

Getting to Know Your Bible
GEMS FROM GENESIS
Notes from Zoom Bible Study Sessions
at Allander Evangelical Church
Spring 2021

Over the past year the Bible Study series at Allander Evangelical Church, under the title of Getting to Know Your Bible, looked at the Bible as a whole. The first series was on the Old Testament and the second on the New. This year we have returned to look at individual books - starting with Genesis and its companion books in the Pentateuch – the 5 books of Moses, often referred to as The Law.

Within the Old Testament, the Pentateuch forms a distinctive section of its own. It comes before everything else and sets the scene for the OT projection of God's redeeming purpose for his people and foreshadows the NT account of redemption and all that accompanies it. It is an excellent introduction to the message of the Bible.

Starting with God in Genesis, it highlights the story of a distinctive people – essentially the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - who learned to trust in God and follow his ways. However, tragedy overcame them and they found themselves – as a result of previous wrong decisions – captives in a foreign country. There, one of their descendants – Joseph – became a key figure who was able to make arrangements for their wellbeing. As the centuries passed the privileged position they enjoyed was reversed and they ended up being slaves to the Egyptians. Yet, through Moses, God made the way – by the Passover – for them to be released from that captivity and, having safely crossed the point of no return when miraculously crossing the Red Sea, they made their way through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

That depicts the gospel. Humanity, created by God, finds itself, because of the 'wrong decisions' of our ancestors, despite best efforts, in a land where they are captives to Satan

and sin, but not without the knowledge that there would be One who would “*come down from His glory*” and would become their Saviour – the Messiah promised in the OT. Eventually, real release was ensured with the sacrificing of the lamb at Passover which opened the way to come out of Egypt and make their way, under God, through the wilderness in a process of rehabilitation, learning to live the new life, following the Ten Commandments and practising proper worship through the Tabernacle and its ordinances.

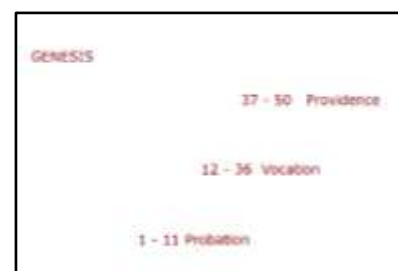
The Pentateuch has much to teach us, starting with Genesis. .

GENESIS

The book of Genesis is concerned with beginnings. It covers the period from the creation of the world and of humanity up to the arrival and settlement in Egypt following the famine.

As a book it covers three phases in that history.

Chapters 1 – 11 provide a context and natural behaviour including Eden, the Fall, men’s actions and aspirations (“*at that time men began calling on the name of the Lord*”) pictures of divine provision (Noah’s ark) and of human folly (Babel) ending in confusion.



The next section, chapters 12 – 36 speak of God’s intervention in calling Abraham from his native environment to step out in obedience to find a land and be the father of a great nation devoted to God. The story of that adventure includes initial apprehension, wayward tendencies, strong faith and a commitment to see God’s purposes fulfilled. It was not plain sailing, however and we see many examples of devious events and personal conflict, especially in the life of Jacob, who subsequently met with God (“*Though like a wanderer, the sun gone down; darkness be over me, my rest a stone*”) until he too was transformed and received assurance of the covenant God had made with his father, Abraham. Yet, there was more trouble in Israel / Jacob’s family when the brothers resented the favouritism shown to his youngest son, Joseph. This phase shows God’s providence.

Joseph’s story, the third phase in chapters 37 – 50, is summed up in Joseph’s statement to his brothers when they came to Egypt. “*God sent me ahead of you to preserve life*”. And, later, he was to assure them that “*you meant it for evil but God meant it for good*”. His is a representation of a saviour whom God sent ahead for that very purpose and it reminds us that God sent the Lord Jesus into this world to save sinners.

Genesis 1

But, we start with Genesis 1: creation. It is a unique and fundamental chapter in the whole story. Not least, because there we encounter God for the first time.

