

# From a person to a people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, is God or are people in control of history?

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## So much more going on here than first apparent

- Not just a retelling of Bible stories that if you heard any growing up—e.g. Joseph and his coat of many colors, Jacob and angels, the family of Jacob moving to Egypt....
- But if pay attention and in some ways, step back and view them as a whole, in the stories of these people there are some incredibly significant lessons on the interplay of the Sovereignty of God where He is in control of everything and human free will where we are free to make choices.
- In other words, how does God being in charge fit in with the choices we make?
- Are they really free choices or is our every action determined?

## Review and Overview

- **First part of Genesis—Four major events**
- **Involved all of humanity at the time**
- Creation
- Fall
- Flood
- Division of people (Babel)
- **A mnemonic from Walk Through the Bible: Creation, Fall, Flood, Nation**
- **Second part of Genesis—Four major people**
- **Narrows the focus to one people—that will then become a nation**
- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Joseph

## Important to remember: God's focus on Israel doesn't mean forgetting

- The remainder of the OT focuses on the nation of Israel, which we will see formed in this lesson
- They are the descendants of Abraham through whom God said all the nations of the earth would be blessed, e.g. in the coming Savior, Jesus
- Also, they were the ones entrusted with God's Word
- But that does not mean God does not care about or is not working in the rest of the world
- We saw how Job, who was not a Jew, was commended for his faith in God and we talked about how there will be stories throughout the OT about those outside the Jewish faith who come to know the true God
- Romans 1 reiterates that all people innately know about

God and are accountable to him

- But to tell his story clearly to the world God chose one people and that is what we will focus on today

## This story has 2 plot lines

- **LINE #1:** God's plan – ultimately salvation for all the earth
- **Line #2:** Human lives that carried out his plan



## How they work together

- Like an ocean liner—the direction is certain, the route is set
- The Captain is in charge
- It's his ship, HIS word is law
- But within the ship the passengers given quite a bit of freedom
- Individual actions do not affect the final destination—that is determined by the captain—but .....

## Individual decisions greatly affect the traveler's time on the ship

- There is a crew with assigned tasks and if they don't do them, things don't go well
- Also, each passenger responsible for his or her actions, his or her attitude and based on that, what they get or don't get out of the trip
- There is individual freedom whether they are a helpful part of the crew, dead weight, a bore or someone thrown in the brig
- They can't change the destination of the ship, but their actions greatly affect their experience of the journey

## Not a perfect analogy, but useful

- God will work out his plan of salvation for the world—that's the destination of cruise ship **Earth**
- He chose a people, Israel in OT; Church in NT (the Crew perhaps) to:
  - **Entrust with his Word**
    - Spoken by his prophets, verified by signs and prophecies
  - **Model his Worship**
    - Which we will see formed in our next section of the Bible, Exodus-Deuteronomy
  - **To be his Witness**
    - When followed him, blessed, when failed, disciplined
    - Individual experiences and times varied tremendously
- Through these actions all the earth is to be blessed –
- That was the plan, though his chosen people didn't and don't always do their job
- Let's now look at how they came to be

## Where our story happens

Never forget the importance of true history taking place in

identifiable geography

### Let's now look at the lives of the "Patriarchs"

- The Founding Father's of the Jewish people, often described in the term "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"
- Joseph in our lesson also as he is responsible for saving the nation from starvation
- Review: **Abraham**: life of trust, moved to Canaan, trusted for a son, passed God's test to sacrifice Isaac
- Sarah dies, Abraham buys the cave of Machpelah for a burial place

### Life goes on.....

- Abraham marries Keturah
  - Had other sons, gave them gifts and sent them away
- One was Midian
- Where Moses fled from Egypt, where God spoke to him
- His wife from there, father called Jethro or Reuel meaning "friend of God"
- He was "a priest of Midian" also described as a "Kenite"
- **Exodus 8:9** And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.<sup>10</sup> Jethro said, *blessed* be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. <sup>11</sup> Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods. . . <sup>12</sup> And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God.
- Counsels Moses to train other leaders
- His son, Hobab, serves as a guide through the wilderness
- Larger group of Midianites with the Moabites later turn on Israel and hire Balaam to curse them and tempt them to commit immorality
- Here on enemies; later oppressed Israel and during time of Judges they were the people Gideon defeated
- Smaller portion of the people, the Kenites were always friends: Jael kills Sisera (battle with Barack and Deborah); and later when God told Saul to destroy Amalakites, Kenites lived near them and told to move away, which they did
- Application, when we don't pay attention to some of these smaller stories, we miss seeing God's care through the ages

