

ADULT BIBLE STUDY  
*FOUNDATIONS*

Winter 2020

Gospel  Advocate

GENESIS PART 2

Gospel  Advocate



Preparation for study should include reading the biblical text, reading the corresponding lesson in *Companion* and *Foundations* or *Horizons*, and answering the questions at the end of each lesson. Doing so will give the reader a thorough overview of the lesson and provide a solid basis for spiritual growth.

# GENESIS

## PART 2

As Genesis continues its focus on particular individuals, others come to the front—Abram and his father, Terah, Abram and Sarai, Hagar and Ishmael, Abram and his nephew Lot, Abraham and Abimelech, Isaac and Rebekah (the second generation after Abraham and Sarah), their twin sons Esau and Jacob, parental favoritism and sibling rivalry, family separation, Jacob and his family (the third generation after Abraham), and Joseph.

As the story builds, family traits become obvious; Isaac and Rebekah fail to curb their partiality to their sons (Isaac for Esau and Rebekah for Jacob). That trait would repeat in the family of Jacob, who showed partiality to his favorite wife, Rachel, and to her children as his favorite sons. He had two wives and each one had a servant; by the four Jacob fathered twelve sons and one daughter, but Joseph and Benjamin, the sons of Rachel, were the favored ones.

The importance Jacob placed on Joseph led to Joseph's sense of superiority over his brothers, leading them to despise him and to plan to kill him. Instead they sold him as a slave into Egypt, where God took control of his life through major events. Ultimately Joseph became second to the pharaoh of the land and was used by God to deliver the Israelites from a widespread famine.

Genesis is not only a book of beginnings; it also a book of personalities providing us with meaningful lessons.

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Lesson 1

# THE PROMISE REALIZED

## Genesis 21:1-21

- <sup>1</sup> And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.
- <sup>2</sup> For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.
- <sup>3</sup> And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac.
- <sup>4</sup> Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.
- <sup>5</sup> Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.
- <sup>6</sup> And Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.”
- <sup>7</sup> She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.”
- <sup>8</sup> So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.
- <sup>9</sup> And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.
- <sup>10</sup> Therefore she said to Abraham, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.”
- <sup>11</sup> And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight because of his son.

<sup>12</sup> But God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.

<sup>13</sup> Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.”

<sup>14</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba.

<sup>15</sup> And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs.

<sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, “Let me not see the death of the boy.” So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept.

<sup>17</sup> And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, “What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.

<sup>18</sup> Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation.”

<sup>19</sup> Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.

<sup>20</sup> So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

<sup>21</sup> He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

## Introduction

Although the gospel is for all (cf. Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11), Jewish individuals were initially better prepared than Gentiles to hear and obey. As Paul noted, one primary advantage was their possession of “the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2). Additionally, the apostle described the Jews as privileged because of “the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen” (9:4–5). From Paul’s vantage point, it was clear God kept the promise He made to Abraham when He declared, “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2–3). God brought forth the Christ from Abraham’s seed (Galatians 3:16).

From Abraham’s perspective, however, the timing of God’s fulfillment of the promise was less clear. Abraham was seventy-five years old when he was initially called to leave Haran for the promised land (Genesis 12:4). After some time had passed and no child had been born, Abraham questioned God: “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” (15:2). On that occasion, God reassured Abraham and declared, “Look now toward the heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be’”

(verse 5). In response, Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (verse 6).

Despite Abraham’s belief, he and Sarah remained childless for ten years. At that point, she attempted to help God fulfill the promises by giving her maid Hagar to Abraham as a “wife” (Genesis 16:3). Ishmael was born to this union when Abraham was eighty-six years old. Nevertheless, Ishmael was not the son of promise. Instead, the Lord revealed He would bless Abraham and Sarah with a son, whom they would name Isaac. He said, “Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him” (17:19). This took place when Abraham was one hundred years old, twenty-five years after the initial promise was made. God faithfully kept the promise He made.

As we read about Isaac’s birth in Genesis 21, we are reminded of God’s faithfulness. We serve a God “who cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). Therefore, we can have confidence the “exceedingly great and precious promises” God made throughout Scripture will be realized (2 Peter 1:3–4).

## Isaac’s Birth

Genesis 21:1–7

When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God assured him Sarah would bear his child the next year (Genesis 17:1, 21). In her ninetieth year, “the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son

in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him” (21:1–2). Regarding the word translated “visited” in verse 1, Andrew E. Steinmann observed, “The Hebrew verb ... denotes having a focused interest in someone or something. It will be connected with future mothers, such as when the Lord gave children to Hannah (1 Sam. 2:21). A Greek verb with a similar denotation is used in the New Testament to note God’s gift of a son to Elizabeth (Luke 1:68)” (*Genesis*, 209). What once seemed humorous to Sarah had occurred (cf. Genesis 18:11–15). God was undeniably at work. He enabled Sarah to bear a child when she was barren, and He did so at exactly the moment He predicted. Importantly, this was something Sarah expected “because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11).

Following the instructions God previously provided (cf. Genesis 17:19), “Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac” (21:3). The name *Isaac* literally means “laughter.” Thus, the child’s name served as a reminder of what God could do. As Paul J. Kissling noted, “The promise, which at first brought laughter from both Abraham and Sarah, brought a different type of laughter when the son was actually born. ... The ludicrous sounding promise that the 100-year-old Abraham and his long barren ninety-year-old wife Sarah would have a child gives way to the joyous laughter of celebration in the faithfulness of a God who does the implausible and the impossible. Every time the child’s name is mentioned, the joke that God played on them would be recalled with great delight” (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 176).

Sarah's statement recorded in Genesis 21:6 emphasized God's role in the process. She declared, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." Isaac's birth could not be attributed to nature. It was clearly miraculous. God promised to bless all nations through Abraham's seed, and He fulfilled the promise.

After the birth, "Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him" (Genesis 21:4). This command was given when God established His covenant with Abraham and declared, "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised" (17:9–10).

## Hagar and Ishmael Leave

Genesis 21:8–14

The birth of Isaac was a joyous occasion for Abraham and Sarah. When the child was weaned, "Abraham made a great feast on the same day Isaac was weaned" (Genesis 21:8). Feasts of this nature were given to celebrate the survival of children, who often died in infancy (Longman, *Genesis*, 272). Nevertheless, the joyous occasion was soured when "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing" (verse 9). The term *scoffing* (NKJV) is also translated *laughing* (ESV) or *mocking* (NASB). Ishmael was evidently making fun of Isaac in some way. William W. Grasham wrote,

"'Mocking' may not be a strong enough term here, since Paul understood the passage to mean that Ishmael 'persecuted' Isaac (Gal. 4:29). Exactly what Hagar's son did to the toddler, we do not know; but Sarah saw Ishmael as a threat to her son" (*Genesis 1–22*, 564).

Defending Isaac, Sarah said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac" (Genesis 21:10). Interestingly, Sarah does not mention Ishmael by name; neither is his name found in the account. He is called *son* (verses 9, 10, 11, 13); *boy* (verses 14, 15, 16); *lad* (verses 12, 17, 18, 19, 20); and *seed* (verse 13). By contrast, Isaac's name is mentioned throughout the narrative (verses 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12). Concerning this obvious difference, Abraham Kuruvilla proposed, "These contrasts between the son of Sarah and the son of Hagar suggest that something like a usurpation might have transpired with the 'mocking' of 21:9. The parallels between the careers of Ishmael and Isaac—particularly between their trips with a parent to the wilderness and to Moriah ... lay emphasis on the fundamental issue: Who will be Abraham's heir?" (*Genesis*, 242).

Although Abraham was bothered by Sarah's demand to dismiss Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:11), God instructed him to do as she directed. He said, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called" (verse 12). God then assured Abraham He would "also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed" (verse 13). Abraham therefore

did as God directed and sent Hagar and Ishmael away with “bread and a skin of water” (verse 14). Regarding this development, Allen P. Ross observed, “The divine approval of sending away Hagar and Ishmael was a sign not of divine abandonment but of protection for Isaac. Once again at the end of his life Abraham sent away all his other sons in order to preserve the inheritance for Isaac (25:6). . . . God had not abandoned Ishmael; he had provided for the resolution of a tension that could have no other resolution” (*Creation and Blessing*, 381).

## God’s Protection

Genesis 21:15–21

The water Abraham provided to Hagar and Ishmael was eventually “used up” (Genesis 21:15). When this occurred, Hagar placed Ishmael “under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, ‘Let me not see the death of the boy.’ So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept” (verses 15–16). As far as she was concerned, all hope was lost.

While Hagar despaired, God responded to Ishmael’s “voice” and “heard the lad crying” (Genesis 21:17 NASB). Rather than allowing the pair to die in the wilderness, God provided for their needs. He both reassured Hagar of His plans for Ismael’s future (verse 18) and directed the mother and child to a well, where she “filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink” (verse 19). Concerning God’s interaction with Hagar, John H. Walton wrote,

“For a second time (see 16:10–13) Hagar receives a visitation from God. He not only comforts her with a promise (21:18) but provides for her immediate needs (21:19). Few individuals in the Bible are favored with two theophanies and can claim to have been rescued by receiving divine instruction. This is another indication of the blessings that surround Abraham and those associated with him” (*The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, 496). God’s continued protection of Ishmael is summarized by Genesis 21:20: “So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.”

## Applications

- The birth of Isaac reminds us of God’s willingness to keep His promises. God made the promise to Abraham twenty-five years before it was fulfilled. Although Abraham believed God, he attempted to expedite the process rather than wait patiently. We would do well to remember God not only knows what we need but also knows when we need it. Making this point, Isaiah wrote, “But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).
- God’s willingness to care for Hagar and Ishmael illustrates His concern for all humanity. His promise to Abraham would be fulfilled through Isaac. Nevertheless, this did not render Ishmael insignificant.



God continues to be concerned with all humanity today. As Paul reminded Timothy, God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

## Questions

1. When did Sarah bear a son for Abraham (Genesis 21:2)?
2. What did Abraham do to Isaac when he was eight days old (Genesis 21:4)?
3. How old was Abraham when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5)?
4. What did Abraham do to celebrate Isaac being weaned (Genesis 21:8)?
5. What did Ishmael do to Isaac on that occasion (Genesis 21:9)?

6. What did Sarah tell Abraham to do to Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:10)?
7. What did God tell Hagar about Ishmael (Genesis 21:18)?

## Discussion

1. What can we learn about God from Isaac’s birth?
2. Did Sarah handle the conflict between Ishmael and Isaac properly? Why, or why not?
3. What can we learn from God’s willingness to protect Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness?

## ABRAHAM'S GREAT TEST

Genesis 22:1-14

<sup>1</sup> Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

<sup>2</sup> Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

<sup>3</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

<sup>4</sup> Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.

<sup>5</sup> And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."

<sup>6</sup> So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together.

<sup>7</sup> But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

<sup>8</sup> And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.

<sup>9</sup> Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

<sup>10</sup> And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

<sup>11</sup> But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am."

<sup>12</sup> And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

<sup>13</sup> Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

<sup>14</sup> And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

### Introduction

Isaac's birth occurred twenty-five years after God promised Abraham He would raise from his seed a "great nation" (Genesis 12:2). Prior to issuing the promise, God instructed Abraham, "Get out of your country, from

your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you" (verse 1). Obediently, he "departed as the LORD had spoken to him" (verse 4). Nevertheless, Abraham, or Abram as he was then known, did not leave his entire family behind, for his nephew Lot joined him on the journey (verse 4).

After some time passed and no child was born to Abraham, he questioned God: "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Genesis 15:2). Rather than rebuking him for his impatience, God reassured him by declaring his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the sky (verse 5). In response, Abraham "believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (verse 6).

Despite his expression of faith in the Lord, Abraham attempted to run ahead of God when he fathered a child with Sarah's maid, Hagar (Genesis 16:3-4, 15). The child born to this union—Ishmael—was not the son of promise. Making this clear, God declared, "Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him" (17:19). Fulfilling this promise, "the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him" (21:1-2).

Given the circumstances surrounding Isaac's birth, the demand God made of Abraham in our lesson text—Genesis 22:1-14—is startling. He commanded Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love,

and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (verse 2). Upon reading this verse, we wonder why such was necessary. Even more startling, however, is Abraham's response. Without the least sign of hesitation, Abraham "bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son" (verses 9-10). God, of course, stopped the sacrifice; Abraham passed the test. In doing so, he exhibited great faith. Summarizing the event, the author of Hebrews wrote, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (11:17-19).

## God's Directive

Genesis 22:1-5

Perhaps the key to understanding why God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac is found in an easily overlooked introductory phrase in Genesis 22:1—"after these things." What "things" preceded and precipitated God's command to sacrifice Isaac? Why did Abraham need to be tested? Looking back over Abraham's life, several "things" come to mind. Although Abraham left his home when instructed by God, he did not leave his entire family. Instead, he was joined by Lot. Regarding

this, Kuruvilla wrote, “Was Abram thinking of Lot as the likely heir, seeing that he himself was already 75 years old, and his wife 65 (12:4)? That certainly was not an attitude of faith in God’s promise. Later, perhaps still holding on to the hope that his nephew Lot would be the chosen heir, Abram gives him the choicest portion of the land (13:10–11). God appears to Abraham soon thereafter, renewing the promise to his descendants (13:16) as if to assert that he, Abraham, had been mistaken in reckoning Lot as his heir” (*Genesis*, 253). Additionally, Abraham left Canaan shortly after his arrival because of a famine (12:10). On that trip, he lied about his relationship to Sarah in an attempt to protect himself from Pharaoh (verses 11–20). The entire event causes us to wonder why Abraham did not trust God to provide and protect.

Other “things” preceding the test of Abraham’s faith include his lack of patience in God’s timing (Genesis 15:2), his attempt to help God fulfill the promise by bearing a son with Hagar (16:3–4, 15), and his encounter with Abimelech, where he again identified Sarah as his sister rather than his wife in an effort to save his own life (20:10–13). Abraham’s faith in God was not always obvious. Kuruvilla concluded, “All of his attempts to help out God with the production of an heir had come to naught. None of his schemes had worked; in fact, they had only created more trouble for himself and, in the future, for his descendants” (*Genesis*, 254). Thus, the test in Genesis 22 was necessary.

Importantly, readers of the passage know what Abraham did not; God’s demand for Isaac’s sacrifice was only a test. As John H. Sailhamer noted, “By stating

clearly at the start that ‘God tested Abraham’ (v. 1), the writer quickly allays any doubt about God’s real purpose. There is, then, no thought of an actual sacrifice of Isaac in the narrative, though in the mind of Abraham within the narrative that, of course, was the only thought that was entertained” (*Genesis*, 167–68).