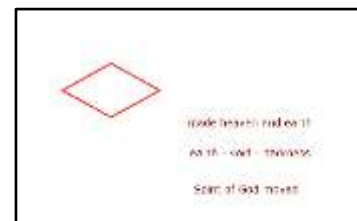
In Genesis 1, God appears without any preliminary introduction, explanation or setting in context. He is God, a name given to no other or to anything before. It is the unique name for this new beginning without precedent or maker. He is simply God.

However, we find out about him from what follows. He is a creator; he brings the world into being from nothing. It all starts with Him and he is the resource. He is the 'man' of the moment. And he creates: brings things into being in a remarkable way by speaking his word and from that spoken utterance sees things formed.

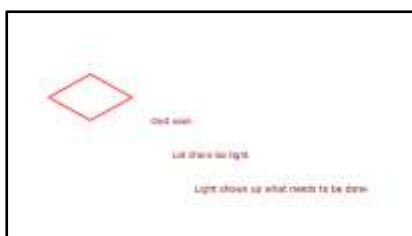
Strangely, in verse 2 we are presented with this God standing beside his creation with the earth displayed as being '*without form and void and covered in darkness*' – hardly a scenario or product to be proud of. It had been created. Was it unfinished, or spoiled? We can never know but what we do see is that he is a God who does something about it: he is redemptive; he came to bring life just as Jesus came that '*they might have life, and have it more abundantly*'.



That is how we meet God in Christian experience. We know that something has gone wrong, that '*vile and full of sin I am*' but God is presented to us as One who will bring restoration or, rather create new life. This God is positive and capable.



So the Spirit moves on the face of the waters. God stirs things. In experience we call that conviction. And it is followed by that creative word "*Let there be light*' and *there was light*". For us that light, that illumination, comes from letting Jesus come into our hearts (hearts that have been cleansed from sin by his precious blood). In a real sense, we have been truly enlightened. ("*In him was life and the life was the light of men*". John 1: 4) For God who said, "*Let light shine out of darkness*" made his light "*shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*". 2_Corinthians 4: 6)

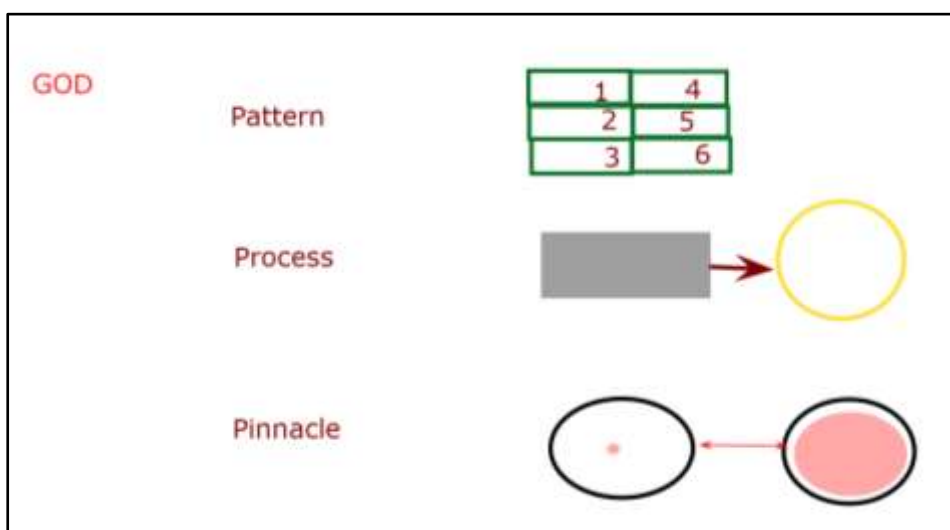


So, light brings in illumination, power and redemptive energy, with all its potential. It also lights up the sordid scene and 'shows us ourselves as we are' – a real mess. Yet, this God is there to rectify the situation and to set things right.



