



Faith
Connections
Bible Study Guide

Fall
21

Beginnings

The Patriarchs



Bible Study Guide

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Perspectives

Course Correction

Have you ever been on a trip and had to make a course correction? When I think about all the trips I have taken, two types of course corrections come to mind. The first is when you have been traveling and realize you are heading in the wrong direction. You might see a mile marker, exit sign, or landmark that indicates you are going the wrong way. That is when you pull off, look at a map, and get on the right trajectory toward your intended destination. The second type happens when you are heading in the right direction but due to road construction, flooding, and so on, you must take a detour. You are on the right road, but must make an adjustment (a course correction) to the path you are traveling.

In life, sometimes course corrections are needed or necessary. For example, people might find that their life is filled with painful and destructive wrong turns. The road they are traveling is leading away from God and a course correction is needed. When people realize their life is going in the wrong direction, they must pull off (so to speak) and allow God to get them headed in the right direction. This means acknowledging they are lost, allowing God's presence to lead them on life's road. One might say it means, "Putting God in the driver's seat."

When people are traveling on the right road, but encounter an unexpected detour (e.g., losing a job, health issues, etc.), it is at those times they must trust God to help them navigate the unintended and unfamiliar path they are traveling. It means relying on God, allowing His presence to guide them during times when life necessitates a course correction.

During this quarter, we will look at stories of people whose life needed or required a course correction. In each case, God was faithful to guide, strengthen, and empower—offering a path that led to a closer relationship with Him. As you read each story, think about the ways God worked in the lives of those who allowed Him to direct their path.

May God bless you as you study His Word this quarter!

MIKE WONCH

Editor

September

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IN THE BEGINNING, GOOD

God is good and therefore His creation is also good.

THE WORD

GENESIS 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

26-31

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

KEY VERSE

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

ENGAGE THE WORD

IN THE BEGINNING GOD

Genesis 1:1-5

Genesis 1:1 declares volumes about the Christian faith and life. Creation theories abound in school textbooks, social media discussions, and research studies. The Judeo-Christian tradition responds to popular creation theories by asserting several foundational truths:

1. One eternal, transcendent, uncreated God exists.
2. God personally created everything in space and time.
3. God created everything with intention and purpose.

Genesis 1 begins the Bible by declaring, not as a plausible scientific theory, but as a spiritual reality, that God's existence is verified by looking at everything the human eye sees in the sky above, the sea below, and the earth on which we live. The Bible teaches that God created everything. It does not speak to the timeline of when or the details of how. Scholars have theorized responses to these questions from time immemorial without reaching definitive conclusions. Genesis 1 assumes God existed before everything we know in space and time; God remains separate from yet vitally connected to all He created; and God left fingerprints of His qualities and attributes on everything we see in creation. Creation did not randomly result from happenstance conditions. God created with goals in mind. Chaos resulted not by generating itself into the world, but from human sinfulness. God is actively involved in restoring the order to which He created everything.

The text introduces us to the loving Creator who brought everything into existence for good. God defines goodness as one of His attributes. God created everything good. Therefore, God declared that all He made is very good.

HUMANITY IN GOD'S IMAGE

Genesis 1:26-27

Many wonder to whom God is speaking when He says, "Let us make . . ." Some believe this conversation

Did You Know?

There may be many reasons why God put human beings on this planet. But one of the reasons is to take care of his creation—to “tend and watch over it” (Genesis 2:15). (Stephen M. Miller, *The Complete Guide to the Bible* [Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 2007], 13).

took place within the members of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Others think the plural word “us” results from a method the Hebrew language uses to describe divine majesty. Still others think God is addressing the angels and other created beings who surround God’s heavenly throne. Or, maybe God is simply declaring His creative intentions aloud much like we do when we start a project with “Let’s do this!”

Regardless of how we interpret God’s declaration at the beginning of verse 26, we have no doubt that the crowning masterpiece of God’s creative activity is humanity. God delighted in everything He created in the heavens above, the sea below, and on the surface of the earth. He especially rejoiced in the pinnacle of His creativity for He created humanity in His own image. What does that mean? God is Spirit (John 4:24), so God’s image in us must be something other than our physical characteristics. We reflect God’s image in our spiritual dimension. We can love God and others, communicate with one another and with our Creator, think intelligently about life’s deepest questions, reason answers to those questions, imagine a preferred future, create art, handicraft, architecture, and bring other images of the mind to reality. We experience a whole range of human emotions and contemplate our existence in eternity. God gave this image of himself to Adam and Eve equally. Both bore this special reflection of God.

While it is true that the garden fall damaged God’s image in us, we did not completely lose that image. God saw something good remaining in us worth redeeming. He continued to work with us to restore that image both in Genesis 3 and throughout the rest of the Bible. We must follow God’s example and respond to the people around us who seem furthest from God’s image. We must see them as God sees them; we must see the potential within them that God sees and treat them with love and respect. They too are God’s highest creation. He loves them and desires personal relationship with every single soul.

Think About It

Consider contemporary theories offered for the origin of our world and everything in it. List the many leaps of faith necessary to maintain these conclusions. God reveals himself throughout the Bible. Today's text implies many qualities and characteristics not only of a mighty creator, but also of a loving father.

Genesis 1:28-31

You can almost visualize the beaming smile of a parent offering a parting blessing along with hopes and dreams for a wonderful life as a child transitions from the childhood home to a new adventure with independent living. Our loving heavenly Father not only blessed the first couple as they ventured out into their new world, He challenged them with plenty to occupy their time and entrusted His new world to them.

God challenged the first couple to begin populating the earth. What a grand challenge; God envisioned people living across the whole planet. He planned plenty of space for everyone. God commissioned the couple to look after all living inhabitants of the sky, sea, and earth—all three levels of His earthly creation. Readers often misunderstand the word translated “subdue” in verse 28. Rather than suggesting that we are to take advantage of our world or treat it with wholesale disregard, the word suggests images that require our responsibility as stewards, servants, guardians, or caretakers. We are to guard it carefully rather than exploit or abuse it.

The key verse (v. 31) of this session imagines the almighty sovereign of the universe taking in a panoramic view of His entire creation. With a big smile on His face, He declared it all very good! Perhaps He reviewed His checklist: create a complete interdependent eco-system. Check. Provide a hospitable environment for all living creatures. Check. Provide food for every living thing. Check. Put caretakers in charge to steward this masterpiece. Check.

Now God could rest for a season.

REFLECT Take time this week to notice and appreciate the “good” of God’s creation.

FRANK MOORE is General Editor for the Church of the Nazarene.

September

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AFTER THE BEGINNING, GRACE

*God brings us grace in the midst of sin
and offers us victory for life.*

THE WORD

GENESIS 3:1-19

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

²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

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

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. **⁹But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”**

¹⁰He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹²The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

KEY VERSE

¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

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

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

¹⁸It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

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

ENGAGE THE WORD

HUMAN WILL MISUSED

Genesis 3:1-7

The opening text highlights the conversation between the serpent and Eve. The serpent’s first line of deception with Eve greatly exaggerated God’s prohibitive command and called His motives in doing so into question. In Genesis 2:17, God commanded the couple to refrain from the fruit of only one garden tree. The serpent, on the other hand, extended the prohibition to the fruit of every tree in the garden. Eve’s response indicates that she completely understood God’s directions about the garden fruits, which were permitted for enjoyment and which one fruit was off limits.

In verse 3, Eve misquoted God’s directive just as the serpent had done. She added a prohibition against touching the fruit, an action which God had

Did You Know?

The words “sin” and “Satan” do not appear in Genesis chapter 3. However, the suggestive influence of Satan characterizes the conversation and suggestions offered by the serpent. The result of the first couple's choices describe the consequences of sin.

not required. This expansion of God's directive made God's motives seem unrealistic just as the serpent had done. Eve then presented God's instructions negatively rather than positively. She could have argued that God's directions promoted life; instead, she emphasized death as the consequence of disobedience. What God intended for the couple's good, she reinterpreted as a threat.

