chapter is in order.

As we consider Jacob's words to his sons, we see the sons of Jacob divided into three groups.

1. Some were Disqualified – Because of their sin some of these boys were destined for judgment and not blessing. Those disqualified were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Dan.

2. Some were Distinguished – Some of Jacob's sons destined for blessings down the road. God took some of these men, who were mostly insignificant in the family, and elevated them to places of prominence in the future kingdom. Those distinguished were Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, and Benjamin.

3. One was Different – Joseph stood out among his brethren. He was singled out for a word of special blessings. In fact, Joseph was given the place of the first born. He received a double portion of his father's inheritance. That double portion was given to his sons Manasseh and Ephraim.

As I said, we do not have time today to consider Jacob's words to all of his sons. I do want to focus our attention on a few of the sons of Jacob today. The reason I focus on these few is because we share a common problem with them. We share the problem of sin.

If you will notice the words of Jacob in verse 2, he says, “Hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.” If you will remember “Jacob” is the old man's birth name. It means “Heel-grabber, trickster, or supplanter”. That name identifies Jacob as a man of the flesh. And for years he did live a fleshly life. He was always out to better himself. He was always trying to gain an advantage over others.

Then, one night, Jacob met the Master! When he did, his life was changed forever. His name was changed, too. No longer was he called “Jacob”. His new name was “Israel”. That name means “Prince with God”. It pictures him as a man of faith, who walks with God. And, that is who Jacob became in his later years.

When he calls his sons to him, he calls them “the sons of Jacob”. I think he is telling them, “You boys are just like I was. You have a sinful, fleshly nature to overcome. You have a sin problem to deal with.”

Doesn't that describe us all today? If there is one common thread that runs among every person in this room, it is the common thread of sin. We all have problems with sin!

If we do not learn to handle sin the right way, we can be certain that it will handle us. I would like to take the words of Jacob to just a few of his sons and preach about “Confronting the Sin Problem.”

I want you to see a Man Who Covered His Sin; some Men Controlled by Their Sin; and a Man Who Confessed His Sin. These examples have some valuable lessons to teach those who will hear them.

### I. A Man Who Covered His Sin

-Jacob deals first with his eldest son Reuben. I would suspect that Reuben expected to hear words of blessing from his dying father. He expected to receive his birthright. He expected to be recognized by Jacob as the head of the family.

When Jacob begins to speak, he does acknowledge the place of Reuben's birth. He also referenced the potential that Reuben had within the family. He was the firstborn and great things were expected of him.

-As Jacob continued his speech, the words of Reuben heard next shattered his world and demolished all his hopes, plans and dreams. Jacob looked at his eldest and said that Reuben was “unstable as water”. The word “unstable” means “to boil”. It refers to a pot of boiling water that is in constant motion.

Reuben was like water. Water is an unstable compound. When it is poured out, it always seeks the lowest level. When it is exposed to cold, it freezes. When it is exposed to heat, it boils. Eventually, water will evaporate and disappear. Reuben was just like that. Instead of being a leader among his brethren, he was unstable and ever changing. He was weak!

Jacob told Reuben that he would never “excel”. That is, his descendants would never rise to prominence in the future kingdom. And, they didn't ! A quick survey of Israel's history demonstrates that very clearly.

- The tribe of Reuben receives very little mention in the nation's history.
- Not a single judge, prophet, ruler, military leader, or other important person came out of this tribe.
- Reuben was often found on the wrong side of conflicts – Jud. 5:15-16.
- The sons of Korah, who stood against Moses and were swallowed up by the earth, were from this tribe, Num. 16:1-49.
- The tribe of Reuben never did “excel” in the kingdom.

-Why was such a harsh prophecy given to Reuben? The answer is right in v.4. Jacob drags out a sin that had been hidden away for forty years. He says, “because thou wentest up to thy father's bed.” Jacob is referring to the sin Reuben committed when he committed adultery with his father's wife Bilhah, Gen. 35:22. When that sin occurred, we are told in that verse that “Jacob knew it.” Jacob knew what his eldest son had done, but there is no record of confession and reconciliation.

