

Chapter Two **The Need of Mankind: Genesis 12-50**

Imaginative writers of our day seek continually to depict what kind of world this would be after an atomic holocaust had completely wiped out all life as we know it. What would it be like to be the first people to start out in such a world? Noah and his family knew, for that is exactly what happened after the flood.

Physically and materially they began again to fulfill the original divine command to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Spiritually, having been on both sides of the flood, Noah becomes a picture of regeneration. He went through the waters of judgment, being preserved in the ark, and came out into a new world and a new life, as a Christian passes from death into life in Christ.

Genesis 12--50 traces three great truths that belong to this new life. In the lives of four men--Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Genesis reveals what man is always seeking:

Righteousness, the sense of being right. Man dislikes the feeling of guilt or unrighteousness and wants always to be seen as acceptable by whatever standard he views as relevant. We see the fulfillment of this need in the life of Abraham.

Peace, a sense of inner well-being. Man is ever seeking a certain calmness and inner confidence which can only be described as peace. The story of Isaac and Jacob, who portray sonship and sanctification, are in themselves the secret of peace of heart.

Joy, a sense of gladness and happiness out of life. This is so evident as to require no documentation other than life itself. Joseph manifested the truth of glorification.

These three virtues are the unseen, almost unconscious goals of life everywhere. But where are they truly to be found? Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Only God can impart these things to men, and this is the story of the rest of Genesis.

MAN SEEKS RIGHTEOUSNESS (Gen. 12-25)

Abram appears first as called by God to exemplify in his entire life story the process of achieving righteousness by means of faith, or as the New Testament calls it, "justification by faith."

God appeared and conversed with Abram on seven occasions, beginning with Abram's call in Ur and ending with his offering of his son Isaac in obedience to God's command. Out of this relationship with God Abram learned eight lessons of faith. The parallel to all these is found in the life of every believer today. For this reason, Abraham is known as the father of the faithful and is called "the friend of God." He depicts forever the friendship which God desires to have in intimate communion with everyone who is made righteous by faith.

The first lesson faith must learn is that of obedience. It is not faith to simply say "I believe"; it is necessary also to add "I obey." In his first encounter with God, Abram is sent out on a march without a map to an unknown destination, but with the promise that God will go with him and show him the way. The promise includes seven specifics: (1) I will make of you a great nation; (2) I will bless you; (3) I will make your name great; (4) you shall be a blessing; (5) I will bless those that bless you; (6) I will curse them that curse you; (7) in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Though Abram was 75 years of age when this call came to him, his obedience was immediate. He left Ur and went to Haran where his father Terah lived. There, after his

father's death, he came into the land of Canaan in obedience to the call of God. The spiritual parallel of this in today's believer is found in a willingness to turn from the natural claims of family and friends, and to recognize the right of God to lead and direct his life.

In the land of Canaan God appears to Abram for the second time. He promises to give the land to Abram's seed, despite its present possession by the Canaanite tribes. Abram's life in the land is immediately characterized by two meaningful symbols: a tent and an altar. Whenever Abram is walking in faith these two symbols are always present. The tent is the symbol of the pilgrim character of his existence. He is never to own the land outright but is to be a sojourner in it, looking for that "city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). The altar is the symbol of fellowship and communion with a living God. It is the secret of the ability to endure in a land possessed by enemies. Every believer must have such an altar, a personal time alone with God, for Bible reading and prayer, that he might endure in a hostile world.

The second lesson Abram learns in the life of faith is that of the sufficiency of faith to meet all human need. Abram's faith was tested by a famine in the land. He trusted God enough not to return to the land of Haran, but he does attempt to flee the famine by going down to Egypt. During his time in Egypt, there is no record of either the tent or the altar. His weak faith led Abram to resort to a lie to defend his wife's honor and finds himself a recipient of Pharaoh's rebuke (see Gen. 12:1~19). Thus, through failure, Abram learns the necessary truth: God is able to supply his need, even in the midst of pressure and circumstantial difficulty. Humbled and repentant, Abram returns to the land and once again the tent and the altar appear.