The serpent cleverly called God's definition of truth into question, and redefined truth in a way that seemingly benefited the couple. The serpent's redefinition of truth allowed the woman to satisfy her physical and intellectual hunger. The man followed suit. Immediately, the couple realized they had traded God's truth for a lie and earned far more consequences for their actions than they ever imagined.

BLAME GAME

Genesis 3:8-13

God's probing question in verse 9 does not imply ignorance. Rather, God politely invited them to join Him without accosting them about their disobedience. He called to them not from a spirit of anger and judgment but from a heart filled with disappointment and parental pain. God could have immediately pronounced judgment upon the failed couple, but He didn't. He chose a series of probing questions to help His children come to terms with what they had done. More than that, He immediately went into action to reestablish their broken relationship.

Adam and Eve defaulted to a reasoning strategy that people have frequently employed: the blame game. Adam first blamed God for bringing Eve into his life. Then he reasoned that God should judge Eve, not him. Eve quickly passed blame off onto the serpent for deceiving her. As the couple analyzed the situation, God should not hold either one of them responsible for their actions. God himself and the serpent should assume blame.

Think About It

Once we become recipients of God's grace, we have the privilege of offering that grace to others. Our reconciliation with God opens the way for us to announce the possibility for others to experience that same reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

**CONSEQUENCES
FOR THEIR ACTIONS****Genesis 3:14-19**

God responded to Adam, Eve, and the serpent by first addressing the serpent. God immediately pronounced a curse upon him. However, verse 15 gives us a glimpse into the compassionate heart of our loving heavenly Father as He announces His plan to redeem His children from the spiritual mess they have created. This verse is recognized by most Bible scholars as the first reference to the good news of our redemption made possible through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The serpent deceived humanity through temptation which led to sin and alienation from God. God would respond by sending His Son to earth to break the power of temptation and sin and restore right relationship with the Father.

We must pay careful attention to the remaining verses of this passage. While God pronounced a curse upon the serpent, He did not curse Adam and Eve. Rather, He announced some of the many consequences they would encounter as a result of their disobedience. The pain connected to Eve's childbearing encompasses the physical anguish in the birth process, but also includes the emotional stress a mother often experiences in raising her children to adulthood.

God announced that Adam would no longer be in harmonious relationship with the ground. Anguishing toil would characterize Adam's life as he worked the soil for food in order to feed his family. Finally, God said life outside the garden would result in a return to the dust from which they came. As in all compromise with sin, nothing turned out for Adam and Eve as they envisioned the day they yielded to temptation and disobeyed their Father. It never does!

REFLECT

How ironic that people today fail, just as the first couple failed, to recognize that fruit, even the most beautiful and succulent fruit, has a limited life span and soon spoils.

September

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“WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER?”

A root of sin is setting aside the image of God and choosing self.

THE WORD

GENESIS 4:1-16

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

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. ⁴And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

⁸Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

KEY VERSE

**⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”
“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”**

¹⁰The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. ¹²When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

¹³Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear.

¹⁴Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from

your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

¹⁵But the LORD said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. ¹⁶So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

ENGAGE THE WORD

TROUBLE AT HOME

Genesis 4:1-7

The first couple adjusted to their new normal and fell into a daily routine. Their love for one another resulted in the first two children born on earth, Cain and Abel. The boys quickly matured and worked with their father Adam, providing for their family. Verses 3-5 describe the first acts of worship recorded in the Bible. No doubt, the first couple raised their boys in a godly home and taught them the importance of worshiping God. The story quickly focuses on the offerings the boys brought. God accepted Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s. Why?

God did not reject Cain’s agricultural offering itself; He rejected the casual attitude with which Cain selected his gift and the indifferent manner in which he offered it to God. Notice that Abel brought the firstborn of his flock. Add to that the portion of meat was especially fatty. He brought God the first and very best animal he owned. Cain, on the other hand, did not bring a first fruits offering. His offering appears to be something he causally picked up on his way to worship, perhaps selected in haste with little forethought.

Cain became depressed over God’s rejection of his offering. His depression soon turned to sibling resentment. God questioned Cain much the way He had questioned his parents in the garden. God wanted to fix matters and restore their relationship. God also genuinely cared about Cain’s emotional well-being. God offered Cain a choice: he could do the right thing by controlling his anger and changing his attitude, or he could allow them to consume him with sin.

Did You Know?

No person sins to him or herself. Cain's sin of jealousy and resentment of his brother did not remain hidden in his heart.

Cain sprang into action, killing Abel, breaking the hearts of God, Adam, and Eve, and alienating himself from all people, God, and even nature.

THE FIRST DEATH

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON BOTH SINS

Genesis 4:8

Cain invited his brother to meet him in a field. The text does not indicate whether Cain's invitation came from a pre-meditated plan to murder Abel. However, the fact that we have no record of their conversation together implies that Cain had one goal in mind: revenge. The Hebrew word translated "attacked" in English indicates the action was not accidental but violently deliberate.

Lack of further detail about the field meeting leaves us to believe that Cain looked down at his brother's lifeless body and simply walked away. He did not try to conceal his murderous act by burying his brother in the field. The text indicates no remorse for his action. Verse 8 powerfully illustrates God's warning to the first couple in the garden. That is, eating from the forbidden tree would lead to death.

No words in any language can capture the horror, pain, and grief Adam and Eve must have felt when they received word that their younger son lay dead in the field, violently murdered by his own brother! Adam and Eve became the first parents to experience a parent's worst nightmare, the death of their child. No words could comfort that grief or take the pain from their hearts. They lost not one son that day but two. They surely began to realize the high price of sin.

Genesis 4:9-16

Just as God reached out to Adam and Eve with a question in Genesis 3:9, God approached Cain following his sin with a question that flowed from divine grace and mercy. No doubt, God asked the question to open the door to Cain's confession and request for forgiveness. Cain chose not to respond as God hoped he would. To the sin of murder Cain added lying to God. He refused to admit what he had done even when confronted by his Creator. Cain's question back to God betrayed the anger and rage in his heart that led to his rude and insulting response: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Think About It

All world religions focus attention on pious acts of worship and good deeds participants offer as they reach out to their god or gods. God's two questions in Genesis 3:9 and 4:9 remind us that our God reaches out to us, comes looking for us, and attempts to establish a relationship with us.

If we place emphasis on the word "I," we realize that perhaps Cain's question actually attempted to transfer the blame for Abel's death onto God. Cain should not be his brother's protector; that is God's job. If God failed to protect Abel as He should have, then the responsibility for Abel's fallen condition lies with God, not Cain. Only a truly cold and indifferent heart could reason this way.

God followed this conversation with the first divine curse upon a person. God cursed the serpent and the ground in Genesis 3, but not Adam and Eve. The ground that had faithfully provided a livelihood for Cain would no longer produce for him. In fact, God announced that Cain would become a wandering fugitive traveling aimlessly around the countryside finding no place to settle and call home. Purpose and meaning would elude him for the rest of his life.

We find one of the saddest pictures in the Bible in the last verse of our text. Cain walked away from the Lord's presence and into the land of wandering (Nod) never to be heard from again. He left behind the broken hearts of his father, mother, and God. Sin continued to wreak havoc in God's good creation.

REFLECT

God does not violate human free will. But, He works graciously to bring sinners back into relationship with himself, offering them an opportunity to repent and find forgiveness.

FRANK MOORE

September

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GOD'S CONTRACT

God is a God of second chances.

THE WORD

GENESIS 6:11-22

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹²God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. ¹⁴So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. ¹⁶Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."