It seems that this tragic sin was never dealt with by Reuben. For forty years Jacob waited on a confession that never came. He waited on his son to come to him and ask for forgiveness, but he never did. Now, Jacob exposes the sin of Reuben for all to hear. I can see Jacob, with his eyes flashing with anger, as he looks around on the others and says, “he went up to my couch!”

-Reuben never dealt with his sin, and it cost him greatly. It cost him his birthright. It cost his descendants. It cost him the respect and blessing of his father. It was a high price to pay for trying to keep his sin a secret.

-There is a lesson for us here. We do exactly what Reuben did, When we sin, we often try to keep it hidden away. We may pretend that it never happened. We may act like all is well. We live, look and act like we never did anything wrong. Yet, that secret is always festering in our hearts.

Like Reuben, our Father also knows when we have sinned against Him, Heb. 4:13, Pro. 15:3; Jer. 2:22-23. He knows and He waits for us to come to Him, confessing our sin and seeking Him in reconciliation. Until we do, we will never prosper spiritually.

-God has a plan for dealing with our sin. That plan is called “confession,” 1 John 1:9; Pro. 28:13. In Pro. 28:13, the word “confess” means to throw down. It has the idea of ceasing to hide something and to bring it out into the open. In 1 John 1:9, the word “confess” means to agree with or to say the same thing as another.

When we confess our sins, we stop seeking to hide them from God and others. We bring our sins out into the open, we expose them to the light, and we say the same thing about them that God says about them. When we handle our sins His way, we can

expect His forgiveness and His blessings. When we refuse to do it God's way, we can expect nothing but chastisement and judgment, Heb. 12:6-12; Rev. 3:19; Pro. 3:11-12. There will come a day when every child of God will stand before Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ. On that day, many will see their entire life's work perish in the flames of judgment, because of unconfessed sin, I Cor. 3:11-15.

-Are you one who is covering sin? Or, are you handling it God's way?

## II. Men Controlled By Their Sin – Genesis 49:5-7

Next Jacob turns his attention to Simeon and Levi. He accuses them of being filled with cruelty and violence. He says they act impulsively and recklessly and caused great damage in so doing. These men operated in “anger” and in “self-will”. They did as they pleased, without regard for the consequences they would face. Unlike Reuben, they never tried to hide their sins. They did what they did out in the open and everyone knew about it.

-Gen. 34 tells us the story of what Simeon and Levi did. Their sister Dinah was raped by a man named Shechem, v.1-2. After the rape, Shechem wanted to marry Dinah, v.3-4, so he had his father approach her family to arrange the marriage. Simeon and Levi agree to allow Shechem to marry their sister, if he and all the men in his village agree to be circumcised, v.13-23. Shechem and his people agree to the terms and are circumcised, v.24. Simeon and Levi waited three days, until the men were at the peak of their soreness, and they attacked the village, killing every man in sight and taking all the livestock for themselves, v. 25-29. Jacob rebuked his sons when they committed this sin, v.30, but they never repented and made it right, v. 31.

-Their sin cost them and their descendants greatly. Consider what happened to their descendants in the kingdom years.

-Simeon became the smallest tribe in Israel, Numbers 26:14.

-When Moses pronounced his blessing on Israel, Simeon was omitted, Deut. 33:8.

-Simeon was forced to share territory with Judah during the kingdom years, Josh. 19:1-9.

-By the times of King Josiah, the tribe of Simeon was numbered with Manasseh, Ephraim and Naphtali, 2 Chron. 34:6. They were indeed scattered throughout the land.

-Levi was also scattered, but there was some measure of repentance on their part. At a place called Baal-Peor, Moses faced a rebellion among the people of Israel. When Moses asked, “Who is on the Lord's side?” Ex. 32:36. the people of Levi came to his side. As a reward, they were made the priestly tribe, and were the consecrated servants of the Lord.

-In the kingdom, Levi had no inheritance in Israel. Instead, they were given forty-eight cities scattered throughout the nation. Six of these cities were called the “Cities of Refuge”, Josh. 21:1-3.

-Simeon and Levi allowed their passions, their lusts, and their fleshly desires to control their lives. As a result, they never achieved all they could have in the kingdom of Israel.