That is done in Genesis 1 by taking definite days to tackle and complete a task. It shows a very clear PATTERN, for each day tackles a separate task and does not end until that task is completed and regarded as being good. The days themselves fall into two groups with the first three being major, structural tasks and the second three complementary tasks which fit in to the first three. That has great significance as we understand God's ways with us in reforming our life. God tackles one aspect at a time: he does not dabble here and there at random. He has a clear design in finishing his new creation. He tackles the major aspects of faith and repentance and belief in God's sacrificial provision. He justifies us on the basis of his righteousness. He sanctifies us – all key and fundamental aspects of Christian existence. These are the essential structure. Yet, into those he then deals with 'lesser, but not unimportant aspects which enhance he creation and add finesse and colour – all ingredients that constitute an effective testimony – the fruit of the Spirit that comprise a testimony that is a savour of Christ and a sweet smelling aroma. Salvation does not depend on the complementary features but is gloriously enhanced by them.

Secondly, there is a PROCESS – evening and morning. While this is the normal calibration of the Jewish day it is also significant that it leads through darkness into a glorious dawn. Often we God deals with us there is a period of darkness, the result of resistance and reluctance and doubt. But, when we let go and let God there is a new dawning, and entry into a new day, higher ground than that experienced before. Scripture has much to say about such experiences – often corrective as well as developmental – through which a loving God develops his children ad makes them more like himself.



And that is the characteristic of the third feature of this story: the PINNACLE. Having provided all the context God's final act is to 'make man in our image'. We began by being born again, Christ (in embryo form, small but containing all the potential) occupies a small part of our life. As time goes on and grace is at work, Christ grows and the likeness increases. As 1 John 3 says: *"Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. But we do not know what we shall be but we know that when we see him we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And, every man that has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure"*. So, our prayer is: *"Finish then Thy new creation; pure and spotless may we be. Let us see thy full salvation perfectly secured by thee. Changed from glory into glory 'til in heaven we take our place"*.

That creation was considered 'very good' by God. Yet, some of the incidents and events that follow introduce happenings and elements that suggest that it somehow fell short of that: Satan appears in the form of a serpent, mankind exercised wilful disobedience, even God 'regretted' that he had made man.

The Probation Period Chapters 2 - 11

Following the description given in Genesis 1 of the 'very good' creation, the next ten chapters focus on human behaviour in the light of what had been established. In doing so it raises (but doesn't provide definitive answers to) issues like: where did evil emanate from, what is the explanation that God's aspirations for his creatures turned sour, that there is even a suggestion that God made a mistake which he subsequently 'regretted' doing? While commentator comments abound in speculation, with good reason, Scripture remains largely silent on any explicit explanation.

Chapter 2 of Genesis covers some of the ground of Chapter 1 but with more detail and elaboration. After the Sabbath rest of the seventh day, with creation completed, we are told that God placed Adam in an ideal garden environment, with rivers flowing out, plants growing, responsibility delegated, a 'helpmeet' provided, occupational therapy prescribed in the form of naming garden items and generally 'managing' affairs within the constraints set by God (Not to touch the two trees: tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life).

Chapter 3 opens with this idyllic scene only to be spoiled when the serpent appears, casts doubt on God's prohibition, even contradicts the command and eventually sees Eve and Adam succumb to the temptation of eating the fruit and disobeying God. That was humanity's downfall – the Fall – resulting in a sense of shame and a guilty conscience in the presence of God; and expulsion from the garden with promised hardships and hazards. But not without a glorious promise of redemption when the *"seed of the woman"* would one day *"bruise Satan's head"* – a foretelling of Calvary.

Taking the whole of this section from 2 – 11 we see three distinct scenarios which provide a good picture of 'normal' life, its features, potential and consequence.