²²Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

GENESIS 9:11-17

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

¹²And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making be-

tween me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶**Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”**

KEY VERSE

¹⁷So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

ENGAGE THE WORD

GOD INSTRUCTS NOAH

Genesis 6:11-17

Genesis 5:1—6:7 describes how the descendants of Adam and Eve continued, as the first couple had done, to use their free wills to disobey God and reject His plan. God’s heart grieved that His good creation had become so corrupted by the sinful actions of humanity. Some read God’s response to humanity’s rejection of His plan as vindictive judgment. God announced destruction on the world’s depravity, to be sure. However, verses 11-13 can also be interpreted that the coming destruction was a natural consequence of sin’s decay. Sin always results in death (Romans 6:23). Humanity’s bent toward selfish, sinful choices triggered the cataclysmic demise of earth’s inhabitants.

In the midst of corruption and lawlessness, God found Noah and his family. God described Noah as righteous, blameless, and faithful. God gave Noah very specific instructions to build a watertight structure that defies description even to this day. Standing 45 feet tall, 450 feet long, and 75 feet wide, this three-story structure would become a safe haven for Noah’s family, pairs from the entire animal and aviary kingdoms, and enough food for all inhabitants to survive for a year. We call this structure an ark rather than a boat because it had no rudder to guide it or

Did You Know?

Many ancient civilizations recorded flood stories, indicating widespread knowledge of the event. Only the story of Noah in the Bible describes a loving, compassionate God who lived in relationship with His children and sought their health, wholeness, and peace.

GOD ESTABLISHES A COVENANT

sails to power it across the flood waters. It simply floated freely on the water. God used instructive rather than commanding language with Noah. Noah did not speak throughout their conversation together; he simply listened and promptly obeyed.

Genesis 6:18-22

The Bible mentions the concept of a covenant between God and humanity for the first time in verse 18. Much like modern-day contracts, a covenant served as an agreement between two individuals or groups of people. It established the terms and conditions of their relationship and bound the two parties in specific ways. God took the initiative in entering into this first covenant with Noah and his descendants. God laid out the terms and conditions of the relationship. Then God did the unthinkable; He bound himself with an everlasting promise to keep His end of the bargain for the duration of humanity's occupation of the earth regardless of their obedience to the covenant!

We do not know for certain, but the text seems to indicate God staffed the ark with Noah, his wife, their three sons, and the sons' wives. Genesis 10:1 indicates that Noah's sons did not have children until after their stay on the ark. God instructed Noah to prepare stalls and food for the great variety of animals the ark would shelter. God did not tell Noah to capture the animals and bring them to the ark; God appears to have instinctively instructed the animals to go to Noah's ark. We cannot discuss the animals spared by the ark without calling attention to the rest of the animal kingdom that drowned in the flood. Their deaths remind us that innocent ones suffer along with sinners in the destructive consequences of sin.

Righteous, blameless, and faithful Noah listened to God's instructions and followed them carefully (v. 22). The text does not recount all that happened in obeying God's instructions. The task of gathering enough wood to construct such a massive structure would

Think About It

The destructive effects of sin deeply grieve God; therefore, sin should deeply grieve us to the point that we will seek God's restoration so that we might experience all that God desires for us.

GOD GIVES A SIGN

have been daunting. The years of labor in notching every piece of lumber into place would have been exhausting. The laughs and ridicule of the neighbors would have been humiliating. But, Noah received divine instruction, and he humbly followed the voice of his God.

Genesis 9:11-17

God fleshed out additional details of the covenant He announced to Noah years ago before Noah built the ark, gathered the animals along with his family, and spent a year in close quarters. God established this covenant not just for Noah's family but for all the generations to follow. Regardless of how people decided to use their free will in the future, God determined that the flood and its destruction was a never-to-be-repeated event.

God created the rainbow as a frequent reminder of God's covenant with all humanity. Rainbows only appear with rain clouds as a backdrop. Our attention must never focus on the storm or the rain, but upon the promise of God to care for us in the midst of threatening weather. Imagine a warrior returning from battle and hanging his bow and arrows on a hook as a symbol of peace. God hung His bow in the clouded sky as a symbol of peace for His creation. We know these many thousands of years later that God has kept His promise to Noah; we can count on Him to remain faithful to us until the end of time on earth.

REFLECT Sin always destroys, but God seeks restoration before sin has the final word; He provides all we need for full restoration of our relationship with Him.

FRANK MOORE

October

3

UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE TOWER

*We must find our identity in God
rather than seeking it elsewhere.*

THE WORD

GENESIS
10:32

These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.

GENESIS
11:1-9

¹Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ²As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

³They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.

KEY VERSES

⁴Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

⁵But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

⁸So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

ENGAGE THE WORD

GOD'S PLAN INITIATED

Genesis 10:32—11:2

God created an incredibly vast and diverse world for all of its inhabitants to explore and enjoy. Sea coasts, forests, deserts, mountains, valleys, wetlands, drylands, islands, warm climates, cool climates, and tropical climates only scratch the surface of the variety the earth offers us. Genesis 10:32 reports not what happened by accident as the descendants of Noah spread out across the world, but the initiation of God's plan to fully occupy His earth. Genesis 10:5 offers an overview of how humanity began to execute God's plan as they spread out across the various world regions following the flood.

The Bible does not specifically address the method in which all of the animals executed God's plan to spread out across the world. No doubt, God instinctively instructed them to follow His relocation plan just as He had instinctively instructed them to arrive at the ark's loading dock at the appropriate time. One of the amazing wonders of animals, birds, and sea creatures to this day is their careful attention to the specific migration directions God gives them. Many spend their entire lives journeying to a specific location then returning to the place of their birth. Others make annual journeys to and from specific destinations that God gives them. These animals, birds, and sea creatures offer us a worthy example to follow. They receive God's instructions, and they willingly obey. Humans seldom follow God's instructions as carefully or willingly.

The flood waters receded and left the ark sitting on a mountain called Ararat located in modern-day Turkey. Noah's family probably disembarked from their floating home and wandered the land living in tents as they spread out following their year at sea. A large clan moved south of Ararat to Shinar and decided to settle down from their nomadic wandering.

Did You Know?

Anything we do solely for ourselves is ultimately meaningless without God's presence and direction.

GOD'S PLAN INTERRUPTED

Genesis 11:3-6

Two simple words in verse 2 announce humanity's interruption of God's plan for their resettlement of the earth: "settled there." They willingly and intentionally disobeyed God's specific direction found in His blessing in 9:1, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." They followed God's direction to increase in number; they refused to fill the earth. Settling down in and of itself is not sinful unless God tells us to keep moving.

This large clan decided to settle into a single location, put down roots, and establish an identity. No one forced this plan of action on them; they made a democratic decision together. In time, community leaders devised a plan to assure a perpetual identity for themselves. What began as an idea that started with "Come let's..." quickly expanded into a detailed action plan. They developed a new technology and built ovens to kiln-dry bricks which would last much longer than the sun-dried bricks currently in use. This new and improved brick replaced stones which were not found in that part of the world. They developed a fool-proof plan, or so they thought.

Their true motives become apparent as we listen to them describe their grandiose plan. They intended the city to magnify their vision, ingenuity, and skill. They built it for themselves and the future generations to marvel at their resourcefulness. This plan was not simply a neglect of following God's direction for their resettlement of the land; it signaled intentional defiance. What's more, their spectacular city would feature a tower that would reach to the heavens, the dwelling place of God! No doubt, their vision involved exaggeration since they could not actually see into heaven's glory; but it clearly betrayed their self-reliance, which assured them they could do anything God could do. Their construction of this impressive tower would put their creative accomplishments on par with God's. Don't miss the arrogance here. They obviously

Think About It

Ironically, sin promises exciting experiences or results but never delivers on those promises. Ultimately, sinners receive the opposite of what they expect. The tower promised a perpetual memorial of their settlement, but they were scattered, never to return.

**GOD'S PLAN
RENEWED**

underestimated God's supervision of humanity and His ability to thwart their self-centered plan.

Genesis 11:7-9

God's response to the citizens of Shinar remind us that humanity can never ultimately thwart God's plan. They may frustrate it for a season, but God always speaks the last word. The subtle irony in verse 5 reminds us of the divine perspective of the situation: God refers to the citizens as "earthlings." God formed them from the earth; they will return as dust to the earth. Their bricks of earth used to build a monument to themselves will never compare to the God who created the earth and everything in it.