Abram's third lesson of faith is that of humility, to learn to take second place. Abram and his nephew, Lot, illustrate different principles of Christian living: Abram was following God; Lot was following Abram--he was a tag-along believer. When a dispute arose between the herdsmen of the two men over the use of the land, even though Abram was the older and had the God-given right of first choice, he exhibited the humility of faith and allowed Lot to choose first. Lot chose his land on the basis of human measurements and ended up in Sodom. However, even though he obtained, he did not truly possess the land, because God gave Abram all the land, including that which Lot had chosen for himself (Gen. 13:14-18). In this lesson of Abram's we see that God's children are called to risk the obedience of faith, believing that God will take care of them even though they apparently are giving up their rights.

Abram's fourth lesson was to exhibit the boldness of faith. Chapter 14 records the historic invasion of the valley of the Dead Sea by the five united kings from the east. Lot was captured and, through this, Abram learned this fourth lesson. Though greatly outnumbered, Abram gathers his servants about him and with a company of 318 he pursues the united armies as far north as Dan and overcomes them in a great battle.

On his triumphant return he is met by Melchizedek at the King's Vale (now known as the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem). Melchizedek appears as the type of an eternal priesthood, to strengthen Abram to meet the most subtle encounter of his career so far: the offer of the king of Sodom to make him rich. Strengthened by the bread and wine which Melchizedek gave him (forerunner of the Lord's Table established centuries later), Abram refuses to be made rich except by God Himself, thus manifesting the fifth quality of faith.

Faith is independent of all natural resources. Chapter 15 is the account of the fourth direct appearance of Jehovah to Abram. Abram had now passed through several testings of his faith and the divine voice declares that He is Abram's shield (for his protection) and his exceeding great reward (as Abram's ultimate resource). Abram's intimacy with God had grown to the point where he can now share the temptation to doubt that was in his heart. God's response is to promise him an heir from whom would come a progeny as numerous as the stars of the sky.

Despite his age Abram believed in the promise of a coming son and for the first time in Scripture we read the great sentence, "his faith was reckoned to him for righteousness" (see Gen. 15:6). Abram is now the friend of God, not by his own merit but on the basis of his faith. Jehovah renews the promise of the land as Abram's inheritance and confirms it with a sign at Abram's request. The sign is a vision of a smoking furnace and a lamp indicating the furnace of affliction Abram's descendants would go through in Egypt before the land was granted to them. Here Abram begins to learn the sixth quality of faith.

Faith endures and has patience. Chapter 16 is the account of Abram's second major deflection from faith. After 12 years of waiting for God to fulfill His promise of a son, Sarai and Abram resort to a human expediency to help God along. Hagar, Sarai's maid, is given to Abram as a wife and from her is born Ishmael. No tent or altar appears in this chapter and Abram reaps the harvest of his folly by continual strife between Sarai and Hagar and the eventual exclusion of Hagar from the household. Thus the man of faith of chapter 15 becomes the man of flesh of chapter 16 and the far-reaching result visible today is the strife between the Arabs (of Ishmael) and Israel (of Isaac). Yet God tenderly cares for Hagar and sends her back to her mistress with a promise of divine support.

God then appears to Abram for a fifth time and an everlasting covenant is made, symbolized by the change of names from Abram to Abraham and from Sarai to Sarah. This is clearly what the New Testament calls "the new covenant," by which God undertakes Himself to be the total resource of the believer for daily activity. This is confirmed by a new revelation of God's name, that of El Shaddai, which means "the God who is sufficient." The sign of this new covenant is that of circumcision, which involves the cutting off of the flesh. It was the outward sign of an invisible inward truth. Abraham's faith falters slightly in seeking to bring Ishmael before God for blessing, but Jehovah patiently explains that he cannot be the heir of the promises since his birth does not rest upon faith, as does Isaac's. (The apostle Paul will base a great argument upon this difference in the letter to the Galatians 3:15-18)

The next chapter records the sixth appearance of God to Abraham, during which God announces the imminent birth of the promised son, and reveals to Abraham His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. The encounter grows out of Abraham's warm hospitality toward three strangers who appear to him as he sits in the door of his tent. As he shows them hospitality there gradually dawns upon him the realization that it is the Lord Himself who thus comes, accompanied by two angels.