Providing instructions to Abraham, God declared, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Genesis 22:2). The way Isaac is identified in the verse leaves little doubt regarding Abraham’s feelings for his son. The question was not, “Does Abraham love Isaac?” It was, rather, “Does Abraham love God?” Regarding the location of the sacrifice, Grasham wrote, “Apparently, in later times, the name ‘Moriah’ came to be applied to a specific mountain—‘the mount of the Lord’ (22:14)—rather than a general area of land. The Israelites gave the name ‘Mount Moriah’ to a certain place in Jerusalem where they believed the sacrifice of Isaac had taken place. On this site, David offered sacrifices to God (2 Sam. 24:16–25), and Solomon built the temple” (*Genesis 1–22*, 589).

In obedience to God’s instructions, “Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him” (Genesis 22:3). When they reached the appointed place, Abraham and Isaac parted company with the young men. He told them, “The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and

we will come back to you” (verse 5). As Clyde M. Woods remarked, “This phrase seems to indicate Abraham’s faith that somehow Isaac would return with him” (*Genesis-Exodus*, 55).

### Isaac’s Query

Genesis 22:6–8

When they parted company with the two young men, “Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together” (Genesis 22:6). Although we do not know exactly how old Isaac was at the time of this event, he recognized they lacked an appropriate animal to sacrifice. Consequently, he asked his father, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (verse 7).

Abraham responded, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering” (Genesis 22:8). Again, Abraham’s confidence in God is on display. Regarding this brief conversation between father and son, Steinmann remarked, “Isaac asks a question with six words (in Hebrew), and Abraham answers with six words. The conversation begins with Isaac’s *my father* (v. 7) and ends with Abraham’s *my son* (v. 8). Abraham’s reply, though vague from Isaac’s point of view, is also a statement of faith: that God will make the necessary provisions for the burnt offering. *God will provide* is literally ‘God will see for himself’” (*Genesis*, 220). After Isaac’s question was answered, the pair continued on

the mission. Whether Abraham believed God would allow the sacrifice to take place, he intended to obey God. “Hope was one thing, but submission to the will of God by his obedience was his primary goal” (*Genesis*, 289).

### Abraham’s Faith

Genesis 22:9–14

When Abraham and Isaac arrived at the mountain, Abraham displayed his resolve. He “built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son” (Genesis 22:9–10). As previously noted, this obedience stemmed from Abraham’s belief “that God was able to raise [Isaac] up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:19).

Before Abraham could strike Isaac, however, “the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ So he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me’” (Genesis 22:11–12; cf. verse 1). This should not be understood to mean God was unaware of how Abraham would respond to the test, for He is capable of “declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done” (Isaiah 46:10). Nevertheless, Abraham had to demonstrate his faithfulness. When he did so, the matter was clear. Abraham showed appropriate fear for God.



According to Kissling, “To fear God is to obey his commandments. Abraham has feared God by obeying his commandment, just as the nation which descended from Abraham would fear God by obeying the commandments given to them. It was only after Abraham’s obedience to a challenging commandment that he could be called someone who feared God. The angel only knows that Abraham fears God when he becomes a fearer of God by offering up Isaac. He could not have known this before this time because Abraham had not yet become one who fears God in this sense” (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 197). With the test completed, God provided a ram for the sacrifice as Abraham predicted (Genesis 22:13; cf. verse 8). Fittingly, “Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide” (verse 14).

### Application

- Abraham was called to demonstrate his allegiance to God. His willingness to follow God’s direction stands as a model for us to imitate. In a parallel sense, “Jesus’ requirement of forsaking one’s family, leaving all, and following him (Luke 14:26–27) is similar to the test of obedience that was taught in Genesis 22. If anyone is inclined to be a true worshiper of the Lord, it will involve the willingness to sacrifice whatever is dearest and most treasured, even if such should be considered a gift from God” (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 398). As Jesus commanded, we must “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33).

### Questions

1. How did Abraham respond when he was initially called by God (Genesis 22:1)?
2. How did God describe Isaac when instructing Abraham to offer him as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:2)?
3. How long did it take for Abraham and Isaac to journey to the “land of Moriah” (Genesis 22:4)?
4. What did Isaac notice they lacked to make a sacrifice (Genesis 22:7)?
5. What did Abraham demonstrate when he was about to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:12)?
6. What did Abraham call the location where this event occurred (Genesis 22:14)?

## Discussion

1. What events led up to Abraham's great test?
2. Why do you think God described Isaac as He did when calling Abraham to offer the sacrifice?
3. What lesson(s) can we learn from Abraham's behavior?

## SARAH'S DEATH

### Genesis 23:1-20

<sup>1</sup> Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.

<sup>2</sup> So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

<sup>3</sup> Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying,

<sup>4</sup> "I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

<sup>5</sup> And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him,

<sup>6</sup> "Hear us, my lord: You are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead."

<sup>7</sup> Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth.

<sup>8</sup> And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me,

<sup>9</sup> that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of his field. Let him give it

to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you.”

<sup>10</sup> Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city, saying,

<sup>11</sup> “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead!”

<sup>12</sup> Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land;

<sup>13</sup> and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, “If you will give it, please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take it from me and I will bury my dead there.”

<sup>14</sup> And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him,

<sup>15</sup> “My lord, listen to me; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? So bury your dead.”

<sup>16</sup> And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants.

<sup>17</sup> So the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field and the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, which were within all the surrounding borders, were deeded

<sup>18</sup> to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city.

<sup>19</sup> And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.

<sup>20</sup> So the field and the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place.

## Introduction

When Sarah, or Sarai as she was then known, is first mentioned in Scripture, she is introduced as Abram's wife (Genesis 11:29). The next verse, however, reveals even more when it declares, “But Sarai was barren; she had no child” (verse 30). Although she often played a supporting role in the narrative that follows, she was not a minor character. She left her home to travel with Abram to Canaan (12:5). She suffered the indignity of being identified as Abraham's sister rather than his wife on two separate occasions (verses 11–13; 20:2). She also attempted to provide Abraham with an heir by giving him her maid as a wife (16:3–4). But God did not need Sarah to fulfill His promise. He intended to do so in His own good time. Ishmael, the child born to Abraham by Sarah's maid, was not the son of promise. Instead, God declared to Abraham, “Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him” (17:19).

Expressing her astonishment at the Lord's plan, Sarah “laughed within herself” (Genesis 18:12). Nevertheless,

she trusted the Lord. Reporting this, the author of Hebrews wrote, “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (11:11). Despite her barrenness and old age, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. She then credited God and said, “God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6). Isaac’s birth was miraculous. Sarah understood it should be a source of joy and celebration.

After Isaac’s birth, Sarah is mentioned only briefly in the biblical record. Besides the account where she called upon Abraham to force Hagar and Ishmael to leave because the boy scoffed at her son, Isaac (Genesis 21:8–10), the text is silent. Only in death does she reenter the narrative. The text describing Sarah’s death and burial—Genesis 23:1–20—serves as the basis for our lesson text.

Not surprisingly, Scripture has much to say about death. We know “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). We also know “the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). But Genesis 23 is not about what happened to Sarah after death. It is about those she left behind. When an individual dies, his or her loved ones must go through a grieving process. This happened when Lazarus died (cf. John 11:33–34), and it happened after Sarah’s passing. Describing this in a brief but clear way, Genesis 23:2 states, “So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.” As the chapter unfolds, we find

Abraham making provisions to bury Sarah—a necessary step in the grief process. We also realize Canaan is now Abraham’s home. Making this point, Ross wrote, “The account of the burial in the Land of Promise informs the reader that there was no going back for Abraham. The future was in Canaan, even though the first recipients of that promise would die before that promise could be realized” (*Creation and Blessing*, 408).

## Burial Place Sought

Genesis 23:1–6

Sarah was ninety years old when Isaac was born (Genesis 17:17). At the time of her death, she was 127 (23:1). Little is known about the intervening years. The text reveals her death occurred at “Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan” (verse 2). Prior to this point, Abraham was living at Beersheba (22:19). When she died, “Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her” (23:2). According to Steinmann, “Abraham’s mourning and weeping (v. 2) was part of the customary ritual for grieving over a loved one. In the Ancient Near East this grieving was expected to be done publicly. As the first part of verse 3 makes clear, Abraham’s mourning was public, conducted near the city gate (cf. vv. 10, 18)” (*Genesis*, 226).

At this juncture, Abraham began to make an effort to secure a place for Sarah’s burial. Speaking to “the sons of Heth” (Genesis 23:3 NKJV) or “the Hittites” (ESV), he declared, “I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury

my dead out of my sight” (verse 4). In response, the sons of Heth answered, “Hear us, my lord: You are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead” (verse 6). In the NKJV, the Hittites called Abraham a “mighty prince.” The ESV, however, translates the phrase “prince of God.” Regarding this difference, Walter Brueggemann observed, “If this translation be accepted, it suggests that, for the narrative, it is the *landless sojourner* who is *God’s prince*. It is the landless one who bears all the promises and lives in hope. It is this very incongruity which intensifies the main concern of Genesis. ... By the end of our narrative (vv. 17–20), Abraham has fully acquired land and ‘belongs’ in a new way” (*Genesis*, 196).

## A Site Requested

Genesis 23:7–11

Having stated his desire to bury Sarah, Abraham attempted to secure an appropriate place. Continuing his conversation with the sons of Heth, he stated, “If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of this field. Let him give it to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you” (Genesis 23:8–9). From this brief statement, we learn two important truths. First, Abraham had already identified where he wanted to bury Sarah. Second, he intended to

purchase the location without any discount, lest there be any challenges to the agreement. Regarding the location, Abraham understood the owner, Ephron the son of Zohar, might not be interested in selling the property. Thus, he asked for the Hittite leaders to “meet with” (NKJV), “approach” (NASB), “entreat” (ESV), or “intercede” (NIV). Regarding his willingness to purchase the location at full price, Walton remarked, “Abraham’s payment was more likely viewed as exorbitant rather than discounted, for rather than negotiating, he pays the inflated initial quote. Abraham refuses the offer to receive the land as a gift because then Ephron’s heirs could reclaim the land after Ephron’s death. In fact, Abraham is likely anxious to pay full price because a discounted price could be later connected to family debt problems and also allow the heirs of Ephron to reclaim the land” (*The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, 528–29). As Tremper Longman III noted, “The patriarch does not want to be beholden to the Canaanites” (*Genesis*, 306).

As it happened, Ephron was in the audience and heard Abraham’s request. He responded, “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead!” (Genesis 23:11). Ephron’s generous offer and open dealings stand in contrast with some of Abraham’s earlier misdeeds (cf. 12:11–13; 20:2). On this occasion, however, Abraham was not duplicitous. He was determined to buy the property in an upright way before many witnesses. Commenting on this important transaction, Clyde M. Woods wrote, “A fascinating aspect of this record is its account of Abraham’s acquisition of



a burial plot, which account reflects clearly the oriental courtesy and indirect negotiation of Near Eastern transactions. Purchase of this plot may have symbolized to later Israelites the firstfruits of their possession of Canaan” (*Genesis–Exodus*, 57).

## An Agreement

Genesis 23:12–20

Abraham’s initial request was for “the cave of Machpelah” (Genesis 23:9). Ephron offered both “the field and the cave” (verse 11). As the negotiation continued, Abraham responded, “If you will give it, please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take it from me and I will bury my dead there” (verse 13). Essentially, he agreed to Ephron’s terms. All that remained was to set a price. Regarding this exchange, Kissling wrote, “Abraham commits to paying the price of the field, which included the cave. He accepts Ephron’s terms and includes the field in the purchase. Since the price had not been negotiated Abraham agrees to pay whatever price Ephron names. He asks only Ephron’s commitment to sell it to him. Doing this publicly in a social situation in which written records were scarce may have been a way of ensuring the legal validity of the transaction” (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 206).

Ephron set the price for the field and cave at four hundred shekels of silver (Genesis 23:15). According to Victor P. Hamilton, “The piece of property was no bargain for Abraham; 400 shekels would be more than a hundred pounds of silver. ... But to Ephron 400 shekels is a paltry

amount—between you and me, what is that?—to pay for a burial site. ... Surely 400 shekels is a minuscule amount for one to pay for a piece of land in which to inter one’s beloved spouse. Abraham offers no resistance to the amount set by Ephron and does not attempt to persuade Ephron to lower his asking price” (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 135).

Without hesitation, Abraham “weighed out the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants” (Genesis 23:16). Abraham thus became a property owner in Canaan. He then buried Sarah in the cave located there (verse 19).

## Applications

- It is natural for us to grieve and mourn when a loved one passes in death. Abraham did this when Sarah died (Genesis 23:2); Jesus did this when Lazarus died (John 11:35). Nevertheless, death for the Christian is but safe passage to what is far better. Describing this, the apostle John wrote, “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’” (Revelation 14:13). When a fellow Christian dies, we experience sorrow. Nevertheless, our sorrow is not like “others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Do not forget the goal. We are living for what is to come!

- The narrative of Sarah's death and burial reminds us of the importance of the process we face when a loved one dies. Rather than ignoring or masking our emotions, we would do well to follow Abraham's example and make provisions for the deceased. Importantly, the cave served as a burial place for not only Sarah but also Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah.

### Questions

1. How old was Sarah when she died (Genesis 23:1)?
2. How did Abraham describe himself when speaking to the sons of Heth (Genesis 23:4)?
3. What did the sons of Heth tell Abraham to do (Genesis 23:6)?
4. Where did Abraham want to bury Sarah (Genesis 23:9)?

5. How much did Abraham pay for the cave and the field (Genesis 23:15)?
6. Where did this transaction take place (Genesis 23:18)?

### Discussion

1. Why do you think this account is recorded in Scripture?
2. How can we help those who are grieving?
3. What does Abraham's willingness to purchase property in Canaan say about his confidence in God's promises?
4. What is the main lesson we can learn from this passage?

## ISAAC AND REBEKAH

### Genesis 24:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

<sup>2</sup> So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh,

<sup>3</sup> and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell;

<sup>4</sup> but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

### Genesis 24:15-18

<sup>15</sup> And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder.

<sup>16</sup> Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up.

<sup>17</sup> And the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher."

<sup>18</sup> So she said, "Drink, my lord." Then she quickly let her pitcher down to her hand, and gave him a drink.

### Genesis 24:56-67

<sup>56</sup> And he said to them, "Do not hinder me, since the LORD has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to my master."

<sup>57</sup> So they said, "We will call the young woman and ask her personally."

<sup>58</sup> Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go."

<sup>59</sup> So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men.

<sup>60</sup> And they blessed Rebekah and said to her:

"Our sister, may you become  
The mother of thousands of ten thousands;  
And may your descendants possess  
The gates of those who hate them."

<sup>61</sup> Then Rebekah and her maids arose, and they rode on the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed.

<sup>62</sup> Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he dwelt in the South.

<sup>63</sup> And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming.

<sup>64</sup> Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel;

<sup>65</sup> for she had said to the servant, “Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took a veil and covered herself.

<sup>66</sup> And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.