Scenario One: Temptation

The harsh truth in this section (chapters 3 – 5) is that evil resided in this Garden. From where, why and how, we do not know but it was there. And it set itself up to challenge the rightful superiority and authority of God. Without any supporting credentials as to who he was, the serpent cast doubt on God's decree and eventually lured humanity into its trap of transferring allegiance from God to himself. That was, and is, Satan's ploy: to set himself up as a plausible, more attractive, alternative. It happened to the Lord Jesus; it happened to Peter (*"Satan has desired to sift thee" Luke 22: 31*) and it is our experience. The devil, having our natural allegiance due to our being innate sinners, seeks to draw us away from God and keep us there. In ordinary life, there is temptation, not necessarily to do wrong things but essentially to abandon any devotion to God. Jeremiah put it very clearly when he said, *"My people have committed two sins; they have forsaken me and hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns" (idols) Jeremiah 2: 13*. And the first Commandment is to *'Love the Lord'* and not make any idol.

The effect of the Fall on human behaviour was to generate conflict and discord, even between brothers, leading to despair. Yet, based on the fact that for reasons unknown to us (other than by speculation) it became obvious that some things please God while other actions do not. With this 'choice' (free will?) men could respond to the circumstances differently. Some *'began to call on the name of the Lord'*. Others, like Enoch, walked with God.

Scenario Two

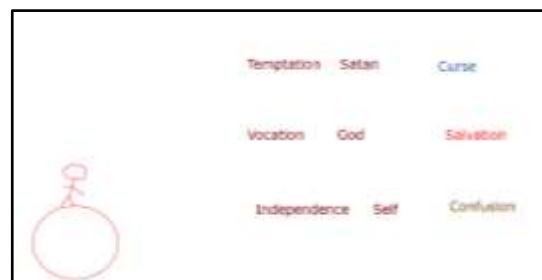
One who *'found favour with God'* at this time because of his godliness was Noah. He must have stood out from the crowd because it was their behaviour that triggered off the comment that God regretted making man and was clearly displeased with general human behaviour. Into this scene God spoke to Noah, commanded him to build an ark, a container, for the purpose of salvation from the destruction that was due to mankind. Hebrews says that, *"Noah, being warned of God, built an ark to the saving of his house"*. Presumably, others were invited but mocked the offer. However, Noah and his family, and pairs of animals and supplies were included, encased in the ark and, when the flood waters came, floated on the surface, buoyant and safe. Eventually, they came out on dry land, built an altar and started a new life.

When we take this model and apply it to human circumstances today it appears that although by nature we are children of wrath and walk according to the course of this world anyone who seeks the Lord will find him. In our predicament, seeking the Lord while he may be found is important. That does not mean earning our place through good works but in believing the gospel's telling of the salvation offered through the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Saving trust in that means salvation, experiencing buoyancy in this life and an entry into the next. Those who were in the ark were saved: those not were destroyed.

Scenario Three

Although the ark provided an offer of salvation, it did not destroy sinfulness. Noah himself showed signs of weakness when drunk and those who came after him demonstrated that they, too, 'were prone' to wander'. So much so that in their independence they followed their own impulses and ambitions and set about to build a tower up to heaven to establish their kingdom and dominance. As Romans later puts it, they failed to acknowledge God as God but trusted in their own ability and strength. The consequence was divine wrath which resulted in their accord and one-language being confused and so the unified society disintegrated to everyone's disadvantage and demise.

That is the fate of anyone who refuses the offer of salvation. Choosing to live without God and putting confidence in their own power and ability may appear promising but in the end it leads to failure and doom.



