

GENESIS DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

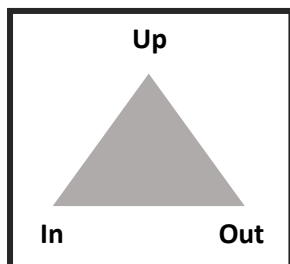
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS

What an incredible book Genesis is. A book of beginnings or, as the title suggests in Greek ... origins. Even how it starts, "IN THE BEGINNING!" This book is the bedrock for all the Bible, the foundation, as it were. It records four major events: Creation, the Fall, the Flood, and the calling together of the nation of Israel. It also introduces us to the stories of four major people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Theologians tell us there are between thirty and forty references to Genesis in the New Testament. I suppose for me the BIGGIE is the introduction of salvation when God intervenes in chapter 3 – a theme that will now run through the whole Bible and won't be truly fulfilled until the final chapters of Revelation are fulfilled.

Fabulous book. Remember, I'm only skimming the surface in my devotion. Don't be afraid to dig deeper. Praying for you as you dive in.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Read

Genesis 1

Live

In the beginning ... GOD! Genesis means 'beginning' and as such it outlines the beginning of many things. It describes the beginning of heaven and earth, obviously. It also outlines the beginning of mankind, sin, and redemption. John's gospel starts, *"In the beginning was the Word."* If you think the world was made for mankind then read Colossians 1:16 *"For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him."* So we see that all things were created by Jesus and for Jesus, and that includes you and me. He created us for Himself.

You will notice that in reference to the creation of mankind, the Bible reveals God saying, *"Let US make man in our image."* God is a trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and we can see all three at work in creation. It should be noted that the word for "God" used in Genesis 1:1 is "Elohim", which is "God in plurality". Trinity and unity are in the very first sentence of Holy writ.

I love how the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the deep. The creator Spirit bringing order out of disorder. Out of chaos, a cosmos. Out of darkness, light. And out of emptiness, fullness. It's also really interesting that He left man to the very last so he could enjoy all God had created and spend time together with God on His rest day – the very next day! The creation of all things is the handiwork and creativity of God Himself. That's why I'm reminded as I look at a sunrise, sunset, landscape or a new born baby to look beyond the artist brush and created thing to the Artist and Creator.

Pray

In Your time, Creator God, this world was put in place and in Your time, it became beautiful through the craftsmanship of Your love. By Your Word, Lord, the heavens were made. By Your Spirit, Lord, life began. By Your wisdom, Lord, the laws were laid. By Your love, Lord, a Son was given and a child was born. By Your grace, Lord, mankind was saved. And by Your power, Lord, the victory was won. How can I not love You? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love how this chapter begins ... *“Thus the heavens and earth were finished, and all the hosts of them.”* This Creator God said, *“Let there be light,”* and BOOM it shot forth at a crazy 299,792,458 miles per second. That means if someone put a light on you, it could pass through your body and go around the world seven times before you could step to the side. Cool or what!

In chapter 1, God said on the third day, *“Let the land produce vegetation.”* Here in chapter two, we read that even though the seeds of the shrubs and plants were in the ground, no plant had yet sprung up. This was because of two things: 1) There was no rain to water the ground. 2) There was no man to work the ground. So the seeds lay in the ground ... waiting ... patiently waiting, for the right time and conditions to occur. The spiritual life mimics the natural in this regard. Jesus told us that the seed is the Word of God that gets sown in the hearts of men (Matthew 13:1-23). The seeds that we sow usually won't show immediate results, but don't let that discourage you! From Genesis 2 you can see that the seed can still sprout and grow when watering and cultivation occurs at a later date.

I love the river that runs from the garden right through the pages of Scripture – from Genesis 2 right to Revelation 22 – a river of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God. I think it is the river of GRACE from which we get our full supply. Grace is the fuel of the believer, and I burn more grace than most. What an incredible kingdom we are now part of as New Testament saints. If I climb the highest mountain, God is there, and yet if I find myself in the darkest valley of my life, He is there too.

Pray

Father, I come into Your presence so aware of my human frailty and yet overwhelmed by Your love for me. I thank You that there is no human experience that I might walk through where Your love cannot reach me. Teach me today to love You more, God. Help me to rest in the love that asks nothing more than a simple, trusting heart, like that of a child. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Genesis 3

Live

The opening verse of Genesis 3 introduces us to the serpent who, *“was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.”* From the outset it’s made abundantly clear that the devil is smarter than both you and me. But all those who are saved through Christ can take hold of the reassuring words spoken in 1 John 4:4 *“greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.”* The heart of the devil’s nature is quickly revealed the instant he speaks. *“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”* Through these words he questions the integrity and truth of God’s character. Is God truly good? Does He have your best interests at heart? Did God really say that? Even with all the vastness of the Garden of Eden, the sheer quality, quantity and diversity God had created, Eve bought the lie and believed the devil (God’s creation), not God (the Creator).

What was the result of the wisdom Adam and Eve so desired? *“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked.”* All they had achieved was an overpowering knowledge of self, the result of which is always the same – separation from God. Even though Adam and Eve made their covering for sin, the knowledge of self was still too overwhelming when in the presence of God, *“and they hid.”* No matter how much we try or work to feel acceptable to God, our overwhelming conscience will never allow us to draw close to Him. The only way we can come to God is through His Son Jesus because when we try to live out of our own strength, it will only be as strong as the fig leaves sewn together, so easily broken and torn apart. I love the unchangeable character of God who in His abundant mercy and grace provides an acceptable covering for the sin of Adam and Eve through the shedding of blood – a shadow of something to come when Jesus would atone for our sin once and for all.

Pray

Father, thank You that before there was sin there was a Saviour. You know the end from the beginning. You knew that man would let You down, yet You had already made an escape route in Christ Your Son. Thank You for the ultimate sacrifice for sin. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Today we see the first effects of mankind banished from the Garden of Eden, and, more importantly, we see the effects of mankind separated from intimate fellowship with God. The next two chapters will give us not only a glimpse of where we have fallen from, but also where we shall return to – a fantastic insight into the mercy and plan of God to fix and restore all things.

The first two humans born to a woman on planet earth, Cain and Abel, decided to come before God with an offering. Cain, being a worker of the soil, brought the best of what his hard work in the fields had produced. Abel, on the other hand, came to God through a blood sacrifice, offering the fat portions of one of his flock. Cain came by works; Abel by faith (Hebrews 11:4). In these two offerings we see the two ways that humans would approach God for thousands of years to come; that is, through their own works (as Cain did) or through a blood sacrifice on their behalf (as Abel did). God lovingly instructs Cain about the need to turn away from the evil intentions rising in his heart. It is interesting that God personifies sin in this verse. He speaks of it as something lying in wait, desiring to master and dominate its victim. God pleads with Cain, *“You must master it!”* He didn’t. Taking his brother into the field, he struck Abel down and killed him.

Unbelievable. As far as we know, this is the first human being to die physically. It makes you wonder whether Cain sat there in stunned silence, staggered at what he had just done. Here we have the first two humans born into the world – two brothers with the same upbringing and love from their parents. They were only one generation from those who walked and fellowshiped with God in the Garden, and already the effects of the Fall are seen with one brother murdering the other. A martyr and a murderer.

Pray

Father, how I long for the day when I will no longer be temptable, deceivable or capable of worshipping any other ‘god’ but You. In Jesus’ strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

What are we to make of a chapter such as Genesis 5? Is it just a list of long, unpronounceable names or is there more to it? This chapter lists the nine descendants of Adam through his son Seth until the time of the flood. But it does more than that. The root meanings of the ten Hebrew names contain the eternal, remarkable, hidden plan of God to redeem and put right that which man had put wrong! It's beautiful and worth a study.