<sup>67</sup> Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

## Introduction

Sarah was 127 years old at the time of her death (Genesis 23:1). Although Isaac was born in her ninetieth year (17:17, 21), he had not yet married when his mother died. Consequently, Abraham was concerned about finding an appropriate mate for Isaac. Knowing the covenant God made with him would be fulfilled through Isaac and his descendants (verse 19; cf. 12:2–3), Abraham understood the importance of this matter. Thus, he spoke to his oldest and likely most-trusted servant and said, “Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac” (24:2–4).

The text does not specifically state why Abraham was concerned about Isaac marrying an inhabitant of Canaan. Nevertheless, other passages make clear the danger he

wished to avoid. Moses made the point explicitly when he forbade the Israelites from marrying Canaanites. Conveying God’s instructions, he declared, “Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly” (Deuteronomy 7:3–4). Explaining, Kissling wrote, “If Isaac is to be the lone heir through whom the promise of a great nation is to come, he must have a wife and children. If that nation is to see the fulfillment of God’s promises, they must remain faithful. ... While intermarriage with Abraham’s extended family back in Haran was not without its problems, and his relatives certainly did not share Abraham’s commitment to God alone, this seemed to be much better than the alternative of intermarrying with the polytheistic women of Canaan” (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 211).

Genesis 24 describes how Abraham’s servant faithfully performed his task and brought Rebekah to meet Isaac. More importantly, however, it emphasizes the efforts of the unseen hand of God at work throughout the process. Before the servant met Rebekah, he prayed, “O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham” (verse 12). After their initial encounter, he declared, “I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master’s brother for his son” (verse 48). Ross observed, “This story, then,

demonstrates how the Lord providentially ensured the continued development of the promise by guiding the faithful servant in the acquisition of a bride for Isaac. ... It reports the hidden causality of God, sovereignly working through the circumstances of those who are acting in faith. The role of faith, expressed in personal prayer, trusting for divine guidance through the circumstances, and acting responsibly in anticipation of God's faithfulness, is predominant because God is not visibly active" (*Creation and Blessing*, 415). Regardless, God's providential involvement in securing Isaac's spouse is obvious. He intended to keep the promise He made to Abraham.

### Abraham's Charge

Genesis 24:1-4

Our lesson text begins with the following description of Abraham: "Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things" (Genesis 24:1). In other words, God kept His initial promise: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing" (12:2). Abraham had a home in the land of promise, and he was given an heir through whom God would bless all nations (22:18). Abraham's race was nearly run; Isaac's was just beginning. Steinmann therefore wrote, "By pointing to the fact that God had fulfilled his promise to bless Abraham, the narrative prepares the reader to move forward in the continuing story by leaving Abraham behind and continuing on to Isaac" (*Genesis*, 230).

With Isaac's well-being in mind, Abraham charged his oldest servant with the task of finding a wife for Isaac. To ensure the servant did not select Isaac's mate from among the Canaanites, Abraham charged, "Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" (Genesis 24:2-3). Whether we understand the symbolism of the encounter, Woods noted, "The act accompanied ... the making of a solemn pledge" (*Genesis-Exodus*, 58).

We find a similar vow recorded in Genesis 47:29. On that occasion, Jacob asked his son Joseph to promise not to bury him in Egypt. Regarding the similarity between the two events, Hamilton wrote, "In both cases the one who asks another to place his hand under his thigh is elderly. Abraham is 'old, along in years' (24:1), and Jacob/Israel is on his deathbed (49:29); therefore neither Abraham nor Jacob can guarantee their wishes will be faithfully carried out. The other individual, the one who places his hand on the thigh, is well known to the person requesting the oath (a servant, a son, respectively). In both cases the real concern of Abraham and Jacob is with family matters. Abraham desires the right woman for his son, and Jacob wishes to be buried with his ancestors. Finally, both stories involve a 'not-here-but-there' geography (a wife not from Canaan but from ... Mesopotamia; a burial not in Egypt but in Canaan)" (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 139). Abraham's servant was thus charged to find Isaac a wife from among



Abraham's family (24:4). As the text reveals, he faithfully fulfilled this responsibility.

## Making a Choice

Genesis 24:15–18

Although the servant expressed concerns about the task Abraham assigned to him, Abraham assured him, "The LORD God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there" (Genesis 24:7). After hearing Abraham's confident response, "the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed. . . . And he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water" (verses 10–11). The servant then prayed for God to bless his efforts with success. In fact, he asked, "Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'—let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master" (verse 14).

Before the servant finished his prayer, Rebekah, a relative of Abraham, "came out with her pitcher on her shoulder" (Genesis 24:15). She is described as "very beautiful to behold" and as "a virgin" (verse 16). The latter fact is emphasized by the statement, "no man had known

her" (verse 16). With regard to her virginity, Longman observed, "It is an important matter especially for someone who is going to give birth to a child who will inherit the promises" (*Genesis*, 316).

Testing Rebekah, the servant "ran to meet her and said, 'Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher'" (Genesis 24:17). She responded not only favorably but also quickly (verse 18). She also "ran back to the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels" (verse 20). Rebekah was indeed an answer to his prayer. She was the one for Isaac. Emphasizing this point, Sailhamer wrote, "The writer leaves us in no doubt that this was the girl the servant had asked for and that God had indeed sent his messenger out ahead of him to prepare the way. The rest of the story only confirms what the writer has given away here at the beginning. This is the girl. Thus when the writer continues to recount all the details to show that this was in fact the girl, it only serves to underscore the extent to which the Lord had prepared this wife for Isaac" (*Genesis*, 177). God's providence was at work.

## Married

Genesis 24:56–67

After Abraham's servant explained his mission and his initial meeting with Rebekah to her father and brother, the two responded, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the LORD has spoken" (Genesis 24:50–51). Although her

brother and mother wanted her to wait at least ten days before going with Abraham's servant (verse 55), he desired to finish his mission as soon as possible (verse 56). When asked, Rebekah agreed to join him without delay (verse 58).

As Rebekah departed, her family members blessed her and said, "Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them" (Genesis 24:60). Rebekah chose to go and become Isaac's wife; Rebekah's family chose to trust God to bless and protect her. As Kuruvilla noted, "This story is not only about divine guidance, but the operations of God in, through, and with, human actions. Indeed, there is a hustle and bustle of human activity: besides the planning of Abraham and his servant, and the frenetic exertions of Rebekah, there is also the resourceful and diplomatic negotiations of the servant first with Rebekah, then with her family, and the equally shrewd and artful movements of Laban. All they did, or attempted to do, was work out the sovereign design of God" (*Genesis*, 285).

The remainder of Genesis 24 focuses on the couple's first meeting and subsequent marriage. When the caravan drew to Isaac, he was meditating in the field (Genesis 24:63). Upon seeing him, Rebekah dismounted and "took a veil and covered herself" (verses 64–65). According to Grasham, "The veil symbolized that she was a chaste, unmarried virgin; her action was proper for a betrothed upper class woman in the presence of her future husband" (*Genesis 23–50*, 56). After listening to the servant's account of his mission, Isaac "took Rebekah and she

became his wife, and he loved her" (verse 67). Abraham's request was granted. God continued to provide.

## Application

- The story of how Rebekah came to be Isaac's wife cannot be told without emphasizing the providence of God. The meeting of Abraham's servant and Rebekah at the well was no coincidence. God was at work. God not only promised to bless all nations through Abraham's seed but also provided for such to occur. Although Abraham took some time to trust God about Isaac, he did not hesitate when it was time to secure a wife for his son. We must seek to develop a similar confidence in God.

## Questions

1. What did Abraham ask his servant to do (Genesis 24:2–4)?
2. Why was Abraham confident in the success of the mission (Genesis 24:7)?

3. What was the servant doing when he first encountered Rebekah (Genesis 24:12–14)?
  
4. How was Rebekah related to Abraham (Genesis 24:15)?
  
5. How did the servant know Rebekah was the one God selected for Isaac (Genesis 24:18–26)?
  
6. What did Rebekah do when she first saw Isaac (Genesis 24:65)?
  
7. How did Isaac react to the servant's recounting of his mission (Genesis 24:66–67)?

## Discussion

1. What does this passage teach us about God's providence?
  
2. What progress can we see in Abraham's faith as the story begins?
  
3. What can we learn from the various characters described in Genesis 24?

## JACOB AND ESAU

Genesis 25:24–34

<sup>24</sup> So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb.

<sup>25</sup> And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau.

<sup>26</sup> Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

<sup>27</sup> So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents.

<sup>28</sup> And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

<sup>29</sup> Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary.

<sup>30</sup> And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom.

<sup>31</sup> But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day."

<sup>32</sup> And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?"

<sup>33</sup> Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

<sup>34</sup> And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

### Genesis 27:1–13

<sup>1</sup> Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, "My son." And he answered him, "Here I am."

<sup>2</sup> Then he said, "Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death.

<sup>3</sup> Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me.

<sup>4</sup> And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die."

<sup>5</sup> Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it.

<sup>6</sup> So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, "Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying,

<sup>7</sup> 'Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.'

<sup>8</sup> Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you.

<sup>9</sup> Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves.

<sup>10</sup> Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death.”

<sup>11</sup> And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.”

<sup>13</sup> But his mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me.”

## Introduction

Although Isaac did not start his family as late in life as Abraham, he “was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife” (Genesis 25:20). Under normal circumstances, this would not pose an obstacle to having children. The problem, however, was that Rebekah, like Isaac’s own mother, Sarah, was barren (verse 21). As was true before Isaac’s birth, the reader of Genesis is left to wonder how God will fulfill His promise to bless all nations through Abraham’s seed (12:3; 17:6–7). Thankfully, resolution comes swiftly, for “Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived” (25:21). The brevity of Genesis 25 makes it seem as if the pregnancy began shortly after Isaac and Rebekah married. In reality, it did not occur until twenty years later (verse 26).

Rebekah’s pregnancy was unusual. Rather than carrying one child, she carried two. Because she did not

understand why “the children struggled together within her” (Genesis 25:22), she asked the Lord about the matter. In response, “the LORD said to her: ‘Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger’” (verse 23). Whether Rebekah fully understood the Lord’s explanation, she gave birth to twin sons. Prior to this point, Scripture records no other instance of twins. Thus, a new problem arose: Who would receive the birthright? Describing the situation, Kuruvilla wrote, “And so the fighting begins, a struggle to be the firstborn, a drive to obtain the blessing of God, as the participants slug it out between themselves to be the first in line for divine blessing, as if they could overcome sovereign design by human vigor” (*Genesis*, 297).

The firstborn son was named Esau; the younger son was named Jacob. Sadly, the strife present in Rebekah’s womb remained with Jacob and Esau throughout much of their lives. This was not helped when Jacob, whose name means “heel-grabber,” convinced Esau to sell the birthright for “bread and stew of lentils” (Genesis 25:34). Neither was it eased when Rebekah helped Jacob scheme and lie to Isaac to steal a special blessing he intended to give Esau (27:18–29). Nevertheless, Jacob was the one through whom God intended to fulfill His promise to Abraham. As He has been throughout the book of Genesis, God is in control. As Brueggemann noted, “This grandson of the promise is a rascal compared to his faithful grandfather Abraham or his successful father Isaac. . . . God has chosen and destined this man Jacob in



a special way. The initial designation of Jacob is inscrutable (25:23). We are not told why God wills this inversion of ‘natural right.’ But as the narrative is given to us, it is this designation by God which brings Jacob to well-being and prosperity” (*Genesis*, 204). The story of Jacob and Esau is one of rivalry and strife. At the same time, it is part of the greater story of the people who will be called by Jacob’s other name—Israel.

## Twins Born

Genesis 25:24–28

Emphasizing the unusual nature of Rebekah’s pregnancy, Genesis 25:24 declared, “So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb.” The firstborn son was named Esau. This name means “hairy” and reflected how the child was “red, all his body like a hairy cloak” (verse 25 ESV). The younger son was named Jacob. His name, which literally means “heel-grabber,” was given because he “took hold of Esau’s heel” at birth (verse 26). Longman observed, “Baby Jacob was grabbing baby Esau’s heel as he followed him out of the womb as if he was trying to pull him back in and take precedence. ... [The name Jacob] has a further idiomatic meaning of ‘he deceives.’ While it is doubtful that that meaning was intended by the parents, as the story goes on, we will see that it aptly fits Jacob’s character” (*Genesis*, 332).

Although they were twins, Jacob and Esau were vastly different. According to Genesis 25:27, “Esau was a

skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents.” The biblical record also reveals Esau was impulsive and vindictive, focused primarily upon the moment. Conversely, Jacob was a schemer, who positioned himself for future success. Whatever rivalry existed between Jacob and Esau was amplified by parental favoritism, for “Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob” (verse 28). Sailhamer believed the struggle between Jacob and Esau was indicative of a broader theme that flowed throughout Genesis—“the struggle between brothers.” Other examples of this include Cain and Abel (chapter 4), Ismael and Isaac (chapter 21), and the sons of Jacob (chapter 37). Nevertheless, he wrote, “Out of each of the struggles, God’s will was accomplished. The point is not so much that the struggles were necessary for the accomplishment of the will of God, but rather that God’s will was accomplished in spite of the conflict” (*Genesis*, 182).

## Twins Clash

Genesis 25:29–34

The birth narrative of Jacob and Esau introduces the rivalry characterizing their relationship (Genesis 25:26). This rivalry was amplified when Esau exchanged his birthright for a serving of Jacob’s stew. On that occasion, “Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary” (verse 29). Jacob obviously knew the impulsive tendencies of his brother well, for when Esau requested to eat some of the stew, Jacob offered to comply

only if Esau gave up his birthright in exchange (verses 30–31). Given the importance of the birthright, Jacob's demand should have ended their negotiations. It was too high a price to pay. The firstborn was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). He also assumed a place of prominence in the family.

That Esau so easily gave up his birthright is shocking. He thought only about the moment. Therefore, he agreed to Jacob's terms and said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" (Genesis 25:32). To formalize their transaction, Jacob insisted, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob" (verse 33). In return for the birthright, Esau was given "bread and stew of lentils." He then "ate and drank, arose, and went his way" (verse 34). Ross summarized the event, "Esau was oblivious to what he had because he was preoccupied with the way he was; Jacob was occupied with obtaining what Esau had and planned to capitalize on the way Esau was. The last part of the narrative report with its rapid succession of verbs—'and he ate, and drank, and arose, and went out'—provides a climax to the description of profane Esau" (*Creation and Blessing*, 446). The section ends by declaring, "Thus Esau despised his birthright" (verse 34). This does not mean he hated the blessing he was in line to receive; it means he failed to appreciate and protect it. Interestingly, the New Testament likens the sin of fornication to the behavior of Esau when he sold his birthright (Hebrews 12:16–17). Those who give up their virginity before marriage or break their marriage vows for one moment of sexual gratification behave like Esau.

