

Tuesday, January 14, 2020—Genesis 43-46

The desperation is palpable. Jacob, the father, needs food for his family. His son sits in an Egyptian jail waiting for his father to act. In order to free his son and feed his family, he has to send his youngest son with the others. He lost Joseph. He may lose Benjamin. He sees no easy decision.

The brothers return, and Joseph prepares a feast, but they can't enjoy it because they don't know who Joseph is, and they have a guilty conscience. Their poor decision sown years ago continues to reap terrible emotions for everyone involved. Joseph was deeply moved to see Benjamin, and he gave him five times as much food as everyone else. Joseph was dropping hints, but the brothers did not understand.

Joseph then plotted to keep Benjamin with him so his father would be forced to return to Egypt. This was a difficult, emotional ploy, yet he was setting the stage for reunion and survival. His brothers had betrayed him years earlier, and he had no guarantee they wouldn't disappoint him now. Benjamin was the key to the whole plan.

The brothers were overwhelmed with grief at the thought of returning without Benjamin, and Joseph could stand the tension no longer. He revealed his identity and his understanding of what God was doing. He was working through Joseph to provide his family's survival (45:6-7). The brothers retrieved their father, who received word from God that He was still at work (46:3-4), and Pharaoh provided for them.

Praise God for working for the good of His people in all things.

Monday, January 13, 2020—Genesis 40-42

Because He is sovereign, God is able to work in any and every situation. When Joseph had dreams as a youngster, God was preparing him for his future. He was showing Joseph the plans He had for Joseph's life and demonstrating that He would speak to Joseph through dreams.

Pharaoh's cupbearer and chief baker "just happened" to be in jail with Joseph. Rather than focusing on himself, Joseph noticed these men were dejected. Both had troubling dreams, and they shared them with Joseph. He told them what God was telling them. For one it was good news. For the other, it was not. Sadly, the cup bearer did not remember Joseph's kindness to him, and Joseph remained in jail two more years.

In His sovereignty, God was preparing Joseph for something bigger than he could have imagined. Pharaoh himself had a dream no one could interpret, and the cup bearer remembered Joseph. Pharaoh called for him, and Joseph told him what God was saying (41:25-32). In what seemed an instant, Joseph went from prison to palace, overseeing Egypt (41:41).

When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for food, they did not recognize him, so Joseph implemented a plan to test them. He kept Simeon, and they had to go home and bring back Benjamin. Joseph's brothers and father now had to choose to trust God in miserable circumstances. God was at work, but they couldn't see any way that was true.

Thank God for being in control. Pray for a patient faith.

Sunday, January 12, 2020—Genesis 37-39

Jacob lived where his father had lived. He spent 20 years away, but God worked to bring Jacob and his abundance back home to the land of His promise. God is faithful

and able to do more than we imagine.

Jacob's youngest son, Joseph, had two dreams which seemed to indicate his brothers would bow to him. Understandably, his brothers bristled, yet Jacob kept this in mind (37:11). He had seen in his own life how God could do remarkable things through the least expected.

The unexpected was certainly what came next. In jealousy, Joseph's brothers plotted to kill him but then decided to sell him off and tell their father he had been killed by a wild animal (37:19-36).

Also unexpected was the story of Judah. While Joseph was in Egypt, Judah started a family. In details worthy of a modern cultural scandal, Judah fathered a child with his daughter-in-law Tamar but didn't know it. She eventually made this known, and he admitted his error in not caring for her well. She had to act secretly to secure her future (38:1-30).

Joseph found himself the servant of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Like Tamar, Joseph was vulnerable. He likely wondered why he was in this situation and how he would survive his circumstances, yet "the Lord was with Joseph and he prospered" (39:2). Joseph refused the advances of Potiphar's wife, and Joseph was jailed, yet the Lord was with him and granted him favor with the captors (39:21).

Even in the unexpected, God is at work. Trust Him.

Saturday, January 11, 2020—Genesis 33-36

Some 20 years had passed since Jacob and Esau had seen one another. They parted on the worst of terms. When Jacob considered reuniting, he was concerned. He had seen God do wonders in his life, but could he fix this? Yes. "Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him" (33:4).

Jacob had been a deceiver, and now he called himself a servant. He stole the blessing years earlier, but now was a giver of gifts. God had changed him, and that made all the difference. Esau, too, was softened by time and the grace of God (36:1-43). Significant healing occurred that day.