A funny story... A little boy is telling his Granny how everything is going wrong – school, family problems, etc. Meanwhile, Granny is baking a cake. She asks her grandson if he would like a snack, which, of course, he does. *"Here, have some cooking oil."* *"Yuck!"* says the boy. *"How about a couple raw eggs?"* *"Gross, Granny!"* *"Would you like some flour then? Or maybe baking soda?"* *"Granny, those are all yucky!"* To which Granny replies, *"Yes, all those things seem bad all by themselves, but when they are put together in the right way, they make a wonderfully delicious cake!"*

Have you ever felt like this little boy? You wonder why God allows something to happen to you. Sometimes you wonder if He has forgotten your address altogether. The Bible says that, *"all things work together for good to those who love the Lord, to those who walk according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28). We just have to trust Him, and, eventually, He will make something wonderful out of the ingredients of your cake – as long as you keep walking in His purpose. We are told that God is love and that love encompasses you and me. He loves you extravagantly. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, He'll listen. He could live anywhere in the universe, and He chose your heart. Try trusting this God today like never before. I hope your day today is 'a piece of cake'!

Pray

Father, I so look forward to an eternity of giving You the adoration, affection, attention, and allegiance of which You alone are worthy. No one redeems us like You. No one understands us like You. No one loves us like You do. No one cares for us like You do. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Genesis 6

Live

I have often wondered if God allowed the people who lived before the flood to have long lives because He wanted them to have sufficient time to change their attitudes. The problem was, in today's chapter, the opposite was true. Most people didn't use their long lives to turn to God and they didn't become better people. In fact, people were becoming even more evil with all kinds of immorality across the divides of nature. It's worth a study and too huge for me to comment on here.

In verse 7, God's plan was to destroy everything that He had made, but God saw there were a few good people among the vast numbers of evil people. There was one especially, called Noah, who was unlike any other. We are told he walked with God like Adam before he sinned. I love the little statement, *"but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."* For the sake of one man, God could not destroy the entire world. He always does the right thing and His ultimate plan is to save the people who trust Him. Here, it was through an ark, but later, He gave Jesus to us and because of Jesus, redemption from sin was made possible.

How sad that the Lord saw there was nothing good in people. Even in their hearts and minds He could not find anything good. He was sad at how sin had totally depraved His prize creation made in His own image. His plan was that He would still punish and kill the wicked, but He would save the righteous. He would also allow some animals to live for a repopulation to happen. Noah, by faith and hard graft, would build a very large boat, an ark in which Noah would protect his family and each type of animal. Noah was not perfect by any means, but he was righteous, which is so important in the eyes of God. I'm glad today for the blood of Jesus that cleanses me from every sin and stain.

Pray

Father, there are some idols I run from like the plague, but others I don't even recognise as idols. It's easier to see the idols outside of me but help me to discern the idols of the heart. Help me to seek You first in all I do and say. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We saw yesterday that God saved Noah and his family because Noah was righteous, but the flood killed all the wicked people, reminding us that God will be the judge of everyone. It's important to note that God is not like a human judge; we can't impress Him by our efforts and it doesn't matter whether we are rich or poor; He will save us if, like Noah, we please Him and we can please Him if we are righteous. The problem is that we do not become righteous by our own efforts. We can only become righteous because of what Jesus did for us when He died to save us from the punishment for our sins. So, we must confess our sins to God and we must invite Christ into our lives.

It's kinda weird that Genesis doesn't mention the reaction of the people before they died in the flood, although 2 Peter 2:5 calls Noah "*a herald*", showing that he had warned them. Jesus said in Matthew 24:37-39 that they were just carrying on their usual behaviour. They were eating and drinking, they were merry and had no concern over the message from Noah. But then the flood came and God punished them. Jesus added that people will act in the same way before He comes back again. They will continue their evil lives with no concern. But then Jesus will return and when He returns, He will be their judge. Jesus' return gives hope to everyone who trusts Him but it will be a terrible event for everyone who opposes Him.

It is interesting in verse 16 that the Lord shut Noah in. Noah couldn't have opened the door even if he had wanted to, and so it will be when Christ returns. God will close the door and it will be under divine control only. He says of that hour knows no man, not even the angels. When the door of the ark closed, that was it. The waters of the flood were so deep that they covered everything on the earth. Nothing outlived them or stayed above the water except the ark. Only those who were inside the ark remained alive.

Pray

Father, whatever else is going on in this portion of Scripture, this I know for sure – only You will one day put an end to all sin. Only in You can perfect and complete atonement for sin be found. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The flood stopped when God sent a wind to pass over the earth causing the waters to subside. This was because He recalled the covenant that He had made with Noah and the inhabitants of the ark to preserve a remnant of life and start a new world with them. Although we know the patterns of weather seasons, they still function by the command of God. The water had covered the mountains for a total of nine months and fourteen days, long enough to make the inhabitants of the ark wonder if it was ever going to be over. But since God was in charge, it had a definite beginning and end.

The ark finally settled on Mount Ararat, a 17,000-foot peak in modern Turkey. Noah waited forty days then sent out a raven and when it didn't return, he sent out a dove. The dove was more selective in the food it ate so it returned to the ark. Noah waited seven more days and sent the dove again. This time, in the late afternoon, the dove brought a freshly picked olive leaf, indicating to Noah that the water had abated from the earth. He then waited another seven days and when the dove didn't return, he knew it was okay to disembark.

Everyone had been on the ark for a year and ten days. They were obedient to stay as long as God wanted them to stay, and leave when He told them to leave. Both are required for complete obedience – going and waiting. They went out by families, or *“according to their kind”*, an estimated 1,600 animals along with birds. God's blessing to them was similar to the creation blessing, to be fruitful and multiply, showing that this was God's way of establishing a new created order, giving man a second chance. If you can think of waiting in the positive, it is much more encouraging, like waiting for pay day, for a holiday to come around, for your wedding or the birth of your baby. All of this is what the Scripture is pointing to when it talks about waiting. I love this!

Pray

Father, thank You for including me in this whole redeeming and restoring process. I realise today like never before that both waiting and going are vital. Help me to understand each of these. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Genesis 9

Live

God gave Noah the same command He gave to Adam – be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. He further promised that all animals would fear man and would be given into man’s hands. From now on they could eat meat as well as vegetation. God underscored the sacredness of life by instituting capital punishment for those who took the life of a human being. He promised to never again destroy all flesh or the earth with a flood, and as a sign of the covenant He put a bow in the clouds.

After the flood, Noah planted a vineyard. From the wine, he became drunk, ending up naked inside his tent. His son Ham discovered this but instead of covering up his nakedness, told his brothers. Although Noah sinned with his drunkenness and nakedness, Ham’s response was worse. It showed disrespect and a certain sinful joy over the state of his father. It is possible that Ham even ‘did’ something to his father while he was in his drunken stupor (verse 24). This may indicate a type of sexual perversity in Ham; his descendants, the Canaanites, were known for their perverse sexual practices. Japheth and Shem did what was right – covered their father’s nakedness with a garment and turned their faces away so that they would not look on him. This is what true love does – it covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

Canaan, Ham’s son, was cursed to become a servant to his brothers. The Hamites resided in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya. They were not cursed with anything racial, but had a less important role to their brothers because of their father’s sin. Shem would be known for his relationship to the Lord. Japheth and his descendants would be enlarged and find shelter in the tents of Shem. Since the Shemites lived in the Middle East it is easy to see how they became the Jewish and Arab peoples. From Japheth came everyone else – Europe and Asia and the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere.

Pray

Father, in light of our study today I think about how the world has grown to over 7 billion people. May the gospel be fresh manna to their souls. Keep their hearts alive to Your affection and mercies. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

A new part of Genesis starts here as life on the earth was starting again after the flood. The actual names are not very important to us but they do show that this account is true and that these people were real. I'm amazed at how quickly new families were born and how quickly they grew up. There is a mixture of names of places as people did not stay close together but moved to new places and became many nations. One of the things I love about the Bible is that even the chapters of seemingly meaningless names and genealogies tell us something if we look hard enough.

The writer begins with Japheth's seven sons and seven grandsons. Their names show us that their families moved north towards Europe around the Mediterranean. Ham's family moved towards the south and into North Africa. We know that Canaan was the original name of the country that became Israel so Canaan's descendants are important to the history in the Bible, but Ham's descendants lived across a much larger area. Nimrod's descendants were especially powerful as Babylon would become the greatest city in the world for a short time. Nineveh was also a very powerful city. Shem's family comes last in this chapter even though his name comes first in verse 1. I have no idea why this is, but perhaps it is because the book of Genesis continues with the story of Shem's descendants.