### Back to the main story.....Abraham Knew Isaac, was the son promise

- Gen. 17: "My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you."
- So, after (or in the midst of) sending other sons away
- Sends his servant to get a wife for his son back to his family near Haran
- Servant asks for God's help; Rebekah appears and offers to water his camels

### Application

- Always do your best even in the "little" things because you never know who might be watching or what it might lead to
- The servant asks that she return with him, father and brothers see his wealth and she agrees to go (brother was Laban, her son's future father-in-law)

### Focus on Isaac

- Know the least about him
- Married when 40, but for 20 years no children
- To their credit, Isaac and Rebekah did not attempt the solution of Hagar (although this wasn't forgotten)
- Finally, Rebekah becomes pregnant, "the babies 'jostled each other'"
- Gen 25: And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."
- **When God says something, he does not change his mind**

### Very Different Children

- Esau-hairy, loved the outdoors, hunting, Father's favorite
- Jacob, obviously mother's favorite, liked to cook....
- Esau comes home hungry and sells his birthright for some stew
- Bible says, Esau "despised his birthright"

### Application

- Esau an example of a really bad decision—some things cannot be undone
- <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; <sup>16</sup> that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. <sup>17</sup> For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. Hebrews 12:15-17 (ESV)
- Forgiveness is always possible; but decisions have consequences
- Later when Children of Israel refuse at first to go into the
- Promised Land

### We have a more encouraging example

- **Matthew 4**: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*"
- **Application: don't focus on your hunger (whatever it might be) but on God's Word applied to your situation.**

### Isaac and God's Covenant

- Father apparently told him God's promise—because he

- didn't get it personally for a long time
- God's Promise to Isaac, didn't come until a time of testing
- **26** Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."
- But then sinned telling the King Rebekah was his sister

### A relatively uneventful life

- Digs a wall, get chased from it, does it again, happens several times until he makes peace
- Esau marries 2 pagan women; does not go well— "a source of grief"
- Time to bless Esau .....Isaac asks Esau to bring meat so he can, but God told him not that Jacob was to be the preeminent son
- Jacob with his mother's help steals this blessing also...
- Isaac's blessing to Jacob:
- **May nations serve you**
- **and peoples bow down to you.**
- **Be lord over your brothers,**
- **and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed**
- **and those who bless you be blessed."**
- Genesis 27:29 New International Version (NIV)
- Esau vows to kill him
- Rebekah sends him to her brother Laban to get a wife and she never sees him again

### History of Esau/Edom

- His father's blessing to him after realizing Jacob had stolen his blessing
- His father Isaac answered him, "Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above. <sup>40</sup> You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck." Genesis 27:39-40 (NIV)
- And that is what happened
- More about blessings lat

### History of Edom/Esau

- Seemed to reconcile with his brother when Jacob returned to Canaan

- Esau moved south
- Bad relations with Israel
- Refused passage after the Exodus
- Defeated by Saul and David
- Judged for their retaliation—uncertain exact date
- Obediah 1:12f
- You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble... . . .
- As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head... . . .
- Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the Lord's.
- **Application: NEVER gloat over God's judgment of others**

### Traditional lands, the same area as Petra

- Maccabee's controlled after Alexander's time
- Forced conversion of inhabitants
- Also called Idumean
- Home of Herod the Great

### Back to Jacob

- Flees to his uncle
- Stops on the way and a most unusual dream, angels ascending and descending to heaven ("Jacob's Ladder" of the spiritual)
- God appears and gives him the covenant in Gen. 28:13-15, promises him the land, that "all people would be blessed through him" and that God would watch over him and bring him back to the land.
- He goes to Laban, falls in love with his daughter Rachel
- Works for her 7 years and is given Leah and then Rachel
- Old story..... Leah, four sons, Rachel barren, Rachel gives Jacob her maidservant, Bilhah, Leah gives him Zilpah, finally Rachel has Joseph
- Not a happy family. . . .but he finally returns to Canaan
- But before arrives another extraordinary encounter, wrestling with God and given a new name, Israel, "Prince of God"

