

January 15-21

### **Week 3**

This week we will cover the last half of Act 2, scene 1 in the biblical story, taking us through the remainder of Jacob's story and focusing especially on the story of Joseph's travails and triumphs in Egypt.

This week look for recurring themes in the narratives about Jacob and Joseph. We have seen that Jacob's life was marked by deception. Yet notice the great integrity of Joseph's life; in his integrity he confronted and forgave the lack of it in his own brothers.

Finally, this story is one of deliverance (from famine), but by moving Jacob's family to Egypt it also sets up the story of the great deliverance, the exodus.

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## **Day 1**

### **Read Genesis 30-33**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 1 - Reading 8**

Notice the progression of the story in today's reading.

1. In Genesis 30 both the resources and the sons of Jacob multiplied; he became rich in sons and material wealth.
2. Jacob then separated from Laban and moved his family back toward the land promised by God.
3. A crisis arose. Genesis 32:24-32 is a difficult passage, but we have clues about what was going on. Remember to watch for details when reading Old Testament stories. Jacob's name, the name of the tributary he crossed (Jabbok; see 32:22), and the word "wrestle" in Hebrew (a-bak) all sound very similar, so this was obviously a significant crossroads moment in Jacob's life.

Jacob's wrestling with the angelic being, who was there representing God, had to do with who Jacob would be in the future; notice the change of his name to Israel, which means "one who wrestles with God." He had lived as a deceiver but was humbled here by the striking of his hip; he was blessed in this moment of struggle.

Read this story as a turning point in Jacob's life and experience with God.

*What does this passage teach you about a relationship with God and how blessing often comes from struggle?*

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## **Day 2**

### **Read Genesis 34-37**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 1 - Reading 9**

As you read the narratives in today's chapters, notice several dynamics.

In the story of the rape of Dinah, watch for the motives of the various characters and how the craftiness of Jacob's sons defeated the craftiness of the local inhabitants of the area. The sons of Jacob took after their father, whose name means "deceiver."

Remember that covenant often lies at the heart of Old Testament stories. Genesis 35 is built around the renewal of the covenant with Jacob and the confirmation of his new name, Israel. He was to chart a new course in life.

The family dynamics in Genesis 37 echo earlier dynamics seen in Genesis. A father's loving one child more than his other children led to problems. Yet God worked through even the dysfunctionality of this family. Think about the fact that God uses less-than-perfect people and less-than-perfect families to accomplish his purposes. He can use you and your family if you will yield to him.

*How might God want to use you and your family?*

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## **Day 3**

### **Read Genesis 38-40**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 1 - Reading 10**

The story of Genesis 38 shows that the Israelites were beginning to assimilate the practices of the people of Canaan. This explains why God sent them down to Egypt, where their identity was maintained and refined. Judah, the son of Jacob through whom Messiah would come, shows a level of moral degeneracy which is alarming. Yet through this sordid story, God turns the tables on Judah and brings him to a level of confession and repentance.

The practice depicted here is called “levirate marriage,” by which the brother of a childless husband who died would marry the dead brother’s widow and have children with her, who were then counted as the heirs of the deceased brother. God later incorporated this custom into the laws of Israel (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10). In our time we find this custom strange and hard to understand.

*Why do you think God would incorporate this concept levirate marriage and inheritance into the laws and customs of his covenant people?*

Look for several statements about Joseph that are repeated in Genesis 39. They will tip you off to main themes in Joseph’s story.

*How can Joseph serve as an example to you today?*

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## **Day 4**

### **Read Genesis 41-43**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 1 - Reading 11**

A dominant theme in the story of Joseph is the sovereignty of God as he orchestrates events in the lives of individuals and nations. He is the main actor or hero in these stories. Watch for key verses that emphasize this theme.

Also notice the emphasis on justice in these chapters. Joseph's brothers saw their treatment by this administrator of Egypt as an expression of God's judgment. Ironically, it was really an expression of God's grace as he prepared a way to preserve their lives.

Finally, identify the temporal setting of this section of Genesis—the time when the events took place.

*Why might God have waited until this point to exalt Joseph?*

*How might God's purpose in Joseph's waiting relate to God's timing of events in your life?*

Think about the fact that timing is of the Lord. God works out the timing of his work in the lives of his people.

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**Day 5**

**Read Genesis 44-46**

**Act 2 - Scene 1 - Reading 12**

Today the story comes to a dramatic climax.

*What elements of tension are built into the story?*

*How is the tension resolved?*

We also see in this passage the grand means of God's fulfilling his promises to his people. Jacob and his whole family were preserved by the move to Egypt, and Joseph paved the way. As you read this section, look for various expressions of God's grace. Worship God today as a God of great grace for you.

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**Day 6**

**Read Genesis 47-50**

**Act 2 - Scene 1 - Reading 13**

Because the Lord worked through Joseph on behalf of Egypt, the powers of the world (Pharaoh in Egypt) worked on behalf of God's people. Notice that Joseph worked as a force of blessing all the way to the end of the book of Genesis.

Another key theme in Genesis is the blessing of children as a father was about to die. Notice ways Jacob's blessing of Joseph's children (see Genesis 48:13-20) was both similar to and different from Isaac's blessing of Jacob in Genesis 27.

*How might you bless people around you today?*

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**Day 7**

**Reading Summary for Week 3**

Two towering figures, Jacob and Joseph, have dominated these readings. Jacob the trickster was transformed into Israel, whose name became synonymous for both a great ethnic group and a promised land. Joseph the spoiled rich kid became God's agent to spare his murderous brothers from death by famine, bringing them to the safety of Egypt. The providence of a good God despite the worst of human treachery has shined throughout these last chapters of Genesis.

**Prayer/Meditation**

Lord, I confess that the events I've read about seem so distant. I've never faced a famine that threatened to wipe out my whole family. I could never imagine living in a place as idolatrous as Egypt was in those days. Yet you had a plan. You moved a youth from prisoner to prime minister. Let me see your providential hand in the affairs of my life, even as Joseph confessed that though his brothers had planned evil against him, "God planned it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Amen.

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