Sarah, listening behind the tent door, hears the announcement that she would bear a son within a year. She laughed when she heard it. But God graciously meets her with a divine revelation upon which her faith may seize and rest. He asks the question, "Is there anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). Sarah doubtless meditated on that for the intervening months, and by the time her son was born she was strong in faith, even as Abraham her husband.

Then Jehovah reveals to Abraham, His friend, the second purpose of His coming, that of the imminent destruction of the cities of the plain for their extreme wickedness and unbelief. This introduces a most helpful manifestation of the authority of faith, exercised in prayer by Abraham out of concern for Lot and his family and the inhabitants of Sodom. With obvious reverence Abraham intercedes with God on behalf of the doomed cities. This intercession is based upon Abraham's awareness of the character of God: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (v. 25). It would be a mistake to view Abraham's prayers as reflecting more mercy than does God. We learn from the New Testament that it is the Spirit of God who prays within the believer, urging him to the specific requests that are made. Thus it is God's mercy, expressed through Abraham's prayers, that limits and tempers the Justice and wrath of God. The sequel shows that God goes beyond anything we ask. Abraham stopped at ten righteous persons, but God saved the two or three in whom there was any recognition of Himself.

Chapter 19 records in vivid detail the sequel of the two angels' visit to Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot himself is righteous, as the New Testament makes clear, but his righteousness has been compromised by his conformity to much of Sodom's ways and he finds himself unable to influence his city, even his own family, toward righteousness. The homosexuality practiced in Sodom reflects the curse of Canaan upon these Canaanite tribes, and the ugly story of Lot and his incest with his daughters reveals the degree to which such practices may pervert those who maintain only an external pattern of righteousness.

Again, for the third time, we see a weakness in Abraham's faith (Gen. 20). Surrounded by the men of Gerar (who afterward were known as the Philistines) Abraham again lies concerning his wife Sarah. Once again the man of faith is censured by the man of the world as Abimelech, the heathen king, rebukes him for his lack of complete honesty. These deflections in Abraham's faith are never in the great things but in the smaller details of his life. Clearly they illustrate for us the danger we face in matters where we feel no compulsion to act in confidence and trust in the living God.

At long last Sarah's laugh of incredulity is turned into the laughter of realization. As Isaac, the child of promise grows, conflict breaks out with the son of bondage, Ishmael. Eventually Abraham must make a choice between the two and in simple obedience he sent forth the child and the bondswoman, and leaned back on the gracious provision of God to fulfill His promise.

Chapter 22 records the last great lesson of faith, the intimacy of faith. In this chapter we also find the seventh and last appearance of Jehovah to Abraham. A gap of perhaps 20 years is evident between chapters 21 and 22. Isaac has grown to young manhood and, as the pride of his father's heart, God asks that he be offered up as a sacrifice to Him whom Abraham serves. It is Abraham's greatest test and must have proved a stunning and desolating trial to him. But faith enables him to triumph as he rests upon the character of God and feels that God is able even to raise the young man from death. Thus, as Hebrews (11:17-19) tells us, in a figure of resurrection Abraham received his son back from the dead. It is most striking that, according to biblical scholars, the mountain on which Isaac was offered is the same mountain upon which the Temple was later built and upon whose summit, many centuries later, Jesus Himself was offered as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.

This last experience ended the testing of Abraham's faith. He had learned his faith lessons and there are no more failures of faith on his part. The testing however is followed by the repetition of God's great promises to Abraham, with the addition of a promised seed, as numerous as the sands of the seashore (22:17). It is clear from this that Abraham is to have two lines of descendants: a heavenly line, symbolized by the stars of the heavens; and an earthly line, symbolized by the sands of the seashore. Thus the writer of Hebrews will later reflect upon a heavenly Jerusalem which is above, and an earthly Jerusalem which is below. Those who by faith are the children of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile, are of the heavenly seed. Those who belong to the earthly Jerusalem are the physical descendants of Abraham, the Semitic nations of today (see Rom. 4:9-16; 9:6-8).