### After settling, Joseph the favored son of Jacob

- Joseph had a special calling from God, but instead of reacting with humility, he brags about it
- Brothers hate him
- Sell him as a slave to Ishmaelites who take him to Egypt
- He was 16-17 when he was sold into Egypt
  - First Potipher's house; then put into prison
  - We see a man of deep faith, who gives glory to God in his reactions to the Baker and Cupbearer
  - But must wait 2 more years before his release
- He was 30 when he was made a ruler in Egypt
- He was 39 when his brothers first came to Egypt (second year of the famine, or nine years after being made ruler)

- He was probably 41 or so when the brothers came a second time and Jacob comes to Egypt
- Puts brothers through various tests—for them to deal with and confess sin
- Genesis 50:20-21 New International Version (NIV)
- <sup>20</sup>You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup>So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

### Why ok for Israel to go to Egypt?

- (when they weren't supposed to before)
- God told Abraham:
- Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there." Genesis 15:13
- Left Canaan to go to Egypt, 66 people. Became about 3 million
- Isolated, did not intermarry or serve Egyptian gods
- Which was always a temptation—not racial, religious reasons
- Applications: Always listen for current directions
- Sometimes isolation (Noah, "God shut him in," Joseph, Moses in Midian for 40 years) a time of preparation and growth

### Before end of Genesis, Jacob's "Blessing"

- More of a prophecy than what we think of as a "blessing"
- And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you *that* which shall befall you in the last days. Gen 49
- Examples:
- **Ruben Unstable as water, you shall not excel, forfeited** by his crime the rights and honors of primogeniture. His posterity never made any figure; no judge, prophet, nor ruler, sprang from this tribe
- **Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty...I will scatter them in Israel and that happened,** Simeon, very small tribe scattered in Judah; Levi faithful in trials, became tribe of priests
- **Dan shall judge his people**  
**As one of the tribes of Israel.**—Samson, a judge from the tribe of Dan
- **Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;** This was the tribe with a reputation for fierceness. Ehud (Judges 3:15-23), Saul (1 Samuel 9:1, 14:47-52), and Paul (Acts 8:1-3).

### Very interesting--Judah

- **Judah: You are he whom your brothers shall praise...as a lion...the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet...to Him shall be the obedience of the people...Until Shiloh comes**
- David Guizek commentary:
- i. From David until the Herods, a prince of Judah was head over Israel (even Daniel in captivity). The promise

was that Israel would keep this **scepter** until **Shiloh comes**. Even under their foreign masters during this period, Israel had a limited right to self-rule, until a.d. 7. At that time, under Herod and the Romans, their right to capital punishment – a small but remaining element of their self-governance – was taken away.

- ii. At the time, the rabbis considered it a disaster of unfulfilled Scripture. Seemingly, the last vestige of the **scepter** had passed from Judah, and they did not see the Messiah. Reportedly, rabbis walked the streets of Jerusalem and said, "Woe unto us, for the scepter has been taken away from Judah, and Shiloh has not come." Yet God's word had not been broken.
- iii. Certainly, Jesus was alive then. Perhaps this was the very year He was 12 years old and discussed God's Word in the temple with the scholars of His day. Perhaps He impressed them with His understanding of this very issue.
- Application: we must be very careful when we think God had not fulfilled or done something we think He promised—usually it is simply our misunderstanding of it.

### Gives a new idea to the Beatitudes

- Always a problem because what they describe doesn't seem to be true
- Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth...don't see too many meek people in places of power
- But when seen in light of OT uses of blessings, when we see them in terms of prophecy, they make much more sense
- And as the "blessings" of the Patriarchs came true for their descendants, so too we can trust the truth of the coming reality to us, as we work to incorporate these characteristics into our lives

### Read the beatitudes—think of them in this way of Jesus saying this blessing over you

- <sup>Matt. 5:3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.
- <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.
- <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.
- <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.
- <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.
- <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.
- <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute

you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you

- Have hope—may not be your present reality, but it will come—his prophecy, his blessing on your life as his child can be trusted.

### **And so the ship of God's plan has completed one part of the journey**

- From Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph— now it has become a nation
- Sometimes they did great things, sometimes very bad things
- Tested, blessed, suffered and rejoiced, sometimes because of their actions; sometimes because God gave blessings or trials
- As Heb.11:13 puts it "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth."
- No one of them could see the whole plan, but they trusted God and His will was accomplished.
- I hope their story has given us some insight into the balance of God's sovereignty and our responsibility.
- The Patriarchs are men we honor—but God is the captain of the ship and the hero of this story and every story in their lives and ours. The journey may toss us around and the waves may terrify us, but our Captain can be trusted and we will safely make it home.