-The same is true in the lives of many people around us today. Whether it is the pursuit of the pleasures of sin, unbridled lusts, rampant desires, or simply self-centeredness, there are multitudes that are controlled by their sins.

When this is the case, those people are never able to reach their fullest potential in Christ. They are always struggling and never walking close to Him. God cannot use them in that condition. He cannot bless their lives. He cannot work in or through them to accomplish His perfect will.

God's desire for His people is that we turn away from sin to follow a lifestyle of service and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, Matt. 16:24; Rom. 12:1-2. God wants us to separate ourselves from evil and consecrate ourselves to Him alone, 2 Cor. 6:17.

-The sins of Simeon and Levi cost them dearly, but they also cost their children. Because of the sins of these men, their families did not receive the inheritance they could have had.

The same is true in our lives. Our sins affect more than just us. Mom and Dad, your children see where God ranks on your list of priorities! They know when other things are more important than Him and His house. They pay attention to those little “slips of the tongue”, when you let “little” cuss words or a “little white lie” slip out. They see your commitment to Jesus and they will often base their commitment to Him on what they learn from you.

-Sin carries a very high price. Often the highest price is paid by the children of the guilty parties! That is the clear, consistent teaching of the Bible, Ex. 34:7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9. What you see in many families is just the results of sin and the damage it causes. Children act, think, talk and walk like their parents. The fruit does not fall far from the tree.

-The best gift we could ever give our families, those who will follow after us and those who live around us, is a life controlled by the

Spirit of God. When He is in control, we will lead people to Him and not away from Him. When He is in control we will set a standard of godliness in our families that will endure for generations.

One thing that blesses me about these boys is the fact that their place in the family is never questioned. They are the sons of Jacob and all the sin in the world cannot change that. They are his sons and they will not be denied.

God's people can be guilty of some serious sin. We often break the heart of God by the things we do and say. But, nothing can ever undermine our relationship with Him. We will sin, but we will still be sons. He will deal with us through chastisement, but he will never cast us out, John 6:37-40; John 10:28; I Peter 1:5.

### III.A Man Who Confessed His Sin – Genesis 49:8-12

The next brother in line that day was Judah. If I had been him, I would have been shaking in my sandals. Those other brothers had been evil, but Judah was worse than them all. Consider the sins of Judah's life.

- Gen. 37:26 - Judah is the one who talked his brothers out of killing Joseph and into selling him as a slave instead.
- Gen. 37:31-35 - Judah was part of the lie that broke Jacob's heart. They told him Joseph was dead and Jacob entered an extended time of mourning.
- Gen. 38:1 - When Judah sought a wife, he married an unbeliever.
- Gen. 38:12-16 - Judah was a man controlled by fleshly lusts. His wife died and he sought female companionship in the bed of a woman he thought was a harlot.
- Gen. 38:12-23 - Judah was guilty of committing incest with his daughter-in-law. She tricked him, but he was still responsible for his actions.
- Gen. 38:24-30 - Judah was judgmental. Tamar, his daughter-in-law, became pregnant through their incestuous relationship and Judah ordered her to be burned for his infidelity. As it turned out, she exposed him as the hypocrite he was. Their relationship produced twin boys, one of whom would become a distant ancestor of the Lord Jesus, Matt. 1:3.

-Judah is standing there hearing everything his father has said to the first three brothers and I can imagine him waiting for the hammer to fall. But, when Jacob speaks to Judah, there is not one word of judgment. There is no mention of his sins. There is no word about his failures and his mistakes.

There are only blessings, hope and promises. Look at the great thing Jacob promises Judah.

- He will be the object of praise among his brethren. In fact, Judah would lead the nation of Israel as they marched through the wilderness, Num. 10:14.
- He will be a conqueror. He will be strong and courageous like a mighty lion. Judah eventually became the largest of all the tribes, Num. 1:27; 26:22.
- Kings will come from his family. David and Solomon will descend from Judah.
- Shiloh, or the Messiah, the greatest King of them all would one day come from Judah's lineage. His name would be Jesus and He would be called the "Lion of the tribe of Judah", Rev. 5:5.
- Judah would be so prosperous that he would tie his donkeys to the grape vines and allow them to eat grapes instead of grass, because he would have so much to spare, v.11.  
He would be healthy and his people would prosper in the kingdom, v.12.
- The blessings and prosperity of Judah would boggle the mind!

