

## **Studies In Genesis: Genesis 25-50**

*For the Pine Bush Men's Bible Study, August 25-29, 2025*

*Outlines / Literary Structure:*

“The Maintenance of the Hebrews’ Vision and Their Development into Israelites (Genesis 25:12-35:29)

### **The Generations of . . .**

1. Ishmael (Gen 25:12-18).
2. Isaac (Gen 25:19-35:29).

### **Details**

1. The pre-natal struggle of Esau and Jacob; Jacob’s election; Esau despises and sells his birthright (Gen 25:20-34); Isaac’s struggle to maintain himself in the land, his denial of Rebekah, the fight for water, the renewal of the promise (Gen 26); Isaac’s blessing of Jacob, Jacob’s deception, Esau’s anger, the nature of blessing (Gen 27).
2. Three periods in Jacob’s life:
  - In the land of promise (Gen 25:19-27:34).
  - Out of the land among the Gentiles (Gen 28:1-31:55).
  - Back again in the land (Gen 32:1-35:29) but still attended by many difficulties in his relations with the surrounding tribes.
3. The subject-matter of Jacob’s training: leaving home to make a future for himself; the vision of the house of God and of the gate of heaven; marriage-deals; the birth and naming of his children; the need to amass capital; trade-secrets, their use and abuse; the jealousy and anger of the Gentiles; Jacob’s flight; problem of reconciliation with Esau; wrestling with the angel, the vision of the face of God, Jacob becomes Israel; the abuse of religion by Jacob’s sons.

### **The Section Ends With the Death of Isaac (Gen 35:28-29.)**

### **The Generations of Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 25:12-35:29)**

#### **The Names of the Sons of Ishmael (Gen 25:12-18)**

#### **Isaac in the Land; Maintaining the Vision (Gen 25:19-26:33)**

1. In the family: God’s sovereignty: human struggle, faith, greed, profanity, birthright sold (Gen 25:19–34).
2. Among the Gentiles: God’s sovereignty: human fear, envy, strife, covenanting (Gen 26:1–33).

#### **The Question of the Blessing (Gen 26:34-33:17)**

1. Esau enraged: Jacob pretends not to be Jacob: steals blessing from man.

##### ***Bethel***

2. Flight to Laban: God’s government: Human love, deceit, faith, rivalry.
3. Flight from Laban: human cheating, rivalry, love, faith: God’s government.

##### ***Peniel***

4. Esau reconciled: Jacob admits being Jacob: wrestles with God for blessing. Jacob gives Esau a blessing (Gen 33:11).

#### **Jacob Back in the Land: Attempting to Fulfil the Vision (Gen 33:18-35:22)**

1. Among the Gentiles: human cruelty with human frailty: God’s insistence on repentance (Gen 33:18–35:8).
2. In the family: God’s power and sufficiency: human weakness, suffering, faith, sin, birthright forfeited (see 1 Chr 5:1–2) (Gen 35:9–22).

#### **The Names of the Sons of Jacob (Gen 35:23-29)**

## **The Development of Israel's Sons into a Nation (Genesis 36:1-50:26)**

### **The Generations of . . .**

1. Esau (Gen 36:1–43).
2. Jacob (Gen 37:2–50:26).

### **Details**

They become a blessing to the Gentiles through Joseph, the saviour of the Egyptians and of the Hebrews:

1. The welding of Jacob's twelve sons into a nation. Unlike what it was with Abraham and his sons, it was not a question of taking one of Jacob's sons and discarding the rest, but of taking all twelve of his sons and welding them into a cohering nation. At first the brothers' treacherous jealousy against Joseph and his dreams of administrative supremacy, and the irresponsibility of Judah (Gen 38)—head of the tribe destined to bear the royal sceptre—and his mercenary attitude (Gen 37:25–27) threatened to divide and scatter Jacob's sons before they could be developed into one nation. But they are preserved, re-united and made a blessing to the nations through Joseph's innocent suffering and Judah's readiness to suffer vicariously (Gen 44:18–34).
2. Jacob's rediscovery of Joseph, and his recovery of his sons Simeon and Benjamin. The preservation of the twelve sons and their families, the beginning of their multiplication into a nation in Egypt, and the maintenance of their prophetic hope in their future destiny.

## **The Section Ends With the Deaths of Jacob (Gen 49:33-50:13) and of Joseph (Gen 50:26)**

### **The Generations of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 36:1-50:14)**

#### **Generations of Esau: Esau went into a land away (Gen 36:1-43)**

#### **Jacob Dwelt in the Land (Gen 37:1)**

1. Joseph's dreams: Joseph sold: Joseph's coat, false evidence: Jacob's false deduction: please identify (Gen 37:32).
2. Judah goes down: the prostitute: false dress: Judah's signet, cord and staff: 'please identify . . .' Judah's confession: Judah's sons! (Gen 38:25).
3. Joseph in Egypt: Potiphar's wife: Joseph's garment: false evidence; Joseph interprets dreams: Pharaoh's signet, chain, robes: Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 39:1-41:52).
4. Jacob Saw That There Was Corn in Egypt (Gen 42:1)
  1. First expedition: climax: Jacob: 'Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin?' No!
  2. Second expedition: climax: Judah, as surety, pleads to be allowed to suffer as substitute for Benjamin.
  3. Joseph made known: sends for father: climax: Jacob discovers truth: evidence of wagons: decides to go to see Joseph.

#### **And Israel Took His Journey (Gen 46:1)**

1. Beersheba—well of oath: God: 'I myself will go down with you . . . and I will also bring you up again.' Names of sons—Egypt.
2. Judah sent in front to arrange meeting with Joseph: climax: Jacob blesses Pharaoh.
3. Joseph's treatment of Egyptians and of Israelites: Joseph buys all Egypt and Egyptians for Pharaoh: Israel prospers.

#### **And Jacob Lived in Egypt (Gen 47:28)**

1. Takes oath of Joseph: 'Do not bury me not in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers'; Joseph introduces his sons to Jacob: 'Who are these?' (Gen 48:8-9). Jacob blesses them.

2. Jacob's prophetic blessing of twelve sons: Judah to have the sceptre (Gen 49:10); final charge regarding burial.
3. Jacob dies: taken back to Canaan and buried there: Egyptians accompany and join in mourning.

Joseph Returns to Egypt (Gen 50:14)

1. Renewed promise to preserve brothers.
2. Dying charge: 'God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham . . . carry up my bones from here' (Gen 50:24-25)."<sup>1</sup>

#### “6.12 Isaac (Genesis 21:8–28:4)

- a **Yahweh's choice of the younger son Isaac** (21:8–19)
- family rift involving *elder son* Ishmael and *younger son* Isaac
  - to protect favored younger son, *matriarch proposes that elder son should leave*
  - she appeals to husband
  - blessing and promise of great progeny given to banished son
- b **marriage of nonchosen elder son** Ishmael (an archer) to foreign woman (21:20–21)
- c **strife with King Abimelech of Gerar over Abraham's wells** (21:22–34)
- treaty at *Beersheba* with Abimelech, involving general *Phicol*
  - unlike previous time at Gerar, matriarch is not taken by king
  - naming of 'Beersheba'
- d **risking everything for the covenant** (22:1–19)
- Abraham's willingness to give up everything, even the *life* of his beloved son, for Yahweh's covenant
- e **nonchosen genealogy**: family of Nahor (22:20–24)
- f **death of Sarah**, Abraham's wife (23:1–20)
- her burial in the *cave of Machpelah*
- g **CENTER: Yahweh selects Rebekah** as chosen matriarch and Jacob's wife (24:1–67)
- f' **death of Abraham**; Abraham's second wife (25:1–10)
- his death and burial in the *cave of Machpelah*
- e' **nonchosen genealogy**: family of Ishmael (25:11–18)
- d' **scorning the covenant** (25:19–34)\*
- Esau's *life* is more important to him than the covenant; he shows contempt for his birthright (and his part in the covenant?): it is no more important than a bowl of beans: "What do I care? I am about to die!"
- c' **strife with King Abimelech of Gerar over Abraham's wells** (26:1–33)
- treaty at *Beersheba* with Abimelech, involving general *Phicol*
  - like Abraham's first time at Gerar, matriarch is taken by king
  - naming of 'Beersheba'
- b' **marriage of nonchosen elder son** Esau (an archer) to foreign women (26:34–35);
- a' **Yahweh's choice of the younger son** (27:1–28:4)
- family rift involving *elder son* Esau and *younger son* Jacob
  - to protect favored younger son, *matriarch proposes that younger son should leave*
  - she appeals to husband
  - blessing and prayer for great progeny given to banished son

The symmetric design of this section accounts for much of the repetition and the otherwise puzzling positioning of episodes; for example, the two accounts of Abraham lying about his wife; the three lengthy promises regarding a son; and the two accounts focusing on Lot and Sodom.<sup>23</sup> The repetitions serve to establish patterns. For example, the repetition of the scenario of Abraham's lying about Sarah draws

<sup>1</sup> David W. Gooding, *An Overview Of Genesis. Myrtlefield House Study Notes*. (Belfast, NI: Myrtlefield Trust, 2022), 17-21; electronic ed. accessed here: <https://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com/sermons/genesis-study-notes>

\* Unit d' exhibits no strong link to unit d.