The text does not intend to imply that God opposes human technology, ingenuity, creativity, or construction, even the construction of impressive skyscrapers. God gave us creative vision and the capacity to bring that vision to reality. God, no doubt, beams with delight when He sees the impressive accomplishments of humanity in our variety of creations and inventions. Rather, God opposes any human technology, ingenuity, creativity, and construction that is used as a testimony to human self-reliance and rejection of God and His plan for us.

To this day, we know the land as Babel, or Babylon. The word originally meant "The Gateway to God." In that place, on that day, God reminded all humanity for time and eternity that He is God and we are not.

REFLECT

Are you trusting in your abilities and/or technology more than God's purposes for your life?

FRANK MOORE

October

10

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

God blesses us and we are to be a blessing in return.

THE WORD

GENESIS
12:1-9

KEY VERSES

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

²“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

⁵He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

⁹Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

ENGAGE THE WORD

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A PATRIARCH AND MATRIARCH: CHOSEN BY GOD

Abraham (Abram, see Genesis 17:5) is called one of the great patriarchs of our Christian faith. The question you may be asking as you began this study is, “What is a patriarch and matriarch in the Old Testament?” A patriarch is understood as a male leader of a tribe or family with legal and economic responsibilities. Women, matriarchs, are also key figures in the stories of faith within Genesis. For example, Sarai (Sarah) is critical to God’s plan of blessing that God powerfully intervenes and she is divinely rescued in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20).

What were the qualifications of Abraham that made him one of the great patriarchs of our faith? This question is fascinating because there is no list of his qualifications in Genesis. The Old Testament is silent regarding the backstory of Abraham’s identity. As readers, we are aware of the family he is connected to (Genesis 11), but there is nothing special about Abraham that particularly qualifies him to be chosen. As you will begin to see through the story, Abraham is not perfect and makes mistakes, but he continually chooses to trust God in key moments. This calling will also involve his wife, Sarah. She is known as the first matriarch of the faith. As the story progresses, we become keenly aware that she is an essential part within this calling. Through Sarah and Abraham this great nation will be built (Genesis 12:1), in order to become a source of blessing to the world (Genesis 12:3).

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING TO THE WORLD

Genesis 12:1-3

The Lord calls Abram to “go” and leave the security of home and country, family and friends. This journey does not include a specific time frame or a specific destination. The initial command details everything and everyone that Abram will leave in order to follow this call. Verse 1 is in the past tense and indicates that God had previously called Abram in Ur in Babylon. Some have wondered if this was the second time God

Did You Know?

Abraham builds an altar in Shechem and “calls on the name of the Lord.” In this place, Jacob will settle down and Joseph will be buried. Later, the city of Shechem will become a center of worship in Israel.

called Abram. Did he wait until after the death of his father, Terah, to begin this journey? As readers, we are not privy to the why; but in this moment, Abram obeyed. The call seems abrupt, out of nowhere. “Go,” and leave everything you have known “to the land I will show you” (12:1). Abram must follow by faith, not by sight. Abram’s call is wrapped in the covenant language of blessing and cursing. Genesis 12:2-3 is key to understanding all that will follow throughout the entire Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible).

This call reveals God’s plan of redemption to the entire world and involves the promise of land, descendants, and blessing. The word bless (*barak*) is used five times in Genesis 12:2-3. In the previous 11 chapters of Genesis, the word bless is used only five times in totality! Here in Genesis 12:2-3, it is clear that the one called by God will be blessed. Those who see the way God is at work in and through Abram will want to be blessed in this way. God is choosing to bless the world through this family. Those whom choose to stand in the way of God’s plans will be cursed. They will choose to forfeit this gift of blessing if they attempt to bring death (curses) upon Abram. God will see to the protection of this family because through them will come blessing, restoration, and redemption for the world. This language of blessing and cursing is framed in familiar covenant language and will be more fully fleshed out later in Genesis 15 and, ultimately, in the Deuteronomic codes.

“I will make you into a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). What is unique about this promise from God is that God promises to make Abram into a great nation. This language of becoming a great nation is not typical. Similar types of agreements with deities in the ancient world suggest that a particular family and their descendants would flourish. Using the language of creating an entire nation from a family is unprecedented in the ancient Near Eastern world. It is also striking that Sarai is elderly and barren (Genesis 11:30). This

Think About It

The story of Abraham and Sarah is one of the earliest stories in the history of our faith that reveals the heart of God, which is to bless the world through God's people. Sharing our stories also reminds us of who God is within our stories. We are reminded of God's faithfulness to us, God's commitment to carry us, and God's grace to see us through to the end of our stories, just like the stories we read about in Genesis.

OBEDIENCE AND WORSHIP

appears to be an impossible mission! The beginning of this journey is marked by themes of impossibilities from its inception. Nevertheless, this journey is marked out by a deep trust in God's promises of creating a people (nation) and providing a place (land).

Genesis 12:4-9

Abram will take his family and sojourn towards the land of Canaan. Included in this group is Lot, Abram's nephew. Abram will now be a foreigner, an immigrant. The Lord appears to Abram and says, "To your descendants, I will give this land" (Genesis 12:7). Abram marks these places through worship, building altars to God, acknowledging that this is the land of promise. His personal obedience to follow and to worship God reveal Abram's faith.

God's grace is woven throughout the early chapters of Genesis 1—2 through the pattern of creation and blessing upon the earth. This extends into Genesis 12:2-3, where the call of Abram will burst forth into the creation of family and then into a nation, ultimately become a source of blessing to the entire world. In many ways, the call to follow God in faith through territories unknown and into the promised land of blessing is ultimately an invitation to us all. From this early story in the history of our faith, the blessing of God in our own lives provides the opportunities for us to be a blessing to others.

REFLECT Where is God calling you to obediently go this week?

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October

17

PROMISED PRESENCE

God's presence is enough.

THE WORD

GENESIS

15:1-21

KEY VERSE

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

²But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

⁴Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.”

⁵He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

⁶Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

⁷He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

⁸But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

⁹So the LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

¹⁰Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹²As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³Then the LORD said to him,

“Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. ¹⁴But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.

¹⁵You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

¹⁷When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— ¹⁹the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

ENGAGE THE WORD

ABRAM: DOUBTS IN THE DARK

Genesis 15:1-6

In the previous chapter, Abram had just been in battle and was victorious, rescuing Lot and his family. On the heels of battle, God will speak to Abram with the imagery of a shield and reward (15:1). The Lord is promising to be present and to protect Abram with this military image. Being called to move about and to follow God into unknown places situates Abram and his family in a socially vulnerable position, leaving the protection of family networks. The promise of God’s protection and presence is not only one of emotional comfort, but a physical need and a significant condition of dependency.

Questions are still lingering in Abram’s mind regarding the details of this plan. Abram will struggle to trust. God will answer with a vision and a covenant. At this point, Abram is struggling to trust the fulfillment of God’s promises of a descendant and land. Abram and Sarai are still childless. They continue oscillate between a place of faith and fear, trust and doubt. In order to understand how things will be happening, Abram attempts to list out a possible heir as he talks

Did You Know?

In the ancient Near East, the type of covenant known as the royal (land) grant was between a king and a faithful servant. The descendants of the servant would continue to benefit from it if they remained loyal to the king.

GOD'S RESPONSE: PROMISE OF PRESENCE

with the Lord. Abram ponders that maybe God's plans will be fulfilled through his servant, Eliezer of Damascus! Abram proceeds to list what God has not yet fulfilled: children.

Abram is shrouded by darkness of doubt. The Lord responds by asking Abram to step outside and look up into the heavens. In the darkness, Abram's doubt and worry is answered through a vision. The Lord reassures Abram that a son from his body will be his heir. Not only will this heir be his child, but the descendants will be as numerous as the stars! At this point, Abram chose to trust and believe God. Abram's faith in the promise of descendants is recognized by the Lord as "righteousness" (15:6). This term encompasses Abram's belief and trust in the Lord, his desire to live by faith.

