

## CHAPTER 2: Genesis 12 thru 50

Out of the scattering of the people of Babel we trace the genealogy of one family. We meet a 75-year old man named Abram. God renames him Abraham so that is what we will call him in the story - Abraham. He and his wife Sarah are childless. In fact, Sarah is barren. She is completely incapable of having children.

**Now the Lord said to [Abraham], “Go out from your country, your relatives, and your father’s household to the land that I will show you. Then I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, so that you will exemplify divine blessing.”** (Genesis 12:1-2) In the last section the people of Babel had arrogantly tried to make a name for themselves, which was NOT God’s desire. Here we see God choosing to make a great name out of one man, Abraham.

God promises Abraham, **“I will bless those who bless you, but the one who treats you lightly I must curse, and all the families of the earth will bless one another by your name.”** (Genesis 12:3) God’s plan is to rescue and bless His rebellious world and He is going to do this through Abraham’s family.

Abraham obeys God. He leaves his home with his family. God directs Abraham to the land of Canaan. There He tells Abraham, **“To your descendants I will give this land.”** (Genesis 12:7) The rest of Genesis follows the story of Abraham and his family. As you will see they are far from perfect. They will make some bad decisions and fail many times. But God remains faithful to them despite all of it.

Abraham struggles with God’s promise that he will have a big family. After all, he is an old man! His wife is barren! And they have NO children! Abraham wonders how God will do this. At first Abraham thinks that maybe God will bring it to pass by making his servant his heir. But God tells him, **“This man will not be your heir, but instead a son who comes from your own body will be your heir.”** The Lord took him outside and said, **“Gaze into the sky and count the stars – if you are able to count them! So will your descendants be.”** (Genesis 15:4-5)

When Abraham hears God tell him this, he believes God. Abraham knows that somehow, some way, God will fulfill this promise. **[Abraham] believed the Lord and the Lord considered his response of faith as proof of genuine loyalty.** (Genesis 15:6) God considers Abraham’s faith to be righteousness. It is his complete faith and trust in God that sets Abraham apart. God is pleased. He makes a covenant with

Abraham. God will make Abraham the father of a great nation. Eventually Abraham's descendants will possess this beautiful land in which he now lives.

Several years go by. Abraham and Sarah aren't getting any younger. They still have no children. Abraham is in his 90s and Sarah is still barren. Their faith is severely challenged. They reason (wrongly in their heads) that the promised son must come through some other woman other than Sarah. So, Sarah conceives a plan. She is going to help God out! She selects one of her servant girls to produce a son for Abraham. Their plan is carried out. The servant girl gets pregnant with Abraham's child. But this is NOT God's plan. A son is born and Abraham calls him Ismael, which means "God hears."

More years pass. Nothing has changed. God re-appears to Abraham and repeats His earlier promise to him. **"...I will give you a multitude of descendants... I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you extremely fruitful. I will make nations of you and kings will descend from you... I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you. I will give the whole land of Canaan – the land where you are now residing – to you and your descendants after you as a permanent possession. I will be their God."** (Genesis 17:2,5-8)

And then, right after this, Abraham receives the most incredible news. **Then God said to Abraham, "As for your wife... I will bless her and will give you a son through her. I will bless her, and she will become a mother of nations. Kings of countries will come from her!"** (Genesis 17:15-16)

Could this really be? Abraham laughs to himself at the very idea that a son could be born to HIM -- a 100-year old man through his 90-year old wife!

But God is serious and makes His plan clear. **God said, "No, Sarah your wife is going to bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will confirm my covenant with him as a perpetual covenant for his descendants after him."** (Genesis 17:19)

God is true to His word. **The Lord visited Sarah just as He had said He would and did for Sarah what He had promised. So Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age... Abraham named his son – whom Sarah bore to him – Isaac.** (Genesis 21:1-3) The name Isaac means "laughter."

**Sarah said, "God has made me laugh. Everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." She went on to say, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have given birth to a son for him in his old age!"** (Genesis 21:6-7) The birth of Isaac is indeed miraculous, but now there is a conflict. Abraham has TWO sons, Ismael and Isaac. So, through which son will God's covenant promise be fulfilled?

God makes it very clear to Abraham that Isaac is the covenant child, not Ismael. **But God said to Abraham, "...through Isaac your descendants will be counted."** (Genesis 21:12) Isaac becomes the focal person of the covenant promise God made with Abraham. God's promises will rest on Isaac.