I'm reminded today how God loves the world. This is so evident in His repopulation of it. Love is an amazing thing – a commodity that one cannot live without. I used to think that if someone could come up with a system whereby no-one would ever have to live without love, that would be a pretty amazing system. Then I discovered that someone had. It was God. The Apostle John writes in 1 John 3:1 *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God."* To love is an expression of God because, as John reminds us, God is Love.

Pray

Father, whatever good or bad experiences family has brought, thank You that I belong, now and forever, to You. Help me to come more fully alive to my belongingness and belovedness in You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Here we have the story of the tower in Babel. There is no doubt that sin once again had dominated society and pride was the biggie. All the people spoke the same language because they were all descended from Noah, but they wanted to be more powerful so they built a great city to live together. What they missed was that God had not told people to live together, rather to move across the world so the whole world would have inhabitants (Gen 9:1). The people were not obeying God's commands. In fact, they were trying to oppose God, so He confused their languages and ended their unity. Because they were not able to talk with one another, they had to move to different places. It's interesting to note that after Adam and Eve sinned, they could not talk with God as easily as before; now, people could not talk to each other easily. Sin always affects relationship.

Chapter 11 continues with the story of Shem's family and now people's lives began to be shorter, all the effects of sin. At last, the writer mentions Abram who was different from other people. Why? Because he believed God. This fact may not seem important in an account of the history of the whole world, but for the writer of Genesis, this was vital. Genesis concentrates on the lives of people who pleased God. We have already read about Abel, Enoch and Noah. Now Abram would join the list of these men whose lives had a vast effect on the relationship between people and God. As a matter of fact, God said that all the people in the world would receive a blessing by means of Abram (Genesis 12:3). The verses from Genesis 11:27 to 12:9 are very important, showing how God was making His plan happen for His people in choosing Abram's family as His special family to become a chosen nation. Abram probably left Haran many years before Terah died (verse 32). It is important to note that Terah was not a part of God's plan for Abram and his descendants. For that reason, the writer tells us that Terah died in Haran.

Pray

Father, oh how I am guilty of falling into the trap of my own wisdom. I am reminded today to not lean on my own understanding but in all my ways acknowledge You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

God had a wonderful plan for Abram and his descendants so He told Abram to leave his home and his father's family, but didn't tell him where he was going. I love the fact that Abram just trusted and went. God's promise was that Abram's descendants would become a great nation even though Abram had no idea how this could happen. His wife, Sarai, was barren but Abram trusted that God could make His promise happen. God also promised that through his descendant, Abram would bless everyone in the world. What an incredible promise. Again, Abram is scratching his head not knowing how this would happen. He just heard God's promise and he trusted God.

Abram was not a perfect man. He, like us, did not always trust God completely. We read that a famine made him act in his flesh; instead of staying in the place where God had taken him, he went elsewhere. Because he left the country that God had promised to him, there was trouble for Abram in that other place, partly because he had left, mostly because he was not honest. It seems that he preferred to trust his own clever ideas when he should have continued to trust God. He thought that he needed to lie in order to protect himself. His story was partly true because Sarai and Abram had the same father but different mothers. The lie was pretending that he and Sarai were not married, so the story was still a lie. Sarai was very beautiful and Pharaoh believed that she was Abram's sister, so he took her as a wife. In a weird twist, Abram got rich because of this situation, but Pharaoh suffered from plagues, after which Pharaoh asked Abram in no uncertain terms to leave, even giving him an evacuation team to make sure he went. You couldn't make these stories up. I love how God works!

Pray

Father, Your Word tells us that one of the things You detest is a lying tongue. Please help me today, and from here on, to speak truth at all times, when it's easy and when it's hard. Your Word says to speak the truth in love. Help me to say what I mean and mean what I say. Thank You for the truth of YOUR Word which sets the captives free and brings us ultimate freedom. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Like Abram, Lot was a righteous man (only for 2 Peter 2:7-8 we would probably not know this as his actions never really displayed it). It would seem that Lot wanted to do the right things but there was a problem with Lot's character – wealth tempted him. It became too difficult for Abram and Lot to live together. Lot obviously liked the wealth, so he chose the well-watered plains even though he would be living with his family near wickedness. Although their evil deeds would upset Lot greatly, he still chose to live with them. Abram was different. He did not care about wealth. He knew that God had led him to Canaan and he knew that God had given his wealth to him. So, Abram allowed Lot to choose whatever land he wanted and was confident in trusting God, knowing that God would give him whatever land he needed.

It is important to note that it was the wealth these two boys accumulated in Egypt that created division. Disobeying God always has consequences. Lot was selfish and chose the place he liked best, but the reasons for his decision were wrong with no respect for the age of Abram or for his own family. Lot put up tents close to Sodom so his animals could eat grass in that area. Closer and closer he went until he was involved in the very politics of the place.

In verses 14-15, God told Abram more about His promise. All the land that Abram could see would become his country. Abram's descendants would be so many that nobody would be able to count them. I love how God will bless us when we trust Him completely. Abram walked through the country, showing that one day he would own the country. Is it any wonder the chapter ends with him building another altar for the Lord's honour as a thanksgiving for the goodness of his God? I have a little saying that I've been learning over the years ... *Trust God, even when you don't understand Him!*

Pray

Father, there are so many convincing reasons why You are singularly worthy of being loved, praised, trusted, and served. Help me love You today with focused abandon and unwavering allegiance. I'm glad You called Abram and I'm glad You called me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There were many tribes and kings who came together to help one another to fight against a more powerful tribe or defeat a smaller tribe, giving them the power to claim taxes and gain servants. It was, and still is, all about who has the power. Abram didn't get involved until one tribe attacked Sodom, where Lot lived. The people from Sodom, including Lot, became prisoners and Abram went to rescue him. Abram was not a king and he didn't have an army, but as a farmer, he was wealthy and had many employees and slaves. He also had three important friends – Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, who were willing to fight for him. They rescued all the people from Sodom, including Lot. Abram also recovered all their possessions, which he could have rightfully kept but didn't because of their source.

On the way back, Abram met a king called Melchizedek, who, like Abram, worshipped the real God. In fact, Melchizedek was a priest of God. Unlike other priests, Melchizedek did not become a priest because of his family. Hebrews 7:7 even says that he was a greater person than Abram. While the Bible only mentions Melchizedek briefly, we can learn many things about Jesus from his story. Melchizedek means 'my king is righteous' or 'king of everything righteous' (Hebrews 7:2). Salem means 'peace' and more than likely refers to Jerusalem.

When God is the centre of a kingdom or city, He makes it strong, "*Like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken*" Psalm 125:1. When God is the centre of a soul, although disaster may cloud in from every side and crash like the waves of the sea, there is a constant calm within. The world can neither give nor take away that peace. What causes people to shake at the first hint of danger? Simply the lack of the living God in their soul, having the world in their hearts instead.

Pray

Father, thank You that You have broken the power of sin in my life. Sin's dominion has been *destroyed* in my whole being. I'm no longer under law, but under grace, no longer condemned, but cherished. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We see today how Abram speaks candidly about his childlessness. This request was not a selfish one as God had already promised that Abram's family would become a great nation (Genesis 12:2) and He would bless people from all nations by means of Abram's special descendant (Genesis 12:3). Abram's prayer in verses 2-3 was that God's promise would happen. God repeated His promises in verses 4-5 but Abram still had to trust God as he was already old and had no children yet. Abram was not perfect, but he believed God and God counted it unto him as righteousness. This is a very important verse. We cannot please God because of our own efforts; we can only please God if we trust Him. God showed Abram who He really is, declaring that He is always the only real God, the same God who called him. The God who guided Abram to Canaan was the same God who was making these promises to him.