Genesis 15:7-21

Faith is rooted in relationship with God. Abram cannot see with human sight how these things will come to pass. The Lord then reminds Abram who He is and what He has done: "I am the LORD who brought you up from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess" (15:7). This introduction is one of authority, common in ancient Near Eastern grants and sets the stage to what will follow. By mentioning land, it is almost as if the Lord was inviting Abram to ask about the second promise that was not yet fulfilled. Abram will seek to understand the details when he asks, "How am I to know I shall possess it?" (15:8). Abram is wondering how this future will come to pass. God tells Abram, "You will surely know," and this is emphatic. The Lord will respond through a covenant ritual, one that is familiar to those during that time in the ancient Near East (similar to a royal land grant). Abram will do as instructed, gathering the animals and cutting the heifer, the goat, and the ram in two, laying the carcasses opposite one another. Birds of prey swoop down and Abram defends the animals, emblematically defending

Think About It

The Lord is described as a “shield” throughout the Psalms, a symbol of protection (Psalm 3:3; 7:10; 18:35; 115:9-11; 119:114; 144:2).

the promises from God. At this point, the sun is setting and Abram falls into a deep sleep. This kind of sleep in the Old Testament is connected to divine visions (see 1 Samuel 26:12; Job 4:13; Daniel 8:18; 10:9).

As mentioned, this covenant is similar to a contract agreement, an ancient Near Eastern royal land grant. It involves a ritual to symbolize the severity of the covenant keeper. In literal rendering, the phrase to “make” a covenant is “to cut” a covenant. What is communicated through the cutting of the animal carcasses is that if this agreement is not fulfilled, then the fate of these animals will be upon the one who did not fulfill the terms of agreement. Keeping the promises of this agreement has severe consequences. Since the Lord is the only one to pass through and to make the covenant, He is solely responsible, as the one to initiate and to fulfill this covenant promise.

The Lord assures Abram that he will have a long life (literally in the Hebrew, “gray headed”), but also that the future holds suffering and servitude in Egypt. The boundaries of the land given are quite extensive and reveal an idealization of the vastness of God’s promise. The list of inhabitants represents completeness and is not meant to be a specific, or comprehensive, list (see Deuteronomy 7:1). God assures Abram of his presence through other culturally understood images such as the smoking firepot and blazing torch (15:17). Fire is often a symbol of God’s presence, as the Israelites will witness after they are freed from Egypt (i.e., Exodus 19:18).

The Lord comes down to Abraham in this scene in Genesis 15, to ratify a covenant in a means recognized during this time. Though his faith may seem wavering, he continues to say yes to the Lord.

REFLECT | In what ways has God been your shield and great reward?

October

24

HOLDING NOTHING BACK

God provides.

THE WORD

**GENESIS
22:1-19**

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”
“Here I am,” he replied.

²Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

³Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

⁸Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

⁹When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

¹²“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

¹³Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. **¹⁴So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”**

¹⁵The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

¹⁹Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

KEY VERSE

ENGAGE THE WORD

A TEST FOR ABRAHAM

Genesis 22:1-8

This passage is one of the most difficult texts in the Old Testament, as seen throughout its history of interpretation. The language slows down to relay the special relationship between Abraham and Isaac: “Your son, your one and only son, whom you love.” The term “son” is used 10 times in this passage, revealing the difficulty of this test. How are we to approach this text? One approach is to see how this command was interpreted in the New Testament by the early Christians. In Hebrews 11, it becomes evident that the focus of this story is on the faith of Abraham and God’s commitment to the covenant promise. Hebrews 11:19 states, “Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.” Though this does not answer every question, it is a story that commends Abraham’s faith and commitment to follow God.

Did You Know?

Sarah is important in the story of God's people. She is the only woman whose name is changed by God and the only woman to have her age recorded at her death (Genesis 23:1).

God commands Abraham to “go,” and this connects to the story in Genesis 12, when God had commanded Abraham to leave his homeland and follow in faith. Abraham will wake up and begin to gather everything needed for this three-day journey to the region of Moriah, to a mountain that God will reveal to him. When they approach the mountain, Abraham and Isaac will climb it alone, leaving the servants to wait. He speaks to the servants saying, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you” (22:5). His desire is to return with his son, even though he does not know what will happen. Similar to Daniel’s friends in the fiery furnace, they know God can save them; but even if He does not, they will continue to trust and have faith (Daniel 3). As they journey, Isaac is probably in his early teens, as he is able to carry the wood up the mountain. As they journeyed up the mountain, Isaac is aware that there is a crucial item missing for the burnt offering. He inquires about a lamb. Abraham responds, “God will provide the lamb, my son.”

THE LORD PROVIDES

Genesis 22:9-14

Reaching the top of the mountain, Abraham builds an altar. He lays the wood down and binds Isaac, placing him on top of the wood. Some scholars have connected this to the other difficult narratives that move close to a disastrous ending, yet God draws near in to save and to provide (i.e., flood, Babel, exile). As Abraham continues to follow through with this challenging test, lifting the knife, an angel of the Lord will call to him, “Abraham, Abraham!” Abraham will respond as he did at the beginning of the story, “Here I am.” God’s response reveals that Abraham has passed the test, “Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” At this critical moment, God finally knows that Abraham is willing to sacrifice his most precious son, revealing an unwavering faith.

Think About It

“God himself will provide the lamb.” Abraham’s words are interpreted in the New Testament tradition to resonate as God’s provision of the perfect sacrificial lamb, Jesus, for the entire world (Mark 10:45; John 1:29).

GOD AFFIRMS

Abraham turns to see a ram caught in the thicket. This ram will become the sacrifice, and Isaac will be freed from that place. Abraham calls this place, “The Lord Will Provide.” In the Hebrew, this term is “to see,” a keyword in this chapter. In a more literal rendering, this place is called, “The Lord Sees.”

Though this story with Abraham is unique in that it is a test for him alone, the character of God is continually revealed through these stories. God proves faithful time and time again as one who intervenes and provides, as the one who sees us.

Genesis 22:15-19

In this last section, God affirms the covenant promise that was made in Genesis 15. Because of Abraham’s obedience in this test reaffirms the promise given, a promise of descendants and land. Hebrews 6:17 details this confirmation, demonstrating that “Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.”

After this close brush with losing his son, an incredible vision is placed before Abraham. God reminds Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. How incredible is this vastness to imagine! It is beyond comprehension. Through these descendants, “all nations on earth will be blessed” because of Abraham’s obedience. God prepares this test for Abraham and provides the provision for the test. In Abraham’s words, “God himself will provide the lamb,” resonates in later interpretations with God’s unique sacrifice through His one and only son, Jesus, for all of humanity (John 1:29).

REFLECT

What step of faith might God be asking you to take today?

October

31

POWER GRAB, PART 1

God calls us to live with integrity.

THE WORD

GENESIS 27:5-10

Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, ⁶Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷‘Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die.’ ⁸Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: ⁹Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. ¹⁰Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”

15-19

¹⁵Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. ¹⁶She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. ¹⁷Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.

¹⁸He went to his father and said, “My father.” “Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”

¹⁹Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

27-36a

²⁷So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.

²⁸May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine.

²⁹May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.”

³⁰After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. ³¹He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, “My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

³²His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?”

“I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.”

³³Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!”

³⁴When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!”

KEY VERSE

³⁵**But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.”**

³⁶Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob?”

ENGAGE THE WORD

Genesis 27:5-10

REBEKAH’S DECEPTIVE IDEA

Favoritism between parents and children is indicated early on in this story with Esau being called “his son” (25:5) and Jacob being called “her son” (25:6). Isaac asks his older son, Esau, to catch wild game and prepare one of his favorite meals. Isaac informs Esau that after this meal, he will bestow upon him the blessing. As readers, we are informed by the narrator that Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, was secretly listening to this conversation. She wants Jacob to receive this blessing, indicating leadership of the family and begins to plan an opportunity of deception. Once spoken, this blessing was irrevocable. One of the oddities in this scene is that Isaac was planning to bless Esau privately. Blessing family members were usually held in the presence of others, as we will see later with Jacob (Genesis 49), Joseph (Genesis 50:24-25), and Moses (Deuteronomy 33).

