

From a person to a people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph

Our lesson today is about much more than history

- As we finish up the book of Genesis, we are going to look at how the Jewish people became a nation.
- Though the history is fascinating, there is much more than history going on here, because the stories told raise these questions:
- ***Did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph have any say in being the founding fathers of a nation or were they predestined to do all they did?***
- ***And what about us? What is God in control of and what are we responsible for?***

Review and Overview of Genesis

- **First part of Genesis—Four major events**
- **Involved all of humanity at the time.**
- Creation
- Fall
- Flood
- Division of people (Babel)
- **Second part of Genesis—Four major people**
- **Narrows the focus to one family—that will then become a nation.**
- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Joseph

Important to remember: God's focus on Israel doesn't mean forgetting the rest of humanity

- 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 in this lesson.

We will also look at the story behind the story –TWO plot lines

- LINE #1: God's plan – ultimately salvation for all the earth.
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- 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 are 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.
- Individuals 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 (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 through the coming Messiah.
- That was the plan, though his chosen people didn't always do their job and the rest of the Old Testament records it.
- 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 term the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" identifies the founding fathers of the Jewish race and that we'll look at in our lesson.
- Joseph is in this lesson also as he is responsible for saving the nation from starvation and preserving his extended family to grow into a nation.
- **In Review:** It all began with **Abraham**, who obeyed God, moved to Canaan, who ultimately trusted for a son, though his wife Sarah was barren.
- They had times of disbelief, but ultimately passed God's test to sacrifice Isaac.
- Sarah dies, Abraham buys the cave of Machpelah for a burial place.

Life goes on.....A note about Midian

- Abraham marries Keturah after Sarah dies.
 - Had other sons, gave them gifts and sent them away.
- One of his sons was **Midian**.
- Where Moses fled from Egypt, where God spoke to him.
- Moses wife was from there, her father was Jethro.
- 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.¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods,. . . ¹² 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.

The Midianites' later history

- Larger group of Midianites with the Moabites after Exodus turn on Israel and hire Balaam (remember the story of the talking donkey) 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 were 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 for many people 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.

- Abraham's servant takes it as a sign that she is the one for Isaac, goes to family and asks for her in marriage to his master's son.

Application

- Always do your best even in the "little" things because you never know who might be watching or what it might lead to.
- Her act of kindness gave her a future of wealth and a place in Biblical history she could have never imagined.
- Remember—her brother was Laban, her son Jacob's future father-in-law.

Focus on Isaac

- We know the least about him of any of the Patriarchs—remember his father almost sacrificed him, but God called it off at the last minute.
- He got married when he was 40, but for 20 years had no children.
- To their credit, Isaac and Rebekah did not attempt the solution of Hagar (although this wasn't forgotten).
- Finally, Rebekah becomes pregnant, and "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."
- Esau is an example of a really bad decision—some things cannot be undone.
- Yet Jacob didn't need to do that—God promised him he would be first.
- Both responded badly to temptation—we forget we don't have to give in or manipulate our way into something that God has promised us.

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. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,
- ^a " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "
- Note: "When starving, you can feel your body consuming itself." And Jesus was at that point.
- C.S. Lewis—the limits of temptation only felt by those who resisted.
- **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

- His 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. ² And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ 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. ⁴ 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, ⁵ 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.

Isaac had a relatively uneventful life

- Digs a well, 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 EsauIsaac asks Esau to bring meat so he can, but God told him 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 her son 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. ⁴⁰ 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 later.

History of Edom/Esau

- Esau seemed to reconcile with his brother when Jacob returned to Canaan.
- Esau moved south.
- But as time progressed there were bad relations with Israel—
 - Refused passage after the Exodus
 - Defeated by Saul and David

- Judged for their retaliation—uncertain exact date
- Judgement in 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 it after Alexander's time.
- Forced conversion of inhabitants to Judaism.
- Also called Idumea.
- Home of Herod the Great, not considered fully Jewish (similar to Samaritan prejudice), Edomite ancestry.
- Herod knew Mark Anthony and Cleopatra and for a time had a joint business venture with her.
- Herod wanted desperately to be accepted, renovated the Temple in Jerusalem, didn't work—he was hated because of massive taxes and cruelty including the murder of the infants at the time of Christ's birth.
- He also undertook many other building projects including Masada the fortress.
- Died of a horrible, painful illness. He feared no one would mourn him, so he had a large group of important people imprisoned with orders that they were to be killed when he died so mourning would take place. Fortunately, those orders were not carried out.

Back to Jacob

- Flees to his uncle Laban, Rebecca's brother after the stolen blessing.
- 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 becomes the favored son of Jacob

- Joseph had a special calling from God, but instead of reacting with humility,

he brags about it and predictably, his brothers hate him. Now a quick history of his life—

- They sell him as a slave to Ishmaelites who take him to Egypt.
- He was 16-17 when he was sold into Egypt.
- First to Potiphar's house; then put into prison.
- He grows into 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) *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

Application: Why was it 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.
- There they were isolated, did not intermarry or serve Egyptian gods.
- Intermarriage was always a temptation—not because of racial, but religious reasons.
- **Application: Always listen for current directions!**
- Sometimes God puts us in isolation (Noah, "God shut him in," Joseph in prison for many years; Moses in Midian for 40 years) all as times of preparation and growth.
- **Sometimes we need to get moving—you won't know unless you are always listening.**

Before end of Genesis, Jacob's "Blessing" is given to his sons

- The passage in Genesis 49 can be a little bit confusing. To understand it, we need to think of it more as 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.**" He pretty much tells us what it's all about. Examples:
- **Ruben: Unstable as water, you shall not excel, forfeited** by his crime of sleeping with his stepmother, the rights and honors of primogeniture. His posterity never had a judge, prophet, nor ruler.
- **Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty...I will scatter them in Israel: That happened,** Simeon, very small tribe scattered in Judah; Levi though was later faithful in trials, became tribe of priests, but were

scattered throughout Israel, this time for blessings.

- **Dan shall judge his people:** 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) were all from Benjamin.

Unique comments about 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.”** Judah did not seem particularly well-qualified from what we know of his life—but remember God’s calling isn’t often because of us—but His plans.
- David Guizek commentary on this blessing/prophecy. It’s a bit long and complex, but worth it:
- 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 that is the issue.

This understanding of “blessings” can help us understand the Beatitudes

- It can be confusing when we read in Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount:
- **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5)...** today, we don’t see too many meek people in places of power.
- But when this and the other beatitudes are 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, his prophecy of your future

- ^{Matt. 5:3} *“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- ⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*
- ⁵ *Blessed are the meek,*

for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

- ¹¹ *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² 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—the blessings here may not be your present reality, but they will come—Jesus’ blessing, his prophecy 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— the family 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, though they seldom deserved them.
- 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.

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