Then God asked Abram to prepare a sacrifice. In this, he makes a covenant with God and, as a friend of God, God told him about His plans (Genesis 18:17-19). God's plans for Abram's family were good, but there would be many terrible troubles. God told him that his descendants would be slaves in Egypt for 400 years. In the Old Testament, when two people made a covenant, they cut an animal into two halves then walked between the halves. Here, only the pot and the burning object went between the halves, Abram did not. This covenant is different from later covenants because in the later ones, someone on each side made promises. In this one, only God made promises; Abram did not make any. Abram just had to trust God that He would do everything He promised. Wow! In Genesis chapters 12 to 15 we can call Abram a prophet because he had messages from God. We can call Abram a priest because he built a sacrifice to God. And we can call Abram a king because he went to war like a king.

Pray

Father, thank You for Your appointments that are always on time ... YOUR time, maybe not always my time. My acknowledgement today is that Your time is always the best time. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Over and over again we have seen how God promised a son to Abram. But Sarai knew that she was too old to have a baby, so she suggested that Abram have a baby with Hagar, a younger slave who worked as Sarai's maid. Sarai's idea was a natural solution, but it was not God's solution. God wanted Abram to continue to trust Him. God's plan was that Sarai herself would be the mother of Abram's son. He wanted that son to be born as the result of His promise (Galatians 4:23). Nobody can please God by his or her own natural efforts, so nobody can become a real Christian by natural methods. Only in Christ can true redemption be found.

When Hagar got pregnant, Sarai's plan seemed successful, but there was trouble cloaked in the names of jealousy from Sarai and pride from Hagar. It was really a big mess. Abram didn't make things any better. He did not tell Sarai her attitude was wrong; instead, he told Sarai to act as she wanted towards Hagar. Abram should have protected Hagar because she was like his wife and would soon become the mother of his son. God still cared about Abram's first son even though that son was born in the natural way. He was called Ishmael, and God even made promises about him.

The writers in the Old Testament mention *"the angel of the Lord"* 58 times. And they mention *"the angel of God"* 11 times. I love the study of angels appearing as men. It is quite possible that some of these appearances were the pre-incarnate Christ Himself. The angel called Hagar by her name and he also called her 'Sarai's maid'. God knew where Hagar had come from, just as in Genesis 3:9 He knew where Adam was, and in Genesis 4:9 He knew what Cain had done to Abel. Ishmael would be a wanderer and have a tendency to make war. Hagar said, *"You are God, who sees me."* I love this. This chapter shows how God cares about the underdog and those who are suffering.

Pray

Father, I thank You that I am no longer a slave to sin and fear, rather I am Abba's child, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the earth. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Promises, promises! Have you ever thought about what you've been promised that hasn't been fulfilled or delivered? Poor Abram and Sarai, this seems to be the story of their life! This chapter is very important as in it, Abram's name becomes *Abraham* – changed from “father” to “father of many”. Sarai is changed to *Sarah*. Ishmael is now 13 years old and still Sarah had no child. That emphasises how wonderful Isaac's birth would be. Only God could make it happen now.

The Hebrew for 'God who can do anything' is El-Shaddai. It appears several times in Genesis and twice elsewhere. God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, rather than just one. God mentions the words 'descendants', 'nations' and 'father' several times here. Circumcision shows that they are part of God's family and is evidence of the covenant. It was a cutting away of the old, which we still need to do spiritually, a circumcision of the heart. God promised that Sarah would have a son and whole nations would be among her descendants. Sarai means 'my princess', and perhaps this showed what her parents thought about her. But Sarah means simply 'Princess'. Now she belonged to another ... her Father God.

This chapter confirms to us that no matter how long one has to wait, God will ALWAYS fulfil His promises. I love this! I'm also thankful that twice God has chosen to give me birth. I was utterly dependent on Him for both ... the first time I breathed in oxygen and the second time I breathed the life of Jesus into my spirit, giving me the new birth. Life and salvation are both of the Lord from beginning to end. It's all of grace. These are just a few of the many, *many* gifts that come down from the Father all the time. Think today about what you have that you didn't receive from Him – nothing!

Pray

Father, what gift have You given me that You don't intend me to enjoy? Not one! Teach me today to give to You my complete love and adoration, for You alone are worthy of it all. In Jesus' strong name. Amen

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Around midday, three visitors came to see Abraham through whom God gave a message that Sarah would have her baby, called Isaac, during the next year. Sarah didn't believe and laughed at the idea, obviously thinking that she was much too old to have a baby. It's kind of ironic that Isaac means "he/she laughed". The visitors were travelling to Sodom to bring God's punishment but wanted to discuss the matter with Abraham. How cool is that! God had a conversation with Abraham about Sodom and we can learn many things about Abraham's relationship with God from that conversation.

The writer has already explained how God destroyed the earth by means of the flood. This story about Sodom is similar. In both incidents, God saved one family. Before the flood, God shut the door of the ark; here, God's angel shut the door of Lot's house. Abraham understood the mercy of God so he asked God to save the city if He could find a few good people in it (verses 23-32). God listened to him and agreed to do the thing he had requested. God would count the good people in Sodom. If there were more than 50, He would save the whole city. Abraham probably realised that there were less than 50 good people, so he asked God to save it if there were only 45. Feeling bold to continue his request even further, Abraham then gained God's agreement to save the city if 10 good people lived there. Abraham knew about Lot and his family, but he did not know whether any other good people lived there. Lot's two daughters were engaged to men from the city and perhaps Abraham hoped that Lot had convinced these families to serve God.

Reflect on the conversation between Abraham and God. James reminds us that the fervent effectual prayer of a righteous person avails much. How fervent is my prayer life? How righteous is my lifestyle? This is the pedestal from which I approach heaven today. Let's put in the spiritual thermometer.

Pray

Father, today I continue to pray for my family, friends, city, and nation. I continue to pray because I know You are a God who both hears and answers prayer. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Lot was sitting at the gate of the city where the elders met to make judgments. How he got to this place it doesn't say; one can only surmise it was by means of his wealth and influence, both given to him by God. Lot extended a big welcome to the visitors and respected them greatly, but he knew how wicked the people in Sodom were and so didn't want the visitors to be in the street at night. Homosexuality was the rule here. The men of the city were so adamant to get at these visitors that, in an act of what must only have been desperation, Lot offered his virgin daughters to them (as a father of three daughters I struggle with this greatly). Lot's guests saved him by pulling him in, shutting the door and striking the men outside with blindness.

When God destroyed the cities and the valley, He sent fire and sulphur, using such great force that it pushed many substances from the ground into the air. With many substances mixed together, the air became full of some kind of salt. When Lot's wife turned around, the wind blew the salt into her face so suddenly that she could not breathe and she died. The salt was so thick that it quickly covered her, leaving her dead body standing there like a column of salt. Her disobedience cost her greatly.

I love verse 29, reminding us that God thought about Abraham and saved Lot because of Abraham's prayer. Oh, the power of prayer! The last verses of this chapter are sad. A man who had everything but forgot to give glory to God now has nothing. He lives in a cave and is disgraced in a drunken stupor by his own daughters. Give all to the eternal hands today. He made and controls the destiny of the universe. Surely, He can be trusted with your life!

Pray

Father, may this chapter be a major reminder to me today that everything I have and own is Yours and I am just a steward of it. Help me to never get cocky in my own self-worth or achievements, but in all things give You the glory. Destroy in me all desire to stay in Sodom. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We don't know why Abraham went to live somewhere else. Maybe the ash from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah affected a large area and maybe those substances spoiled the land where Abraham's animals ate grass. He went south to live just outside Canaan. Abraham, in fear yet again, said that Sarah was his sister. He did not think about the trouble that it might cause other people; the punishment for adultery was death.

God showed His mercy to Abimelech and spoke to him in a dream. Abimelech was very kind, giving Sarah back to Abraham, and also giving great wealth to him. He even invited Abraham to live in Gerar. One thousand shekels was a huge amount of money. A bridegroom usually gave a gift to his bride's family so that he could marry her, but fifty shekels was the biggest amount a man would give. In Babylonia, an ordinary workman earned half a shekel a month. Abimelech gave the money in order to settle the matter, also showing that he was sorry about his actions, even though he had not acted on purpose. It had become clear that the women in Gerar could not have children, so it would seem that Sarah was in Abimelech's household for several months. This makes one wonder how God had kept her and Abimelech from sexual relations.