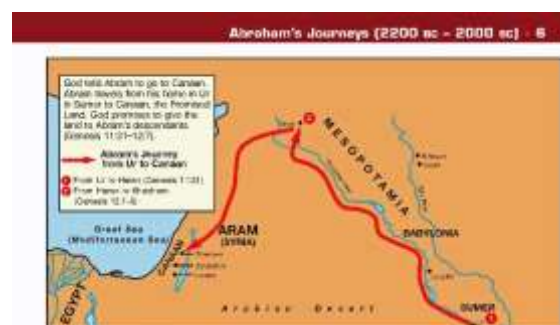
If God 'regretted' during Noah's day he must have regretted even further now. However, he is a loving God, not willing that anyone should perish and so, in the next phase we see another new beginning – another chance – with the call of Abraham.

Vocation Chapters 12 – 36

Part 1: Abraham 12 – 24

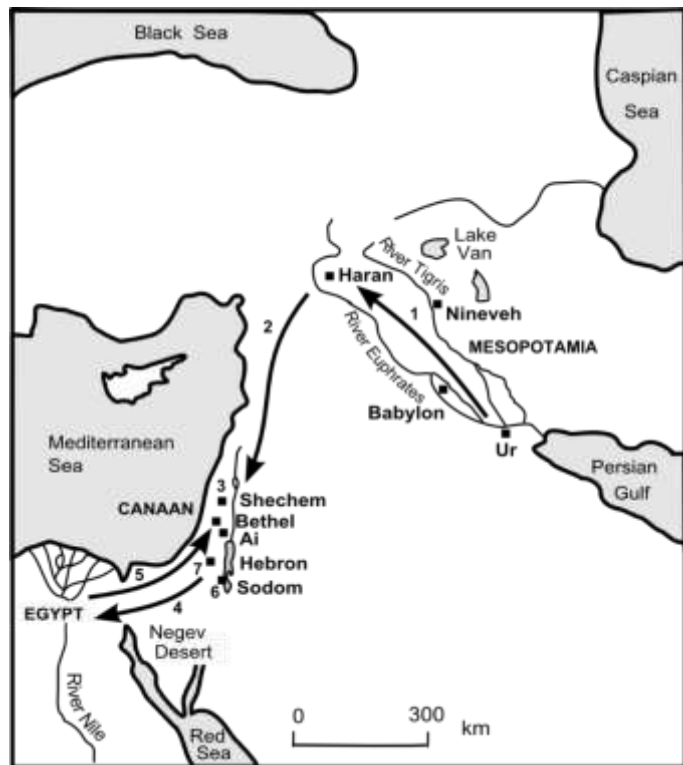
In Chapter 12, God intervenes and speaks directly to Abram (later Abraham) who was part of a migration led by his father, Terah, along the Fertile Crescent from Ur to Canaan that had stopped in Haran in the north. Who was Abram? How did he know God or of God as opposed to the gods of his people? We don't know.

What we do know is that God clearly had a purpose for him and commanded him to leave his immediate environment and launch out "to a land that I will show thee". When the call is heard there is an immediate response and Abram leaves the familiar environment and proceeds south-westwards until he arrives in Shechem in mid-Canaan. Lot, his nephew, went with him. No sooner were they there than a famine makes them move on down to Egypt to find food.



Lot really had no right to go with Abram for he was not commissioned. It is not surprising that this ‘trial’ sorted out the difference between the two men and their values for strife broke out. Abram allows Lot to take first choice which is governed by what he can see, leaving the uncle with the poorer part of the bargain. It gets worse for soon Lot is moving towards wicked Sodom and is caught up in a civil conflict in which he is taken prisoner needing to be rescued by Abram and his trained men.

Meanwhile, Abram is assured by God that *“I am your shield and great reward.”* But that makes no sense to Abram for he figures that, comforting though such an assurance is, it doesn’t make sense for he cannot be the *“father of a great nation”* if he has no son, and *“one born in my house, this Eliezer of Damascus is my heir”*. God repeats the promise and gives assurance that he will have a son.



And, in the process enhances his name to Abraham, including God in his very being.

Meanwhile that seems to be an empty promise for Sarah is barren and unlikely to conceive so she devises a plan whereby Hagar can become a surrogate mother and thereby produce an heir. That is what happens and Ishmael is born – a second best, and a ‘thorn in the flesh’ for centuries to come. .