<sup>23</sup> Kikawada and Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*, 95, note the symmetry in Genesis 12–20

attention to the weakness of Israel's ancestors and the contrasting power of Yahweh, who is able, even in foreign lands like Egypt or Philistia, to protect his people, and who alone is responsible for the birth of the nation of Israel. Standing in the position of greatest emphasis, in the center and seventh position, is God's great covenant of circumcision, accompanied by his changes of Abram's and Sarai's names and his assurance that the promised son will indeed be through Sarah."<sup>2</sup>

**“6.13 Jacob (Genesis 28:5–37:1)**

- a     **Jacob's exile begins** (28:5)
  - Jacob leaves for Padan Aram, sent off by father Isaac
- b     **Esau's family** (28:6–9)
- c     **stop at Bethel** (28:10–22)
  - God appears to Jacob; his *promise* to Jacob
  - sets up memorial *stone* to commemorate God's appearance
  - *names* the place El-Bethel ('God of the house of God')
- d     **departure from Canaan and arrival at Paddan-aram** (29:1–30)
  - Laban's *treachery* with marriage agreement
  - deceitful reassurance: 'you are my bone and my flesh!'
  - Jacob *loves* ('*āhēb*) Rachel, willing to pay any price
- e     **Jacob's family becomes large** (29:31–30:24)
  - *tension* between *elder* and *younger* wife finally resolved
- f     **Jacob's scheming** (30:25–43)
  - involving *positioning of flocks*
  - use of his name *Jacob*
  - result: gains many flocks
- g     **TURNING POINT: Yahweh enables Jacob to escape** and depart for home (31:1–55 [31:1–32:1])
- f'    **Jacob's scheming** (32:1–32 [32:2–33])
  - involving *positioning of flocks*
  - changes *Jacob's* name
  - result: loses many flocks
- e'    **Jacob introduces his large family** to Esau (33:1–17)
  - *tension* between him (*younger*) and Esau (*elder*) finally resolved
- d'    **arrival back in Canaan from Paddan-aram** (33:18–34:31)
  - sons' *treachery* with marriage agreement at Shechem
  - deceitful reassurance: 'we . . . will be one people!'
  - Shechem *loves* ('*āhēb*) Dinah, willing to pay any price
- c'    **stop at Bethel** (35:1–29)
  - God appears to Jacob; he kept his *promise*!
  - sets up memorial *stone* to commemorate God's appearance
  - *names* the place El-Bethel ('God of the house of God')
- b'    **Esau's family** (36:1–43)
- a'    **Jacob's exile ends** (37:1)
  - Jacob settles 'where his father had lived, in . . . Canaan'

As in the Abraham unit, the symmetric scheme of this section helps explain much of the repetition and positioning of episodes, such as (1) the two accounts of treaties with King Abimelech of Gerar and Phicol, involving Abraham's wells and the town of Beersheba; (2) the two brief notes about the marriages of the non-favored elder son to foreign women; and (3) the two tragic stories of family strife that resulted in the expulsion of one of the two sons in the family. Structurally highlighted themes in this unit include the following:

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<sup>2</sup> David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 57. [Boldface & italics original.]

1. Yahweh's power over foreign monarchs (as reinforced in the matching stories involving Abimelech)—a key theme throughout the Book of the Law
2. importance of commitment to Yahweh's covenant
3. Yahweh's sovereign determination of who will be his chosen people (Isaac not Ishmael; Rebekah; Jacob not Esau)
4. Yahweh's choice of the younger over the older—foreshadowing his choice of the younger nation, Israel, over the older nations of the earth.”<sup>3</sup>

**“6.14 Parallel pattern in the Joseph story (Genesis 37:2–50:26)**

- a **trouble between Joseph and his brothers (37:2–11)**
  - they hate him
- a' **more trouble between Joseph and his brothers (37:12–36)**
  - they dispose of him
- b **sexual temptation involving Judah (38:1–30)**
  - Tamar successfully entices Judah to have sex with her
  - she keeps his ring and staff to produce as condemning evidence later
- b' **sexual temptation involving Joseph (39:1–23)**
  - Potiphar's wife unsuccessfully tries to seduce Joseph
  - she keeps his cloak to produce as condemning evidence later
- c **Joseph interprets two dreams of prison mates (40:1–23)**
- c' **Joseph interprets two dreams of pharaoh (41:1–57)**
- d **brothers come to Egypt for food (42:1–38)**
  - they bow to Joseph
  - Joseph fills sacks with grain, money
  - Reuben offers his sons as surety for Benjamin
- d' **brothers again come to Egypt for food (43:1–44:3)**
  - they bow to Joseph
  - Joseph fills sacks with grain, money
  - Judah offers himself as surety for Benjamin
- e **Joseph has some of his family brought to him (44:4–45:15)**
  - including all his brothers
  - weeping
  - joyful reunion
- e' **Joseph has all of his family brought to him (45:16–47:12)**
  - including all his brothers, their families, and his father
  - weeping
  - joyful reunion
- f **prospering in Egypt: Joseph in ascendancy (47:13–26)**
  - Joseph prospers in his rule over all Egypt
  - Egyptians are impoverished and enslaved to him
  - Joseph gives Egyptians provisions
- f' **prospering in Egypt: blessings on Jacob's sons (47:27–49:32)**
  - Joseph's family prospers and flourishes (cf. 47:27)
  - Jacob's blessings upon sons
- g **death of patriarch: Jacob (49:33–50:14)**
  - Jacob dies
- g' **death of patriarch: Joseph (50:15–26)**
  - Joseph dies

Most of the constituent units of this section are well marked, generally introduced by shifts in person (28:6, 10; 29:31; 31:3; 34:1; 36:1; 37:1), place (28:10; 29:1; 32:1 [32:2]; 35:1), or time (30:25). As with the

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<sup>3</sup> Dorsey, 58.

previous two major sections, this one also contains thirteen units arranged with a touch of symmetry (6.13). Hints of a symmetric arrangement are abundant,<sup>25</sup> including the inclusio of Jacob's departure from home and his return (a and a'; cf. 35:27); the two units about Esau's family, one positioned immediately after the beginning of Jacob's journey, the other immediately before its end (b and b'); the two stops at Bethel, one on the departing journey, the other on the return trip (c and c'); and the two instances of treachery regarding the promised giving of a girl in marriage (d and d'). The center of the story and its turning point is unit g, in which Jacob decides to leave Paddan-aram and sets out on his journey back to Canaan.

The arrangement of this section serves to highlight two main themes: (1) Yahweh's gracious protection of Israel's weak and scheming ancestor, emphasized by the matching of Yahweh's two gracious appearances to Jacob at Bethel and by Yahweh's key role in Jacob's escape at the story's center, and (2) the chaos caused by family strife p 60 and social disorder (through the repetition of matching stories of strife and disorder).<sup>24</sup>

*“Patriarchal Narratives about Abraham's Descendants (Primarily Jacob) (25:19–37:1).* Although Jacob receives the bulk of attention in this section, Isaac plays no insignificant role. When Abraham died, God's covenant plan did not come to a screeching halt. No, God continued revealing His covenant plan for Israel (and the world). As He did with Abraham and Sarah, the Lord gave Isaac and Rebekah a child (in fulfillment of His covenant promise) in a way that makes it absolutely clear to all that He alone is responsible for this provision of another son of promise. God's intentions are further narrowed: Isaac and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau. God chose to work through Jacob to continue the outworking of His plan for His creation, not because Jacob was a paragon of virtue and submission, but because God had seen fit to do so. After two decades in Paddan-aram, Jacob returned to his homeland, with covenant blessings of his own: wives, children, herds, and flocks. After an unfortunate set of events at Shechem, the Lord told Jacob to move south, first to Bethel and eventually to Hebron, where his father Isaac was still living.

The verses that delineate the family and eventual influence of Esau (chap. 36) tangibly demonstrate that God is interested in impacting nations other than Israel. God intends to bring salvation to the nations (Gen 12:3; 26:4; 28:14). The verses in chap. 36 also pave the way for understanding God's demand for Israel to treat the Edomites properly in later centuries (e.g., Deut 2:1–8; 23:7).