## Conspiracy

Genesis 27:1–13

Having taken Esau's birthright, one might think Jacob would be content. Such, however, was not the case. When Rebekah, who favored Jacob (Genesis 25:28), overheard Isaac's plan to provide a special blessing to Esau, the mother and her son conspired to trick the aged Isaac and steal the proposed blessing. Isaac, who was old and nearly blind (27:1), asked Esau to hunt and prepare "savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die" (verse 4). The text does not say why it was necessary for Esau to prepare Isaac a meal before he could be blessed, but it did indicate this was the reason Isaac favored Esau over Jacob (cf. 25:28). Steinmann supposed Isaac's actions on this occasion to be similar to those of Esau when he sold his birthright. He wrote, "Isaac's desires ran counter both to the prophecy given to Rebekah (25:23) and to the bitterness that Esau had brought into his life (26:35). Clearly, Isaac's appetite overruled his better judgment as he intended to act counter to God's revealed will" (*Genesis*, 266).

Before Esau could do as his father requested, Rebekah alerted Jacob to the situation. In response, she proposed Jacob pretend to be Esau. Directing this ruse, she said, "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death" (Genesis

27:8–10). Jacob was willing to do as instructed, but he questioned whether he, with his smooth skin, would actually be mistaken for his hairy brother (verse 11–12). He feared Isaac would see through their trick and curse rather than bless him (verse 12). Rebekah responded, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me” (verse 13). Despite the elaborate nature of the scheme, Woods wrote, “Rebekah doubtless felt she was insuring the success of God’s prediction” (*Genesis–Exodus*, 70).

With Rebekah’s assurance, Jacob carried out the plan. Although Isaac was hesitant, he unknowingly blessed Jacob and said, “Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!” (Genesis 27:28–29).

### Applications

- Esau’s impulsive behavior stands as an example to avoid. Rather than living only for the moment, as he was when he thoughtlessly sold his birthright, we must think soberly about the consequences of our behavior (cf. Titus 2:11–14). Individuals who cavalierly yield to temptation mirror the behavior of Esau. Those who wish to please God instead must seek the way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

- God’s ability to accomplish His will despite the obvious flaws in the family of Abraham is encouraging. Neither favoritism, jealousy, schemes, or lies could thwart His intentions. We should rejoice that He is able to use imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plan. Truly, “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men” (Daniel 4:32).

### Questions

1. What unusual fact did the Lord tell Rebekah about her children before they were born (Genesis 25:23)?
2. What was unusual about Rebekah’s pregnancy (Genesis 25:24)?
3. What does the name *Esau* mean (Genesis 25:25)?
4. What does the name *Jacob* mean (Genesis 25:26)?

5. Why did Esau sell his birthright (Genesis 25:32)?
  
6. What did Isaac plan to do for Esau (Genesis 27:4)?
  
7. Who intervened and helped Jacob impersonate Esau (Genesis 27:6–13)?

### Discussion

1. What does this lesson teach us about God?
  
2. How is Esau's decision to sell his birthright similar to the sin of fornication?
  
3. What can families do to avoid displaying favoritism?

## JACOB AT BETHEL AGAIN

### Genesis 35:1–13

<sup>1</sup> Then God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.”

<sup>2</sup> And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.

<sup>3</sup> Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.”

<sup>4</sup> So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

<sup>5</sup> And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

<sup>6</sup> So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him.

<sup>7</sup> And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.

<sup>8</sup> Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.

<sup>9</sup> Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him.

<sup>10</sup> And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel.

<sup>11</sup> Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body.

<sup>12</sup> The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

<sup>13</sup> Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him.

## Introduction

When Esau discovered Jacob had tricked Isaac and stolen the special blessing their father intended for him, he "hated Jacob" and planned to kill him (Genesis 27:41). Upon learning Esau's plan, their mother, Rebekah, advised Jacob, "Arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran" (verse 43). Although she was certainly concerned for her favored son's safety, she was also interested in securing a wife for Jacob from outside of Canaan (verse 46;

cf. 26:34-35; 28:6-9). Before Jacob left, Isaac "blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take for yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother'" (verses 1-2).

Jacob obeyed his parents and "went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran" (Genesis 28:10). As he made this journey, "he came to a certain place and stayed there all night" (verse 11). During that night, Jacob "dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (verse 12). Additionally, "the LORD stood above it and said, 'I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (verses 13-14).

Having received this assurance from the Lord, Jacob declared, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Genesis 28:17). He then "took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of the place Bethel" (verses 18-19). Kissling observed, "By pouring oil on top of the stone which Jacob stood upright, he effectively anointed that place as a holy place. Because Jacob had come to understand that in some sense God had chosen to dwell

there, he named the place Bethel, or 'house of God.' By renaming, the place comes to have a special significance in the working out of God's purposes for the descendants of Jacob as Bethlehem and Nazareth would for Christians" (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 294).

After affirming his allegiance to the Lord (Genesis 28:20–22), Jacob made his way to the house of Laban, where he met his future wives, Rachel and Leah. Several years passed, during which Jacob worked for Laban. Eventually, he and his family left and made their way back toward Canaan and settled in Shechem (33:18–20). Jacob's entrance into Canaan "is reminiscent of Abraham's arrival in the Promised Land from Haran many years earlier. We do not know where Abraham crossed the Jordan; but his first recorded stop was near Shechem, and there he set up an altar (12:6, 7). Jacob would do the same (33:20)" (Grasham, *Genesis 23–50*, 268).

Jacob was living in Shechem when God called him to "go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God" (Genesis 35:1). Rather than refusing God's call, he instructed his family to cleanse themselves of idols and impurities in preparation for the move (verses 2–3). Following Jacob's return to Bethel, God reiterated the earlier change of his name to Israel (cf. 32:28) and reaffirmed His earlier promises (35:10–12). According to Ross, "This passage parallels the account in 17:5–8, in which Abram's name was changed to Abraham as a sign of the surety of the promise. The name change to Israel was proof of the promises, and here the promises included nations, royalty, and the land" (*Creation and Blessing*, 581).

## At God's Direction

Genesis 35:1–4

Jacob's time in Shechem was marred by the rape of his daughter, Dinah (Genesis 34:1–7). Because of that incident, bitter conflict arose between Jacob's family and the men of that area. Whether this was the deciding factor, God instructed Jacob to leave and move to Bethel. He charged, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother" (35:1). Explaining this command, Woods wrote, "After the sordid violence at Shechem, Jacob and his family were certainly in need of spiritual renewal. As Jacob contemplated, God called him to return to Bethel, the scene of earlier commitment. As God had strengthened him when he fled from Esau, so now as he flees from the vengeful wrath of the Canaanites, God upholds him" (*Genesis–Exodus*, 89).

We do not realize how much Jacob's family needed spiritual renewal until we read his instructions to his family members. According to Genesis 35:2, "Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.'" Although not likely all Jacob had in mind, this admonition to purge foreign gods would have included the idols Rachel stole from her father (cf. 31:19, 30). Steinmann wrote, "It may be shocking to readers that Jacob's household contained idols. However, idolatry was a constant temptation for God's people in antiquity, since it was ubiquitous in the surrounding cultures. ... To Jacob's credit, he had now

come to the realization that as Yahweh's chosen bearer of the messianic promise he could not worship pagan gods or even tolerate the presence of their idols" (*Genesis*, 327).

Importantly, Jacob did not merely intend for his family to stop worshiping foreign gods. He also planned to build an altar and direct worship "to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone" (*Genesis* 35:3). In response to his admonition, the people removed both the foreign gods and the earrings from their ears (verse 4). These trinkets were possibly associated with pagan idolatry. It is also possible they were taken during the conflict with the inhabitants of Shechem. Regardless, Jacob disposed of the items before moving the family to Bethel. They were ready for a fresh start.

## An Altar Built

Genesis 35:5–8

Because God protected Jacob's family, their enemies did not pursue them when they left Shechem (*Genesis* 35:5; cf. 34:30). Thus, they safely arrived at Bethel (35:6). As Sailhamer noted, "The arrival at Bethel marked the end of Jacob's journey and the final demonstration of the faithfulness of God. He had been with Jacob throughout his journey, and now Jacob had returned to Bethel in safety" (*Genesis*, 217). The return to Bethel surely reminded Jacob of the vow he previously made at that place: "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing

to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God" (28:20–21). God had done as Jacob requested.

Celebrating God's faithfulness, Jacob "built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother" (*Genesis* 35:7). The construction of the altar indicated Jacob's desire to worship God but also demonstrated his willingness to obey the earlier command of the Lord (cf. verse 1). Jacob worshiped God as he reflected on the deliverance God provided. Kuruvilla observed, "In sum, this section points to the importance of worshipping God, especially at critical junctures of life, in response to God's blessings in the past" (*Genesis*, 457).

One member of Jacob's household, Deborah, his mother's nurse, died and was buried near Bethel (*Genesis* 35:8). This detail is somewhat curious. Longman wrote, "We have not heard about Rebekah for quite some time, and one wonders why her nurse was living with Jacob at this time. Does it indicate that Rebekah and Isaac were now with their son? We cannot be sure. In any case, the nurse was buried under an oak tree in Bethel and the place where she was buried was then named Allon Bakuth, 'Oak of Weeping'" (*Genesis*, 438).

## God Blesses Jacob

Genesis 35:9–13

Scripture speaks of Jacob being blessed on several occasions. He, instead of Esau, was blessed by Isaac (*Genesis*

27:41); he was blessed a second time by Isaac before he left Canaan to go to Padan Aram (28:1); he was blessed when he wrestled with God (32:29); and he was blessed when he returned to Bethel (35:9). On this latter occasion, God reiterated the change of Jacob's name to Israel—a change first mentioned in Genesis 32:28. He declared, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name" (35:10). The importance of this event should not be missed. Hamilton explained, "Jacob is reminded that he returns to Canaan not as Jacob but as Israel. He is not only to bury the foreign gods, but he is to bury what has become for all practical purposes a foreign nature—a Jacob nature. He who instructed the people to change their garments must live up to his own change of name" (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 381).

Having emphasized Jacob's new name, God also reiterated the promises. Using the same name He revealed to Abraham (cf. Genesis 17:1), He declared, "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land" (35:11-12). The promise God previously made to Jacob at Bethel was reaffirmed (cf. 28:13-15).

## Applications

- Jacob and his family were called to leave Shechem for Bethel. The strife that existed in Shechem had no easy resolution. Thus, for their own good, it was necessary to make a fresh start. Of course, their relocation to Bethel reminded Jacob of God's faithfulness. It is possible sinful actions, whether our own or those of others, may force us to leave a variety of things behind—jobs, locations, friendships, etc. Regardless, we must remember God is always faithful. He keeps His promises. He saves. He forgives. He is the one we must obey.
- When Jacob returned to Bethel, He built an altar to worship God. Importantly, his recollection of God's care for him when he fled from Esau motivated his actions. We would do well to follow his example in this regard. Worship should be motivated by a remembrance of God's faithfulness. We should praise God when we consider His willingness to send Jesus to die on behalf of sinners (cf. Romans 5:8).

## Questions

1. What did God command Jacob to do when he arrived at Bethel (Genesis 35:1)?



2. What did Jacob instruct the members of his household to do before they moved to Bethel (Genesis 35:2)?
  
3. Where did Jacob dispose of the items his family members provided at his insistence (Genesis 35:4)?
  
4. Why did Jacob's enemies not pursue his family as they left Shechem (Genesis 35:5)?
  
5. What member of Jacob's household died after they arrived in Bethel (Genesis 35:8)?
  
6. What new name did God give to Jacob (Genesis 35:10)?
  
7. What name did God use for Himself when He reiterated the promises to Jacob (Genesis 35:11)?

## Discussion

1. Why do you think God called Jacob to move from Shechem to Bethel?
  
2. What does Jacob's call for the removal of foreign gods and the purification of his family say about his dedication to God?
  
3. What can we learn about God from this passage of Scripture?

## JOSEPH THE DREAMER

### Genesis 37:1-22

<sup>1</sup> Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.

<sup>2</sup> This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.

<sup>3</sup> Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors.

<sup>4</sup> But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

<sup>5</sup> Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more.

<sup>6</sup> So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed:

<sup>7</sup> There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."

<sup>8</sup> And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?"

So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

<sup>9</sup> Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."

<sup>10</sup> So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?"

<sup>11</sup> And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

<sup>12</sup> Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

<sup>13</sup> And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." So he said to him, "Here I am."

<sup>14</sup> Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

<sup>15</sup> Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?"

<sup>16</sup> So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks."

<sup>17</sup> And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

<sup>18</sup> Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him.

<sup>19</sup> Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming!

<sup>20</sup> Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"

<sup>21</sup> But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him."

<sup>22</sup> And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

## Introduction

Joseph was the eleventh of Jacob's twelve sons. As the first son born to Rachel, Jacob's favored wife, he enjoyed a special relationship with his father. In fact, Jacob "loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors" (Genesis 37:3). Having been the favorite of one of his own parents (cf. 25:28), Jacob's treatment of Joseph may have seemed natural. Nevertheless, it caused problems between Joseph and his older brothers, who "hated him and could not speak peaceably to him" (37:4).

The conflict between Joseph and his brothers, however, was not the first to afflict Jacob's family, for it resembled

the conflict that previously existed between their mothers, Rachel and Leah. After Leah bore four sons to Jacob, "Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or else I die!'" (Genesis 30:1). Knowing the matter was beyond his control, Jacob responded, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (verse 2). Whether intentional or not, Jacob's question anticipated the birth of Joseph, one whom God would use to save the family of Jacob. Joseph used the same phrase after Jacob's death when his brothers feared he might punish them for the evil way they treated him. He responded, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (50:19–20). Eventually, "God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and said, 'God has taken away my reproach'" (30:22–23).

Although Joseph's birth is reported in Genesis 30, the narrative focusing upon his life begins in Genesis 37 and continues to the end of the book. It records the tension existing between Joseph and his brothers, the sale of Joseph into slavery, the intentional deception of Jacob regarding Joseph's whereabouts, Joseph's rise to second in rank in Egypt, the salvation of the family of Jacob from starvation, and the eventual relocation of Jacob's family to Egypt. Summarizing the biblical record of Joseph's life, Kuruvilla wrote, "The focus of the narrative is upon Joseph as the one who brings life, the mediator of Yahweh's blessing to the rest of humanity. When everyone else is in dire need and dying of famine,

Egypt under Joseph is the fount of life and food to which nation 'all the earth' comes (41:57; 42:2); he is the instrument of salvation (47:19, 25), a fact Joseph himself is not unaware of (42:18–20; 45:5–8; 50:19–21). Thus Joseph's life is intricately tied in with his being the agent of God's blessing to the world. ... both Joseph's family and the nation, as well as 'all the earth,' are blessed by Yahweh through him" (*Genesis*, 448). As we begin to consider the life of Joseph, keep in mind the way God used His willing servant to accomplish His will.