God answered Abraham's prayers for Abimelech even though Abraham was far from perfect. I love this about our God. It was when we were still far from Him and in our sins that Christ died for us. I cannot read today's chapter without thinking of John 15:16 that declares the words of Jesus Himself, *"You did not choose Me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you may ask the Father in My name He may give it to you."* Abraham was a chosen vessel and God saw through his weaknesses. Say today, "I'm chosen!"

Pray

Father, there is not a thought of mine that slips Your attention and yet You hear me when I pray. Forgive me when I, like Abraham, try to work it all out myself and operate in fear. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Genesis 21

Live

At last, the son that God promised was born to Sarah and Abraham. God always does the things that He promises; we can always be sure of that. Ishmael insulted Isaac because he was jealous of Isaac's importance in the family. Sarah did not want trouble between Ishmael and Isaac and she realised that trouble was brewing. Paul discusses this situation in Galatians 4:30. He explains that Isaac was born because of God's promise – by the power of the Holy Spirit. But Ishmael was born in the flesh – the natural way. There is no doubt that Abraham loved Ishmael and tried to provide for him and Hagar, yet, under the command of God to do whatever Sarah wished, he turned Hagar and Ishmael out for the second time. God provided water in the desert for Hagar. This is where Ishmael continued to live, in the desert, where he married and had twelve sons. Like Ishmael himself, his descendants lived in the desert and they became a great nation, as God had promised (Genesis 25:13-18).

People knew that God was blessing Abraham because he had become a very wealthy man with many servants and animals. Abimelech and Phicol did not want to fight Abraham and his servants so they asked for a peace agreement. Abraham was pleased to agree with them because he also wanted peace, but ownership of the well had to be agreed. It's good to live at peace and be prudent as well. The Bible teaches us to live at peace with all, as far as possible. This is a great lesson today – wait on God and also be prudent; don't allow the world to walk over you. Whatever God gives you He wants you to look after it and be a good steward for His glory and for the extension of His kingdom. Maturity is produced by practice: *"Those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil"* (Hebrews 5:14). It is produced by acting on what you believe and stepping out upon it. I trust today you are encouraged to live and walk in the freedom that is yours.

Pray

Father, this chapter today shows me that You always come true. Thank You that the rider of the white horse in Revelation 19:11 is called FAITHFUL AND TRUE. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Throughout his whole life Abraham was learning to trust God, but this is the chapter that makes it clear Abraham trusted God completely. He didn't know why God was testing him but he could recognise God's voice. We might ask why God wanted Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice; after all, the Bible clearly teaches that murder is wicked (Deuteronomy 5:17). God never wanted Abraham to kill Isaac and stopped him before he could hurt the boy. God was asking Abraham to prove that he would always trust Him. My name for these times is, 'Now I know' moments. I've come to know them well!

Abraham didn't know about God's plan to save Isaac but realised that He must have had such a plan as he told his servants that he would bring Isaac back to them (verse 5) and he told Isaac that God would provide the sacrifice (verse 8). Hebrews 11:17-19 explains what Abraham was thinking; he knew the promises that God had made about Isaac, so Abraham was confident that he could trust God. And he was right.

We can only really understand this event if we think about Jesus. God provided a ram to die instead of Isaac. In the same way, we all deserve God's punishment because of our sin (Romans 6:23) but God sent His Son, Jesus, to die in our place. We should know God's voice and be able to recognise when God is guiding us to do something (John 10:2-5). It is also important to note that God does not tempt anyone to do an evil deed (James 1:13). God was testing Abraham to see whether he would trust Him. There is something about inheritance I want you to think about today. I believe the Bible clearly teaches eternal security; hence it is called "ETERNAL LIFE", but I do believe that a believer can lose their inheritance. Paul calls it "*saved as by fire*" or we would say, "*Saved by the skin of your teeth.*" Are you walking in your inheritance? Are you listening daily for His voice? What is He saying to you today? Do it! Walk into your inheritance.

Pray

Father, freedom is only found in You and it is You who completes me today. No more crutches, Father. You are all I need. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It is interesting that the writer tells us Sarah's age when she died. You don't often find this as it was only custom to state a man's age. This could be to remind us that Sarah was very important to the promise of the nation. When she died, Abraham was living in the country that belonged to the family of Heth. But he did not own any land there to use as Sarah's grave, so he asked to buy some land. He wanted to bury her near Mamre where he used to live (Genesis 18:1). The members of Heth's family greatly respected Abraham and Sarah and offered to give the land for free, but Abraham insisted that he would buy it. So, for the first time, Abraham bought land in Canaan. Abraham knew that his descendants would live away from Canaan for 400 years (Genesis 15:13), but he trusted God's promises, and so bought this land, confident that his descendants would return there.

I love how verses 4-6 calls Abraham *"a great prince"* or *"God's prince"*. What an incredible testimony this man had in a strange land. Food for thought, me thinks! Remember this: if you are not gracious in your lifestyle, your words and impact on others will be dulled. James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 tell us that grace is given by God to those who are of a humble spirit and Paul tells us in Galatians 2:21 not to frustrate the grace of God. I continually hear people 'frustrating the grace of God' by not showing grace and love to others. Grace knows the worst but sees the best. It doesn't only operate *after* change but is actually the very force that brings change. And, of course, it operates only under the umbrella of *Agape Love*, the love of God. Do you want to grow in grace? Well then, you must be His disciple. You may ask, 'How can I do that?' Simple. Love one another. *"By this shall ALL men know that you are My disciples, that you have love one for another"* (John 13:35).

Pray

Father, how I long to represent You as Abraham did in this chapter today. How I long that the world around me would see You in me. Let me be reminded that I am like Abraham, a sojourner in a strange land, and I must represent my Master well. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Abraham believed that he would soon die. He wanted to make sure that there would be a good wife for Isaac, so sent his chief servant to arrange the marriage. He wanted Isaac to marry one of his own relatives, as was the custom. He also wanted Isaac's wife to be a woman who would help him to serve God. The account in this chapter is very long and we learn a lot about Abraham from it. We learn how Abraham's servants trusted him and his God.

We have a great type and shadow of the Trinity in this story: Abraham (the Father) sends his servant (the Holy Spirit) to find a bride (the Church) for his son (Jesus). He takes ten camel loads of gifts (the gift of the Spirit) to give to the bride until she and her bridegroom can be together. When they arrive home, Rebekah lights off her camel and runs to meet her bridegroom-to-be. Why? Because the servant has talked so much about him on the way home, she feels like she already knows him and loves him more than words can say. I love this chapter as it reminds me how we have been sought out, the *ecclesia* ... the called-out ones.

As Christians, we must always keep in mind the two-sided reality of the Christian journey. On the one hand, we are complete in Christ (our acceptance is secure). On the other hand, we are continuously growing in Christ (becoming more like Him). You will feel both the presence of the Holy Spirit and the pressure of sin. You will enjoy the peace that comes from being made right with God, but you will still face daily problems, problems that are approved by God and serve to help you grow in spiritual maturity. If you remember these two sides of the Christian life, you will not grow discouraged as you face temptations and problems. Instead, you can learn to depend on the power available to you from Christ who lives in you by the Holy Spirit. I trust you are encouraged today to live and walk in the freedom that is yours.

Pray

Father, as Your child, I long to be finally and fully whole. No more knowing in part. No more worshipping You in part. No more loving others in part. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It's not clear when Abraham married Keturah, before or after Sarah died. There are more sons. God was carrying out His promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. God had promised Canaan to Isaac and his descendants and Abraham realised that Keturah's sons should not live with him in Canaan, so he sent them all away. It's a nice comment in verse 9 that Isaac and Ishmael buried their dad. Even though these two boys were destined never to live together, it seems they remained friends.