Chapters 23 through 25 record the death of Sarah and Abraham's sorrow at her passing. For her burial Abraham purchases the cave of Machpelah from the Hittites. Thus Abraham's first actual possession in the land is a grave.

In the story of Abraham's servant, Eliezer, sent to find a bride for Isaac, we have a beautiful Eastern idyll, picturing in accurate terms the sending of the Holy Spirit from the Father to seek the church as a bride for His own dear Son. Running throughout the account is the theme of the sovereign call 'of God. This alone accounts for Rebecca's willingness to leave her home and family to join a man she has never seen, in a land to which she has never been before. She finds Isaac waiting for her, meditating in the fields at evening time. Abraham's faith is rewarded by seeing the union of his son with a woman of his own kindred, who, though they are of two different temperaments, would walk together in the fulfillment of the divine purpose.

The final years of Abraham's life are gathered up for us in chapter 25, following his marriage to Keturah. From this union there came six more sons who also fathered tribes that later appear in the record of Israel. They form no part of the heirs of the promises made to Isaac, but are nevertheless given, by God's grace a place to dwell and made to flourish as nations.

Finally, at the age of 175 Abraham dies and is buried by his two sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah, beside Sarah his beloved wife. Throughout the rest of the Bible, the figure of Abraham looms as preeminently the man of faith. By his experiences with God, and even by his failures, he has been taught the ingredients of righteousness which come by faith alone. These, as we have seen, may be summarized as: the obedience of faith, the sufficiency of faith, the humility of faith, the boldness of faith, the independence of faith, the authority of faith, and finally, in the sacrifice of Isaac, the intimacy of faith.

MAN SEEKS PEACE

Isaac symbolizes the condition of those who are the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ. He dwells in the land in the midst of God's blessing and is refreshed by a continual supply of water in the wells that he digs in various locations, despite the opposition of his enemies. This truly depicts one who has found peace.

There is another aspect to Isaac: the principle of sonship. While his father was alive Isaac was the darling of his father's heart, and after Abraham's death he becomes the heir of the promises to Abraham and of the blessings of God. But Isaac's sonship also reflects the weaknesses of his father. For in the land of Gerar he repeats his father's sin: he lies about his wife Rebekah. Abimelech--not a proper name but the title of the kings of the Philistines--was the man of the world who rebuked Isaac.

As the heir of the promises, Isaac is given authority to pass these along to his posterity. When he was an old man, nearing the end of his life, he called his sons before him to give them his blessing. Before his twin sons, Jacob and Esau, were born, God told their mother Rebekah that the elder would serve the younger. Even though Isaac must have been aware of this prediction, when the sons appeared for their blessing Isaac sought to reverse the divine command. He intended to give the greater blessing to Esau, the firstborn.

Through a series of deceptions, masterminded by Rebekah, Jacob appears before his blind father in the guise of Esau, and receives the blessing of the firstborn. When Isaac found out that he had been tricked, he dares not alter the blessing he has pronounced. Instead he confirms to Esau the fact that he must serve his brother, but assigns to him the role of rebel and proud overthrewer of his brother's yoke.

When Isaac died, the story centers on Jacob. Isaac has been a man of peace, quite content to enjoy his close relationship with his father and to experience his own spiritual relationship with God, distinct from those of Abraham or Jacob. He has learned how to pray and receive God's answer and to obey God's word and experience His blessing. In the brief record of his life we learn the secret of being a son and enjoying the inheritance of a great and glorious father.

Just as the life of Abraham vividly illustrates what is involved in the teaching of justification by faith, and that of Isaac, his son, portrays the meaning of sonship, so the life of Jacob describes and illustrates for us in exceedingly helpful ways the doctrine of sanctification by faith. Jacob's story is that of the struggle of two natures within him. His natural disposition was one of cunning and self-centered shrewdness. When he was born he emerged from the womb with his hand upon his brother Esau's heel and thus was given the name Jacob which means "heelcatcher" or "supplanter," one who seeks to take another's place. But Jacob had another bent within him which Esau, his twin brother, seemed totally to lack. Jacob had a hunger for spiritual relationships. He valued his brother's birthright which he took from him by trickery. He had a strong personal faith, was a hard worker and an intensely loving person. The story of Jacob, therefore, is the story of how God so dealt with a man of like passions with ourselves that He taught him how to rise above his lower nature and to become a man of God and a man of respect and dignity in his own generation.