## Joseph's Dreams

Genesis 37:1–11

Our passage begins by reporting, "Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 37:1). A study of Jacob's life reveals this was not always true. For several years, Jacob lived outside of Canaan. Eventually, however, he made his way back from Padan Aram (33:18) and dwelled first in the promised land. Regarding this fact, Sailhamer noted, "The writer's point is to show that the promises of God had not yet been completely fulfilled and that Jacob, as his fathers before him, was still awaiting fulfillment. It is from a verse such as this that the NT writers read the lives of the patriarchs as 'aliens and strangers on earth' (Heb. 11:13). The verse also provides a fitting transition to the next section, the Joseph narratives, which trace the course of events by which the sons of Jacob left the Land of Promise and entered the land of Egypt" (*Genesis*, 225).

Having established Jacob's residency in Canaan, the text shifts its attention to Joseph. According to Genesis 37:2, "Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father." Without further details, we are left to speculate about this initial introduction to Joseph. We know he was actively working alongside his brothers Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher (cf. 30:3–13). We do not know if he believed himself superior to them because he was the son of Rachel rather than a secondary wife. Regardless, the text describes Joseph bringing "a bad report of them to his father" (37:2). Kenneth O. Gangel and Stephen J. Bramer observed, "Whether this was a wise or needful action the Scripture does not say. To call it tattling gives the impression of a poor motive or an unnecessary action. On the other hand, this behavior may have been a significant act that threatened the flock or Jacob's reputation among a people where he was without friend or ownership of land. What is important to note is that even as a young man of seventeen, Joseph was willing to speak against his brothers, although he must have been aware that this action could cost him dearly" (*Genesis*, 307).

If Joseph's speaking against his brothers didn't cause them to despise him, Jacob's favoritism of Joseph certainly did. Jacob not only "loved Joseph more than all his children" but also "made him a tunic of many colors" (Genesis 37:3). The brothers did not miss Jacob's partiality to Joseph and "hated him and could not speak peaceably to him" (verse 4).

To make matters worse, Joseph told his brothers about a dream he had where their “sheaves stood all around and bowed down to” his sheaf (Genesis 37:7). Not missing the implication of this dream, the brothers asked Joseph, “Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” (verse 8). Consequently, “they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words” (verse 8). Despite their hostility, Joseph shared an additional dream where “the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed” before him (verse 9). Jacob questioned Joseph about the dream but “kept the matter in mind” (verses 10–11). The brothers simply “envied him” (verse 11). Lost in the animosity is the truthfulness of Joseph’s dreams. He did indeed rule over his family. Ross explained, “The first scene of the Joseph story, then, relates how God sovereignly selected his future leader and how that choice brought out the envy of those who would have to submit. Rather than recognize God’s apparent choice through their father and through the divine revelation, the brothers set themselves on a course in which they would eventually try to destroy him” (*Creation and Blessing*, 601). Thankfully, their efforts to destroy Joseph failed.

### Joseph’s Errand

Genesis 37:12–17

Evidently, Jacob was unaware of the disdain Joseph’s brothers had for him, for he sent Joseph on an errand to check on the brothers, who were feeding the flock in

Shechem (Genesis 37:12–13). Providing instructions, he directed Joseph, “Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me” (verse 14). The term *well* (NKJV) is also translated *welfare* (NASB). According to Steinmann, “The word for *welfare* here is the same word used of how the brothers could not speak to Joseph *peaceably* ... (v. 4). The use of this term may be a forewarning to the reader of what will happen to Joseph” (*Genesis*, 352). Perhaps Jacob’s concern for his sons stemmed from the trouble they previously had in Shechem (cf. 34:30). Nevertheless, Joseph did not hesitate to obey his father’s command.

Despite his eagerness in making the fifty-mile journey from the Valley of Hebron to Shechem, Joseph did not know exactly where to find his brothers. In fact, when he arrived, they had moved on. As he wandered about, a “man asked him, saying, ‘What are you seeking?’” (Genesis 37:15). The text does not identify the man who helped Joseph. Grasham observed, “The man’s overhearing of the brothers’ plan is one of the providential elements in the story. Interestingly, Jewish tradition identified the ‘man’ as an angel. This is possible, but uncertain. Earlier in the book, Abraham, Lot, and Jacob each encountered angels who appeared to be men (18:1–19:26; 32:24–32)” (*Genesis* 23–50, 349). Upon learning Joseph sought his brothers, the man directed him to Dothan, another thirteen-mile journey (37:17). Dothan was “on the international trade route that ran from the north down to Egypt” (Longman, *Genesis*, 460).

## Joseph's Abuse

Genesis 37:18–22

Joseph's brothers saw him before he drew near to them, likely because of the coat of many colors he wore. As he approached their position, "they conspired against him to kill him" (Genesis 37:18). They also mocked him, saying, "Look, this dreamer is coming!" (verse 19). Revealing their disdain for Joseph and his dreams, they continued, "Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!" (verse 20). Describing their reaction and plans, Kissling wrote, "The cumulative effect of the open favoritism of Jacob and Joseph's interactions with them has borne its fruit. Resentment unchecked is about to spill over into violence. Their plan is to murder Joseph and throw his body into a cistern, and tell Jacob that he was devoured by an 'evil' animal. ... They think that in so doing they will be able to falsify Joseph's dreams. In fact, as the ensuing narrative will show, they are actually assisting in the fulfillment of those resented dreams, or at least one of them" (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 428).

Rather than allowing the brothers to go through with this vile plan, Reuben intervened and said, "Let us not kill him" (Genesis 37:21). According to the next verse, Jacob's oldest son intended to rescue Joseph and "bring him back to his father" (verse 22). Although he succeeded in keeping Joseph alive, Reuben was not able to return and deliver him from the pit. Joseph was sold into slavery (verses 27–28), and the brothers conspired together

to make their father believe Joseph was killed by a wild beast (verses 31–34).

## Applications

- Men do not always appreciate God's plans. Joseph's brothers despised him because of his dreams, yet God was merely revealing how Joseph would play a key role in their salvation. When the brothers attempted to thwart Joseph's dreams, they actually expedited them. We would do well to remember that the God who revealed Joseph's dreams to him knows "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). Those who fight against God will always lose.
- The favoritism shown to Joseph caused unnecessary problems in Jacob's family. Jealousy and envy are to be avoided, not encouraged. Parents would do well to learn from Jacob's mistake and seek to do differently.

## Questions

1. How old was Joseph at the beginning of this section (Genesis 37:2)?

2. What did Joseph report to Jacob concerning his brothers (Genesis 37:2)?
  
3. How did Jacob demonstrate his love for Joseph (Genesis 37:3)?
  
4. How did Joseph's brothers respond to the favoritism shown to him (Genesis 37:4)?
  
5. What did Joseph share with his brothers and father (Genesis 37:5-11)?
  
6. Where did Jacob send Joseph (Genesis 37:13)?
  
7. What did the brothers want to do to Joseph (Genesis 37:18)?

8. Who intervened on Joseph's behalf (Genesis 37:21-22)?

### Discussion

1. What can parents do to avoid showing favoritism?
  
2. What does this passage teach us about God's foreknowledge?
  
3. What does this passage teach us about God's providence?

## JOSEPH AT POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

Genesis 39:1-23

<sup>1</sup> Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

<sup>3</sup> And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.

<sup>5</sup> So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field.

<sup>6</sup> Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

<sup>7</sup> And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

<sup>8</sup> But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.

<sup>9</sup> There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

<sup>10</sup> So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.

<sup>11</sup> But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside,

<sup>12</sup> that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.

<sup>13</sup> And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside,

<sup>14</sup> that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.

<sup>15</sup> And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside."

<sup>16</sup> So she kept his garment with her until his master came home.



<sup>17</sup> Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, “The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me;

<sup>18</sup> so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside.”

<sup>19</sup> So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, “Your servant did to me after this manner,” that his anger was aroused.

<sup>20</sup> Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.

<sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

<sup>22</sup> And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.

<sup>23</sup> The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

## Introduction

When Joseph’s brothers saw him coming from a distance, “they said to one another, ‘Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit’” (Genesis 37:19–20). The text does not specify which brothers conspired together. We know Reuben was not one of them, for he came to Joseph’s

defense and said, “Shed no blood, but cast him down into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him” (verse 22). The verse goes on to reveal that Reuben intended to rescue Joseph and return him safely to his father.

Although the brothers heeded Reuben’s advice and refrained from killing Joseph, the eldest brother was not able to rescue Jacob’s favored son. While Reuben was away (cf. Genesis 37:29–30), Judah suggested Joseph be sold to traders who happened to be passing by. He said, “What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh” (verses 26–27). Therefore, “the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt” (verse 28). The brothers sold Joseph for the price of a slave (cf. Leviticus 27:5). Describing the scene, Grasham wrote, “One can only imagine Joseph’s tears and pleas as he begged his brothers not to sell him into slavery (see 42:21), but it was too late. They would not tolerate the special treatment and grandiose dreams of their half-brother any longer. The caravan traders were unmoved by this family tragedy. They completed their purchase and took Joseph with them into Egypt” (*Genesis 23–50*, 354).

Joseph did not remain with the traders for long. When the caravan arrived in Egypt, Joseph was sold “to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard” (Genesis 37:36). Our knowledge of Potiphar is limited to the text’s description of his position. Regardless, he

was an important official and evidently a wealthy man. Concerning the record of Joseph's being sold, Walton observed, "This is just enough to indicate that he had not been written out of the narrative never to be heard from again. His whereabouts are known, but his fate hangs in the balance" (*The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, 666). Our lesson text, Genesis 39, resumes the story at this point and reports, "Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there" (verse 1).

## Joseph the Overseer

Genesis 39:1-6

With God's help, Joseph made the best of a bad situation. According to Genesis 39:2, "The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian." Joseph's success did not escape the notice of Potiphar, for "his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand" (verse 3). As Kissling explained, this says something about both Joseph and Potiphar. He wrote, "Potiphar knew of Joseph's god and his dedication to him. Potiphar also knew that the Lord, and not some other god nor Joseph's 'innate' abilities, had brought about this success. Obviously Joseph had been speaking of the Lord. His life, especially in his 'secular' pursuits as Potiphar's servant, was a living testimony to the Lord's power and blessing" (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 455).

Because of his success, "Joseph found favor in [Potiphar's] sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority" (Genesis 39:4). This was quite a promotion! Steinmann remarked, "Thus, Joseph was elevated from simple slave to trusted member of Potiphar's staff. Since Joseph was made steward of all Potiphar's property, he would have learned valuable administrative skills that would prepare him for his future role as Pharaoh's right-hand man. Potiphar's estate must have been substantial, since he was highly placed in the royal court" (*Genesis*, 369).

God continued to bless Joseph's efforts in his new position, "and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field" (Genesis 39:5). Potiphar's decision to give Joseph more responsibility paid off. In fact, he came to trust him completely, as verse 6 reports, "Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate." Joseph's faithful efforts bore much fruit. Potiphar concerned himself only with his own appetite. The working relationship seemed to benefit both men, but because of sin, it did not last.

## Joseph Tempted

Genesis 39:7-15

At the close of Genesis 39:6, Joseph is described as "handsome in form and appearance." This brief statement anticipates the event that follows. According to verse 7,

“his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’” Rather than yielding to the temptation, Joseph “refused and said to his master’s wife, ‘Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’” (verses 8–9). Gangel and Bramer noticed two valuable components in Joseph’s answer: “His proper view of marriage involved the fact that the woman who was seducing him was someone’s [Potiphar’s] wife. His proper view of sin was that it was an action against God” (*Genesis*, 322). Joseph neither intended to violate his master’s trust nor rebel against the God he served.

Potiphar’s wife, however, was not deterred by Joseph’s noble refusal of her advances. Instead, she made similar proposals “day by day” (*Genesis* 39:10). When the two were alone in the house, “she caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me.’ But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside” (verse 12). He found the way of escape, even if it was narrow. Joseph’s resolve held strong. Ross suggested, “His refusal was possible because he was convinced that (1) God had chosen him for a special task and (2) God had been prospering him to give him the responsibilities that he had. He had evidence of God’s plan in his rise from the pit and enjoyment of God’s presence” (*Creation and Blessing*, 626).

Rather than accepting Joseph’s rejection quietly, Potiphar’s wife turned against Joseph. With his garment in her hand (*Genesis* 39:13), “she called to the men of her

house and spoke to them, saying, ‘See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside’” (verses 14–15). Longman wrote, “Once again a garment of clothing plays a role in Joseph’s fate. Earlier the ornate robe was used as evidence that he had been mauled by a wild beast. Potiphar’s wife uses his cloak as evidence that he had tried to rape her” (*Genesis*, 481). Although her accusation was blatantly false, the damage was done. Joseph, a servant, was presumed guilty.

## Joseph Charged

Genesis 39:16–23

To make her case against Joseph, Potiphar’s wife “kept his garment with her until his master came home” (*Genesis* 39:16). She then repeated the accusation she previously made (verses 17–18). After hearing her accusation, Potiphar’s “anger was aroused” (verse 19). He then took Joseph “and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined” (verse 20). Once again, Joseph is placed in a position of great difficulty through no fault of his own. He did not deserve to be in prison, yet that is where he was. As Sailhamer wrote, “the narrative is explicit in its emphasis on the total uprightness of Joseph throughout the attempted seduction by the Egyptian’s wife. He was in jail because of false witness laid against him” (*Genesis*, 235).

Nevertheless, God continued to bless Joseph. According to Genesis 39:21, “The LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” In fact, “the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing” (verse 22). As God had previously done for Joseph, He continued to cause Joseph’s actions to prosper (verse 23). Joseph remained faithful in all his dealings. Despite being treated unjustly, he maintained his integrity. Kuruvilla thus concluded, “The integrity of God’s people facilitates their becoming agents of divine blessing to others” (*Genesis*, 493). This was certainly true of Joseph!

## Applications

- It is not possible to read Joseph’s story without considering the providence of God. Although Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery, he ended up being bought by a powerful Egyptian and placed in charge of his household. As was previously noted, this provided Joseph with the kind of experience he would eventually need when he ascended to a high rank in the Egyptian government. Additionally, his placement in the king’s prison also reflects God’s care. Not only did he escape death, a punishment was usually given to those charged with rape, but he was also placed in a setting where he would meet and help individuals who would be able to carry his name to the Pharaoh of Egypt. God was undeniably at work in Joseph’s life!

- Joseph’s devotion to God is especially encouraging. When tempted by Potiphar’s wife to commit fornication, Joseph asked, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). This question reveals the foundation of his integrity. Joseph sought to avoid sin because he did not want to violate his relationship with God. Christians should think similarly (cf. Ephesians 4:30).
- We do not know how Joseph got out of his garment and escaped the clutches of Potiphar’s wife; we simply know that he did. Scripture promises God will make a way of escape from the temptations we face in life. Making this point, Paul wrote, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). The way of escape may be narrow, but it will be available. We must look for it.