*C. The Story of Joseph (37:2–50:26).* The God who established His covenant people and guides them will also preserve them. The wickedness of the Canaanites had an impact on Jacob's family. When Jacob first returned to Canaan, his family faced challenges with the inhabitants of Shechem (34:1–17). Reuben had intimate relations with his father's handmaiden (35:22), p 184 and Judah eventually chose to marry a Canaanite woman (38:1–2). God Himself orchestrated the transition of Jacob's family from Canaan to Egypt. He allowed Jacob's favored son, Joseph, to experience tragedy after tragedy, a set of circumstances that eventually led to his promotion to the second highest position in the Egyptian government. Malicious intent, outright lies, negligence—all contributed to the humanly challenging circumstances of Joseph. On the other hand God used those circumstances to install Joseph in a position where he would be able to provide a haven for his beloved father Jacob and his entire family. Although his brothers had acted out of malicious evil, God arranged these circumstances to accomplish what He determined to be good (50:20). God was bringing to pass His plan to work in and through the descendants of Abraham for His own glory.<sup>25</sup>

“Life of Isaac and his family, 25:19–26:35

A. Birth of Esau and Jacob, 25:19–28

B. Sale of Esau's birthright to Jacob, 25:29–34

C. Isaac and Abimelech II, 26:1–16

D. Dispute at Beersheba, 26:17–33

E. Esau's marriages, 26:34–35

<sup>25</sup> Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 42, senses symmetry in this section of Genesis, although his analysis differs from the one presented here (he extends the symmetry from 25:19 through 35:22, with 30:1–43 at the center).

<sup>4</sup> Dorsey, 59-60.

<sup>5</sup> Michael A. Grisanti, “The Book of Genesis,” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 183-184. [Italics original.]

## IV. Life of Jacob, 27:1–37:1

- A. Jacob in his father's home, 27:1–46
- B. Jacob's exile and journey, 28:1–22
- C. Jacob with Laban in Syria, 29:1–33:15
- D. Jacob's return to the promised land, 33:16–35:20
- E. Posterity of Jacob and Esau, 35:21–37:1

## V. Life of Joseph, 37:2–50:26

- A. Joseph's boyhood, 37:2–36
- B. Judah and Tamar, 38:1–30
- C. Joseph's promotion in Egypt, 39:1–41:57
- D. Joseph and his brothers, 42:1–45:15
- E. Joseph's reception of Jacob in Egypt, 45:16–47:26
- F. Jacob's last days and final prophecies, 47:27–50:14
- G. Joseph's assurance to his brothers of complete forgiveness, 50:15–26.<sup>6</sup>

**“Chart 5. Literary Development of the Jacob Narrative**

(Preceded by *tôl<sup>e</sup>dôt*)

- A Oracle sought; Rebekah struggles in childbirth; *bekorah* birthright; birth; themes of strife, deception, fertility (25:19–34).
- B Interlude: strife; deception; *berakah* blessing; covenant with foreigner (26).
- C Deception; *berakah* stolen; fear of Esau; flight from land (27:1–28:9).
- D Encounter (< *paga* ) with the divine at sacred site near border; *berakah* (28:10–22).
- E Internal cycle opens: arrival; Laban at border; deception; wages; Rachel barren; Leah fertile (29:1–30:21).
- F Rachel fertile; Jacob increases the herds (30:22–43).
- E' Internal cycle closes: departure; Laban at border; deception; wages (31).
- D' Encounters (< *paga* ) with divine beings at sacred sites near border; *berakah* (32).
- C' Deception planned; fear of Esau; *berakah* gift returned; return to land (33).
- B' Interlude: strife; deception; covenant with foreigner (34).
- A' Oracle fulfilled; Rachel struggles in childbirth; *berakah*; death resolutions (35:1–22).<sup>7</sup>

**“The Generations of Jacob”**

“The following outline summarizes the literary structure.

## I. Cycle one: Testing of Joseph (37–41).

After God elects Joseph to administer his program in exile, two rounds of testing reveal that Joseph is faithful.

- A. Election and rejection: Through dreams God elects the faithful Joseph to be the ruler, but he is envied, hated, and sold into slavery by his brothers (37).
  - 1. Evil: Destruction of life through jealousy (cf. Cain), and deception of the father with the blood of the kid (cf. chap. 27).
  - 2. Good: Faithful servant of the father, faithful servant in Egypt.
- B. Interlude—rebuke of Judah: Through a series of unusual circumstances, evil is judged and righteousness triumphs, showing in Judah that the program of election cannot be set aside (38).
- C. Faithfulness and suffering: Through another period of testing Joseph shows himself to be faithful (39–40).
  - 1. Faithful servant of Potiphar, refusing temptation to evil.
  - 2. Once again falsely accused, with his cloak as evidence.
  - 3. Once again thrown into prison after faithful service.

<sup>6</sup> Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 194.

<sup>7</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 85. [Italics & boldface original.]

4. Faithful steward in prison, retaining faith in the promise of God (revealed in his dreams) by interpreting dreams in spite of the circumstances.

D. Fulfillment of destiny: Having remained faithful in spite of envy, hatred, temptation, and enslavement, Joseph rises to power (cf. the end of chap. 38) (41).

1. Means (as a test): Pharaoh's two dreams.
2. Interpretation of the dreams: Good and evil years.
3. Instruction: Live wisely according to what God's plans are.

II. Cycle two: Testing of the brothers (42–45).

Whereas Joseph's tests were designed to demonstrate his faithfulness, the testing of the brothers was necessitated by past unfaithfulness. The point was that participation in God's program of blessing cannot permit evil (i.e., acts and attitudes that destroy life).

A. First test (to set up the second): Will good overcome evil? (42).

1. Joseph accuses them of spying (what they had done to him) and demands Benjamin as proof of their truthfulness.
2. Joseph puts money in their sacks and imprisons one of them (as they had done to him) to raise their consciousness about evil.

B. Second test (completion): Will they preserve life? (43).

1. Joseph gives them all good things but shows favoritism to Benjamin, causing envy in the brothers.
2. Joseph puts the cup in Benjamin's sack to give them the opportunity to abandon their brother, as they had abandoned him.

C. Aftermath (44–45).

1. Good triumphs over evil now, as Judah magnanimously stands for Benjamin (he had learned much in chap. 38).
2. Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and explains the work of God in delivering his people.

The last several chapters of the book may be considered transitional chapters. The family moved to Egypt, the names of the family were entered in the record, the family settled in Goshen by Pharaoh's goodness, the nation enjoyed the protection of Joseph's wise administration, the blessings of the family were carefully recorded, as were, finally, the p 88 burial in Canaan and the promise of divine visitation. The book ends with a promise of future blessings.

The repetition of the theme of exile in the Joseph and Jacob cycles displays a tension theologically. If evil threatens to destroy the ongoing work of God to bless the world and if it meets with disciplinary acts and with sojournings away from the fertile land, how should the people of God conduct themselves? And is the promise of God really in jeopardy?

Naturally God protects and delivers his people. Laban twice could not do "good or evil" to the covenant people (24:50; 31:29). And when God predicted the Egyptian exile (15:13–14), he ensured Israel's safety. Ultimately, the covenant is safe because it is the Lord's covenant.

These narratives also teach the covenanters how to live in bondage when they know that the promise of God belongs to them, for participation in the blessings of the covenant requires obedience. They are to do what is good and shun what is evil, never losing sight of their destiny. They are to fear God, love the brethren, forgive one another, and make provision for the future. In short, the way of wisdom begins to surface in these stories, a wisdom that the parents in the garden mistakenly sought through disobedience. It cannot be developed by doing evil, for evil undermines and destroys God's good creation.

It takes such wisdom to endure this evil world while waiting for the fulfillment of the promises. God had promised the blessings of seed, land, and dominion. Fertility in the family and increase in their possessions began with the patriarchs. And now with Joseph there was a beginning in the expectation of dominion. But the servant who comes to such prominence must be a faithful steward of the covenant, one who resists evil and clings to that which is good."<sup>8</sup>

*Isaac*

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<sup>8</sup> Ross, 86-88.