Jacob's life can be seen in three clear stages. The first stage is his early years at home when he was basically a deceiver of others, living up to his name. In the second period of his life he learns what it is like to be deceived. Finally, Jacob learns to live as a man devoted to the word and will of God.

Jacob, the Deceiver

Esau, the older of Isaac's twin sons, was a man of the field, a skilled hunter, hairy and of ruddy complexion; he was also called *Edom*, which means red. Jacob, his brother, on the other hand, was a quiet lad and content to live in the tent around his mother. As the firstborn, Esau had the right to the blessing of Isaac, but God had told Rebekah that the "elder shall serve the younger." So Rebekah was determined that Jacob would receive the inheritance.

One day, in a moment of hunger, Esau traded his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage. The Bible said that "Esau despised his birthright." So when the time came for her sons to receive their father's blessing, Rebekah decided to make sure that Jacob would get the firstborn blessing. Isaac, old and blind, had sent Esau out to the field to hunt game "and prepare a savory dish" for his father. While he was gone, Rebekah told Jacob to dress in Esau's clothes. She covered his hands with hair. Then she prepared a savory stew of goat meat and sent Jacob to his father with the food. When Jacob entered his father's room he said, "I am Esau your first-born; Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me" (Gen. 27:19). Isaac was a little doubtful at first, but finally gave Jacob the blessing.

When Esau returned from the field, he also prepared a savory stew from the game he brought. He approached his father to receive the blessing. As Isaac learned of the deceit practiced upon him he fell into a violent fit of trembling, undoubtedly caused by his consciousness of the sovereign overriding of God. Isaac, aware of the divine prediction which he had sought to evade, gave Esau a lesser blessing.

Rebekah, fearing what Esau would do, convinced Isaac to send Jacob to Laban, her brother, to find a wife. Isaac sent Jacob off with his blessing.

Jacob, the Deceived

It was 600 miles from Jacob's home at Beersheba southwest of the Dead Sea, to Haran in Mesopotamia where Rebecca's family lived. Jacob spent his first night in lonely homesickness at a spot which he later named Bethel. There God appeared to Jacob in a dream of a ladder reaching up into heaven upon which angels ascended and descended. The ladder symbolized the continual communication open between him and God. This was followed by God's renewal of the promises which He made to Abraham, now extended and confirmed to Jacob. Thus God's first step in the process of sanctifying Jacob was not to scold him or punish him or rebuke him, but rather to reveal to him His love and faithful concern. Jacob was shown that the way was open between himself and God and was given a promise upon which his faith could rest and which he could pass on to his descendants.

Jacob had thought he was alone and uncared for, but he found that God was with him, loving him and seeking to help him. In response, Jacob erected a great stone, anointing it with oil, and named the place Bethel--the house of God. To this place Jacob returned again and again, gaining from each visit a renewed awareness of God's faithful love and sure promise. So the sanctifying process in each believer today will consist of ~ returning again and again to the faithful promises of God and the reminders of His love and care for us.

The rather lengthy account in chapters 29 through 31 of Jacob's life in Haran is the story of God's loving discipline of a favorite son. It is a record of God's careful mingling of blessing and chastisement so that Jacob's spiritual fiber is toughened and strengthened while his heart is kept from discouragement by the love of Rachel, one of his wives, the fertility of Leah, another wife, the birth of sons, and by his growing prosperity even under the exacting hand of his uncle Laban. The scene when Jacob arrived at Haran and met Rachel beside the well is reminiscent of the story of Rebecca and the servant of Abraham many years before. Jacob fell in love with Rachel at first sight and, having been welcomed initially into Laban's family, felt that all was working out well for him, for he was promised his beloved Rachel for his wife after seven years of service to his uncle.