Did You Know?

The firstborn birthright was an inheritance that included a double portion of the family's estate (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Though Esau was tricked out of his blessing, he sold his birthright for some lentil stew (Genesis 25:33-34).

JACOB DECEIVES HIS FATHER

THE BLESSING

Genesis 27:15-19

Jacob follows through with his mother's plan of deception. He is concerned he is going to be caught, mentioning that he is a man of "smooth skin" and Esau is "hairy" (27:11). Along with Esau's clothes, Rebekah covers Jacob's hands and neck with goatskin. She prepares the meal and gives it to Jacob to bring into his father while Esau is still hunting. As Jacob enters, Isaac asks, "Who is it?" Jacob replies that it is "Esau" and asks for the blessing (27:19).

Isaac is curious about how quickly Esau hunted and prepared the stew and inquires about this. Jacob replies that it was the Lord who "gave me success" (27:20). Isaac asks Jacob to draw near. It is clear that Isaac is a bit uncertain in this moment and even acknowledges that he hears the "voice of Jacob" (27:22), even though he feels the hands of Esau (27:23). Isaac will decide to trust the senses of smell, taste, and touch only.

Genesis 27:27-36a

Even with this hint of doubt, Isaac asks his son to lean in and kiss him. Overwhelmed with the smell of Esau's clothes, Isaac will bless Jacob. The beginning of the blessing arouses through smell as Isaac says, "Ah, the smell of my son" (27:27). This blessing will include descendants and dominion. This blessing includes beautiful banquet imagery of the earth's richness (in Hebrew, it is literally "oil of the earth") with grain and new wine. There will be an analogous blessing given through Moses to Israel as they put down roots in the promised land (Deuteronomy 7:13).

The blessing has been given. Esau has missed the moment as he bursts in the tent with the prepared stew. He asks his father to sit up and eat to receive his blessing. Isaac asks Esau the same question he had previously asked Jacob, "Who are you?" (27:32). Esau answers, "I am your son...your firstborn." Eyesight has failed, and the deception is complete. Isaac trembled,

Think About It

In Hebrew narrative, it is unusual for more than two characters to be in dialogue. One of the interesting aspects of this story is there are seven pairs of dialogue. This reveals the dissonance within the family (i.e., 27:1-4; 27:5-17; 27:18-29; 27:30-40; 27:41-45; 27:30-40; 27:41-45; 27:46; 28:1-5).

realizing their deception. Esau bitterly cries and asks for a blessing, almost like a small child. This bitter cry of Esau is more of a scream. He realizes that he has sold his birthright and has lost his blessing.

Esau will now turn to Jacob, focusing on his name, which is also an indicator of his identity. Esau blames Jacob for taking advantage of him, for taking his birthright and blessing. He turns his name into a verb, giving it the connotation of heel grasper and deceiver. Though Esau refuses to acknowledge his part with the birthright, he is right to feel the anger of being deceived by his mother and brother. Esau's anger is so intense Jacob will flee into exile for 20 years. Rebekah most likely did not anticipate the consequences of exile for Jacob. Short term goals can blind us to long term consequences. Nevertheless, all these dealings of dysfunction and deceit are of no surprise to God.

Though Esau names Jacob as a deceiver, making wordplay with his name, Jacob is not defined by these actions for his entire life. Not only is reconciliation ahead for these jostling twins, but there are also new blessings and names to be pronounced. God is still at work in the story. The blessing of descendants and land is still in play. Though this story ends on a difficult note, there is still much to be determined. Jacob's lack of integrity in his relationship with his brother has long-term consequences. Fortunately, this is not the end of the story between these two brothers. Similarly, our stories are still not finished. There is always hope.

REFLECT

Consider the ways God calls us to live with integrity in all our relationships.

JENNY MATHENY

November

7

POWER GRAB, PART 2

God calls us to a divine encounter.

THE WORD

GENESIS 32:22-32

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

²⁷The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

KEY VERSE

²⁸Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

²⁹Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

³¹The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. ³²Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Sometimes when we are facing a problematic encounter with someone we care for, we are deeply distressed. In these difficult moments, there is an invitation to meet with God, an opportunity to be strengthened and experience peace. Coming face to face with God reminds us that we are not alone. In this story today, Jacob is in a difficult place. He is about to encounter his twin brother, Esau, and he is also running from Laban, his father-in-law. As you may recall, Jacob's last encounter with Esau was 20 years earlier. This parting was one of a strained and deeply ruptured relationship. Jacob had deceived Esau out of his father's blessing and had to run into exile for fear he would kill him. This moment we will engage with today in Genesis 32 is the night before Jacob's encounter with Esau. In this place, Jacob will encounter God in a powerful moment.

Jacob has given his wives, Rachel and Leah, his 11 children, and his servants a detailed plan for the next day. Even so, Jacob is deeply distressed. It is in this moment that we have Jacob's first documented prayer (32:9-12). In this prayer Jacob calls on God twice and is structured similarly to a lament for rescue from an enemy.

WRESTLING MATCH **Genesis 32:22-26**

That evening, Jacob has crossed the river Jabbok with his family and servants. Jacob is alone that night, filled with fear that the following day may be his last. Even so, he has just prayed, reminding God of the covenant promise of descendants (32:9-12). In this solitary moment, God meets him in a way that will alter his identity forever.

As Jacob is alone, a nondescript man enters the scene and begins wrestling with him. Jacob is 97 years old at this point in the story. In this unique encounter, God comes to Jacob in a way that Jacob understands. Throughout Jacob's life, he has been a trickster and used his own strength to win the day. From wrestling

Did You Know?

Jacob has three divine encounters and honors each place with a name: Bethel ("House of God," 28:19), Mahanaim ("Two Camps," 32:2), and Peniel ("Face of God," 32:30).

Esau in the womb (Genesis 25) and removing the large stone to water the sheep when he saw Rachel in Paddan Aram (Genesis 29:10), to finagling his way to obtain a birthright and blessing (Genesis 27), Jacob is a man who gets the job done through strength or scheming. In this divine encounter, Jacob will experience God in a way that will transform his identity and vocation.

At daybreak, the man could see that he could not "overpower" Jacob and touches the socket of his hip, the main area of strength for a wrestler. Physically wounded, Jacob refuses to give up. At daybreak, the man requests for Jacob to let him go. Here is the moment where we see Jacob overcoming by more than physical strength, but through prayer. Jacob asks to be blessed. A surprising turn happens in this moment.

A NEW NAME

A theophany is a mode of revelation, an appearance of God to human beings in a visible or audible form. See Genesis 18:2-22; Exodus 3:2; 19:20; Judges 11:24; Matthew 3:17; 17:1-13; Acts 9:1-9.

Genesis 32:27-32

The man asks Jacob, "What is your name?" God knows his name. Jacob speaks this out loud, as a reminder of his past, as a "heel grabber" and "deceiver." The last encounter between Jacob and Esau resulted in Esau naming him a deceiver. Here in this vulnerable struggle and wounding, God is going to do something new in Jacob's life. Divine encounters get to the heart of the issue. For Jacob, he was not looking for more than a physical victory. The blessing Jacob asks for reveals a new identity for Jacob. "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome" (32:28).

This moment of transformation is a new start for Jacob, one pronounced by God, the giver of new life, and new beginnings. You may notice that this struggle describes God *and* humans. Jacob was struggling to move forward because of his past. The encounter ahead of him with his brother, Esau, was almost too much for him to bear. Jacob is given strength through this divine encounter to face his past mistakes, ruptured relationships, and continue in his journey.

Think About It

The encounter with Esau and Jacob, a beautiful moment of reconciliation, will be witnessed by all of Jacob's children (Genesis 33). Perhaps this moment, witnessed by Joseph, later influences Joseph's forgiveness of his own brothers at the end of Genesis.