Isaac and Rebekah had to wait twenty years before their sons were born, but God answered Isaac's prayer in the end. Rebekah was having twins and even before their births, the babies seemed to be fighting inside her. God knew the character of each son before they were born, and He knew about the future of their descendants. Only one son would receive the benefit of God's promises and it was as if the babies were struggling for that right. Usually, the older son was expected to rule the family, but God told Rebekah that the opposite would happen.

After the sons were born, the younger son, Jacob, was desperate to benefit from God's promises (it seemed the older son, Esau, couldn't care less about God's promises). Jacob seemed to always struggle to take the right away from Esau. He had struggled to be born first, but failed. However, he would not fail in his desire to gain God's special blessing, convincing Esau to sell his birth right for a bowl of stew. This was a huge mistake from Esau who seemed deaf to the voice and prompting of God. I've had people tell me, "God never speaks to me!" Oh really? Is it possible that you've been too busy to listen? God wants to talk to you. Tune into Him today. Try reading James 1. God speaks to those who take time to listen!

Pray

Father, I know I'm not to be defined by my weakness and brokenness, but I realise more than ever that that's where Jesus meets me. I have zero ability to change my heart. I'm utterly dependent on You, the God who raises the dead. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Genesis 26

Live

Everyone needs their own personal experience with God. It is not enough to have a generational backlog of Christians in your lineage. Isaac's father, Abraham, was a friend of God and had learned to trust God completely. It is obvious that Isaac had always known about God too, but even he needed to find God for himself and learn many of the lessons that his dad had learned. I love how God reminds Isaac about the promises that He gave to Abraham and now He was making these promises to Isaac and his descendants.

It's amazing how our kids don't do as we say but as we do. Isaac does the exact same thing his dad had done and lied about his wife being his sister. He didn't need to be afraid. God was protecting him and pouring out a blessing so great that it is hard to wrap your head around it – a blessing 100-fold, which I think is pretty supernatural!

Water was precious and people often fought over it. Lot argued with Abraham; the Philistines argued with Isaac; Laban would argue with Jacob. Isaac didn't argue, he just moved elsewhere. The arguments continued but Isaac just moved on to another place. Maybe he was trusting God to provide for him. He had seen how God gave a plentiful harvest in a famine, so he was not afraid to move on. The name 'Esek' means 'quarrel'. 'Sitnah' means 'enemies' but 'Rehoboth' means 'space'. Isaac thanked God that he did not need to fight the people who opposed him; God had made room for him and given him a place to live. Like his father, Abraham, Isaac stayed in Beersheba and there he prayed to God. Abimelech came to see him and wanted to make an agreement with him. Isaac had become wealthy and powerful, so perhaps Abimelech was afraid that Isaac's men might oppose him. One thing we know is that they respected him as a man who had been blessed by God. I love this!

Pray

Father, today I ask You to forgive me for the times I haven't trusted You like I should. I love that You didn't get cross; You got generous and blessed me. You amaze me with infinite grace and mercy. Actually, where sin abounds grace much more abounds. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I am a little bewildered by this chapter as Isaac would undoubtedly have known about the prophecy at his sons' births (Genesis 25:23). In the prophecy, Jacob was clearly the son that God had chosen. Yet it would seem that Isaac spoke to Esau in secret about his favourite food which he wanted Esau to make for him. At special times, people often ate special meals and Isaac's request for a special meal emphasises the importance of his blessing. Rebekah heard Isaac's words. She knew that Isaac loved Esau (25:28), but God had told her that Jacob would serve Esau (25:23), so she conjured up a plan so Jacob would get Isaac's blessing. Even though Rebekah knew Jacob was God's choice, she should have trusted God, knowing that His plans never fail. It's a warning for us to trust God and wait on Him and not lean on our own understanding.

You can read the plan of action in verses 7-17, Jacob living up to the meaning of his name ... deceiver. What amazes me is the extent of the blessing that was handed down. It wasn't just a 'Lord, bless Esau' prayer that Jacob got. When Isaac realised what had happened, verse 33 says he "*trembled violently*". He could do a 'bless Esau' prayer for Esau now, but the big generational hand down had happened and couldn't be revoked.

The end of the chapter is sad as Rebekah suggests Jacob go and live with her brother 'for a while' until Esau's temper cools. Little did she know she would never see him again. The 'while' was twenty years. This is a passage which reminds me that when I run ahead of God and try to make my own plans, it usually creates a mess. I am also reminded that when I stray away from the purposes and plans of my Father, the 'while' it takes to get back on track and in right relationship with Him is usually longer than I'd ever anticipated.

Pray

Father, today I ask that my trust and utter dependence on You rise to a whole new level. I long to be more restful and less resentful. I want to feel joy and hope every time I hear Your name and not feel rejection and self-pity when I don't hear my name. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is kind of weird. It seems Isaac realised he had been favouring the wrong son and now he confirms his blessing on Jacob as the one through whom the nation would grow. With this done, he sends him off, and, as we saw in chapter 27, little did he know that he would never lay eyes on him again on earth. I feel sorry for Esau. He tried to please his parents by means of another marriage; it seems he was trying desperately to be loved and accepted.

Jacob lies down to sleep and has a dream. He dreams of a staircase between earth and heaven with angels going up and down and the Lord standing above. The very fact that God was above implies He was controlling the situation. I love this. God made the same promises to Jacob that He had made to Abraham and Isaac. When Jacob woke up, he declared the awesome presence of God in that place. The place was probably not a city until later; it seems Jacob was alone in the desert. He calls it 'Bethel' meaning 'the house of God', obviously because he met God there. Jacob agrees to serve God if God helped him. His words may sound as if he was trying to bargain with God, but I'm not sure this was really his intention. He knew that God was his God and that He was great. He also knew that God had promised to take care of him so he has clearly decided to worship Him. At that time, Jacob had nothing to give but he believed that God would bless him and that was why he said he would give a tenth to Him.

Jacob got one thing right ... God's presence made the place awesome. May we be reminded today that God's presence makes a place awesome and that He chooses to live in us. Surely this is why Paul writes to Colossae in 1:26,27 saying the mystery hidden for ages and generations is now revealed to His saints, which is ... CHRIST IN ME, the hope of glory!

Pray

Father, what an incredible God You are – ever true to Your promises, despite the weakness and frailty of mankind. It's my greatest confession today, every day, and throughout eternity ... CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY. In Jesus' strong and eternal name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If I were to write a title for this chapter, it would be, ‘Jacob Meets his Match; the Deceiver is Deceived’. It was God’s plan that Jacob would have a large family. He had already promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they would have many descendants. Jacob’s intention was to marry Rachel. He loved her as soon as he saw her and offered to work seven years for her. At the end of the seven years, Laban (Rachel’s father) cheated Jacob. It was the custom that the bride would cover her face at the wedding and the morning after, Jacob discovered that he had married Leah (Rachel’s sister). He did not refuse to accept her as his wife, but the sad thing is he never really loved her. Laban allowed Jacob to marry Rachel too, but insisted that Jacob work another seven years for her. Rachel was the wife Jacob really loved, but, like Sarah and Rebekah, it was difficult for Rachel to have children. It is all quite sad really for both girls – Leah was unloved and Rachel felt inadequate and uncompleted. Reuben means ‘Look, a son!’. God was making Leah into the mother of many tribes. In that way, Leah was part of God’s plan but she could not force Jacob to love her. Simeon is like a Hebrew word meaning ‘has heard’ and Levi means ‘love’. Judah is the word for ‘praise’.