Now God puts Abraham's faith to the test... **God said, "Take your son – your only son, whom you love, Isaac – and go to the land of Moriah! Offer him up there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will indicate to you."** (Genesis 22:2) Abraham doesn't question, argue or struggle with God's instruction. He obeys. He takes Isaac, the wood for the offering and sets out.

God directs Abraham to a certain mountain. As Abraham and Isaac walk up the mountain they carry on a conversation... **Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father? Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham replied. The two of them continued on together.** (Genesis 22:7-8) Abraham really believes what he told Isaac – God is going to provide an animal. He knows Isaac is the key to all the promises God made to him. God has said that many of his descendants will be produced THROUGH ISAAC! So Abraham knows that for God's promise to become a reality, God will have to intervene.

They reach the top of the mountain, build an altar and place the wood on it. Abraham looks around – no animal. You can just see Abraham looking around. Abraham binds Isaac who willingly lays himself on top of the wood – still no animal. Abraham reaches out his hand and takes the knife and prepares to kill his son (what God had instructed him to do). At that moment an angel calls out from heaven and stops him. Abraham notices a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. He grabs it and offers it as a burnt offering to God in the place of his son. It is a remarkable story and God is pleased with Abraham's faith.

God reaffirms His promise to Abraham. **"I solemnly swear by My name, decrees the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be as countless as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore... Because you have obeyed Me, all the nations of the earth will pronounce blessings on one another using the name of your descendants."** (Genesis 22:16-18)

Abraham eventually dies at a ripe old age and now we follow the story of Abraham's family through his son Isaac.

God restates to Isaac the covenant promise that He made to Abraham. He tells Isaac... **"Stay in this land. Then I will be with you and will bless you, for I will give**

**all these lands to you and to your descendants, and I will fulfill the solemn promise I made to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants so they will be as numerous as the stars of the sky, and I will give them all these lands. All the nations of the earth will pronounce blessings on one another using the name of your descendants.”** (Genesis 26:3-4) This is the same thing God had said to Abraham.

To his credit Isaac remains his entire life in the land God had originally promised to Abraham. He never leaves it.

Isaac marries Rebekah. There is a wonderful story in Genesis 24 about how they met each other. They end up having the same problem that Abraham and Sarah had. Twenty years into their marriage they are childless. Isaac prays and God answers Isaac's prayer. When Isaac is 60 years old Rebekah conceives, not just one child, but twins!

God tells Rebekah... **“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will be separated from within you. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”** (Genesis 25:23)

When the twins are born, Esau emerges first with Jacob holding on to Esau's heel. God providentially chooses Jacob, the second born son to be the child of promise. It is through JACOB'S line that God's covenant promises will be fulfilled. Isaac lives a while longer but he now fades into the background and the storyline follows Jacob.

Jacob and his twin brother Esau are polar opposites. Esau is the rugged outdoors type and he is favored by his father. Rebekah dotes on Jacob who is more of a homebody. As we will see Jacob is also a bit of a conniver and a deceiver.

The boys grow up. One day Esau returns home. Jacob has cooked some lentil stew and Esau pleads for some – “I'm famished!” he says. Well, Jacob does not have any sympathy for Esau. Instead he makes a deal with him. He'll give him some stew in exchange for Esau's birthright. The birthright is what entitles an older son (in this case it is Esau) to a double portion of his father's inheritance. Esau is foolish and trades his birthright to Jacob for some stew!

Some more years pass. Isaac grows old and feeble and is nearly blind. He thinks he may be nearing the end of his life. He asks Esau to go out and hunt wild game for him and prepare a savory dish. Isaac tells Esau that when he returns he'll give Esau the patriarchal blessing (reserved for the oldest son). Rebekah overhears this and tells Jacob. The two of them team up to deceive Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau. Rebekah has Jacob dress in Esau's clothes. She places goatskins on Jacob's hands and neck (to mimic Esau who is a hairy man). Finally they prepare a

substitute meal for Isaac. Jacob goes to Isaac pretending to be Esau. It works! Isaac gives the patriarchal blessing to Jacob rather than to Esau.

When Esau discovers that Jacob has cheated him out of his blessing he gets very upset. Isaac and Rebekah fear that Esau may kill Jacob so they urge Jacob to go live with Rebekah's brother Laban way up north.