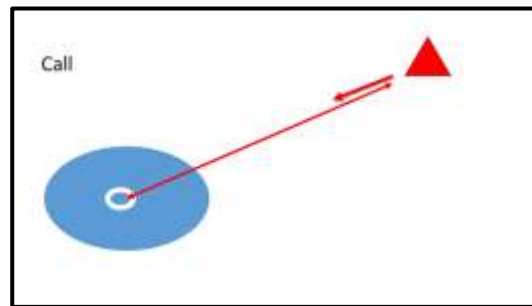
While this is going on Lot is now entangled in Sodom and in danger of being there when God’s wrath is vented against the wicked place. Abraham intercedes but has to be content with Lot escaping by the skin of his teeth and eventually end up in disgrace.

Abraham’s faith, though susceptible in smaller details, never wavers and eventually, with more covenant assurances, sees Isaac born as a true heir. He is an answer to prayer: the fulfilment of promise.

So, when years later Abraham is asked to *“take your son, your only son Isaac”* and lay him on the altar on Mount Moriah it is a severe test which Abraham quietly accepts *“believing that God could raise him from the dead”*. Sure enough, the fatal blow was stayed and Isaac lived, a substitute ram found for the sacrifice and Abraham truly vindicated. The story concludes with Abraham, fully taken up with the purpose of God in bringing a people into being secures a suitable wife for his son Isaac and ensure the perpetuity of the promise.

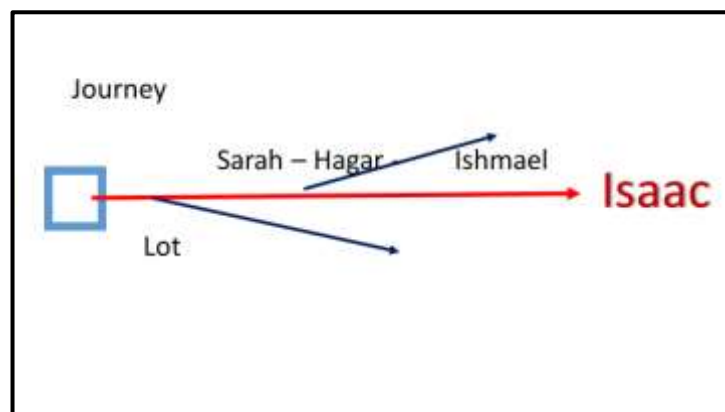
What lessons can we learn from this overview?

God's purpose is epitomised in the call of Abraham to be disconnected from his immediate surroundings and connected to God and follow His directions, regardless. The call comes from outside and, when responded to properly, links us to God and sets us on a new course. Thereafter our responsibility is to walk that path with dedication.



However, Lot represents a major distraction in that the "old nature" with its sinful desires makes us think in terms of what is seen and tangible seeking immediate gratification and eventually luring us away from the 'straight and narrow'. Worldliness is a major distraction. John, in his epistle warns: "love not the world" for "we look not at the things which are seen but those things which are not seen".

The other distraction is the temerity to try and do God's work for him, resulting in compromise and carnality. Any attempt to practise the false axiomatic dictum that God helps those who help themselves leads only to diversionary and irritating substitutes for the real thing; where man takes over



control from God rather than enjoying being led by the Spirit with life forming a perfect pattern reflecting God's love of order and perfection. As the couplet says: "He gives the best to those who leave the choice with Him".

Hebrews exhorts us, after citing all these examples of faith in action, to, "run with patience the race that is set before us looking (only) unto Jesus".

How that ensued we will see next time.

Part 2: Isaac and Jacob Chapters 25 - 36

While Abraham ran his race with patience (most of the time!) and ensured that his heir was provided with a wife, the same cannot be said about the two who succeeded him: Isaac and Jacob. Yet, all three are designated as Patriarchs and constantly cited together as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the fathers of the nation.