Gen. 25:21 - “Though the accomplishment of God’s promise is always sure, yet it is often slow, and seems to be crossed and contradicted by Providence, that the faith of believers may be tried, their patience exercised, and mercies long waited for may be the more welcome when they come. While this mercy was delayed, Isaac did not approach to a handmaid’s bed, as Abraham had done, and Jacob afterwards; for he loved Rebekah, ch. 24:67. But, 1. He prayed: he entreated the Lord for his wife. Though God had promised to multiply his family, he prayed for its increase; for God’s promises must not supersede, but encourage, our prayers, and be improved as the ground of our faith. Though he had prayed for this mercy very often, and had continued his supplication many years, and it was not granted, yet he did not leave off praying for it; for men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Lu. 18:1), to pray without ceasing, and knock till the door be opened, He prayed *for* his wife; some read it *with* his wife.”<sup>9</sup>

“Though tried in a similar way to his father, he did not follow the same crooked policy; and if his faith in the Divine promise was less strong than that of Abraham, his conduct under the protracted trial was more praiseworthy. Twenty years *he* continued unblessed with offspring, whose seed was to be ‘as the stars.’ But in answer to their mutual prayers (1 Pet. 3:7), Rebekah was Divinely informed that she was to be the mother of twins, who should be the progenitors of two independent nations; that the descendants of the younger should be the more powerful, and subdue those of the other (Rom. 9:12; 2 Chr. 21:8). The protracted sterility of the mothers of the patriarchs, and other leading men amongst the Hebrew people, was a providential arrangement, designed to exercise faith and patience, to stimulate prayer, to inspire a conviction that the children born under extraordinary circumstances were gifts of God’s grace, and specially to foreshadow the miraculous birth of the Saviour.”<sup>10</sup>

*Israel & Edom* (Gen. 25:23) - “The oracle hardly brings comfort to Rebekah. This uterine struggle is but p 178 an anticipation of a much more difficult situation. It explains her pain, but perhaps it raises more questions than ever. If only Rebekah had known - but perhaps her ignorance is bliss - that it would take almost a millennium for at least the last part of the prophecy to be fulfilled. Not until the time of David do the Israelites (the younger) subjugate the Edomites (the older) - see 2 Sam. 8:12-14, especially v. 14b, ‘and all the Edomites became David’s servants.’”<sup>11</sup>

“A pre-intimation having been given to Abraham of the character and greatness of his posterity by Ishmael, the son of the bond-woman, it was a reasonable expectation that a similar prediction should be made concerning the offspring of Isaac, who was the heir of the promise. In neither case, however, did these prophecies refer to single individuals, so much as to people and nations springing from them. They were not verified in the personal experience of Isaac’s two sons, but in that of their respective descendants, who rose not only into two separate nations, but ‘two manner of people,’ widely differing in character, habits, and pursuits. Although nearly equal in the natural advantages of their situations, they were destined to run very dissimilar courses of national fortune; for though the posterity of the elder should delight in war and violence, they should have to bow in submission to that of the younger, who, moreover, should always enjoy the superiority in religious privileges and attainments.”<sup>12</sup>

“This revelation to Rebekah provides another in a long list of illustrations in which the younger brother replaces his older brother(s). One thinks of Isaac and Ishmael, Zerah and Perez (also twins), Joseph/Benjamin and their older brothers, Ephraim and Manasseh, David and his older brothers, Solomon and Adonijah. All of these bear witness to God’s gratuitous choice in which the factor in the choice is not age but God’s sovereign will.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 58. [Italics original.]

<sup>10</sup> David Brown, A. R. Fausset, and Robert Jamieson, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Genesis–Deuteronomy*, Vol. I. (London; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited, n.d.), 188. [Italics original.]

<sup>11</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 177-178.

<sup>12</sup> David Brown, A. R. Fausset, and Robert Jamieson, 189.

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, 177.

### *Jacob & Esau*

“It is doubtful if anyone would have called Esau a beautiful baby from this unflattering description which suggests he looked like a red, wooly sweater (even his name is close to the word for ‘hairy’!). And **Jacob’s name, which described his holding of his twin’s foot at birth, while it was related to the idea of God being at our heels, as a guard, came to mean someone who had a tendency to supplant, to trip, or to cheat. The twins had arrived on the scene and the scene would never be the same again.**”<sup>14</sup>

“Favouritism, partiality, rivalry, deceit, strife, - all might have been averted from this house, if only the declared and revealed counsel of God had been believed and acted upon.”<sup>15</sup>

“The ‘way of Cain’, Jude 11, is to bring the fruit of a cursed earth, without blood. Abel comes God’s way, accepted in the value of the lamb. Ishmael was born after the flesh while Isaac was by promise. Esau despised his birthright, but Jacob would not let go until he had the blessing.

Note the events in Esau’s life that underline this tendency.

*His birth:* The words Adam and Edom, are linked to the modern Hebrew *adam*, meaning red, and with the word for earth, *adamah*. He ‘came out red’, Gen. 25:25, says the record, and so we all are born, bearing the ‘image of the earthy’, 1 Cor. 15:49.

*His hunting:* Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David were shepherds. Our Lord, ‘that Great Shepherd of the sheep’, stated that He had come to give His life for the sheep. Beware of those, He said, who come to kill and destroy.

*His despising:* The man named Red traded his birthright for a bowl of red pottage. Just in case we miss the connection, the Spirit adds, ‘Therefore was his name called Edom’. Beware those earthy appetites; they always cost you dearly.

*His weeping:* Both boys are mentioned as recipients of Isaac’s blessing in Hebrews chapter 11, and Jacob has his own listing there, but Esau doesn’t make it until chapter 12. There he is remembered, not for his faith but for his failure, v. 17. Those who reject God’s blessing find out too late that their search for anything else to satisfy is all in vain.”<sup>16</sup>

Gen. 25:29-34 - “In a word, Esau despised the spiritual and chose the material. Jacob desired the spiritual. The majority of the men of the world agree with Esau and follow Him. We Christians agree with Jacob in desiring the spiritual.”<sup>17</sup>

“There is also a slight parallel with the story of the fall in Genesis 3. In both accounts there is a confrontation between the shrewd and the naive. In both passages the birthright is traded for food. And in both passages after the exchange, the narrative reports the development with p 447 a series of verbs in rapid succession. At the heart of each narrative is the dialogue that invites the naive to surrender the spiritual blessing for the satisfaction of the natural desires.”<sup>18</sup>

“In Hebrews 12:16, Esau is designated, ‘profane person,’ and coupled with a ‘fornicator.’ The appropriateness of the connection is apparent when we remember that this latter sin is used figuratively for unholy connections between the believer and the world; whilst the profane person is one who lives wholly for this world, and shuts God and His world out of his thoughts. Esau had not only done this but also had despised what was of God. Now when people go to the length of despising God and His blessing they perish, as is stated in Acts 13:41. In our day and in our land there are multitudes slipping into that great sin in regard to the Gospel, and they stand on the brink of destruction.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> D. Stuart Briscoe, *Genesis*, The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Vol. 1, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1987), 207. [Boldface mine.]

<sup>15</sup> Robert S. Candlish, *The Book of Genesis*, Vol. 1. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1868), 438.

<sup>16</sup> J. B. Nicholson Jr., “January 28th: Esau, the One Born First (Genesis 25:29–34; 27:1–10, 30–41),” in *Day by Day with Bible Characters*, ed. Ivan Steeds, Day by Day Series (West Glamorgan, UK: Precious Seed, 1999), 44. [Italics original.]

<sup>17</sup> F. B. Hole, *Genesis*; “(Extracted from *Scripture Truth* Vol. 36, 1948-51)”; electronic ed. accessed here: <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Pent/Genesis.html#a13>

<sup>18</sup> Ross, 446-447.

<sup>19</sup> Hole, *Genesis*; accessed here: <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Pent/Genesis.html#a14>

“Thus we learn what a profane person is, viz., **one who would like to hold both worlds, one who would like to enjoy the present without forfeiting his title to the future. This is by no means an uncommon case. It expresses to us the merely worldly professor, whose conscience has never felt the action of divine truth, and whose heart has never felt the influence of divine grace.**”<sup>20</sup>

### *Genesis 27*

“It is interesting to note that in the six scenes the family is never together: in the first it is Isaac and Esau; in the second, Rebekah and Jacob; in the third, Isaac and Jacob; in the fourth, Isaac and Esau; in the fifth, Rebekah and Jacob; and in the sixth, Isaac and Jacob. In fact, Jacob and Esau never meet in the story; nor do Rebekah and Esau. In four of the six scenes we find the parent with his or her favorite son.”<sup>21</sup>