Just before Jacob leaves home Isaac has perhaps his finest moment. Fully aware now that it is Jacob to whom he is speaking and that he is about to leave, Isaac gives Jacob this blessing: **“May the sovereign God bless you! May He make you fruitful and give you a multitude of descendants! Then you will become a large nation. May He give you and your descendants the blessing He gave to Abraham so that you may possess the land God gave to Abraham, the land where you have been living as a temporary resident.”** (Genesis 28:3-4)

On his way north to Laban's house in Mesopotamia Jacob stops for the night. He has a dream where he sees a stairway to heaven and angels of God going up and down the stairway. **The Lord stood at its top. He said, “I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of your father Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the ground you are lying on... All the families of the earth will pronounce blessings on one another using your name and that of your descendants. I am with you! I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you!”** (Genesis 28:13-15) This is the same promise God made to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob builds an altar and calls that place Bethel which means “house of God.”

After a long journey Jacob arrives at his uncle Laban's house. Over the course of several years Jacob takes four wives and has many sons. But the wife Jacob loves the most, Rachel, is barren. This seems to be a recurring problem with this family! It is the same issue that Jacob's parents and grandparents faced. Rachel's inability to have children creates all sorts of rivalries and resentments within Jacob's household. But in His time God gives Rachel a son and they name him Joseph. He will become prominent later in the story.

Jacob ends up being deceived by his uncle Laban several times over the 20 years he is with him. Jacob the deceiver is the one being deceived! This proves to be a humbling experience for Jacob.

After 20 years living in Mesopotamia with Laban... **The Lord said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives. I will be with you.”** (Genesis 31:3) A much older, wiser and humbler Jacob packs up his large family and heads back to his homeland. Jacob is filled with fear and anxiety.

As Jacob returns to the land of Canaan, he encounters angels from God just as he had when he had left. **So Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he exclaimed, “This is the camp of God!”** (Genesis 32:1-2)

Despite God’s reassurance to be with him, Jacob is afraid of his brother Esau. He is not sure how Esau will react to seeing him after all these years. But Jacob has no reason to fear. God has told him that He will be with him. But Jacob’s standard operating procedure has always been one of self-reliance. And so Jacob worries.

The night before his reunion with Esau, Jacob wrestles all night with someone simply described as “a man.” As it turns out this is a supernatural messenger that has been sent by God. He has a message for Jacob: **“No longer will your name be Jacob,” the man told him, “but Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have prevailed.” ...Then he blessed Jacob there.** (Genesis 32:28-29)

During their wrestling match the man dislocates the socket of Jacob’s hip. This gives Jacob a permanent limp. Now physically disabled, Jacob must trust God. This incident is indicative of Jacob’s life. He has been struggling against God, living for himself, doing things his own way his whole life. The name Israel is so fitting because it means, “strives with God.” But as we move on in the story Jacob continues to be called by his old name. Only on rare occasions will he be referred to as Israel.

The next day Jacob has a tearful reunion with his brother. As it turns out Esau is no longer angry with Jacob. Esau has become a very wealthy man himself and he no longer harbors any ill will toward Jacob. As you can see Jacob had nothing to worry about!

As they part ways Jacob shows that he is the same old deceitful Jacob. He tells Esau to go on ahead and that he and his family will catch up with him at Mount Seir (Esau’s home). Jacob basically says “We are slower than you so we will catch up.” But this is NOT Jacob’s plan. It never was! God had directed him to return to the land of Canaan. So while Esau and his group head south, Jacob and his family head west across the Jordan River and back into Canaan where he settles.

Jacob revisits Bethel, the place where he had experienced God years before. There God reiterates His covenant promises to Jacob. **God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but your name will no longer be called Jacob; Israel will be your name... I am the sovereign God. Be fruitful and multiply! A nation...will descend from you... The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac. I will give it to you. To your descendants I will also give this land.”** (Genesis 35:10-12) Yet again Jacob continues to be called Jacob.

The rest of Genesis focuses on Jacob's 12 sons. They form the foundation of the great nation that God had promised to Abraham and re-affirmed to Isaac and Jacob. Unfortunately, Jacob's four oldest sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah each demonstrate a complete lack of moral character. They show a total disregard for God's covenant promises and to be this representative people of God. They do not behave like God's people should.

In one story Reuben commits adultery with one of his father's concubines. Jacob never forgot this or forgave Reuben. This ultimately costs Reuben his rights and privileges as Jacob's firstborn son.

In another story Jacob's daughter Dinah is sexually assaulted by a godless man named Shechem. Simeon and Levi retaliate by killing Shechem and many of his friends. They bring their sister back home and loot the city in which Shechem and his friends had lived. This violent over-reaction grieves Jacob.