-Why this seeming disparity? Why is Judah blessed after all the evil Judah did? The answer is right there in verse 11. We are told that "he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of the grapes". This is a reference to what Judah did in Gen. 44:18-34 when he stood before Jacob and confessed everything. He brought his sins out in confession, and they are not mentioned against him again!

-That is how it works for us! What we bring out at the mercy seat is forgiven and will never be brought up again, whither here or at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The truth is, we all fail and we all fail regularly. We all come short of the glory of God in thought, word, and deed. We all come short in both sins of omission and sins of commission.

The only way we can be restored to a place of fellowship with the Lord is for us to be honest about our sins. There is forgiveness for everyone who will repent and forsake his sins, 1 John 1:9! Thank God for such a kind, loving, forgiving Savior!

We all deal with the sin problem, don't we? The question is: How do we deal with it?

- Do we try to hide our sins away?
  - Do we just do as we please with no thought for God's will or for the effect our sins will have on others?
  - Or, do we handle them God's way?
- If the Lord has touched your heart about this matter of sin, come get before Him today and do what you need to do.
- There will either be confession, or there will be chastisement. There will either be separation and holiness now or there will be a high price to pay in the future. The choice is yours!

## **God Meant It For Good!**

### **Genesis 50:15-26**

Death isn't an accident it's an appointment (Heb. 9:27). "It's not that I'm afraid to die", wrote Woody Allen. "I just don't want to be there when it happens." But he will be there, and you and I will be there when it happens to us. Nobody has figured out how to erase the date of their death from God's appointment book.

This chapter records three burials, two of them literal and one figurative; and all of them important.

#### I. A Coffin for a Beloved Father - Genesis 49:32-50:14

Jacob was on his deathbed. He had given prophetic blessings to his sons. Jacob had nothing more to say, so he drew himself into the bed, lay down, and went to sleep with his sons standing around him and God waiting for him.

When Jacob breathed his last breath, we are told that Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. This is the sixth time we see Joseph weeping, and it wasn't a quiet affair. Jewish people aren't ashamed to express their emotions openly; and Joseph didn't let his important office smother his true feelings. Later, when the funeral procession approached Canaan, Joseph led the people in a week of public mourning for Jacob (50:10).

When somebody we love dies, God expects us to weep. That's why He gave us the ability to shed tears. Normal tears are a part of the healing process, while abnormal grief only keeps the wounds open and prolongs the pain. People who suppress their grief are in danger of developing emotional or physical problems that are difficult to heal.

Jacob had prepared both himself and his family for his death, and this is a good example for us to follow. He had privately instructed Joseph concerning his burial (47:27-31). And then had repeated the instructions to all the sons publicly (Genesis 49:29-32). There could be no disagreements about the matter because everything had been settled in advance.

Joseph had his father's body embalmed, a skill the Egyptians had mastered. Pharaoh commanded the Egyptians to observe an official mourning period for Jacob, since Jacob was the father of the second ruler in the land.

Joseph had to get permission to leave the country, and he also had to assure Pharaoh that he and his family would return. Except for the smallest children (v.8) the whole family traveled from Egypt to Canaan to pay their last respects to the founder of the family. Verse 13 suggests that the whole company didn't go into the land of Canaan to the cave of Machpelah, but that Jacob's twelve sons served as pallbearers and carried the body to the final resting place.

This was Joseph's first trip back to his homeland in thirty-nine years, and it's too bad it had to be for his father's burial. But, he didn't linger in Canaan, for God had given Joseph a job to do in Egypt, and that's where he belonged with his family.

#### II. A Coffin for a Painful Past - Genesis 50:15-21

We don't know if the event in verse 15 took place during the long period of mourning prior to the trip back to Egypt or if it took place when they got back to Egypt. The eleven brothers became aware of the fact that their father's death left them without anyone to mediate with Joseph, and they were afraid. They are sure that now that their father is dead, Joseph will seek revenge against them. "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"

They were accusing Joseph of harboring a hatred for them in his heart all these years, and the only reason he hadn't acted and killed them was that their father's presence held him back. "Now that Dad is dead, Joseph will want his pound of flesh."