Gen. 27:21 - “It wasn’t the best venison, it was a Chinese takeaway spiced up. Going by his sensations and his emotions, they all deceived him. He stands on the page of Scripture to be a warning to us because, from time to time, we all make that mistake, don’t we? Instead of going by the word of God, resting our faith in it, and being assured that we have the blessing, we start putting our faith in our feelings and in our sensations. At least some people who come to the Lord Jesus are sinners, and they seek salvation. They suddenly see what it is to trust the Saviour, and they trust him and get forgiveness of sins and the assurance that they have eternal life. So they get the blessing, and of course their hearts swell up, they feel full of joy, and some of them even shed tears. What a marvellous thing it is to be saved. Then, as the days and weeks go by, the sensations begin to go down, and the emotion goes down, and they don’t feel so full of joy. They say to themselves, ‘I don’t know, I don’t feel as wonderful as I did when I first came to the Lord. So what shall I do now?’ So they try to wind up the joy once more and wind up the feelings. They are making the same mistake as Isaac. Instead of depending on God’s word, they’re depending on feelings and sensations. You know, feelings can deceive you horribly. Our blessing doesn’t depend on having marvellous feelings. How can we be sure we’ve got the blessing? By starting the other way round and believing God’s word. And if God says it, then we have it, and we let the feelings take care of themselves. We need to take notice of that because some people organize enormous, great meetings, and what they’re doing instead of preaching the word, is working up people’s feelings and getting them excited and feeling they’re having such a wonderful time. But that could be merely feelings, emotion and sensation, couldn’t it? That’s not a solid thing. If you want real blessing in life, the way is not to put your trust in feelings. The way is to take God’s word and expound his word until people’s faith is in God’s word. If they believe God, they have the blessing that God says they have. If it works itself out in feelings, that’s marvellous. If the feelings subside and don’t come back, well what does that matter? If God says it, it is true, and when we pass over from this world to the next, it won’t be our feelings that count. It will be God’s immovable word.”<sup>22</sup>

The verb “Bless” appears in some form 22 times in Gen. 27-28; the noun, “blessing” appears 7 times.

God’s discipline - “We see how God maintains His purpose and at the same time exercises His disciplinary government. Everybody suffered; Esau and Isaac, and finally both Jacob and Rebekah, since the parting lasted for many years, rather than ‘a few days,’ as she anticipated. Further, Jacob went forth to be deceived by others and Rebekah was left to the unwelcome society of the daughters of Heth. She dwelt upon her weariness as a reason and an excuse for sending Jacob off to her brother, but doubtless the discord between them was very real, and she was left to face it without her favourite son.”<sup>23</sup>

### *Jacob*

“What is Jacob about? Well, he’s not so much another repeat lesson in how we are to be justified. In Jacob, we meet the businessman. Suppose you are a very wealthy businessman. You’re sitting in your great office,

<sup>20</sup> C. H. Mackintosh, *Genesis to Deuteronomy: Notes on the Pentateuch*. (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1972), 115. [Boldface mine.]

<sup>21</sup> Ross, 473.

<sup>22</sup> David W. Gooding, *What it Means to be a Believer: Hebrews 11 Defines the Term*. Myrtlefield House Transcripts. (Belfast, NI, UK: Myrtlefield Trust, 2018), 50.

<sup>23</sup> Hole, *Genesis*; electronic ed. accessed here: <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Pent/Genesis.html#a14>

and in comes a poor man who has failed in business. He asks you to buy a painting that he has because this is his hope of getting some money. You go and look at the painting and see at once that it's a Renoir worth a million pounds. The poor man who's about to be bankrupt says, 'What will you give me for it?' Would you say, 'I'll give you ten thousand pounds?' 'Well, that's how business works.' Is it not a matter that concerns our Christian faith? In Jacob we learn the lesson about whether God minds how we conduct our business life.

Jacob had robbed Esau of the birthright and escaped, and he'd made good. He had two wives, and their handmaids as well, and he could no longer stay with Laban, his father-in-law, because all the shops in that part of the world were 'Jacob's shops'. He'd managed to transfer most of his father-in-law's balance to his own bank account. In the end his brothers-in-law couldn't stick it anymore, and he had to run for his life. So there he was, running for his life to escape Laban, and he hears the news that Esau is coming. What now?

This was the occasion when he wrestled with the angel (see Gen 32). You see, God blessed Jacob; but if Jacob thought that the way to blessing was by stealing and perverse business deals, he had yet to be taught. When he heard that Esau was coming, being the brave man he was, Jacob sent his wives across first, and there was no end of sheep and stock and so on. As he thought about what would happen, there came a man who wrestled with him until the daylight (v. 24). It was God incarnate of course, breaking Jacob, touching his thigh so he could no longer wrestle and had to learn to depend. He was given the new name Israel and came back to Canaan lame. There his sons committed unspeakable atrocities—the return of Israel in modern times has likewise not been without its complications, in the way that the Israelis have treated the local population.

Jacob, therefore, is not just a repeat of justification by faith, but how true faith in God should be applied to our business lives, our marriages and so forth. Like Jacob, we too may have to face what we've done in the past, regrettable though that might be."<sup>24</sup>

“The truth is, the question between them was, which should be heir to the blessings promised in the covenant with Abraham. This Jacob desired, and Esau despised; and in despising blessings of so sacred a nature, and that for a morsel of meat, he was guilty of profaneness. The spirit of his language was, 'I cannot live upon promises: give me something to eat and drink, for to-morrow I die.' Such is the spirit of unbelief in every age; and thus it is that poor deluded, souls continue to despise things distant and heavenly, and prefer to them the momentary gratifications of flesh and sense.”<sup>25</sup>

*Jacob at Bethel* (Gen. 28:10-22) - “Doubtless Jacob was familiar with God, the Almighty, who dwelt in heaven, but at Bethel Jacob discovered something remarkable and new about God. The vision led him to exclaim: 'Surely the Lord is in this place'; that is, God was right beside him - not at the top of the ladder in heaven but at the bottom of the ladder, right where Jacob was resting. God was, so to speak, running the universe from where Jacob was. The remaining imagery supports this idea, for the gate of an ancient city was not simply its entrance; it was the place where the local government officials sat and held their meetings to manage the affairs of the city. For instance, Lot sat in the gate of Sodom; that is, he was an official in the local administration. The gate of heaven, then, was the place from which God's angelic ministers received their orders, carried them out, and returned for more. **In other words, Jacob found himself at God's administrative center. In this kind of context the term 'house of God' is likely to carry the connotation, not so much of God's dwelling, but of God's government. Just as in the UK, when we speak of the House of Windsor we don't mean the palace in which our queen resides; we mean her government, her reigning house. God speaks to Jacob and, impressing upon him his nearness and his willingness to be with the man, he promises to guide him into his future. Jacob, ever out for a deal, tries to bargain with God: if God will do this, that, and the other for him, then God will be Jacob's God. It seems a**

<sup>24</sup> David W. Gooding, *Excavating the Foundations One Introductory Study on the Structure of Genesis*. A Myrtlefield House Transcript. “This text has been edited from a transcript of a talk given by David Gooding in Apsley Hall, Belfast, N. Ireland on 1 September 2013.” (Belfast, NI: Myrtlefield Trust, 2016), 7-8; electronic ed. accessed here: <https://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com/sermons/excavating-the-foundations>

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Fuller, “Discourse XXXIV: Abraham's marriage with Keturah, and death. - Ishmael's posterity and death.—the birth and characters of Esau and Jacob,” in *Expository Discourse On The Book Of Genesis*, in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Expositions - Miscellaneous*, ed. Joseph Belcher, Vol. 3. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 104.

pretty inadequate response, possibly hinting at a desire deep within Jacob to keep God at arm's length, perhaps to give himself more wriggle room. As we know only too well, the human heart is like that. Even when God appears and offers his guidance and direction, and we know it is real, there may linger that deceitful, essentially devilish idea that God will cramp our style in some way. In the years to come Jacob would have to learn, often the hard way, that God was overwhelmingly for him. God would direct him and yet treat him with dignity as a responsible human being. God would educate him as to the nature of his rule, and some of that education would be painful. Jacob was to be the leader of a nation with a unique role in the world. As we now follow him and his family, we shall find ample evidence of the complexity of his relationship with the Lord."<sup>26</sup>

Gen. 29:25 - "In the full light of day, Jacob looked and saw that the woman with whom he had consummated his marriage was Leah, the unattractive older sister of Rachel. Trembling with anger, Jacob went to Laban and said, 'What is this you have done to me?' Laban replied calmly that he should have known that it was customary in their land for the older girl to be married before the younger girl. If Jacob was committed to work for an additional seven years, he added, he'd be happy to throw Rachel in as part of the deal. Stung and trapped, Jacob submitted to seven more years in order to marry Rachel as well as Leah."<sup>30</sup><sup>27</sup>

*Jacob in Padan Aram* - "Into the house of Laban he was received with an effusive welcome, but only to find himself there **in the hands of a man who was his equal in duplicity.**"<sup>28</sup>

Gen. 30 - "No reflecting person can read this chapter without being disgusted with polygamy, and thankful for that dispensation which has restored the original law of nature, and with it true conjugal felicity."<sup>29</sup>