Then there is this story about Judah. He separates from Jacob's family for a while and marries a Canaanite woman and has children by her. Judah's first-born son is so wicked that God takes his life. Judah fails to meet his legal obligation to Tamar, his dead son's childless widow. She is supposed to be allowed to marry one of Judah's other sons in order to produce an heir and carry on the family name. But Judah disallows it. From here the story takes a bizarre twist. Judah commits adultery with Tamar who had disguised herself as a prostitute! Well, Tamar ends up getting pregnant as a result. When Judah finds out that Tamar has become pregnant by someone other than one of his sons, he plans to have her killed on the charge of adultery. At this point Tamar reveals to Judah that HE is that "someone." Judah spares Tamar's life and declares, **"She is more upright than I am..."** (Genesis 38:26)

Sadly, Jacob's sons appear to be complete moral failures, not behaving as God's covenant people. They are "bottom line" guys! They disappoint God and they bring great sorrow to Jacob. The future hope that God's people will one day bless the nations does not appear very bright at this point.

But then there is Joseph.

He is Jacob's favorite son because he was the firstborn son by his beloved wife Rachel. **Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons because he was a son born to him late in life, and he made a special tunic for him. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated Joseph and were not able to speak to him kindly.** (Genesis 37:3-4) Here you have a rare instance where Jacob is referred to as "Israel."

A family conflict develops due to Jacob's favoritism. Joseph now emerges as the central figure of the story. He is a bright contrast to his brothers' dismal failures.

One day Joseph tells his brothers a dream he received from God. In the dream the brothers bow down to Joseph. This just further enrages his brothers. The very idea that THEY would bow down to their younger brother...please!

Another time Jacob sends Joseph on an errand. He asks Joseph to go check on his older brothers who are away grazing the flocks. When the brothers see Joseph afar off coming toward them, they conspire to kill him. They do not end up killing him. Instead they throw Joseph into a pit and sell him to a caravan of Midianite slave traders. To cover up what they have done they take Joseph's distinct tunic (the one Jacob had given him), tear it up and dip it in blood. This makes their father think that Joseph has been killed by a wild animal. Jacob the deceiver is again deceived, but this time by his own sons. Believing his beloved son Joseph is dead, Jacob mourns for him.

Now the storyline begins to follow Joseph. We leave the brothers and Jacob for now and focus on Joseph.

The Midianite slave traders take Joseph to Egypt. There they sell him to Potiphar the captain of the guard. God blesses Potiphar's house because of Joseph. Potiphar recognizes this. He promotes Joseph to a high position in his household. But Potiphar's wife has an eye for Joseph. When the opportunity presents itself one day she comes on to Joseph. But he refuses her advances. He is a man of godly moral principles – a top line guy. When Joseph tries to run away, she grabs his outer garment and pulls it off. She then shows it to Potiphar and falsely accuses Joseph of trying to rape her. Potiphar believes her lie and has Joseph thrown into prison.

There Joseph remains for years. But God is with Joseph. Joseph finds favor with the prison warden. He puts the other prisoners under Joseph's care. One day Joseph interprets the dreams of the chief baker and chief cupbearer (who had been imprisoned by Pharaoh). Joseph interprets the cupbearer's dream to mean that he will be restored to his original position. He interprets the baker's dream to mean that he will be executed. The fates of both these men unfold exactly as Joseph predicted. The cupbearer is restored while the baker is hanged. Joseph asks the cupbearer to put in a good word for him, but he forgets all about Joseph!

Two more years pass while Joseph remains in prison.

One night providentially Pharaoh has two disturbing dreams. He summons the wise men of Egypt and relates his dreams to them. But none of them can interpret his dreams. Then the cupbearer remembers Joseph and how he had correctly interpreted his and the baker's dreams. He tells Pharaoh about Joseph. Pharaoh summons Joseph



from the prison and tells him about his two dreams. Joseph informs Pharaoh that both dreams have the same meaning – there will be 7 years of abundance in the land followed by 7 years of extreme famine. Joseph makes sure that Pharaoh knows it was God who had revealed this to him.

Joseph offers some sound advice – appoint a wise and discerning man to oversee the task of collecting and storing food during the 7 good years for distribution later. After a brief discussion with his officials Pharaoh decides that Joseph is the best man for the job. He makes Joseph his second in command.

For the next 7 years Joseph supervises the collection of all the excess grain and has it stored up in various cities. As Joseph predicted, the 7 good years are followed by a severe widespread famine. People come to Egypt from all over to buy grain. Through Joseph the nation of Egypt is blessed and many lives are spared.

The famine is widespread and reaches up into the land of Canaan. Jacob sends his ten oldest sons down to Egypt to buy grain. But he keeps his youngest son Benjamin behind. And so it is that Jacob's sons head down to Egypt.