## Questions

1. What was Potiphar’s position in Pharaoh’s government (Genesis 39:1)?

2. To what position did Potiphar promote Joseph (Genesis 39:4)?
  
3. What did Potiphar's wife seek to get Joseph to do (Genesis 39:7)?
  
4. Why did Joseph refuse Potiphar's wife's advances (Genesis 39:9)?
  
5. What piece of evidence did Potiphar's wife present when she accused Joseph (Genesis 39:16)?
  
6. Where was Joseph imprisoned (Genesis 39:20)?
  
7. How did God bless Joseph after he was imprisoned (Genesis 39:21)?

## Discussion

1. What can Christians do to develop the kind of integrity possessed by Joseph?
  
2. What can we learn from the way Joseph refused Potiphar's wife?
  
3. What can we do to keep from becoming bitter when treated unfairly?

## PHARAOH PROMOTES JOSEPH

Genesis 41:37-57

<sup>37</sup> So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants.

<sup>38</sup> And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?"

<sup>39</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you.

<sup>40</sup> You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you."

<sup>41</sup> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."

<sup>42</sup> Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.

<sup>43</sup> And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt.

<sup>44</sup> Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

<sup>45</sup> And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.

<sup>47</sup> Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly.

<sup>48</sup> So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable.

<sup>50</sup> And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house."

<sup>52</sup> And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

<sup>53</sup> Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended,

<sup>54</sup> and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.

<sup>55</sup> So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.”

<sup>56</sup> The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt.

<sup>57</sup> So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.

## Introduction

A delicate balance exists between divine sovereignty and human freedom. Although God is in control and “rules in the kingdom of men” (Daniel 4:32), He does not force man’s actions. Instead, He allows man to act freely and uses man’s actions, whether good or evil, to accomplish His will. For example, Joseph’s brothers acted freely when they sold him into slavery. By doing so, they intended to harm their brother. Nevertheless, they unwittingly sent Joseph to the place he needed to be in order to help his family survive and ultimately develop into a nation. This was no accident; God was at work behind the scenes. Thus, when Joseph later spoke with his brothers about what had transpired, he declared, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

Looking back on Joseph’s life, we see additional moments when God utilized the free choices of others to bring about His desired result. For instance, the false accusation made by Potiphar’s wife against Joseph proved beneficial, for because of that charge, he was placed in the prison “where the king’s prisoners were confined” (Genesis 39:20). In that setting, Joseph encountered two of Pharaoh’s officers, “the chief butler and the chief baker” (40:2). When those men had troubling dreams, Joseph provided an interpretation for each. Speaking to the chief butler, he declared, “Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house” (verses 13–14).

As Joseph predicted, the chief butler was restored to his position. Even so, he “did not remember Joseph, but forgot him” (Genesis 40:23). This is yet another injustice Joseph endured. Two years later, however, the butler remembered Joseph when Pharaoh had two dreams, “but there was no one who could interpret them” (41:8). Telling Pharaoh about Joseph, he recalled, “Now there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his own dream. And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened” (verses 12–13). Upon hearing about Joseph from the butler, “Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly

out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh” (verse 14).

After Pharaoh explained to Joseph that he summoned him to interpret his dreams, Joseph humbly replied, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (Genesis 41:16). God, of course, did so through the agency of Joseph. Joseph skillfully relayed the meaning of Pharaoh’s two dreams and the way they pointed to a future famine that would follow seven years of plentiful harvests (verses 29–32). He then advised, “Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine” (verses 33–36). As our lesson text reveals, Joseph’s “advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh” (verse 37). Consequently, Pharaoh promoted Joseph to oversee the efforts to prepare for the famine (verses 39–41).

## Joseph’s Appointment

Genesis 41:37–45

Both Pharaoh and his servants were pleased with Joseph’s advice regarding how to handle the coming famine

(Genesis 41:37), and Pharaoh believed Joseph to be the obvious choice to lead the effort. Thus, Pharaoh asked his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?” (verse 38). Concerning this question, Hamilton wrote, “Pharaoh suggests that it is most unlikely, should a nationwide search for a viable candidate for this ad hoc position be launched, that a more qualified occupant for that office than Joseph could be found. ... It demonstrates that Pharaoh, via his rhetorical declaration, understood Joseph’s skills: Joseph has no intrinsic ability that would explain his effective insight and counsel. For Pharaoh, Joseph is one who has been divinely equipped and gifted” (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 503).

Speaking to Joseph, Pharaoh declared, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you” (Genesis 41:39–40). With those words, Joseph was officially released from prison and made second in command in all of Egypt. To emphasize the power he was giving to Joseph, Pharaoh added, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt” (verse 41). He then “took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he made him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, ‘Bow the knee!’ So he set him over all the land of Egypt” (verses 42–43). According to Kissling, “These tokens given in public would ensure obedience to Joseph as he managed



the complex task of saving and storing twenty percent of the crops of Egypt for a predicted, though as yet unrealized famine” (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 482). Besides providing Joseph with physical tokens of his authority, Pharaoh also gave Joseph an Egyptian name, Zaphnath-Paaneah, and an Egyptian wife (verse 45). All these things were done to make Joseph more acceptable to the Egyptian people he would govern.

### Joseph’s Plan for Plenty

Genesis 41:46–52

Joseph was promoted by Pharaoh when he was thirty years old (Genesis 41:46). Thirteen difficult years had passed since his brothers sold him into slavery (cf. 37:2). During that time, Joseph had learned to manage the affairs of Potiphar’s household and the affairs of the king’s prison. The first thing he did after beginning his new job was to go “throughout all the land of Egypt” (41:46). This trip allowed him to both survey the task at hand and gain the confidence and approval of the Egyptians.

As Joseph predicted when explaining Pharaoh’s dream (cf. Genesis 41:29), Egypt experienced a period of seven years where “the ground brought forth abundantly” (verse 47). Taking advantage of the abundance, Joseph “gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them” (verse 48). Although Joseph was collecting “one-fifth” of the harvest (cf. verse 34), the collected amount

was “as the sand of the sea” (verse 49). In fact, Joseph “stopped counting, for it was immeasurable” (verse 49). Praising the practicality of Joseph’s efforts, Steinmann wrote, “The description of Joseph’s execution of his plan to provide for the coming famine years notes that he stored the grain in the nearby cities. Placing the granaries in centers of population made the most sense and demonstrated Joseph’s character as wise and discerning (vv. 33, 39): there would be a ready source of personnel to service the granaries and yet distribution would not be a problem, since the stores in each city could provide for the immediately adjacent countryside” (*Genesis*, 390).

During this period of plenty, Joseph’s house was blessed by the births of two sons. According to the text, “Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: ‘For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.’ And the name of the second he called Ephraim: ‘For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction’” (Genesis 41:51–52). Woods observed, “As in the matter of the interpretations, so also in his rise to honor and power, Joseph sees the hand of God. Thus he gives his sons names which recall God’s activity” (*Genesis–Exodus*, 103).

### Joseph’s Plan for Famine

Genesis 41:53–57

After the years of plenty, “the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said” (Genesis 41:54). Nevertheless, the land of Egypt was prepared. Pharaoh

directed the people to Joseph when they cried out for relief (verse 55). If anything, this shows the confidence Pharaoh placed in Joseph. Joseph collected grain during the years of plenty; Joseph distributed grain during the years of famine.

Importantly, the famine affected more than the land of Egypt. Declaring this, Genesis 41:56–57 states, “The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.” Joseph did not likely realize his efforts to save Egypt from the famine would also save many others—including his own family! That, however, is exactly what eventually occurred (cf. 42:2). God remained in control. Joseph freely obeyed God, and the descendants of Jacob, who previously treated Joseph with contempt, were saved because of His faithfulness. Ross wrote, “Joseph knew God’s revelation, boldly declared it to Pharaoh, and advised him to conform to what God was about to do. ... It must also be added that, once Joseph was elevated to his position of responsibility, he continued to live in faith” (*Creation and Blessing*, 645).

## Applications

- Pharaoh knew Joseph was the right person to lead Egypt’s efforts to prepare for the coming famine. He could see the Spirit of God at work in him. Although our circumstances are vastly different, we should strive to live so that others see Christ in our actions. If anything, our words and deeds should point others to God. Jesus charged, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).
- Joseph’s efforts to prepare Egypt for the famine remind us of the need to obey God. Although God revealed to Pharaoh what would take place in Egypt, that knowledge alone would not have saved the Egyptians from starvation. Without taking the necessary steps and storing the surplus of grain in the years of abundance, there would have been nothing to eat during the lean years. We must be doers of God’s Word (cf. James 1:22).

## Questions

1. What was “good in the eyes of Pharaoh” (Genesis 41:37)?
2. What did Pharaoh say was in Joseph (Genesis 41:38)?
3. What did Pharaoh give to Joseph (Genesis 41:42, 45)?
4. How old was Joseph when he was promoted (Genesis 41:46)?
5. Where did Joseph store the grain he collected (Genesis 41:48)?
6. What were the names of Joseph’s two sons (Genesis 41:51–52)?

7. Who came to Joseph to buy grain (Genesis 41:57)?

## Discussion

1. What qualities did Joseph possess that we should seek to imitate?
2. What can we learn about Joseph from the way he named his children?
3. How do we reconcile the sovereignty of God with human freedom?

## JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Genesis 45:1-24

<sup>1</sup> Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

<sup>2</sup> And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.

<sup>3</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence.

<sup>4</sup> And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

<sup>5</sup> But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

<sup>6</sup> For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

<sup>7</sup> And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

<sup>9</sup> "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry.

<sup>10</sup> You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have.

<sup>11</sup> There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine."

<sup>12</sup> "And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth that speaks to you.

<sup>13</sup> So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here."

<sup>14</sup> Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.

<sup>15</sup> Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.

<sup>16</sup> Now the report of it was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, "Joseph's brothers have come." So it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well.

<sup>17</sup> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and depart; go to the land of Canaan.

<sup>18</sup> Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land.

<sup>19</sup> Now you are commanded—do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and your wives; bring your father and come.

<sup>20</sup> Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.”

<sup>21</sup> Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them carts, according to the command of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey.

<sup>22</sup> He gave to all of them, to each man, changes of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments.

<sup>23</sup> And he sent to his father these things: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and food for his father for the journey.

<sup>24</sup> So he sent his brothers away, and they departed; and he said to them, “See that you do not become troubled along the way.”

## Introduction

Members of a family should love one another. This is natural and proper. The apostle John also encouraged Christians to “love one another” (1 John 3:11), but he warned, “Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous” (verse 12). Unlike Cain, we are to seek the best for both our physical and spiritual families. Emphasizing the point, John added, “We know that we have passed from

death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (verses 14–15).

Examples of brothers treating one another with spite are more common in Genesis than examples of loving behavior. Cain murdered Abel (Genesis 4:8); Ishmael mocked Isaac (21:9); Jacob took Esau’s birthright and stole a special blessing intended for him (25:29–34; 27:18–29); and Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery and lied about his demise (37:28, 31–32). Very little brotherly love is depicted.

Thankfully, Joseph did not treat his brothers with hatred or contempt when given the opportunity. Not knowing Joseph was still alive, the brothers eventually made their way to Egypt to buy grain (Genesis 42:3). Joseph, who was in charge of the famine relief program, recognized them and made inquiries of them (verse 8). Although he questioned their intentions (verse 14), he provided them with grain, money, and “provisions for the journey” (verse 25).

When the brothers returned a second time with Benjamin in the group, Joseph hosted a feast at his house (Genesis 43:16). He did not yet reveal his identity. Instead, he sent them away with the grain they sought but framed Benjamin by placing his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack (44:2). This was done to test his brothers. Instead of abandoning Benjamin, Judah, who years earlier suggested the brothers sell Joseph into slavery—Genesis 37:26–27—offered to take Benjamin’s place and be punished in his stead (44:18–34). Summarizing the event, Gangel

and Bramer wrote, “Joseph had tested his brothers by framing Benjamin and allowing his other brothers to go free if they so chose. How the other brothers reacted is not stated, but the fact that all the brothers returned (v. 13) seems to indicate that they were united in their commitment to their father and to Benjamin. Judah’s intervention on their behalf showed the great love he had for his father and the loyalty he had to Benjamin. It also demonstrated that the brothers were not willing to repeat the act they had committed against Joseph many years before. They were not perfect, but they were showing signs of repentance and change” (*Genesis*, 350). Joseph had seen enough. He revealed himself to his brothers and credited God, saying, “God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (45:7).

## Joseph’s Revelation

Genesis 45:1–5

Judah’s intercession on Benjamin’s behalf was quite telling. He asked Joseph, “Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?” (Genesis 44:33–34). Much had changed in the behavior of his brothers in the two decades since Joseph had been sold into slavery. Consequently, “Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and

he cried out, ‘Make everyone go out from me!’ So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers” (45:1). Kissling wrote, “Certainly this was a personal matter for Joseph and he wanted privacy. But there is undoubtedly more to it. It could be that Joseph did not know what the reaction of his brothers would be. It could also be that they needed privacy to plan for the future of the family. The narrator uses Joseph’s name and refers to his siblings as his ‘brothers,’ ... emphasizing that what was about to take place was the beginning of the process of familial reconciliation” (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 531).

Joseph’s emotions flowed, “and he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it” (Genesis 45:2). After revealing his identity, he asked about their father. The brothers, however, “could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence” (verse 3). As Kuruvilla noted, “The impact of Joseph speaking to them in their own tongue, and revealing himself as their long-lost, and presumed-dead, brother is so powerful, the brothers are rendered speechless and even terrified (45:3). After all that they had been through at the hands of this anonymous Egyptian ruler, what would a powerful Joseph—whom they had once sold into slavery—do to them? They do not answer Joseph’s question about their father (45:3), and he has to repeat himself (45:4—‘I am Joseph’). In fact, they say nothing at all in this episode (that is reported in direct speech) until they arrive back in Canaan (45:26)!” (*Genesis*, 537).

In an attempt to ease their fears, Joseph credited God with bringing him to Egypt. He declared, “But now, do

not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:5). Although the brothers intended to do Joseph harm, God had other plans. Joseph was providentially placed in a position to save his family.

## Joseph’s Plan for Jacob

Genesis 45:6–13

Rather than harboring ill will toward his brothers, Joseph recognized his placement in Egypt as part of God’s plan. At the time of their reunion, the famine had lasted two years. But Joseph knew it would last five more years (Genesis 45:6). Thus, he declared, “And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (verses 7–8). Had Joseph not been in Egypt, his family would have been in jeopardy of starvation. Because he was there, hope existed. This was all by God’s design. Sailhamer wrote, “Joseph’s words pull back the narrative veil and allow the reader to see what has been going on behind the scenes. It was not the brothers who sent Joseph to Egypt; rather it was God. And God had a purpose for it all. ... Joseph, who could discern the divine plan in the dreams of Pharaoh, also knew the divine plan in the affairs of his brothers. Through it all, he saw God’s plan to accomplish a ‘great deliverance’ (v. 7)” (*Genesis*, 257).