But Jacob must learn the harvest of deceit, and at the end of seven years he found himself tricked into marrying Leah, Laban's older daughter, instead. When Jacob protested, Laban offered to let him have Rachel for yet another seven years' servitude. So great was Jacob's love he consented to this as well. Fortunately for him, Rachel was given to him immediately and he had her love and companionship throughout the second seven years of service.

During this time a total of 11 sons were born to Jacob's wives and their handmaids who became his concubines. This was in accordance with the customs of the day and before the written law made such practices clearly wrong. When Rachel gave birth to a son after many years of barrenness she named him Joseph. At that point Jacob decided that the time had arrived when he should return to Canaan.

But God was not yet through with Jacob's training. He must again experience the deceitfulness of his uncle in the matter of obtaining flocks and herds to take on his journey. After 14 years of service Jacob had learned much of the need for straightforward honesty and integrity and so he offered to make a deal with his uncle. He would take only the speckled and spotted sheep and goats while Laban would retain all those who were totally white, which was certainly a predominance of the flock. To this Laban readily agreed but secretly separated the spotted and speckled sheep and goats and put them under his sons' care at a distance of three days' journey. Jacob was left with nothing but white sheep and goats. He resorted to what he felt would be a stratagem to overcome his uncle's deceit. He tried a method that we would consider an "old-wives-tale" to insure that he

would have sheep and goats to take with him. What he did not know was that God, who understood the laws of genetics since He Himself had called them into being, was using the invisible, hereditary genes for color in the white sheep to produce offspring which were spotted and speckled. The result was a spectacular increase in Jacob's flocks.

At this point God appeared to Jacob again in a dream and commanded him to return to the land of promise. To escape from Laban's wiles Jacob left in the middle of the night with his wives, children and flocks, and though Laban pursued him and caught up with him, God intervened to keep him from harming Jacob any further. Instead Jacob and Laban made a covenant of peace with one another and Laban returned to his own home. Despite Jacob's suffering during all these 20 years there was no trace of bitterness in his attitude, but one of praise to God for His blessing. Jacob had grown spiritually in tremendous ways during the 20 years of his servitude, but he would reach his true potential only after he had wrestled with God and his human strength was broken completely.

Jacob, Man of God

As Jacob came to the ford of the river Jabbok he learned that his brother Esau was on his way to meet him with 400 armed men. Immediately his reaction was to resort again to wiles and stratagems of his own. He divided his household into two groups and planned to send them on before him to try to appease the wrath of Esau with gifts before he must encounter him personally. While he waited alone, an angel in the form of a man, met him and began to wrestle with him through the long night. As the day broke the angel sought to disengage himself but Jacob clung with stubborn persistence. The angel touched Jacob's thigh and threw it out of joint; but still Jacob clung in helplessness to the divine messenger, refusing to let go until he was blessed of God. Then the divine being changed the name of Jacob to Israel which means "he who prevails with God." As the sun rose, Jacob limped off to meet Esau with a totally different attitude in his heart. He no longer feared man but was confident that God would fight his battles for him. When Esau arrived his own heart had been strangely altered and instead of attacking he fell upon Jacob's neck and embraced him. Thus Jacob learned the great principle of sanctification: that God was his strength and his refuge and is fully capable of working out all the problems with which he may be confronted.

As the result of an incident involving Jacob's daughter Dinah, God appeared again to Jacob and sent him back to Bethel to dwell there with a tent and an altar, as his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac had done before him. There God renewed His promises to Jacob and there Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, gave birth to her second son Benjamin, and died in childbirth. Jacob traveled on to Mamre where he found his aged father on his deathbed and he and Esau joined together in burying Isaac with honor and reverence. The record then traces in one chapter (36) the extent of the sons of Esau and the nation of Edom which came from his loins. From here on, in Scripture, Jacob and Esau will forever stand for conflicting and opposite principles, the Spirit versus the flesh. The spotlight of Genesis now turns to Joseph and his sons.