Living in the new place was not all positive. One of the Hivites violated Jacob's daughter Dinah. Her brothers developed a way to exact revenge. They convinced the men to circumcise themselves in order to be acceptable and then attacked them while they were vulnerable (34:1-31).

God told Jacob to move his family to Bethel, the place where God had appeared to Jacob when he was fleeing from Esau. Jacob was coming full circle, and his family had to purge themselves of the idols so common among the peoples near them, and the terror of God fell on all those around them (35:5). The Hivites learned that outward religious action is no guarantee of protection. Jacob's family learned the condition of the heart is what moves God to protect and provide.

God changed Jacob's name to Israel, "he who struggles with God." Thank God for a relationship in which to change, learn, and grow.

Friday, January 10, 2020—Genesis 30-32

Jacob was walking a path he had never seen modeled. His father had one wife. He had two. His father had two sons. He now had four from one wife, and a second

wife, the one he truly loved, was barren and jealous of the other. Jealousy and family are never a good mix.

What ensued was a competition between the wives—using their bodies and their maidservants as measures of value. Despite this selfish process, each woman praised God as He gave them sons. From one father came 12 sons. God was fulfilling His promise to make Abraham a nation.

Jealousy also developed in Jacob's father-in-law Laban. He and his sons were convinced Jacob was cheating them, so Jacob gathered his wives, sons, livestock, and possessions and headed toward Canaan, where God had promised to be with him (31:3). Laban pursued Jacob, but God warned Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob. Like many who are surprised when someone he has harmed runs away, Laban wondered why Jacob left (31:27).

Jacob stood by his decision and his faith in God (31:42). The two men came to an agreement and built a monument. God had brought Jacob home with abundance he never would have imagined, and his gratitude moved him to make amends with his brother. On the way to Esau, Jacob wrestled with God, and God changed his walk. The deceiver was restored. He was humble and blessed, and God was glorified.

Thank God for His undeserved blessing. Pray for humility and faith that produce obedience and fruit.

Thursday, January 9, 2020—Genesis 27-29

Kids walk behind their parents trying to mimic their footsteps. They observe and absorb their habits and mannerisms. Parents are without a doubt the primary source of truth and practice for their children.

Isaac learned much about life and faith from Abraham. For example, He told the same lie about his wife (see Genesis 26) because both father and son were not sure how to live in faith. What Isaac had not observed was how to be a father to two sons. Ishmael and Isaac had not grown up together.

As a result, Isaac favored Esau. Rebekah favored Jacob. This favoritism proved devastating. When Isaac was old, he wanted to bless the firstborn as all fathers did. He asked Esau to make a meal for the ceremony, but Rebekah and Jacob concocted a plan that gave Jacob the blessing and enraged Esau. God had promised before the boys were born that He would work through Jacob, yet Rebekah thought she had to help God along. The jealousy between the brothers drove Jacob away in fear for his life.

Esau willingly gave his birthright but blamed Jacob for it (27:36). He married a Canaanite woman precisely because it angered his parents (28:8). Esau displayed the character of one not interested in carrying on the covenant and promises of God. Jacob had flaws as well, yet God was working His promise in him for his good and God's glory (28:10-29:33).

Pray for faith and character that reflect God and His goodness. Seek to be an example others can follow.

Wednesday, January 8, 2020—Genesis 23-26

Real estate is a precious commodity. No one makes new land. To own land is to have possession of something permanent. For Abraham, a man from a foreign land, to

be able to buy land from the Hittites showed the remarkable way God had worked to make Abraham a man of integrity and influence. For Abraham to bury Sarah demonstrated the dignity of the human body and the importance Abraham saw of being in that place.

Marriage and family require constant attention. Abraham cared for Sarah in life and death, and he also looked after his son, Isaac. He knew God had covenantal plans for Isaac, so choosing a wife for him was a decision of utmost importance. She could not be a woman of the local peoples—they worshiped idols. She had to be a woman who knew of Yahweh, the one true God, and would be willing to come back to Canaan to help establish God's covenantal plans there. Thus, Abraham sent his servant to bring back a wife, and God worked convincingly to provide.

Abraham took another wife and had more children before his death, and Ishmael had many sons (25:1-18), but God's plan was at work through Isaac and Rebekah. God told them they would have twins, and the older would serve the younger. He was preparing the world for His ability to use the weak to lead the strong. Along the way, Isaac had to learn to trust God as his father did (26:1-32). Faith is a personal journey.

Thank God for His promises, His power, and the gift of life.