This encounter leaves Jacob wondering about the name of the one he encountered throughout the night. God responds with a question, "Why do you ask my name?" This is not an unusual response. Manoah, in Judges 13:18, asks "the angel of the LORD" (v. 17) the same question and receives the same answer. It is as if God is asking Jacob, "Do you not realize who I am?" Once the encounter has passed, Jacob recognizes the gravity of this encounter and names that place Peniel, which in Hebrew means, "Face of God." This term "face" occurs six times in chapter 32. Five times "face" is used in verses 20 and 21, describing the encounter with Esau. The final time we see this word face, it is regarding Jacob's encounter with God as "face to face." Jacob encountered God personally, though he does not see the face of God. God says to Moses, "No one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). Both Moses and Jacob see the "form" of God. The intimate encounter on both accounts is understood as "face to face." God meets us in forms we can comprehend, in order to call us into new beginnings.

Jacob has met God in a struggle that was frightening, yet deeply personal and intimate. Jacob realizes that God spared his life, though he would continue on with a limp from that struggle. As the sun rose that morning, Jacob walks forward in this new identity, as Israel, "because he had struggled with God and humans and had overcome." Now, Israel was ready for his next face-to-face encounter with his brother, Esau. Similarly, divine encounters call us into new beginnings, providing strength to face whatever we may be wrestling with, whether problems from our past or encounters in our future.

REFLECT

Think about the ways you can encounter God today (i.e., prayer, Bible study, music, sermon, etc.).

DETOURS

November

14

*God's promises will be fulfilled,
whatever our path may be.*

THE WORD

GENESIS 37:1-5

Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

²This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. ⁴When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

⁵Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

23-36

²³So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—²⁴and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

KEY VERSES

²⁶**Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood."** His brothers agreed.

²⁸So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

²⁹When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. ³⁰He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?”

³¹Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³²They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.”

³³He recognized it and said, “It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.”

³⁴Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.” So his father wept for him.

³⁶Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

ENGAGE THE WORD

The final chapters of Genesis tell the dramatic story of Joseph, whose dreams took several detours. What he and his father envisioned for his life is not what happened. But more was at stake than his personal life plans. Through Joseph the promise of God to his great-grandfather Abraham was being played out. So Joseph’s life was not only about himself and his generation, but generations to come.

THE DREAM

Genesis 37:1-5

We are officially introduced to Joseph in Genesis 37 as the favored son of his father Jacob and heir apparent to lead the family. Earlier he appeared in genealogies as the firstborn of Jacob’s favorite wife Rachel. The narrator says Jacob treated Joseph special because “he had been born to him in his old age” (v. 3). But he was also treasured because Rachel had died while giving birth to Joseph’s younger brother Benjamin (Genesis 35:16-20).

Jacob had 12 sons all together and, by birth order

Think About It

Inheritance practices in ancient Israel normally favored the oldest son who received two-thirds of his father's estate. With these resources he was also responsible for the welfare of the rest of the family once the father died.

and status, Joseph fell somewhere toward the middle. Yet Jacob selected Joseph as heir to the family fortune. He put Joseph in charge of reporting on his brother's work (v. 2) and gave him "an ornate robe" (v. 3), which signaled his privileged position.

The symbolism was not missed by Joseph's brothers and they hated him for it. They could see that their father planned to overlook traditional inheritance rights and jeopardize their future livelihood. The oldest, Reuben, should have been Jacob's successor according to custom.

To make matters worse, Joseph told his brothers his dreams about leading the family someday (v. 5). This fueled more jealousy because they thought that ruling was only about power and politics. But God's ideal for rulers includes much more than that. It is about tending those under their care, like a shepherd with sheep. Joseph eventually showed that he truly understood this divine design for leaders and in so doing became the means of preserving the promise of God to Abraham.

THE DETOUR

Genesis 37:23-28

Jealousy exacts a heavy price on both its object as well as those who hold it in their hearts. The brothers' intense hatred of Joseph led them to do something they might not have done otherwise. They sold him into slavery. Maybe they only acted impulsively and just did what big brothers often threaten to do to little brothers. But their actions radically changed the family dynamics.

The one who was to care for his family in the future had become a slave far from home. Joseph was sold to Ishmaelites "who took Joseph to Egypt" (v. 28). In the social stratification of the ancient world, a slave stood on the exact opposite pole of a ruler. In slavery Joseph possessed no status, no power, no influence in his world. He must do only what some other authority directed him to do.

Did You Know?

The Ishmaelites were also descendants of Abraham, which made them distant cousins to Joseph. It seems ironic that they should play a role in jeopardizing God's promise to Abraham.

THE DESPAIR

Talk about a major life detour. Everything Jacob had hoped for and Joseph had dreamed about seemed vanquished. The future leader of the family had been removed from the picture. More importantly the promise of God to Abraham and his descendants appeared completely derailed. How could God fulfill His promise through a family like this?

Genesis 37:29-36

In order to cover their deed, the brothers lied to their father. They led him to believe Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. That lie threw Jacob into such deep mourning that “he refused to be comforted” (v. 35). Jacob's sorrow highlights the despair detours in life can produce. The events of Joseph's life had seemingly destroyed the hopes and dreams of Jacob as well as God. Reuben also cried out in despair (v. 30). He tore his clothes as Jacob did; an action that expressed great distress in the ancient world.

Despair need not be the response of God's people though. Sometimes detours lead us where we need to go. Our final destiny does not depend solely upon us. It ultimately remains in God's hands. The steps along the way may not be what we expect, but the Bible affirms that “it is the LORD's purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21).

The story of Joseph will reveal that God has a way of guiding every detour in the life toward His ultimate purposes. Joseph's slavery in Egypt eventually became the means of rescuing his family. At each stage God led Joseph one step closer to his final destiny just as He does us. Every detour can become another path toward fulfilling God's purposes for our lives.

REFLECT **T**hink about the ways God has been with you during the “detours” of life you have encountered.

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November

21

WHATEVER MAY COME

God is constant in our ever-changing circumstances.

THE WORD

GENESIS 39:2-21

The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, ⁴Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, ⁷and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

⁸But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

¹¹One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹²She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹³When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴she called her household servants. "Look,"

she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

¹⁶She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home.

¹⁷Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

¹⁹When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. ²⁰Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

KEY VERSE

But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹**the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.**

ENGAGE THE WORD

Joseph’s life went from highs to lows and back again. Last week we saw him move from leader to slave. This week’s story tells of his rise again to a position of influence only to have it taken away. Joseph remained remarkably steady through it all though. His secret? The Lord was with him. The Lord’s presence in his life enabled Joseph to face whatever came his way, both the good and the bad.

JOSEPH’S RECOVERY **Genesis 39:2-6b**

Joseph’s dream did not die in slavery in Egypt. God made sure of that. Genesis 37 introduced us to Joseph as a man destined to lead his family and carry on the promise God made to Abraham. The Lord had told Abraham that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3) and Joseph had been selected to fulfill that promise.

But Joseph’s brothers jeopardized the divine plan when they sold him into slavery. How could God keep His promise through a slave in Egypt? Genesis 39 tells us how that could happen, as well as how hard it can be to keep a dream alive. Twice the opening

Did You Know?

Potiphar's wife called Joseph a "Hebrew," which was likely a racial slur. In Egypt this term seems to identify landless, transient people that persons in high positions like Potiphar looked down upon.

verses affirm that "the LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered" (vv. 2 and 3). The dream revived because of God's presence with Joseph. This is the same hope that had empowered Jacob (Genesis 26:3) and would encourage Moses (Exodus 3:12) and Joshua (Joshua 1:5). It was the secret of David's success (1 Chronicles 11:9) and Israel's hope in exile (Isaiah 41:10). The followers of Jesus hold on to this promise as well. Just before leaving earth Jesus said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

God's presence in the life of His people cause others to take notice. Potiphar saw the hand of God upon Joseph and "put him in charge of his household" (v. 4). As a result, Potiphar also experienced the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The blessing spilled over, so to speak, "on everything Potiphar had" (v. 5). So God kept His promise even in the midst of slavery.