MAN SEEKS JOY

With Joseph we come to the last of the four great patriarchs who symbolically present to us the great truths of redemption. To justification by faith, exemplified in Abraham; to sonship, shown in Isaac; and to sanctification, revealed in the life of Jacob; we now add the truth of glorification, set forth in the story of Joseph. He clearly appears as the forerunner, sent into Egypt to prepare the way for the coming of the 12 tribes into that land, and as such he pictures our great Forerunner who has gone on before us, even Jesus our Lord, to prepare the way for all His own to come into glory with Him and to share that glory together. In line with that emphasis, the character of Joseph is presented to us with almost unblemished consistency. He is often regarded as a type of Christ since he was beloved of his father but rejected by his brethren, sold into slavery for 20 pieces of silver, and, in the view of his father Jacob, died and eventually was brought to life again as a triumphant king instead of a suffering servant. Like our Lord he also forgave his brothers for their treatment of him and was used to save them from death and preserve the family line.

Beloved by His Father, Rejected by His Brothers

We have already learned that Joseph was born in Haran while Jacob was serving Laban, his uncle. In chapter

37 we discover him at the age of 17 working as a shepherd in his father's home in Hebron. Joseph was the obvious favorite of his father Jacob, who had bestowed on him a princely coat as a special mark of his favor. Therefore, he was the object of bitter hatred by his brothers. When, further, they learned that God had given Joseph two special dreams which predicted his elevation above his brothers, their hatred took a murderous form and they sought a way to kill him. Like his father Jacob, to whom God also spoke in dreams, Joseph seems to have had a special spiritual quality which God would greatly use in the years that lay ahead.

When Jacob's sons delayed returning from Shechem where they were feeding their flocks, Jacob sent Joseph the 50 miles from Hebron to Shechem to check on his brothers. Upon arriving at Shechem he found his brothers had departed for Dothan and he trudged on another 20 miles further north to find them there. Seeing him coming from afar, and recognizing the hated coat, his brothers plotted together to kill him, throw him into a pit, and tell his father that a wild beast had destroyed him. The oldest of the 12, Reuben, objected and persuaded them to leave him to die in a pit.

One can imagine the agony and fear of the 17-year-old boy who was thus roughly treated by his own brothers and tossed into a pit to die alone. While his brothers were in preparation for their journey home, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites traveling by and hit upon a scheme to sell Joseph to them as a slave, but to tell their father that he had been killed.

Sold for 20 Pieces of Silver

Thus for 20 pieces of silver they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. Then they brought his coat, dipped in goat's blood back to their father with the report that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. Once again, Jacob who had deceived his own father Isaac, is now most truly deceived by his sons. But God's strange purposes were at work to bring about a quite different turn of events.

Chapter 38 records an incident to show why God found it necessary to remove the chosen family into Egypt for a period of time. Judah the fourth son of Jacob married a Canaanite woman. Their marriage led to a series of events that indicates the degradation of Canaan. To prevent them from being absorbed by a heathen culture God was moving in ways that would eventually put the family out of Canaan.

Meanwhile, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, an officer in the army of Egypt. The excellence of Joseph's character soon elevated him to a place of trust and responsibility and he was put over all of Potiphar's household. Surely he must have felt that the prediction of his dream was soon to come to pass. But a loving heavenly Father saw his need for being made perfect through suffering (see Heb. 2:10) and events quickly took another turn.

Because Joseph was handsome and good-looking, Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him. Joseph resisted until one day she found him alone and lay hold of his garment, attempting to drag him into her bed. Crying out, "How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9), Joseph fled from her presence leaving his garment behind.

Potiphar's wife reported the incident to her husband as though Joseph had attempted to assault her. Potiphar cast Joseph into prison. In all this there is no hint of bitterness or resentment on Joseph's part, but a quiet trust that God was working His way. Joseph's kindness and skill soon won him a position as trusty over the other prisoners, because "the Lord was with Joseph." Whatever he did the Lord made it to prosper.

Once again, dreams play a large part in Joseph's story. This time Pharaoh's butler and baker, who were cast into prison, were the dreamers, and Joseph was the interpreter. The dreams were fulfilled as Joseph said. The baker went to his death and the butler was restored to Pharaoh's household, but soon forgot his promise to remember Joseph when he was released. But another dream got Joseph out of prison two years later.