There is a little phrase in this chapter that catches me. It’s in verse 31: *“When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved He opened her womb.”* I think that is pretty awesome, displaying how God sees every hurt and pain. Maybe today you’re feeling a little disconnected and pulled in a thousand different directions. Maybe a big school of little piranha fish are nibbling away at your focus and energy. You are not feeling tempted to do something crazy, just feeling a bit dazed. It’s hard to sit still. It’s hard not to think about the next thing. Remember this, God sees everything. He knows your innermost thought and pain and is just a call away. Jeremiah 33:3 (333 – God’s phone number!) *“Call upon Me and I will answer.”*

Pray

Father, if this passage teaches me anything today it teaches me that even those nearest and dearest to me cannot fully complete me; only You can do that. I acknowledge this afresh today. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jealousy is a dreadful thing. Instead of this being a big happy family it was fast becoming a big mess. The wives decided to give their maids to Jacob to clock up the score of who could produce the most children. Rachel was desperate. She could not conceive herself so she wanted Bilhah to have children she could help look after. The name Dan means 'God is my judge'. Naphtali means 'a fight or a struggle' (it is a rare word; some commentaries suggest that it means 'God's fight'). Gad means 'good luck'. Asher means 'happy'. Issachar means 'let God be merciful'. Zebulun probably means 'honour'. Daughters weren't usually included in lists of children; however, Dinah would later be an important part of the story of this family. Dinah means 'judgement'. At last, Rachel had a son – 'Joseph', meaning 'let the Lord add'. This is an amazing record of the favour of God on this man Jacob. It seems everything he touched turned to gold.

Jacob had stayed with Laban for fourteen years. He worked in order to pay for his marriages to Leah and Rachel, but the time that he agreed to work ended and he wanted to return home to the country that God promised to him. There were a couple of problems. One was that Laban knew that God had made him rich because of Jacob, so he obviously didn't want Jacob to go. The second problem was that Laban didn't want Jacob to have anything. The animals with marks would belong to Jacob and the animals without marks would belong to Laban. Laban led away all the animals that had marks, so Jacob was looking after animals with no marks. This guy was the cheater of cheaters. But God made Jacob wealthy and allowed Jacob to own the stronger animals while Laban's animals were weaker. The fact was that God had promised that He would take care of Abraham and his descendants. Clearly, God was doing what He had promised.

Pray

Father, to harbour resentment is nothing short of harbouring a thief and a serial killer, for resentment is bent on criminal activity – stealing and vandalising. Fill my soul with Your patience, kindness, and love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

After twenty years away from his homeland Jacob is finally leaving Paddan-aram and heading back to Canaan. Attitudes were changing for the worst and it would seem Laban and his sons just couldn't handle Jacob's success. It is easier to weep when someone is weeping than to rejoice when someone is rejoicing. Weeping with someone in difficulty gives us a power over the other person whereas rejoicing with someone's blessing takes a completeness and a genuine delight in that person. Jacob had worked hard for Laban, but Laban and his sons didn't respect Jacob and continued to cheat him, not paying him fair wages. There were also some accusations starting to fly around as Laban's sons suggested that Jacob had stolen his wealth from Laban. Actually, it was the other way around; God had blessed these guys for just hanging around Jacob. What a beautiful lesson for us today; hanging around God's people is a great thing to do as the blessings of God are quite contagious. Jacob had prospered even though he had had ten pay cuts in twenty years and himself bore the loss of any animal that had died or been killed. Laban certainly wouldn't win any 'employer of the year' award. He was a cunning, deceitful man. He did everything to make sure Jacob wouldn't prosper, and yet, what folly. When God chooses someone, there is nothing anyone can do to stop or divert it.

In the end, God told Jacob to leave Laban, and that's what he did. Quietly, under cover, he slipped away. After three days, Laban heard that Jacob had left and he gathered his relatives to chase him, but God warned him in a dream not to oppose Jacob. When he caught up with Jacob's crew they argued, but Laban was careful with his words because of God's warning. They decided to make a covenant, but not of friendship. Instead, they promised to stay apart so their sons would not fight one another. This is a great chapter about God's favour and a brilliant one to study and unpack.

Pray

Father, Your covenant is laced with Love, Faithfulness, and Forgiveness, and oh how I need all three. Help me today to live my life confident that You are my Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord my Provider. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the statement in verse 1 about Jacob meeting the angels of God, but Scripture doesn't unpack the conversation. It is one of my questions for Jacob when I see him in Glory. I want to know what that confab was all about. It certainly showed that God was with him. He calls the place 'Mahanaim', meaning 'two camps', which is what he would do with his own crew in verse 7. Esau has heard that Jacob is coming home and he is coming to meet him with an entourage. Jacob is freaking out, to say the least, and so he sends all kinds of presents ... or should I say, peace offerings.

We are not told why Jacob stayed behind alone when he sent all his family across the river. Maybe he needed to pray and did not want anyone to disturb him. He is jumped by a stranger. Who is this? A thief? A stalker? No, it's actually an angel who wrestles Jacob to the ground before the tables turn and Jacob pins the angel down. What a contest this is becoming. He changes Jacob's name to *Israel*, meaning 'he who struggles with God'. That's after the angel touched his hip giving him a limp for the rest of his life.

Jacob, or should I say *Israel*, calls the place Peniel, meaning 'God's face'. He hobbles over the river Jabbok the next morning. He's limping, dishevelled and bleeding, but I think he's smiling. He's had an encounter. Do you fancy one? Someone once gave me a little card with the picture of a young boy riding a horse with no saddle. Perched behind him is a young girl. Her weary head rests on his shoulder and her arms are wrapped tightly around his waist. The couple have just crossed a flowing river and ahead of them lies a dark forest. The caption at the bottom of the picture reads, "The best way out is always through." This is so true. When we are tempted to go over, under or around painful circumstances, remember, it's always best going through.

Pray

Father, this chapter teaches me how patient You are. Teach me today that encounters with You are not momentary, but are for life changes and calls, collisions with the supernatural. I realise I may limp, but then I'll have You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

At last, it was time to meet Esau again. Even though Jacob had been very afraid of this meeting and his body was weaker because of his experience with the angel, I truly believe Jacob felt stronger. Why? Because he now had God's blessing and anointing on him. Consider the odds: Esau had 400 men; Jacob didn't have 400 men and he himself had an injury. The men with Jacob weren't soldiers but farmers to take care of the animals, and they were probably tired after the long journey. This a most beautiful reunion in that Esau has had the blessing of God on his life too and has long since buried the hatchet of offence. It is interesting and worthy of note that while the Bible calls us to be at peace with mankind, it doesn't say we have to live with them. It would seem that the years and the differences made these two brothers realise that they could let bygones be bygones, but they weren't going to buy a house together. Jacob wanted to go to the country that God had promised; he didn't want to go to Seir where Esau lived.

I'm not sure why Jacob built a house at Succoth (which means 'shelters'). Maybe he just wanted to have a bit of peace and calm in his life. These verses remind us of Genesis 21:33 and Genesis 26:25 where both Abraham and Isaac found quiet places where they could live. Maybe Jacob hoped that he had arrived at such a place. When he sets up the altar, he calls it 'El-Elohe-Israel' which means 'God is Israel's (Jacob's) God'.

How amazing is this chapter! Can you say today, "God is my God"? I'm sure there have been times when people have let you down, but today let go of all grudges and offence. Declare today, "I will no longer fly into the devil's snare and take the bait." Choose this day to forgive (put a name or situation in here), realising that, yes, it was wrong what happened but you will walk in freedom from this day forth. Your heavenly Father He isn't calling you to move in with them, but to forgive them and be courteous and kind.

Pray

Father, today I can pray that You are my God. You are the One who knows me intimately and loves me unashamedly. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is one of those tragic chapters that gives us some insight into wrong parenting issues. Dinah, Jacob's daughter, was eyed up by this young man Shechem, who raped her. The report about Dinah probably upset Jacob greatly, but he didn't say anything (which, as a father of three daughters, I find weird). I like to think he was too sad to speak about it or perhaps he was being careful not to speak too quickly in case his reaction was angry. Jacob was quiet and waited. Shechem, Shechem's dad (Hamor), Jacob, and his sons all seemed to put on a pretty civil face; however, there was a storm brewing underneath the covers. The brothers were angry because Shechem had raped their sister and it seems that he was still living with her. Jacob's sons concocted a plan to use circumcision for their own advantage. They were certainly not following God. They were not using circumcision to show a covenant with God but rather to make the men in Shechem weak. They were plotting revenge and murder. In the tragic unfolding of this story, Hamor and Shechem convince all the men of the city to be circumcised so they can intermingle with Jacob's family. While they are weak and convalescing, Simeon and Levi murder them and take Dinah out of their house. After Simeon and Levi killed the men, they took all their possessions and kept these things for themselves. They also took the women and children to be their slaves, becoming wealthy because of their brutality and cruelty.