Having revealed his identity to his brothers and conveyed that he harbored no ill will, Joseph told them to return to Jacob and inform him of the news. He charged them to say, “Thus says your son Joseph: ‘God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine’” (Genesis 45:9–11). Knowing the famine would get worse before it got better, Joseph intended to care for his entire family in Egypt. According to Steinmann, “His message to Jacob is also not to delay (v. 9). In stating that God had made him ‘lord of all Egypt’ (v. 9), Joseph may have been seeking to allay any fears that Jacob may have had of abandoning the land of God’s promise. There are other items in his invitation that Joseph used to induce Jacob to move to Egypt. First, as a positive inducement Joseph offered Jacob a place in the land of Goshen. ... Goshen is said to be near Joseph but also able to accommodate Jacob’s children and grandchildren. ... Second, as an added incentive Joseph mentioned the negative impact of the famine: there would be five more years of famine, and in Canaan ‘you, your household and everything you have will become destitute’ (v. 11)” (*Genesis*, 415).

To prove his identity, Joseph asked his brothers to compare his eyes to the eyes of Benjamin (Genesis 45:12). Surely the full brothers shared a resemblance! Thus, they were to go to Jacob without delay and share what they

had seen and learned. Most importantly, they were to bring Jacob back to Egypt (verse 13).

## Reunion and Plans

Genesis 45:14–24

Having charged the brothers with the task of returning to Canaan and bringing Jacob and their families back, Joseph “fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him” (Genesis 45:14–15). The emotions associated with their reunion could not be contained.

Upon hearing about Joseph’s brothers, Pharaoh instructed Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: Load your animals and depart; go to the land of Canaan. Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. Now you are commanded—do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and wives; bring your father and come. Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours’” (Genesis 45:17–20). No expense would be spared. Joseph’s family would be treated like royalty. Woods observed, “Pharaoh not only was happy to learn more about Joseph’s background (which he discovered was quite honorable and prosperous) and to become acquainted with Joseph’s family, but also the turn of events gave Pharaoh an opportunity to express the profound gratitude of his government for Joseph’s vital service.

This last he does by generously offering Joseph’s family the “best of the land of Egypt” (*Genesis–Exodus*, 111). Loaded with provisions and gifts from Egypt, Joseph’s brothers returned to Canaan (verses 21–23). His final admonition was key: “See that you do not become troubled along the way” (verse 24). There were to be no more quarrels or arguments among the brethren.

## Applications

- Rather than blaming his brothers for all they did to him, Joseph saw his situation as the result of God’s work. This was easier to do from an Egyptian palace than it would have been in an Egyptian prison. Nevertheless, Joseph could look back over his life and see the hand of God at work. He was in a position to save his family, and he intended to do that very thing. Rather than dwelling upon the many ways we have been wronged in life, let us focus on the good we can accomplish where we are.
- Joseph’s final charge to his brothers before they depart is significant. He did not want them to “become troubled along the way” (Genesis 45:24). He did not want them to fight amongst themselves. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we should seek to avoid such fights as well. Paul warned the Galatians, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” (Galatians 5:15).



## Questions

1. What did Joseph do before he revealed himself to his brothers (Genesis 45:1)?
2. What question did Joseph immediately ask his brothers (Genesis 45:3)?
3. Why did Joseph tell the brothers they should not be angry with themselves (Genesis 45:5)?
4. What were the brothers to tell Jacob (Genesis 45:9)?
5. Where did Joseph promise to let his family live (Genesis 45:10)?
6. How many years of famine remained (Genesis 45:11)?

7. What did Joseph give his brothers before they departed (Genesis 45:21–22)?
8. What did Joseph send for his father (Genesis 45:23)?

## Discussion

1. How can we develop a willingness to forgive those who have wronged us?
2. What can we do to keep from arguing with one another?
3. What does this passage teach us about God's providence?

## JACOB IN EGYPT

### Genesis 47:1–12

<sup>1</sup> Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, “My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they are in the land of Goshen.”

<sup>2</sup> And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh.

<sup>3</sup> Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, “What is your occupation?” And they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, both we and also our fathers.”

<sup>4</sup> And they said to Pharaoh, “We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.”

<sup>5</sup> Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, “Your father and your brothers have come to you.

<sup>6</sup> The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock.”

<sup>7</sup> Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

<sup>8</sup> Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How old are you?”

<sup>9</sup> And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.”

<sup>10</sup> So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.

<sup>11</sup> And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

<sup>12</sup> Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with bread, according to the number in their families.

### Genesis 47:27–31

<sup>27</sup> So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly.

<sup>28</sup> And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob’s life was one hundred and forty-seven years.

<sup>29</sup> When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt,

<sup>30</sup> but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.” And he said, “I will do as you have said.”

<sup>31</sup> Then he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.

## Introduction

More than twenty years had passed since Jacob was made to think his son Joseph had died. On that occasion, his other sons brought him the special coat of many colors he gave to Joseph and said, "We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?" (Genesis 37:32). After examining the garment, Jacob declared, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces" (verse 33). Despite the best efforts of his children, Jacob would not be comforted. Instead, he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning" (verse 35). Jacob sincerely believed Joseph was dead, but he was wrong.

When the brothers returned to Canaan after Joseph revealed himself to them, they told Jacob, "Joseph is still alive, and he is the governor over all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:26). To Jacob, who had been convinced Joseph was dead, the news seemed too good to be true. In fact, his "heart stood still, because he did not believe them" (verse 26). Nevertheless, both their testimony and the gifts they brought from Egypt supported their claim. Consequently, "the spirit of Jacob their father revived" (verse 27), and he declared, "It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (verse 28). Regarding his resolve, Hamilton wrote, "Now convinced that Joseph is alive,

Jacob resolves to go down to Egypt immediately. He suggests the possibility that his time is growing shorter (v. 28c). If he waits too long, advancing age or death will prohibit such a voyage. This is too touching a moment for Jacob to say: 'your brother Joseph is still alive.' 'My son Joseph' is how he speaks of the boy whom he has not seen for so long" (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 587).

The journey to Egypt took Jacob and his family to Beersheba, near the southern border of Canaan. There he "offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac" (Genesis 46:1). Grasham observed, "By offering a sacrifice here, presumably at the altar his father had built, Jacob demonstrated that he worshiped the same God as Isaac did. More specifically, he sought confirmation that the God of Abraham and Isaac would be with him and his family as they left the Promised Land to go to Egypt and multiply there for four hundred years, as the Lord had promised (15:13-16)" (*Genesis 23-50*, 510). In response, God provided the confirmation he sought and declared, "I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes" (46:3-4).

Having been divinely assured regarding the journey, Jacob and his descendants made their way to Egypt and "came to the land of Goshen" (Genesis 46:28). Joseph met his father and "presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while" (verse 29). The family was back together again.

## The Brothers and Pharaoh

Genesis 47:1–6

When Pharaoh initially learned about Joseph's family, he offered to give "the best of the land of Egypt to them" (Genesis 45:18). After they returned to stay, Joseph made arrangements for some of his family to meet with Pharaoh (47:2). When they came before the king, he asked, "What is your occupation?" They answered, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and also our fathers" (verse 3). Importantly, this is the answer Joseph told his brothers to provide (cf. 46:34). According to Ross, "Their straightforward answer ... was intended to achieve what Joseph's advice wanted to achieve—a separate life in the land of Goshen" (*Creation and Blessing*, 686). Thus, the brothers added, "We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen" (verse 4).

Upon hearing their request, Pharaoh turned his attention to Joseph and said, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock" (Genesis 47:5–6). Besides granting the request of the brothers and allowing them to settle in Goshen, Pharaoh offered them the opportunity to oversee his livestock as well. Sailhamer concluded, "Thus the narrative shows that Joseph's fortune was duplicated in the fortune of his brothers. The land of Goshen

is called 'the best part of the land' (v. 6), which perhaps is a wordplay on the 'good' ... that God intended in all these recorded events (50:20)" (*Genesis*, 264).

## Jacob and Pharaoh

Genesis 47:7–12

Having brought his brothers before Pharaoh and secured a place for his family to dwell, Joseph next introduced his father to the ruler. When the two met, "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (Genesis 47:7). When they departed from one another, he blessed him again (verse 10). Kuruvilla noted, "In the audience between Jacob's sons and Pharaoh (47:1–4), the former are recipients of the latter's favor; but in the audience between Jacob and Pharaoh (47:7–10), Pharaoh is at the receiving end!" (*Genesis*, 549). This indicates Jacob, the patriarch of his family, is superior to Pharaoh. After all, he is part of the lineage through whom God intended to bless the world (cf. 12:2–3).

Following the initial blessing, Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How old are you?" (Genesis 47:8). According to Steinmann, "Pharaoh's question concerning Jacob's age confirmed Jacob's superior status, since the aged were held in high esteem in the Ancient Near East" (*Genesis*, 432). In response, Jacob stated, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage" (verse 9). Although he lived many years, Jacob said his time did

not compare to his father's. The term *pilgrimage* (NKJV) is also translated *sojourning* (ESV). By using this term, Jacob indicates his belief in something beyond this life (cf. Hebrews 11:13–16).

Joseph made sure his father and brothers were provided for. Describing his efforts, Genesis 47:11–12 states, “And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, according to the number in their families.” Commenting on this blessing, Kissling wrote, “In normal circumstances this might not be such an extraordinary thing given Joseph's position and the power and wealth that it implied. But during a severe famine when there was no (extra) food, this showed extraordinary generosity and extraordinary influence at Pharaoh's court that would enable him to provide it” (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 560). Jacob's family did not starve. Instead, they prospered.

## Joseph's Vow to Jacob

Genesis 47:27–31

Despite the famine, the family of Jacob prospered during their stay in Egypt. Describing this, the text reported, “So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly” (Genesis 47:27). Longman wrote, “That they ‘were fruitful and increased greatly in number’

(v. 27) is reminiscent of both God's command to Adam and Eve (Gen 1:28) as well as the promise to Abraham that his descendants would become a ‘great nation’ (Gen 12:2). Furthermore, it looks forward to the opening of the book of Exodus (1:7), which will repeat this phrase” (*Genesis*, 534). Besides their prosperity, the text mentions that Jacob lived another seventeen years in the land of Egypt (verse 28). He not only got to see Joseph but also Joseph's children.

Before his death, Jacob “called his son Joseph and said to him, ‘Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place’” (Genesis 47:29–30). Jacob's concern is understandable. He was a stranger in a strange land, despite Joseph's high-ranking position. Consequently, he longed to be taken back to the promised land. To ensure this would occur, he asked Joseph to place his hand under his thigh. A similar request was made by Abraham in Genesis 24:2. As Gangel and Bramer observed, “The placement of the hand under the thigh might have emphasized the ties of family kinship. Promises made by placing the hand near the organ of procreation tied this oath to the continuation of Abraham's line through Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. If anyone violated an oath made in such a manner, the other descendants would carry out appropriate judgment” (*Genesis*, 365). Joseph agreed to do as Jacob requested (47:31). Afterward, Jacob “bowed himself on the head of the bed” (verse 31 NKJV) or “worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff”

(verse 31 NIV; cf. Hebrews 11:21). Regardless of which translation is correct, Jacob worshiped God.

## Applications

- The provisions God made for the family of Jacob cannot be dismissed. He not only saved them from the famine afflicting the land but also provided for them in abundance. They were placed in the land of Goshen and given the task of caring for Pharaoh's flocks and herds. We would do well to remember what James 1:17 states: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." Our God remains in control and is able to bless His children abundantly.
- When Jacob described his age to Pharaoh, he likened his life to a pilgrimage (Genesis 47:9). That is an interesting word choice, for it indicates his understanding that there is more to life than the physical. This is the same idea conveyed in Hebrews 11:13, which states, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Jacob understood the world was not his home. We must learn that lesson as well.

## Questions

1. Where did the family of Jacob settle when they arrived in Egypt (Genesis 47:1)?
2. What did Joseph's brothers tell Pharaoh was their occupation (Genesis 47:3)?
3. What opportunity did Pharaoh offer to Joseph's brothers (Genesis 47:6)?
4. What question did Pharaoh ask Jacob (Genesis 47:8)?
5. What did Jacob do to Pharaoh (Genesis 47:7, 10)?
6. What did Joseph provide for his family (Genesis 47:12)?

7. What did Jacob ask Joseph to do for him after he died (Genesis 47:29–30)?

### Discussion

1. What does this passage teach us about the provisions of God for His people?
2. What can we learn from the meeting that occurred between Pharaoh and Jacob?
3. Why do you think Jacob wanted to be buried in the promised land?

## MOURNING FOR JACOB

Genesis 50:1–14

<sup>1</sup> Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him, and kissed him.

<sup>2</sup> And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel.

<sup>3</sup> Forty days were required for him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.

<sup>4</sup> Now when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the hearing of Pharaoh, saying,

<sup>5</sup> 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.'"

<sup>6</sup> And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear."

<sup>7</sup> So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt,

<sup>8</sup> as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen.

<sup>9</sup> And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering.

<sup>10</sup> Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. He observed seven days of mourning for his father.

<sup>11</sup> And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a deep mourning of the Egyptians." Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.

<sup>12</sup> So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them.

<sup>13</sup> For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place.

<sup>14</sup> And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father.

## Introduction

Jacob lived seventeen years after he moved from Canaan to Egypt (Genesis 47:28). Before his death, he made Joseph promise to bury him with his fathers (verse 30). He also summoned the strength to provide

blessings and directions to his sons. In one particularly moving statement, he declared to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" (48:11). Jacob was thankful for the time he had with Joseph, whom he thought long dead, and his sons. He understood he would not live forever. Consequently, he sought to speak to his family members before it was too late.

As a means of honoring Joseph, Jacob claimed Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own. Regarding them, he said, "And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance" (Genesis 48:5-6). He then said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers" (verse 21).

After blessing Joseph and his sons, Jacob summoned all his sons before his death and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days: Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father" (Genesis 49:1-2). He then proceeded to bless "each one according to his own blessing" (verse 28). Following these final remarks, Jacob reiterated his desire to be buried in Canaan (verses 29-32). He then "drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people" (verse 33). Jacob's pilgrimage on earth was over (cf. 47:9).



## Official Mourning

Genesis 50:1–3

After Sarah's death, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her" (Genesis 23:2). His reaction to the passing of his wife was appropriate. It is natural to mourn the loss of a loved one. On that occasion, Abraham also made provisions for Sarah's burial. This, too, is a part of the grieving process. Thus, we are not surprised by Joseph's reaction to the death of his father, Jacob. According to Genesis 50:1, "Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him." This reaction is not surprising, especially when viewed in light of the way Jacob and Joseph loved one another. When Jacob believed Joseph was killed, he "wept for him" (37:35). When Jacob came to Egypt, Joseph "fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while" (46:29). Both father and son shed tears over one another in life. Now Joseph wept over his father's death. Kissling wrote, "The favorite son of the father had just lost that father, and the normal signs of grief come flooding out. ... While weeping is a modern sign of grief that we share with the ancient audience, falling on the face of a corpse and kissing it may seem strange to some modern observers. But people in grief often touch and kiss the corpse at such times" (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 612).