Isaac's life is quite unremarkable. There are no heroic stories or great exploits nor are there many outstanding statements or memorable expressions. He did not travel out of the country. He did do some things for himself – buried Abraham, prayed for Rebekah's barrenness, sowed and reaped and dug wells – but most things were done for him by others. His father found him a wife, Abimelech gave him territory, his servants dug wells and his mother secured Abraham's blessing for him.

Isaac	
	Depository
He did	Done for him
• Buried Abraham	• Wife
• Prayed for child	• Territory
• Sowed and reaped	• Blessing
• Dug wells	• Promise

Yet, we read that Abraham *"gave him everything he had"* which means that all of the rich inheritance arising from that patriarch's experience and endeavour was entrusted to Isaac. So, he became the custodian of that life and wealth. He was the link person. It was for him to safeguard that possession for future generations.

Jacob, on the other hand, was a wild character whose life was marked by a series of conflicts with others and within himself. He was a twin and all his life he was in a struggle with 'rivals'. He was captive (he stole the birthright from Esau), he acquiesced in his mother's cheating of Abraham for a blessing, his guile earned him wealth – and wives – from Laban and he wrestled with God.



Yet, through all these he had some remarkable experiences of God which affected his life and future. Escaping from Esau he encountered God at Bethel and saw a ladder up to heaven with angels ministering to him. He declared, *"Surely, God was in this place and I knew it not"* and called the place Bethel. Later, on his way back from Padan Aram he found himself wrestling with God, his physique affected and his personality changed for he was given a new name – Israel. And, through all of these strange experiences – his own foolhardiness and God's interventions, not to mention how others dealt with him, he ended up the father of a Family – the People of God – a major part of the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham and the prototype of what would become known as God's *"treasured possession"*.

Lest any of the three patriarchs lose their perspective the promise that God gave to Abraham was repeated several times to each of them ensuring that these life stories were an essential feature of the out working of God's purpose on earth. In later generations God became known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Jacob	
	Achievement
• Personal Transformation	
• Received confirmation of promises	
• Generated a family	Children of Israel

What can we learn from this 'experiment' of God? While Abraham with his obedience, faith and continuing trust was the original 'father-founder' in accordance with God's declared sovereign purpose it fell to Isaac and Jacob to see this worked out in reality. Isaac was the custodian of all the riches of Abraham; he was faithful in protecting that deposit and aided by the supporting acts of others. He was a key link person. However, that purpose has to be worked out and as we perceive this purpose of God in reality it is a struggle and conflict between the true course and the alternatives. Yet, it is not a human struggle: it is "*God working His purpose out*" as we "*let go and let God*". God can – and does – use such poor material to accomplish his purpose. His word will "*not return to him void but it will accomplish that for which it was sent*". For he wants to make known his wisdom "*by the church*". And we can play our part in that by: familiarising ourselves with the original declaration and respond to that 'calling'; safeguarding that deposit – just as Paul exhorted Timothy centuries later; and to "*contend for the faith*" as Titus was charged to do.

That is a major task. No wonder Jesus posed the question: "*When the Son of Man appears, will he find faith on earth?*"

Did this 'family' live happy ever after? We shall see next time.

Joseph and God's Redemptive Provision Chapters 37 – 50

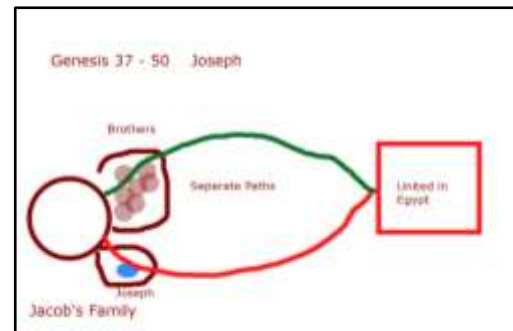
Apart from the death of Rachel at the birth of Benjamin, the family – the Children of Israel – was intact: Father Jacob and twelve sons. Yet, it was not totally united. Within that cluster, Joseph held a special place, partly because he was favoured by Jacob who gave him a coat of many colours and by the fact that he seemed to have insight that the others did not. Where the brothers stood spiritually we do not know but it seems certain that Jacob's devotion to God was influencing Joseph, for there are traces of God awareness in him that are conspicuously absent from the brothers.