What Joseph hears makes him weep. It was never in Joseph's heart to hold the past over their heads. He had forgiven them for their transgression a long time ago.

Some of the brothers were sowing seeds of gossip and bitterness in the minds of others. “What if...” “What if Joseph feels like this and what if he acts like that? What if this should happen and what if that should happen?” It happens in churches today. “What if he did this...What if she did that?” Nothing is happening and nothing will happen, but what if...what if?” Nothing has happened but we are judging and avoiding folks for what they might do. These brothers had been with Joseph all those years in Egypt and they still didn’t understand the grace of God that had wonderfully delivered them and blessed their family life.

“The fear of man brings a snare”. They would send a messenger to Joseph bearing falsehood. “Joseph will perhaps hate us and pay us back for what we did to him.” We often suspect in others what we’d do ourselves if we had the opportunity.

-There was no instruction from Jacob to his eleven sons as to what they were to say to Joseph. They were trying to save their skins by deceit. The fear of man does bring a snare and they were caught. They sent a man to tell an open lie in the name of their own father.

Joseph’s response to their deceit? He wept. Then Joseph says to his brothers, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?” (v.19). “You don’t answer to me ultimately, or I to you. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” God will right all wrongs and vindicate the innocent and also He will condemn those who have escaped just condemnation during their violent lives on earth.

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” This is one of the classic statements on the doctrine of the divine providence in the Bible. You remember that Joseph has said something very much like this a few years earlier to his brothers in 45:5, “It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.” Joseph believed that God had sent him to slavery in Egypt. Again, he repeated that conviction again in 45:7, “God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by great deliverance.” Here again, after the death of Jacob, he is repeating that conviction again. Joseph says, “It was not you who sent me here but God. The brothers did sell him into slavery in Egypt, but behind their decision was the work of God. God had overruled their evil deeds to accomplish His good purpose.

Believing in the providence of God can free us from bitterness and give us a new perspective on our tragedies. Believing in providence gives us courage to keep going in hard times and constrains us to live by faith.

My Father’s way may twist and turn, My heart throb and ache  
But in my soul I’m glad I know, He’s making no mistake.  
My cherished plans may go astray, My hopes may fade away.  
But still I’ll trust my Lord to lead, For He does know the way.  
There’s so much now I cannot see, My eyesight’s far too dim;  
But come what may, I’ll simply trust and leave it all to Him.  
For by and by the mist will lift And plain it all He’ll make.  
Through all the way, tho’ dark to me, He made not one mistake.

In the end that will be the testimony of every child of God. When we finally get to heaven, we’ll look back over the pathway of life and see that through all the twists and turns and seeming detours that “He made not one mistake.”

### III. A Coffin for a Special Brother - Genesis 50:22-26

What an exceptional man Joseph was. Because of him, many lives were saved during the famine, including his own family; and therefore the future of the people of Israel was guaranteed.

Joseph also gave instructions concerning his bones. Joseph knew what he believed and where he belonged. Therefore, he didn’t want his coffin to remain in Egypt when God -delivered His people. He made his brothers swear that they would instruct their descendants, who would then pass the word along to future generations; and they kept their promise.

-Moses took Joseph’s remains with him when the Jews left Egypt (Ex. 13:19), and Joshua buried him in Shechem (Joshua 24:32). Since Shechem became the capital for Ephraim and Manasseh, the tribes founded by Joseph’s two sons, that was the ideal place for him to be interred.

Fifty-one years after Jacob’s death, at the age of one hundred and ten, Joseph died. Joseph’s coffin in Egypt was a constant reminder to the Jewish people to have faith in God. When the Jews found themselves slaves instead of resident aliens (Ex. 1:8a), they could look at Joseph’s temporary burial place and be encouraged. During their wilderness wanderings, as they carried Joseph’s remains from place to place, he ministered to them and urged them to trust God and never give up.

“A Coffin in Egypt” may appear to be a discouraging way to close a book, but from the viewpoint of faith, it couldn’t be more encouraging. Joseph died believing that God would do what He promised to do. God will fulfill His promise to you and me as well.