Gen. 31:13 - "In calling him back to the land of promise, God revealed Himself to him as 'the God of Bethel,' reminding him of the pillar he anointed and the vow that he made. Thus **he was called back to the beginning of his direct dealings with God. Such is ever God's way with His people. We may wander away but back to the original spot, whence we departed, we have to come. The point of departure proves to be the place of recovery.**"<sup>30</sup>

Gen. 32:30-32 – "Jacob's early life was one long wrestling match, but there are four incidents in particular that we ought to find instructive because we, too, are born wrestling 'against flesh and blood', Eph. 6:12, and need to learn, as Jacob did, how to do battle in the spiritual realm. We must discover that 'the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds', 2 Cor. 10:4. Jacob lost his first wrestling match in the womb; his brother emerged first. Jacob wrestled then for the birthright and the blessing. In the first case, he took advantage of Esau's carnal desire for food and, in the second, took advantage of his father's hunger (Isaac loved Esau because he loved his venison, Gen. 25:28). In both instances Jacob seemed to have won. Esau fumes, 'Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing', 27:36. But, as in the womb, Jacob's wrestling was of no avail. Fleeing for his life, he had to leave behind the birthright's role of family leader and the double portion of the blessing. Once more Jacob wrestled, and this time he prevailed. Hosea links his first and last wrestlings, 'He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he . . . prevailed . . .', Hos. 12:3-4. Jacob wrestled the Lord that night ('I have seen God face to face', Gen. 32:30). And Jacob

<sup>26</sup> John C. Lennox, *Joseph: A Story of Love, Hate, Slavery, Power, and Forgiveness*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 35-36. [Boldface mine.]

<sup>27</sup> 30 Why didn't Jacob simply refuse to go along with this bold, obvious swindle? Again, Robert Alter's insights are invaluable. When Jacob asks, "Why have you deceived me?" the Hebrew word is the same one used in chapter 27 to describe what Jacob did to Isaac. Alter then quotes an ancient rabbinical commentator who imagines the conversation the next day between Jacob and Leah. Jacob says to Leah: "I called out 'Rachel' in the dark and you answered. Why did you do that to me?" And Leah says to him, "Your father called out 'Esau' in the dark and you answered. Why did you do that to him?" His fury dies on his lips. He sees what it is like to be manipulated and deceived, and he meekly complies with Laban's offer. Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters Timothy*. (New York: Penguin, 2016), 32.

<sup>28</sup> Hole, *Genesis*; accessed here: <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Pent/Genesis.html#a14> [Boldface mine.]

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Fuller, "Sermon XXXIX: Jacob in Haran," in *Expository Discourses On The Book Of Genesis in The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Expositions—Miscellaneous*, ed. Joseph Belcher, Vol. 3. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 121.

<sup>30</sup> Hole, *Genesis*; electronic ed. accessed here: <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Pent/Genesis.html#a14> [Boldface mine.]

prevailed, not because God didn't have the *power* to subdue him, but because He didn't have the *will* to do it. Yet Jacob did not receive the blessing by wrestling. God showed him the weakness of his flesh by touching his thigh, and when Jacob stopped wrestling and could only cling, at that moment the blessing came; see 2 Cor. 12:7–10.”<sup>31</sup>

“Twenty years or so have passed since Jacob's outward-bound journey. Some people learn nothing in twenty years. Jacob has learned humility, tenacity, godly fear, reliance upon God's covenantal promises, and how to pray. None of this means he is so paralyzed by fear that he does nothing but retreat into prayer. Rather, it means he does what he can, while believing utterly that salvation is of the Lord. By the time the sun rises, he may walk with a limp, but he is a stronger and better man.”<sup>32</sup>

Gen. 33 - “Wedged between chapters recording cowardice, fear and distrust on the one hand and a sexual violation that led to a cold-blooded massacre on a large scale on the other hand, we find this literary oasis filled with respect, affection, generosity and peace! After the troubled history recorded in the previous chapters, we might think this a different book were it not for the fact that the leading personalities have the same names: Jacob, Esau, Leah, Rachel and Joseph. It is undoubtedly the same story.”<sup>33</sup>

Gen. 34 - “The whole of Genesis 34 is occupied with the unhappy results that sprang from the lowering of Jacob's separation from the world, which we have just noted. Its effects for evil were not manifested in Jacob himself but in his family. The tide of evil runs in two broad channels: violence and corruption. They are first mentioned in Genesis 6:12-13: they are personified in ‘the evil man’ and ‘the strange woman’ of Proverbs 2:12, 16. The world is just the same today; and how often we have to hang our heads in shame and confess that a bit of world-bordering on our part, as Christian parents, has led to sorrow and even disaster in our families.”<sup>34</sup>

“Spiritual lessons emerge from this sad story, the first being that believers have a responsibility towards their families, not to expose them to wrong environments or pursuits. Again, for those who wish to find a partner for life, Shechem is an example of how not to go about it—initially to be governed by his passions and so take what might have been his legitimately, if he had gone about it in God's time and according to His word.”<sup>35</sup>

Gen. 35 – Back to Bethel - “A clear view of God in Christ Jesus and a vivid sense of Jesus' love is a sweet reward for broken idols and Bethel reformations.”<sup>36</sup>

“The first verse of Genesis 35 shows us how God intervened when things had reached this sorry pass. He called Jacob back to the place where first God had made Himself known to him. There he was to dwell and there his altar was to be. At Bethel, as we saw in Genesis 28, God declared what He would be for and to Jacob, without raising any question as to Jacob's response or behaviour. Now God is always true to Himself and to His word. Before the giving of the law through Moses, God was dealing with these patriarchs on the basis of His promises in grace, and those promises abide. God deals with us according to grace in the Gospel today. Hence we read of, ‘this grace in which we stand’ (Rom. 5:2), which is equivalent to saying that our dwelling before God is in His grace or favour. As we dwell in the sense of His favour so shall we be led to approach Him in the spirit of worship, and to have done with all that is displeasing to Him.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> J. B. Nicholson Jr., “January 31st: Jacob, the Wrestler (Genesis 32:1–32),” in *Day by Day with Bible Characters*, ed. Ivan Steeds, Day by Day Series (West Glamorgan, UK: Precious Seed, 1999), 47. [Italics original.]

<sup>32</sup> D. A. Carson, “Jan. 31,” in *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word.*, Vol. 1. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Jim Cochrane, “March 10th: Behold, Esau Came (Genesis 33:1–20),” in *Day by Day: Paradise to the Promised Land*, ed. John Bennett, Day by Day Series (Fareham, UK: Precious Seed, 2007), 88.

<sup>34</sup> Hole, *Genesis*; electronic ed. accessed here: <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Pent/Genesis.html#a14>

<sup>35</sup> Howard Coles, “February 5th: Shechem (Genesis 34),” in *Day by Day with Bible Characters*, ed. Ivan Steeds, Day by Day Series (West Glamorgan, UK: Precious Seed, 1999), 52.

<sup>36</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “Family Reformation; Or, Jacob's Second Visit to Bethel,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, Vol. 24. Undated. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1878), 58.

<sup>37</sup> Hole, *Genesis*; electronic ed. accessed here: <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Pent/Genesis.html#a14>

Gen. 35:16-39 - “To every matter there is a bright as well as a dark side. Rachel was overwhelmed with the sorrow of her own travail and death; Jacob, though weeping the mother’s loss, could see the mercy of the child’s birth. It is well for us if, while the flesh mourns over trials, our faith triumphs in divine faithfulness. Samson’s lion yielded honey, and so will our adversities, if rightly considered. The stormy sea feeds multitudes with its fishes; the wild wood blooms with beautiful florets; the stormy wind sweeps away the pestilence, and the biting frost loosens the soil. Dark clouds distil bright drops, and black earth grows gay flowers. A vein of good is to be found in every mine of evil. Sad hearts have peculiar skill in discovering the most disadvantageous point of view from which to gaze upon a trial; if there were only one slough in the world, they would soon be up to their necks in it, and if there were only one lion in the desert they would hear it roar. About us all there is a tinge of this wretched folly, and we are apt, at times, like Jacob, to cry, ‘All these things are against me.’ Faith’s way of walking is to cast all care upon the Lord, and then to anticipate good results from the worst calamities. Like Gideon’s men, she does not fret over the broken pitcher, but rejoices that the lamp blazes forth the more. Out of the rough oyster-shell of difficulty she extracts the rare pearl of honour, and from the deep ocean-caves of distress she uplifts the priceless coral of experience. When her flood of prosperity ebbs, she finds treasures hid in the sands; and when her sun of delight goes down, she turns her telescope of hope to the starry promises of heaven. When death itself appears, faith points to the light of resurrection beyond the grave, thus making our dying Benoni to be our living Benjamin.”<sup>38</sup>