JOSEPH'S TEMPTATION

Genesis 39:6c-12

Once again Joseph's dream was placed in jeopardy though. This time a powerful and persistent woman, Potiphar's wife tempted him to throw it all away in moment of passion. This was no small temptation for a young man whose dreams seemed dashed and who ranked near the bottom of the social scale. What could one little fling hurt?

Yet Joseph did not forget who he was nor who his God was. Though a slave in a foreign country, he had been given much. He could see that God was fulfilling His promise even in the midst of his adversity. His master had trusted him to manage his household. To violate his master's wife would violate his master's trust. More than that, it would be "a great evil and sin against God" (v. 10). The word for "sin" here connotes missing God's goal for life. Joseph knew that sexual indiscretion was not part of God's plan for him, or anyone.

Joseph heeded the wisdom of Proverbs 5—7, which

Think About It

Potiphar could have executed Joseph for violating his wife. The fact that he did not suggests Potiphar may not have believed his wife's story. In order to save face though, he must at least imprison Joseph.

warns against succumbing to sexual exploits. He knew that “a man who commits adultery has no sense” and “destroys himself” (Proverbs 6:32). Though his position as a slave may have seemed insignificant, he must continue to be God's man. If he ever hoped to fulfill God's calling and lead in bigger things, he must be faithful in little things. Much more was at stake than satisfying his own desires.

Genesis 39:13-21

Joseph's steadfastness was rewarded, but not in the way he might have imagined. Right living is not always rewarded positively by this world. We might hope that Potiphar would have been grateful for Joseph's loyalty. But his wife falsely accused Joseph and turned his master against him. As a result, Joseph landed in prison, ending up even lower on the social scale than a slave.

Once again the Lord's plans for Joseph seemed spoiled. But God also had a reward for Joseph that was different from the reward the world gave him. The Bible says that God continued to be “with him” and “showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden” (v. 21). The Hebrew word translated “kindness” conveys the idea of loyal love. Because Joseph had remained loyal, the Lord was loyal to him. Even in prison God can keep dreams alive.

As Joseph's story unfolds in the following chapters (39:20—41:38), we see how God used this prison experience to accomplish His divine purposes. God's goodness remains constant in life's ever-changing circumstances.

REFLECT

Take time today to thank God for His faithfulness and His leading presence in your life.

November

28

GOD IS GOOD

God's goodness is never failing.

THE WORD

GENESIS 41:39-41

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.”

⁴¹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.”

GENESIS 45:4-8

⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

⁸“So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

GENESIS 50:15-21

¹⁵When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” ¹⁶So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said.

KEY VERSE ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰**You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**

²¹So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

ENGAGE THE WORD

The final chapters in Joseph’s story are the perfect way to begin our journey toward Christmas. In many ways Joseph reflects the life and character of Christ. Their stories of rejection and overcoming parallel one another in many ways. God rescued Israel through Joseph just as He saved the world through Jesus.

Joseph was the right person in the right place at the right time, just as Jesus was. How can that be? Because God is good. The goodness of God can transform any circumstance of life into something good.

THE RIGHT PLACE

Genesis 41:39-41

As unlikely as it might seem, Joseph found himself in the right place to carry out God’s purposes for his life. Pharaoh put him “in charge of the whole land of Egypt” (v. 41). From this position he could bless his family as well as the rest of Egypt. Thus he fulfilled God’s promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all peoples (Genesis 12:3).

Actually Joseph had been in the right place for the past several years. He may not have realized it when he was falsely accused and put in prison. Yet, in that very place he met Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer, who became his ticket out of prison and to a place of influence. As the story goes in Genesis 40—41, because Joseph accurately explained the meaning of a dream, the cupbearer recommended him to Pharaoh when he had a dream. When God enabled Joseph to interpret Pharaoh’s dream he was placed in a position to rescue his people.

Did You Know?

Ancient people understood dreams to be communications from the divine world. So they took them very seriously and relied upon professional interpreters of dreams to discover what they meant.

THE RIGHT TIME

Jesus also fulfilled His purpose in life from an unlikely place. His birth in an animal stable in Bethlehem may not seem like the right place for the savior of the world to be born. But somehow it was. The right place to do God's work in this world is wherever God decides it will be. God can make any place in our lives the right place to fulfill His purposes, because God is good.

Genesis 45:4-8

Genesis 42—45 tells the dramatic story of Joseph's reunion with his brothers. They came to Egypt to buy food because the famine that Pharaoh's dream predicted impacted Canaan as well. They did not recognize Joseph, of course. Who would imagine that the brother they sold into slavery could be the second most powerful man in Egypt?

When Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers he realized God's perfect timing for his family. He told them, "God sent me ahead of you ... to save your lives" (v. 7). Joseph had been storing grain for years in preparation for the famine. So when his family became desperate for food, he could help. Joseph spent several years in slavery, at least two in prison, and another nine managing Egypt's grain supply. All of this for one moment of rescue. He was there when his family needed him the most.

According to the apostle Paul, "When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son" (Galatians 4:4). Jesus entered our world at just the right time to bring salvation. Since the Garden of Eden, God had been preparing for that moment. Why was this the right moment in human history? Only God knows for sure. But we can always trust that God knows the best time to do what He wants done, because God is good.

THE RIGHT PERSON

Genesis 50:15-21

For God's purposes to be fulfilled we need more than the right place and the right time. The right

Think About It

Jesus came to earth when Romans ruled much of the known world. Scholars suggest that international travel, along with the Hebrew Scriptures translated into the international language of Greek, made this an opportune time to spread the gospel.

person must show up as well. In the final passage of our session today we see that Joseph was that person. Prior to this, Joseph's stories have shown us a man of vision with leadership skills and unshakeable integrity. Most importantly "the LORD was with him" and "showed him kindness" because of he was faithful to God (39:21). Even Pharaoh recognized Joseph as "discerning and wise" because "the spirit of God" was in him (41:38-39).

These qualities become even more evident in one final confrontation between Joseph and his brothers. After their father Jacob died, the brothers feared Joseph would seek revenge from his position of power. So they threw themselves at Joseph's mercy. But Joseph did not respond as they expected.

Joseph's response reveals a spirit that had been shaped by the Spirit of God. He told his brothers not to be afraid because his power was not something to fear. Joseph's power enabled him to care. His authority allowed him to rescue his brothers and "provide for" their families (v. 21). From his position Joseph could fulfill his destiny to shepherd his family. So Joseph sought no revenge. He offered only forgiveness to those who tried to harm him.

Like Joseph, Jesus also forgave those who intended to harm Him. He knew that even in His death, God intended it for good to accomplish the saving of lives. This is God's way in the world, to take evil and turn it into good. He did that through the lives of Joseph and Jesus. He can do that in our lives as well. We can be the right person at the right place at the right time to accomplish God's good purposes in our world, because God is good.

REFLECT

In what ways can you accomplish God's good purposes in your world this week?

Key Verse Memory

Committing God's Word to memory is an important goal for Christians of every age. To assist you in this worthy objective, we have suggested three key verses for memorization. Select one to memorize each month or memorize one of your choosing for the quarter.

Key verses for Fall 2021:

Genesis 1:31a

Genesis 9:16

Genesis 12:2-3

COMING NEXT QUARTER

Winter 2021-22

Unit 1: Welcome the Messiah

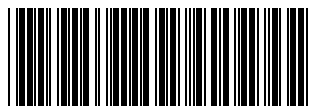
In this unit, we explore the beginning of the hope-filled story of Jesus, the Messiah. This story has an everlasting message: God became a human being and lived among us.

Unit 2: Listen to the Messiah (Matthew)

Jesus came to show us, through His words and example, what the kingdom of God is all about. During this study, we will examine some of Jesus' teachings from the book of Matthew.



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