From Suffering Servant to Triumphant King

Pharaoh had a dream. He commanded his seers to interpret the dream for him. When they could not the chief butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh of his interpretative skill. Joseph was hastily hauled from the dungeon and brought before Pharaoh. There he interpreted Pharaoh's dream, predicting the seven years of

good harvest followed by seven years of drought and famine. Pharaoh, impressed not only by Joseph's interpretative skills, but also by the wisdom with which he suggested ways to meet the coming crises, put his signet ring upon Joseph's hand, arrayed him in garments of fine linen, put a gold chain about his neck and made him at the age of 30 years the second ruler in all the kingdom. Thus the stage was set for the coming of Jacob and his sons down to the land of Egypt.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch in Canaan, Jacob and his sons were experiencing terrible famine which settled upon the land. Jacob sent all his sons but the youngest, Benjamin, into Egypt to buy grain for their cattle. When the brothers came before Joseph he recognized them immediately, but did not reveal his knowledge. Instead he treated them roughly and accused them as spies come into the land. When they protested he ordered that they leave one of the brothers behind as a hostage and return to Canaan and bring back Benjamin, the youngest, as proof of their integrity. In discussing this among themselves, Reuben, the eldest, reminded them that this was a divine retribution for their treatment of Joseph many years earlier. Simeon, the second oldest, remained behind and the brothers returned to Canaan. Jacob at first was adamant that he would not let Benjamin leave. But the famine forced him to relent.

Upon reaching Egypt, Joseph entertained the brothers in his own home, much to their bafflement and uncertainty. When they left he commanded that the money they used to buy the grain be put back in their bags, and his own private cup be hidden in Benjamin's bag. A short way out from the city he sent his servants after them who accused them of stealing the cup. Protesting their innocence they vowed that the man in whose bag the cup should be found would immediately be put to death. But when the cup was found in Benjamin's bag they were overcome with sorrow and were brought back to Joseph's presence.

There, in a most moving plea, Judah privately recited the whole story in Joseph's ear and begged of him that Joseph would permit Judah to remain as hostage and let Benjamin go. Upon hearing this Joseph could not control himself any longer, and ordering all the Egyptians from the room, in a most moving scene he made himself known to his brothers. Upon Pharaoh's command the brothers returned to Canaan with the good news, and at last Jacob was persuaded to come with them into Egypt. Once again God appeared to Jacob in a vision of the night and reassured him that it was right for him to go into Egypt, for there He promised to make of his sons a great nation and to bring them again to the land of Canaan.

The remainder of the story is quickly told. The Israelites settled in the land of Goshen with Pharaoh's permission and became the herdsmen and keeper of Pharaoh's cattle. As the famine continued, the Egyptians sold first their cattle and then their land to Pharaoh, and at the end of the drought Joseph gave them seed to plant their land and retained the fifth part for Pharaoh's possession.

As the aged Jacob neared his death, Joseph brought his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim before him to be blessed of him. Joseph stood Manasseh, the older one, at Jacob's right hand and Ephraim, the younger, at Jacob's left hand, but when the old patriarch, sitting on the side of his bed, blessed them he crossed his hands so that the blessing of the firstborn fell upon Ephraim the younger and Manasseh, the elder, was given the secondary blessing. Once again the right of the firstborn was withheld from the one born first, and, by means of a cross, was transferred to the younger son. It was God's reminder that the right of the firstborn, which belonged to Adam, was now transferred to the last Adam (Jesus) that He might be "the firstborn of all creation."

In a great predictive chapter, Jacob called his sons before him and in poetic style foretold their destinies. When he had finished charging his sons "he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last."

The final chapter recounts how Joseph brought the body of his father, in a great procession, up to the land of Canaan and buried him with Abraham in the cave of Machpelah. Joseph then returned to Egypt where he lived till the age of 110 and himself died, having made his brothers swear that they would bring his bones into Canaan when at last God brought the nation out of Egypt into the Promised Land (see Exod. 13:19).

Thus Genesis, which began with the creation of the heavens and the earth, ends in a coffin in Egypt. But behind the sad reality there bums the bright promise of El Shaddai, the God who is sufficient to bring about the fulfillment of all His promises by means of the process of justification, adoption, sanctification, and ultimately,

glory.

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