### *Joseph*

“Joseph comes at the end. What a story it is, as poor old Jacob comes down to Canaan to get the food necessary to save his life. He’s introduced by his glorious son Joseph to the pharaoh, and Jacob blesses Pharaoh. The lesser is blessed by the greater, you know, so says Scripture (see Heb 7:7). Pharaoh was blessed by Jacob because of Jacob’s son, Joseph. The solution to our world’s problems will be found in Jacob’s Son, our blessed Lord, our Joseph who is yet to rule. In these scattered remarks there might be an odd thought among them that would encourage you in your excavations in the book of Genesis.”<sup>39</sup>

“*Young Yosef: Love and Hate (37)*: As has been the pattern with the Avraham and Yaakov cycles, the opening chapter here introduces **the key themes of the entire story. These include the father’s love, the power of words, dreams, ‘ill’ as a key word (here denoting evil intent but eventually encompassing misfortune, among other concepts), and of course, the brothers’ hatred, which at first glance is the motivating force behind the action.**

But the initial blame for what happens clearly lies with the father (vv. 3–4), and is made unbearable by Yosef’s own behavior. In point of fact he is largely responsible for his own downfall, bearing tales about his brothers (v. 2) even before Yaakov’s preference for him is noted. His insistence on telling his dreams to his brothers must be galling, particularly the second time (v. 9), coming as it does after the report that ‘they hated him still more for his dreams’ (v. 8).

**The key word of the chapter, not surprisingly, is ‘brother,’ culminating in Yehuda’s ironic words (v. 27): ‘let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother . . . .’ Shortly afterward Yosef, their ‘(own) flesh,’ is sold into slavery and probable death.**<sup>40</sup>

“The following outline summarizes the literary structure.

#### I. Cycle one: Testing of Joseph (37–41).

After God elects Joseph to administer his program in exile, two rounds of testing reveal that Joseph is faithful.

A. Election and rejection: Through dreams God elects the faithful Joseph to be the ruler, but he is envied, hated, and sold into slavery by his brothers (37).

<sup>38</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “March 8, p.m.,” in *Morning and Evening: Daily Readings*. Complete and unabridged; New modern edition. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006.)

<sup>39</sup> Gooding, *Excavating the Foundations*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; a New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes* (New York: Word Publishing, 1995), mg. [Boldface mine; italics original.]

1. Evil: Destruction of life through jealousy (cf. Cain), and deception of the father with the blood of the kid (cf. chap. 27).
  2. Good: Faithful servant of the father, faithful servant in Egypt.
  - B. Interlude—rebuke of Judah: Through a series of unusual circumstances, evil is judged and righteousness triumphs, showing in Judah that the program of election cannot be set aside (38).
  - C. Faithfulness and suffering: Through another period of testing Joseph shows himself to be faithful (39–40).
    1. Faithful servant of Potiphar, refusing temptation to evil.p 87
    2. Once again falsely accused, with his cloak as evidence.
    3. Once again thrown into prison after faithful service.
    4. Faithful steward in prison, retaining faith in the promise of God (revealed in his dreams) by interpreting dreams in spite of the circumstances.
  - D. Fulfillment of destiny: Having remained faithful in spite of envy, hatred, temptation, and enslavement, Joseph rises to power (cf. the end of chap. 38) (41).
    1. Means (as a test): Pharaoh’s two dreams.
    2. Interpretation of the dreams: Good and evil years.
    3. Instruction: Live wisely according to what God’s plans are.
- II. Cycle two: Testing of the brothers (42–45).

Whereas Joseph’s tests were designed to demonstrate his faithfulness, the testing of the brothers was necessitated by past unfaithfulness. The point was that participation in God’s program of blessing cannot permit evil (i.e., acts and attitudes that destroy life).

- A. First test (to set up the second): Will good overcome evil? (42).
  1. Joseph accuses them of spying (what they had done to him) and demands Benjamin as proof of their truthfulness.
  2. Joseph puts money in their sacks and imprisons one of them (as they had done to him) to raise their consciousness about evil.
- B. Second test (completion): Will they preserve life? (43).
  1. Joseph gives them all good things but shows favoritism to Benjamin, causing envy in the brothers.
  2. Joseph puts the cup in Benjamin’s sack to give them the opportunity to abandon their brother, as they had abandoned him.
- C. Aftermath (44–45).
  1. Good triumphs over evil now, as Judah magnanimously stands for Benjamin (he had learned much in chap. 38).
  2. Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and explains the work of God in delivering his people.

The last several chapters of the book may be considered transitional chapters. The family moved to Egypt, the names of the family were entered in the record, the family settled in Goshen by Pharaoh’s goodness, the nation enjoyed the protection of Joseph’s wise administration, the blessings of the family were carefully recorded, as were, finally, the p 88 burial in Canaan and the promise of divine visitation. The book ends with a promise of future blessings.

The repetition of the theme of exile in the Joseph and Jacob cycles displays a tension theologically. If evil threatens to destroy the ongoing work of God to bless the world and if it meets with disciplinary acts and with sojournings away from the fertile land, how should the people of God conduct themselves? And is the promise of God really in jeopardy?

Naturally God protects and delivers his people. Laban twice could not do “good or evil” to the covenant people (24:50; 31:29). And when God predicted the Egyptian exile (15:13–14), he ensured Israel’s safety. Ultimately, the covenant is safe because it is the Lord’s covenant.

These narratives also teach the covenanters how to live in bondage when they know that the promise of God belongs to them, for participation in the blessings of the covenant requires obedience. They are to do what is good and shun what is evil, never losing sight of their destiny. They are to fear God, love the brethren, forgive one another, and make provision for the future. In short, the way of wisdom begins to surface in these stories, a wisdom that the parents in the garden mistakenly sought through disobedience. It cannot be developed by doing evil, for evil undermines and destroys God’s good creation.



It takes such wisdom to endure this evil world while waiting for the fulfillment of the promises. God had promised the blessings of seed, land, and dominion. Fertility in the family and increase in their possessions began with the patriarchs. And now with Joseph there was a beginning in the expectation of dominion. But the servant who comes to such prominence must be a faithful steward of the covenant, one who resists evil and clings to that which is good.”<sup>41</sup>

“The Joseph narrative fits well into the Egyptian cultural milieu of the early to mid-second millennium BC. At the beginning of the story, Joseph was brought to Egypt and sold there by Midianites (Gen. 37:28). Egypt had a large caste of foreign slaves at any given period in its ancient history, and many arrived by way of a thriving slave trade. In fact, so many slaves came from Asia (i.e., Canaan, Hatti, and Mesopotamia) that the Egyptian word for ‘Asiatic’ became synonymous with ‘slave.’ Joseph was sold for twenty shekels of silver, a common price for a male slave between five and twenty years of age during the first half of the second millennium BC.<sup>37</sup> After Joseph was falsely accused of molesting Potiphar’s wife, he was placed in prison. Imprisonment was a punishment unknown in the law codes of the ancient Near East, including in biblical legislation. However, it is well attested in Egyptian documents, and therefore, the story accurately echoes the culture of ancient Egypt. The story line of the episode regarding Potiphar’s wife is not unique in the literature of the ancient Near East. This ‘spurned seductress’ motif, in fact, occurs in ancient Egypt in a text called ‘The Tale of the Two Brothers.’<sup>38</sup> One brother accuses the other of forcing a sexual relationship on his wife. The wife, in reality, is the deceitful one, and she blames the situation on her brother-in-law, who, like Joseph, refused her advances. The story ends differently, however, as the husband kills both his brother and, after discovering the truth, his wife.<sup>39</sup> After a long term of imprisonment, Joseph is freed and elevated to a high position in the Egyptian government through his God-given ability to interpret dreams, most importantly the dreams of Pharaoh. Through interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph prophesied a coming time of great famine in Egypt, which allowed the Egyptians to prepare for the disaster. As I note elsewhere, ‘At least as early as the Middle Kingdom the Egyptians believed that dreams were a means used by the gods to reveal the future to humans. In fact, the Egyptians collected written dream omens. The structure and content of these dream omens are quite similar to the dream accounts in the story of Joseph. It is tempting to think that Joseph was really defeating the Egyptians on their own ground.’<sup>40</sup> Pharaoh then places Joseph ‘over the land of Egypt’ (Gen. 41:41). He was likely the vizier in Egypt, whose duties are spelled out in a document from the Tomb of Rekhmire from the mid-second millennium BC. The vizier was the ‘grand steward of all Egypt,’ and all the activities of the nation were under his purview. Rekhmire was vizier under Thutmosis III, and he served as overseer of the treasury, chief justice, police chief, war minister, secretary of agriculture, secretary of the interior, and other positions. Aside from Pharaoh, the vizier was often the most powerful leader in Egypt. The author of Genesis spends an extraordinary amount of time discussing the life of Joseph. It can properly be described as a novella, a ‘short long story’ or a ‘long short story.’ Why does the writer give so much space (Genesis 37, 39–50) to it? His overarching purpose seems to be to demonstrate how all Israel ended up in the land of Egypt. This, then, lays the groundwork for God’s greatest redemptive act of the Old Testament, the Lord’s deliverance of Israel out of the land of darkness and his bringing the people to the Land of Promise. When all is said and done, it should be clear that the vast majority of the patriarchal narrative material fits nicely into the first half of the second millennium BC. The details appearing in these narratives that perhaps reflect a later date— such as the mentioning of the Philistines (e.g., Gen. 21:32)— are, in the grand scheme of things, very few in number and merely represent an updating of the material by the biblical author.<sup>41</sup>”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Ross, 86-88.