It was not long before resentment and rejection stepped in to divide the family. The brothers plotted to kill Joseph but finished up selling him to the Ishmaelites who sold him on to Potiphar in Egypt yet claimed, when reporting to their father, that he had been devoured by a wild beast. They had to live with that on their conscience for years to come.

Meanwhile Joseph rose to prominence in Egypt, becoming Potiphar's right-hand-man because of his ability and integrity. That integrity was severely tested when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him and subsequently accused him falsely resulting in him being thrown into prison with another two of Pharaoh's servants, whose dreams he interpreted. When that was eventually reported to Pharaoh he had opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and subsequently was appointed as 'prime' minister in the government overseeing the famine relief programme that eventually brought the brothers down to Egypt to seek provisions and led to Joseph disclosing to them who he really was and then led to Jacob being invited

to come down to Egypt and enjoy the best of the land. Once again the family was providentially complete in one place – but with a significant difference.

Although there is no suggestion in the text that Joseph was commissioned by God nor assured of the covenants spoken to the patriarchs there is frequent reference to *“The Lord was with Joseph”* and Joseph’s own acknowledgement that abilities came from God. Undoubtedly, his



was a godly walk. He displayed this in his demeanour throughout this

period. He accepted his fate. He showed a positive attitude in Egypt, resisted temptation – at a cost, was considerate of others, earned respect and ‘promotion’, showed no trace of bitterness, and forgave his brothers for their treatment of him.

The reason for this comes out in his two statements to his brothers who became alarmed when they realised who he was. He told them that it was not their doing (although it was) but God’s in *“sending me before you to save life”*. Then, later, he told them plainly, *“You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good”*. It had not been a great step of faith or an act of obedience to divine prompting on his part but a quiet godly trust that resulted in these ordinary events showing evidence of the sovereignty of God. His purposes were being achieved through these ‘ordinary’ circumstances, combining both ungodly acts by the brothers and a godly demeanour on the part of Joseph.

Nor does it finish there. Both the – now – godly Jacob and the faithful Joseph had their eyes on God and his promise to Abraham. Well as they were treated in Egypt, their eyes were on the land that God had promise to their forefather, Abraham. Jacob wanted to be buried back in Canaan and Joseph, anticipating a long sojourn in Egypt for the ‘children of Israel’, foretold of their return and so commanded that when that happened they took his bones with them. Hebrews 11 reinforces these sentiments, for the citations for Isaac and Jacob make no reference to their exploits, only to their desire for a continuation of God’s blessing on their sons. Similarly none of Joseph’s outstanding acts is recorded, only this desire to be where God would be.

What lessons does this have for us? Possibly the fact that, after the more spectacular events of the Patriarchs and God’s calling into being a ‘great nation’ with all the evidence of divine commission and assurance, the next stage is to *“walk worthy of that calling”* in consistent godly testimony, not looking for any fresh revelation but being faithfully obedient to what we already know and, through that consistent godliness, *“looking unto Jesus”* and aware of being *“citizens of heaven”* we maintain that faithful walk in the ordinary circumstances of life – whatever they may be, knowing that our Sovereign God, works out his purposes through these events and his people’s witness.

And, what of the family? As we leave Genesis they are there in Egypt as guests, enjoying favour and plenty; but, by the beginning of Exodus they are crying out for escape from there. Why?

We shall look at that in our next study in the Book of Exodus.

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