In keeping with the cultural practices of the Egyptians, "Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel" (Genesis 50:2). As Walton noted, "Numerous rituals were associated with embalming because it reflected

a particular view of the afterlife. It was performed by a trained group of mortuary priests, who removed the internal organs and then placed the body in embalming fluids for forty days. The philosophy behind this is the Egyptian belief that the body must be preserved as a repository for the soul after death. The fact that the bodies of Jacob and Joseph are embalmed may suggest the desire of the Israelites to soothe the feelings of the Egyptians, but it also serves the purpose of preserving their bodies for later burial in Canaan" (*The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, 720).

The embalming process lasted forty days; the entire period of mourning lasted seventy days (Genesis 50:3). Sometime later, the Israelites mourned the death of Moses for thirty days (Deuteronomy 34:8). Whether this was a custom, Brueggemann correctly noted, "Jacob dies an honored man. The one who had kicked his way out of the womb (25:22–26) and 'conned' his way into God's promise (25:29–34; 27:22–29) is at rest in the plot of promise and is honored even by the empire" (*Genesis*, 368).

## Joseph Explains His Vow

Genesis 50:4–9

When the embalming of Jacob's body was complete and the initial period of mourning for his death ended, Joseph explained to Pharaoh and his household the vow he made to his father. He declared, "My father made me swear, saying, 'Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall

bury me.' Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back" (Genesis 50:5). The text gives no reason why Joseph needed Pharaoh's permission to leave Egypt to bury Jacob. Perhaps it was an act of courtesy to inform the king and receive his blessing; perhaps there were genuine doubts about whether Pharaoh would allow any of Joseph's family to depart from the land. Longman observed, "Joseph may have been the second most powerful person in Egypt, but even he cannot do anything without the approval of Pharaoh. He had earlier sought Pharaoh's permission to bring Jacob and his family to Egypt; now he seeks permission for his family to return to Canaan in order to bury his father" (*Genesis*, 560).

Interestingly, Joseph mentioned Jacob's desire to be buried in a tomb he "hewed" for himself (Genesis 50:5 ESV). This request would certainly have resonated with Pharaoh, who was concerned with building his own tomb. Thus, "Pharaoh said, 'Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear'" (verse 6). With the permission of the king, "Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's house" (verses 7–8). Jacob's funeral was more than a family affair. It was, as Steinmann wrote, "an official Egyptian state procession, as the presence of horses and chariots attests. The procession left from the land of Goshen (v. 8), the same place from which the Israelites would leave Egypt four centuries later" (*Genesis*, 469). Joseph kept his promise to Jacob. He took his body back to Canaan for burial.

## Jacob Buried in Machpelah

Genesis 50:10–14

We first read about "the cave of the field of Machpelah" in Genesis 23, when Abraham buried Sarah in that location (verse 19). That, however, was just the beginning of the location's significance in the biblical record. In addition to Sarah, Abraham was buried there (25:9). It was also the burial place of Isaac and Rebekah as well as Jacob's wife Leah (49:31). Jacob made Joseph promise to bury him there with his fathers (47:30). He also charged his other sons with the same task (49:29–30). Thus, the procession of individuals transporting the body of Jacob from Egypt to Canaan made their way toward that location.

As they drew near to the Jordan, "they came to the threshing floor of Atad" and mourned for Jacob for seven days (Genesis 50:10). According to Hamilton, "Seven days was the normal period for mourning (see 1 Sam. 31:13; 2 Sam. 11:27; Job 2:13 ...). The thirty days of mourning for Moses (Deut. 34:8) and for Aaron (Num. 20:29) are exceptional. Other texts refer to fasting as part of the mourning ceremony. ... Perhaps mourning included a number of acts, of which fasting would only be one, and hence the reason for not mentioning it explicitly in v. 10" (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 696). Regardless, their mourning impacted the Canaanites, who concluded, "This is a deep mourning of the Egyptians" (Genesis 50:11). Nevertheless, Gangel and Bramer explained, "The people of Canaan misinterpreted the event. The clothing, the coffin, and maybe even the language may have led to this assumption. But the reality was that this was

a Hebrew patriarch who was being buried in the land he believed he owned by faith" (*Genesis*, 37:5). Jacob's resolve to be buried in Canaan rather than Egypt greatly impacted Joseph, who later made a similar request concerning his bones (verse 25; cf. *Hebrews* 11:22).

The remainder of our lesson text reports how the sons of Jacob "did for him just as he had commanded them. For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place" (*Genesis* 50:12–13). Having buried their father, the brothers returned to Egypt, as Joseph had promised Pharaoh (verse 14; cf. verse 5). Noting the similarity to Israel's eventual return to Canaan, Ross wrote, "The family of Jacob, with its attendant company of Gentiles, rehearsed, as it were, the future homecoming of the nation in fulfillment of the promises to Israel. Once more the children of Israel would leave Egypt, taking with them the bones of the patriarch (see *Exod.* 13:19). Here, however, the pilgrimage to the Land of Promise was only temporary; the grave was only a claim to the land. Moses would lead the next pilgrimage to Canaan" (*Creation and Blessing*, 715). Even so, Jacob was laid to rest with Abraham and Isaac, and God's people were reminded that Egypt was not their home.

## Applications

- It is fitting to mourn the loss of a loved one. It is also appropriate to make sure the dead are buried with dignity. Although the burial process is not identical in every culture, the need to grieve is constant. Let us show compassion toward those who mourn. When possible, "weep with those who weep" (*Romans* 12:15). At the same time, realize that Christians do not "sorrow as others who have no hope" (*1 Thessalonians* 4:13). Because Jesus defeated death, we can as well. Death is not the end.
- Jacob's burial in Canaan served as a visible reminder that Egypt was not his home. Christians need a similar reminder about this world. At the longest, our time on this earth is brief. We must live in preparation for the eternal home in the heavens awaiting the faithful (*Matthew* 25:34). Paul told the Corinthians, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (*2 Corinthians* 5:1).

## Questions

1. What did Joseph do after Jacob died (*Genesis* 50:1)?

2. What did Joseph command his servants to do to Jacob (Genesis 50:2)?
  
3. How many days did the Egyptians mourn for Jacob (Genesis 50:3)?
  
4. What did Joseph ask Pharaoh permission to do (Genesis 50:5)?
  
5. Where did the burial party mourn for Jacob for seven days (Genesis 50:10)?
  
6. Where was Jacob buried (Genesis 50:13)?
  
7. What did Joseph and his brothers do after the burial (Genesis 50:14)?

## Discussion

1. Why do you think Joseph wanted to be buried in Canaan rather than Egypt?
  
2. What can we learn from the way Joseph asked Pharaoh for permission?
  
3. In what way(s) did Jacob's funeral impact others?

## FEAR AND ASSURANCE

Genesis 50:15–26

<sup>15</sup> When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him."

<sup>16</sup> So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying,

<sup>17</sup> "Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

<sup>18</sup> Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants."

<sup>19</sup> Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?"

<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

<sup>22</sup> So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph's knees.

<sup>24</sup> And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

<sup>25</sup> Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."

<sup>26</sup> So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

### Introduction

When Joseph first revealed his identity to his brothers, he sought to allay their concerns about whether he would retaliate against them for what they had done to him. He said, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:4–7). As far as Joseph was concerned, God was the one who sent him to Egypt. The brothers intended to do him harm, but things turned

out differently than they expected. Joseph was placed in a position to save his family. He was thankful, not angry.

Whether the brothers believed Joseph harbored no ill will toward them, they knew he longed to see their father, Jacob. Besides asking about Jacob's well-being (Genesis 45:3), Joseph instructed his brothers to hurry and bring Jacob to Egypt (verse 9). It is possible the brothers believed the preferential treatment they received once the family moved to Egypt was because of Joseph's relationship with Jacob. Pharaoh certainly showed great respect when he spoke to Jacob (47:7), and Jacob developed a special bond with Joseph and his sons (48:11). Thus, when Jacob died, the brothers expressed fear about what Joseph might do to them. They said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him" (50:15).

Thankfully, Joseph did not harbor ill will toward his brothers. He was not merely treating them with kindness for the sake of Jacob. Instead, Joseph forgave them. Their suggestions to the contrary caused Joseph to weep. Nevertheless, he reminded them of the truth he previously declared: "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. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones" (Genesis 50:20-21).

The brothers seemed to struggle with the concept of forgiveness. Joseph did not. He was willing to forgive those who had done him wrong, and he was willing to credit God with his success. Ross provided a summary of the scene: "The sovereign plan of God, designed to

save many people alive, in some way incorporated the evil of the brothers and used it as a means of bringing about the good. On the basis of his confidence in the ways of the Lord, Joseph was able to comfort his brothers and relieve their fears" (*Creation and Blessing*, 716).

## The Brothers' Fear

Genesis 50:15-18

Jacob's death caused Joseph's brothers to evaluate their relationship with him. Would Joseph treat them differently now that Jacob was gone? Expressing this concern, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him" (Genesis 50:15). Hamilton wrote, "Their suspicion is that Joseph will loathe them. The Joseph narrative started with the brothers hating him (37:4, 5, 8). At the end of the narrative the tables are turned, and they think Joseph will hate them. ... Their hatred for Joseph is real, but Joseph's hatred of them is only imaginary" (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 702). In fact, Joseph gave them no reason to think he intended to seek revenge. Quite the opposite was true. He treated them favorably and made provision for their families.

Despite having no reason to think Joseph intended them harm, the brothers sought to avoid any potential conflict and sent the following message to him: "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you."'"

Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father” (Genesis 50:16–17). If Jacob spoke the words reported to Joseph, the text does not reveal it. It is possible they fabricated the statement. Grasham believed so and wrote, “Although Joseph’s brothers earnestly desired his forgiveness on this occasion, it is doubtful that Jacob had really spoken this message to them” (*Genesis 23–50*, 627).

Regardless, the words affected Joseph, for he “wept when they spoke to him” (Genesis 50:17). Concerning his reaction, Kissling observed, “Joseph sees through the transparent fiction of some message from his father for him after his death. He sees also the inability of his brothers to trust that he has in fact forgiven them. The fact that they would lie in such a transparent attempt to elicit mercy because they could not bring themselves to believe that Joseph had forgiven them saddens Joseph deeply, even to the point of weeping. In a family so fractured by favoritism, forgiveness, the acceptance of forgiveness, and the trust necessary to believe forgiveness is possible are hard to obtain” (*Genesis, Volume 2*, 620). After Joseph’s emotional reaction, the brothers fell down at his feet and proclaimed themselves his servants (verse 18; cf. 37:7).

## Joseph Assures Them

Genesis 50:19–21

Rather than allowing his brothers to persist in fear, Joseph addressed their concerns. He said, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you

meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:19–20). Joseph did not hold a grudge for the way they treated him years earlier. Instead, he looked at what had transpired and realized the hand of God was at work. Kuruvilla observed, “Joseph’s response to his brothers (Gen 50:19–21) captures in a nutshell not only the theology of the Joseph narrative, but that of the book of Genesis as well—the good-evil polarity, and God’s working out good from evil, began with the events of creation and those in the Garden of Eden. Man is not in the place of God ...; rather, he must acquiesce to the divine will, trusting that God knows what he is about” (*Genesis*, 570). Joseph certainly trusted God and believed God placed him in the position he occupied to bring about good. Consequently, he did not hate or blame his brothers.

Instead, Joseph made clear his intention to continue to provide for his family. He stated, “Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones” (Genesis 50:21). Additionally, “he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (verse 21). God obviously intended to protect Jacob’s family; Joseph promised to do his part. Longman wrote, “Joseph was not exonerating his brothers’ wrongdoing, but he was also aware of God’s overruling their evil actions and using them for good. Thus, Joseph not only refrains from vengeance, but he also provides for his brothers and their children. Indeed, Joseph goes out of his way to comfort his brothers” (*Genesis*, 562). What a wonderful example for us to consider!

## Joseph's Death

Genesis 50:22–26

Genesis summarized the remainder of Joseph's life simply: "So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years" (Genesis 50:22). If Joseph was close to forty years old when his family came to Egypt (41:46; 45:6), he would have been in his mid-fifties when Jacob died (47:28). Thus, the last fifty-plus years of his life are reported without incident. The only detail given in the text involved Joseph's family. According to Genesis 50:23, "Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph's knees." Regarding Joseph's lifespan, Steinmann wrote, "Since 110 years was considered by Egyptians to be the ideal lifespan, Joseph's 110 years, all but seventeen of them in Egypt, mark him as especially blessed by God to the very end of his days" (*Genesis*, 472).

Before his death, Joseph expressed confidence in God's willingness to deliver His people from Egypt and take them back to Canaan. Thus, he instructed his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Genesis 50:24). Because of this confidence, Joseph added, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here" (verse 25). According to Hebrews 11:22, Joseph acted "by faith" when he gave these instructions. After his death, Joseph was embalmed and put in a coffin. Nevertheless, he was taken from Egypt to Canaan. Woods wrote, "Joseph's

last request was honored by the Israelites. His body was embalmed in Egypt and his remains carried out in the exodus (Exodus 13:19) and buried in Shechem (Joshua 24:32). The book of Genesis thus closes with the death of its last chief character, who expresses before death strong trust in God's plans for the people of Israel" (*Genesis-Exodus*, 123).

## Applications

- Joseph's brothers feared their relationship might turn sour after the death of Jacob. This fear stemmed from their lack of trust in the forgiveness Joseph extended to them. This was not because Joseph failed to reveal his feelings. He plainly told them, "Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here" (Genesis 45:5). His feelings were genuine. He held no grudge. They evidently failed to forgive themselves. This reminds us that forgiveness is difficult to grant and to receive.
- Joseph's kindness to his brothers provides us with a wonderful example to consider. Although they anticipated he might deal harshly with them after Jacob's death, he did not. Instead, "he comforted them and spoke kindly to them" (Genesis 50:21). The New Testament calls upon us to be kind to others as well. Paul wrote, "And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).



## Questions

1. Why did Joseph's brothers think he might repay them for the evil they did to him (Genesis 50:15)?
2. How did Joseph respond to the message his brothers sent to him (Genesis 50:17)?
3. What did Joseph's brothers do when they presented themselves before him (Genesis 50:18)?
4. Why did Joseph believe God orchestrated the events as He did (Genesis 50:20)?
5. What did Joseph promise to do for his brothers (Genesis 50:21)?
6. How old was Joseph when he died (Genesis 50:22)?

7. What did Joseph ask the children of Israel to do with his bones (Genesis 50:25)?

## Discussion

1. What can we do to help others learn to forgive? What can we do to help others learn to accept forgiveness?
2. What can Christians do to encourage kindness toward others?
3. How does Joseph's view of God's intentions help frame his perspective?
4. What can we learn from Joseph's last request?