<sup>42</sup> Ftnt. #37: This is the same price as in the Code of Hammurabi, laws 116, 214, and 252. It was written in the eighteenth century BC.

Ftnt. #38: John A. Wilson, “The Story of the Two Brothers,” in Pritchard, *ANET*, 23–25.

Ftnt. #39: See Currid, *Against the Gods*, 65–73.

Ftnt. #40: Currid and Barrett, *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas*, 75. The most important collection of dream omens from Egypt is the Chester Beatty Papyrus III, which may date as early as the nineteenth century BC. See Alan H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, 3rd series, Chester Beatty Gift* (London: British Museum, 1935).

Ftnt. #41: For further development of this idea, see Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 368–72.

John Currid, “Genesis,” in Miles V. Van Pelt, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), Kindle Loc. 1441-1474.

“But Genesis 37–50 is much more than a piece of dramatic literature; for when you penetrate deeper, you discover a story abounding with profound theological implications. The hand of God is evident in every scene, ruling and overruling the decisions people make; and in the end, God builds a hero, saves a family, and creates a nation that will bring blessing to the whole world. Behind this story is the heart of the covenant-making God, who always keeps His promises.

For the Christian believer, there’s a third level to the story; for Joseph is one of the richest illustrations of Jesus Christ found in the Old Testament. Joseph is like Jesus in that he was beloved by his father and obedient to his will; hated and rejected by his own brethren and sold as a slave; falsely accused and unjustly punished; finally elevated from the place of suffering to a powerful throne, thus saving his people from death. The major difference, of course, is that Joseph was only reported to be dead, while Jesus Christ did give His life on the cross and was raised from the dead in order to save us.<sup>2</sup> Genesis 37 unfolds the destructive dynamics of a family that knew the true and living God and yet sinned against Him and each other by what they said and did. The presence of Joseph in the home didn’t *create* problems so much as *reveal* them. Consider the destructive forces at work in this family, forces that God in His grace overruled for their good. Where sin abounded, grace abounded more (Rom. 5:20).<sup>3</sup>”<sup>43</sup>

“Those who try to do good *must keep before their minds the providential care of God over them*. Nothing can happen in this world without His permission. There is no such thing in reality as chance, accident, or luck. ‘The very hairs of their heads are all numbered.’ The path of duty may sometimes lead them into great danger. Health and life may seem to be perilled, if they go forward. Let them take comfort in the thought that all around them is in God’s hand. Their bodies, their souls, their characters are all in His safe keeping. No disease can seize them—no hand can hurt them, unless He allows. They may say boldly to every fearful thing they meet with, ‘Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.’”<sup>44</sup>

“When Joseph exchanged a prison for the chief honour and government of Egypt, the advantage of his exaltation was felt by those who little deserved it (Gen. 45:4-5.) His brethren hated, and had conspired to kill him. And though he was preserved from death, they were permitted to sell him for a bondservant. He owed his servitude, imprisonment, and sufferings to them; and they were afterwards indebted to him for their lives, subsistence, honour, and comfort; God in a wonderful manner over-ruling their evil conduct for future good to themselves. Thus Jesus was despised, rejected, and sold; and he was actually slain. But he arose, and ascended. The man of sorrows took possession of the throne of glory; and not for himself only: his honour is the source of happiness to those who were once his enemies, and rebellious against him. For the sake of such he lived and died. For their sakes he lives and reigns. He fought, conquered, and triumphed over their enemies. As their representative, he received gifts to bestow upon them: such gifts as their necessities required, derived from the relation he was pleased p 325 to stand in to them, and from the value and dignity of his engagements on their behalf: such gifts as he alone could communicate, and which alone could restore them to the favour of God, and revive his image in their hearts, so as to make it suitable to his holiness and truth for the Lord God to return to his polluted temples, and to dwell in them and among them.”<sup>45</sup>

“Thus lived and died Joseph, the son of Jacob, a man . . . whose inflexible constancy in the hour of temptation and adversity, whose unaffected simplicity, incorruptible integrity, and fervent piety in his season of prosperity and power, have marked him out as one of the greatest examples for admiration and

<sup>43</sup> <sup>2</sup> While it’s true that we have no New Testament authorization for calling Joseph a “type” of Jesus Christ, yet there are so many parallels between Jesus and Joseph that the evidence can’t be ignored. The fact that some people have carried this to an extreme shouldn’t prevent us from honestly examining the text and looking for our Lord (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). Only two places in the New Testament mention Joseph: Stephen’s address (Acts 7:9–16; Heb. 11:21–22).

<sup>3</sup> As Romans 6:1–2 makes clear, Romans 5:20 isn’t an excuse for sin; because those who sin suffered for what they do, even if God does overrule their disobedience for ultimate good, Joseph’s brothers suffered more for their sins than Joseph did from their hatred or the consequences of their evil deeds.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Authentic*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1997), 78.

<sup>44</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 104. [Italics original.]

<sup>45</sup> John Newton, “Sermon XXIX: Gifts Received For The Rebellious,” in *Messiah: Fifty Expository Discourses in The Works of John Newton*, Vol. 4, ed. Richard Cecil. (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1824), 324-325.

imitation which the Bible contains. As a son, a brother, a servant, a father, or a ruler, he was equally faithful, generous, and affectionate. To the sagacity of the statesman he added the penetration of the prophet, the firmness of the believer, and the purity of the saint.”<sup>46</sup>

“He could have had his tomb in the Westminster Abby of the time, but no, he said they were to take his bones to Canaan. He said, ‘God will surely visit you and take you up out of Egypt and bring you, at last, back to Canaan’ (Gen 50:24). In saying that, Joseph gave evidence that he had not only maintained his devotion, but he had also maintained his hope . . .”<sup>47</sup>

“Here was Egypt, mighty Egypt, the leading political power in the Middle East in those days, if not the world. To say to Egypt that the future didn’t lie with them, but rather with this little, tiny, not much more than an extended family and tribe, Israel, must have seemed absurd beyond everything. Joseph believed the hope that God had set before him, and we, with our hindsight, can see the point of it, can’t we? Joseph’s hope has already been justified. Ancient Egypt crumbled to the dust but that tiny little nation that was called Israel, Abraham’s seed, although remaining, as far as nations were concerned, comparatively small but, oh, the wonderful thing that has happened! Abraham’s seed has turned out to be not merely Jews born physically from him; Abraham’s seed has turned out to be nothing less than the Messiah—God incarnate. The future was indeed with Abraham and his seed. And I’ll tell you what, Joseph is aloft where he is now and he’s clapping his hands with glee. He made the right decision. His name might have been simply noted in the old, musty, fusty records of some museum, but instead it stands on the pages of holy Scripture, connected with God’s central plan not only for earth, but for the whole universe. Joseph made his choice, and so must we. The future of the world, ladies and gentlemen, does not lie with America or Dublin or London or Bonn or Moscow. The future of the world lies with Abraham and his seed, and pre-eminently with his seed, that is Jesus Christ our Lord. Though men gave him a cross, p 32

Jesus shall reign where’er the sun  
does its successive journeys run,  
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
till moons shall wax and wane no more.<sup>2</sup>

The mark of true faith is our decision, once again renewed, surely, as we consider these things, as to with what future we cast in our lot. Because your concept of the future, if it is real and genuine, will determine what your ambitions are, what your choices are, what your motivations are, what will be the goals you will set before you in life, and what will be your great objectives.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> T. Boston Johnstone, *Analysis of the Book of Genesis*. (London: John Heywood, 1884), 159.

<sup>47</sup> Gooding, *What it Means to be a Believer*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> 2 Isaac Watts, ‘Jesus shall reign where’er the sun,’ 1719. Gooding, *What it Means to be a Believer*, 31-32.