**Now Joseph was the ruler of [Egypt], the one who sold grain to all the people of the country. Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the ground.** (Genesis 42:6) The dream Joseph had years before of his brothers bowing down to him is fulfilled.

**When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger to them and spoke to them harshly... Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.** (Genesis 42:7-8) At this point 20 years has passed since Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. One can only imagine the thoughts and emotions running through Joseph's head when he sees his brothers again! He must have been wondering if they have changed at all.

The next several chapters cover a two-year period where we see Joseph "toying" with his brothers. He never reveals to them who he is. He is trying to determine if they are top line or bottom line people. The brothers make several journeys back and forth to Egypt to buy food. All the while Joseph, who is never recognized by his brothers, puts them to various tests to figure out their character. Through a series of events Joseph finally forces them to bring their youngest brother Benjamin with them to Egypt – something that Jacob had been resistant to do from the beginning. When they finally show up in Egypt with Benjamin, Joseph gives one final test. He has his prized silver cup planted in Benjamin's bag of grain without them knowing it. He then sends his men after the brothers who are on their way home. This is all a set up. Benjamin's bag is found to contain the missing cup and Benjamin is detained.

Joseph threatens to keep Benjamin in Egypt while allowing the other brothers to return home. At this point Judah, the acting leader of his brothers steps forward. He pours out his heart in deep contrition. He declares his willingness to serve as a slave in Egypt in the place of Benjamin. **“So now, please let your servant remain as my lord’s slave instead of the boy. As for the boy, let him go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I couldn’t bear to see my father’s pain.”** (Genesis 44:33-34)

Joseph is deeply moved by this. He realizes now that his brothers have changed. He can see that Judah is not the same person he was when they were younger. Joseph can no longer contain himself...

**Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” His brothers could not answer him because they were dumbfounded before him. Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me,” so they came near. Then he said, “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be upset and do not be angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me ahead of you to preserve life!”** (Genesis 45:3-5)

Joseph finds out that his father IS still alive and tells his brothers to bring him with them back to Egypt. What an emotional time! All of the brothers weep with joy having been reunited with their long-lost brother, Joseph whom they had given up for dead! When news reaches Pharaoh about how Joseph has been reunited with his brothers, it pleases him. He invites Joseph’s entire family to come live in the land of Goshen, a fertile region in Egypt.

He lends wagons for Joseph’s brothers to take with them to help make the move easier. He gives provisions, money and clothes. Joseph’s brothers return home and give Jacob the good news – Joseph is still alive! At first Jacob is stunned and doesn’t believe them. But then Jacob looks around and sees all the wagons and gifts they brought from Egypt. Then he believes them. He is eager to go with them to Egypt so that he can see Joseph.

The night before he leaves for Egypt God speaks to Jacob in a vision. **He said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt and I myself will certainly bring you back from there. Joseph will close your eyes.”** (Genesis 46:3-4) God tells Jacob that he will die in Egypt.

And so it is that Jacob and his entire household, 66 people in all, depart from the land of Canaan and journey down to Egypt. Jacob is reunited with Joseph. His family remains in Egypt, in the land of Goshen with their flocks and herds and flourish there for

the remaining 5 years of the famine and then long after that. Jacob lives out the remaining 17 years of his life in Egypt.

Just before he dies, Jacob gives his patriarchal blessing to each one of his 12 sons. It is then we discover that someone special, a mighty ruler will come through Judah's line: **“Judah, your brothers will praise you... [they] will bow down before you. You are a lion's cub, Judah... The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; the nations will obey him...”** (Genesis 49:8-10)

Jacob instructed them to bury him in the same cave in the land of Canaan where his father and grandfather were buried. After Jacob's death his sons honor his final request, transport his body back to Canaan, and bury him there.

With their father now dead Joseph's brothers worry that Joseph might retaliate against them for the evil they had done to him years before. They do not fully comprehend that Joseph is a top line guy. He does not think like they do. Joseph reassures them (again) that what happened to him was all part of God's sovereignly orchestrated plan... **“Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so He could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day.”** (Genesis 50:19-20)

As the Book of Genesis closes, God's people, who will take the name of their last patriarch, Israel, are at peace and prosperous. Joseph and his brothers are blessed covenant sons and heirs to God's promises to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. But these promises have yet to be fulfilled. They are not a great nation yet. At this point they number only about 70 people in all. They do not possess the land of Canaan yet. In fact, they aren't even living there. They are in Egypt!

This forces us to read further to see how it is all going to unfold. How and when will God's covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob become a reality?