This is one of those chapters that has no winners. Shechem did wrong to Dinah. Jacob should have done more about Dinah's situation but he was more worried about his own safety among his neighbours. Hamor and Shechem were not honest with their own people. And the behaviour of Simeon and Levi was atrocious. All this is such a contrast to the last chapter.

Pray

Father, one can only be grieved at today's chapter. Your Word declares that the heart of man is desperately wicked above all things (Jeremiah 17:9). My own heart is capable of such atrocities were I not to stay in close proximity to You. Help me to stay there. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It's hardly surprising that Jacob didn't feel safe near the town called Shechem after his sons Simeon and Levi killed many men there. His fear was that the relatives of those men might attack his family. So much for Jacob's quiet retirement plan. God told Jacob to take his family to Bethel and he was happy to do just that. Remember, this was where God had first spoken to Jacob. I'm sure he was a little excited to return. It was at Bethel where God repeated His promises to Jacob and he rebuilt the altar that he had made there.

Soon afterwards, at a new place called Ephrath, Jacob's last son, Benjamin, was born. But tragically Rachel died at the birth. Just before she died, she named her boy 'Benoni' which means 'son of my sorrow'. I can't help but think she is summing up her life in this name. Her life had indeed been one of sorrow. But Jacob interjected and called the new baby 'Benjamin' – 'son of my right hand'. I have often thought of this name, 'son of my right hand', as Benjamin doesn't seem to appear on the radar much throughout Scripture. Then one day I was reading in Philippians 3:5 and I read this ... *"If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee."* The apostle Paul is writing to tell us to put no trust in our flesh. Then he proceeds to tell us his pedigree. The great apostle Paul – preacher, church planter, and proclaimer of the kingdom of God – was of the tribe of Benjamin.

Have you ever thought about your legacy? Who you are raising? What's coming after you? Reuben wasn't thinking like this. In verse 22 it is recorded that he slept with his father's concubine, writing himself out of dad's will, just like Simeon and Levi. Now, as we will soon see, the lot will fall to Joseph!

Pray

Father, one word comes when I read today's passage and think of what Reuben did ... *shame*. You're the only One who can break the binding power of my shame because You have completely broken the condemning power of my guilt. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is one of those chapters that one might be inclined to skim read, if read at all. It is a long line of ‘begottens’ and genealogies of people long forgotten. Today, I would love you to take the time to read it slowly and keep in your mind a promise that God made to a pregnant lady (Rebekah) in Genesis 25:23 *“Two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be divided and one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.”*

Esau had three wives, two of whom did not come from his own nation. God didn’t want the families of Esau and Jacob to intermarry, and so God was blessing both brothers with large flocks so that the land could not sustain them both. I love how God can use anything to get His purpose fulfilled; here, He used blessing. The thing to keep in mind is that God always does what He promises to do. The writer here reminds us about this principle. Esau was not the son God had chosen, but God had made a promise about him, and so gave him many descendants. Later, King David defeated the Edomites and ruled over them, so they did indeed serve Jacob’s descendants.

The only really successful nations are those whose rulers and people serve God. Of course, the same is true today as history is HIS STORY. It is all about Jesus and I am so glad that He chose me to play a part in His story. If you are like me, sometimes you think it is all about you and your petty problems, when all the time we are part of the Master’s plan, part of the big picture. How exciting is that! I wonder today as I read and ponder this chapter, did Esau figure this truth out? Could this be why he accepted Jacob back lovingly? Thank God for people who don’t always have to play the lead but are willing to serve, even serve those who are younger, because they understand God’s big plan.

Pray

Father, I am rocked by Your sovereignty and Your wisdom. After all, You are the One who knows the end from the beginning, the One who has already written the script of history. In Jesus’ strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Today begins the account of Joseph's life, and runs, incredibly, over the next thirteen chapters. You will remember that even though Reuben was Jacob's oldest son, he slept with his dad's concubine (Genesis 35:22), so Jacob decided that Reuben should not receive the birth-right. Simeon and Levi were the next in line, but they too had upset Jacob when they murdered the men of Shechem. Jacob chose Joseph to receive the birth-right. Jacob's other sons were angry about this. Benjamin was still just a young boy but all the other brothers were much older than Joseph. It is important to add that Joseph was favoured because of Jacob's undying love for Rachel. Jacob made a special coat for Joseph, which probably showed that Joseph had the birth-right.

Joseph had dreams, which were prophecies really, showing that he would become the leader of the family. Joseph's brothers hated the dreams. In fact, they hated Joseph and I wonder about the maturity and wisdom of Joseph in telling them his dreams. One day, Jacob sent Joseph to find out what was happening with his brothers who were working away from home. This was an opportunity for the brothers to attack Joseph. Their first plan was to kill him, but Reuben had a secret plan to save Joseph. Perhaps he wanted to please Jacob, thinking his father might change his mind about the birth-right. One can only assume. But when Reuben was away, Judah and the brothers sold Joseph as a slave. I read this and imagine the screams of young Joseph as he was being led away, probably tethered to a camel, screams for mercy and unbelief at his brothers' actions against him. Upon returning home, the brothers presented their well-executed evidence, Joseph's blood-soaked torn coat that they had dipped in the blood of an animal. Jacob could only draw one conclusion. Joseph was dead. Joseph, however, was not dead. He was sold as a slave in Egypt into the house of Potiphar, an important and influential guy in Pharaoh's army.

Pray

Father, today as I study this beautiful type of Jesus, would You remind my heart of the One who was sent for my redemption and came to set me free. Thank You, Father. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We have seen how Reuben, Simeon, and Levi (the three oldest sons) had all upset Jacob, and now that Jacob thought Joseph was dead, Judah became his most important son. Judah was the fourth son, but much of his life would also disappoint Jacob. Judah had three sons. The first was called Er; he married Tamar but was so evil that God killed him. At that time there was an important custom: if a widow did not have a child, the unmarried brother of the dead husband would marry her and they would have children together. Er's brother Onan married Tamar but he too was evil, and God killed him. Judah promised Tamar she could marry his last son, Shelah, when he became old enough to marry, but Judah didn't keep his word. So, Tamar made a plan. She covered her face so nobody would recognise her and pretended to be a prostitute. Judah bit the bait. Afterwards, Judah discovered that Tamar was expecting a baby and he ordered her to be burned for being immoral, but she was able to show that Judah himself was responsible for her situation. Judah was the one with egg on his face now and he confessed that he had been unfair to her and allowed her to live.

Tamar had twins; the oldest, Perez, received the birth-right among Judah's descendants. If you read the last four verses of Ruth, you will see that Perez was in King David's lineage. Keep this wee thought in your mind as we study Genesis over the next couple of weeks. We will see a different side to this man, Judah. I suggest that Judah's character and attitudes changed after this event with Tamar. Through grief, pain and loss, Tamar gave birth to a nation that in turn would be the seed of Christ Himself. As I weave my way through the genealogies of Christ, I see pain and loss, rejection and misunderstanding, yet God continually works all things for our good and His glory, assuring us of His continued control of our lives.

Pray

Father, when I doubt that anything good could come out of something ... so wrong! Let me lift my eyes to heaven and remind myself that You are always in control and You have my destiny all planned and realised. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter opens saying that Joseph had been “*brought down to Egypt*”. Egypt is lower than the mountains in Canaan which the writer is probably referring to, but Joseph had gone “*down*” in another way. He also went down in his social importance, becoming a slave in Potiphar’s house rather than a favourite son in a rich man’s house. Everything Joseph did was successful because God’s favour was on him, so Potiphar gave Joseph authority over everything in his household. Joseph also impressed Potiphar’s wife, but in a different way. She wanted to seduce him into the bedroom. Joseph knew that God does not permit such behaviour and he respected his boss, so he refused. It looks as if this behaviour had gone on for quite a while, so one has to respect this young man for holding up under the constant bombardment of temptation. There’s nothing worse than a spurned lover and this woman was used to getting what she wanted, so she lied, saying that Joseph had tried to rape her. Proof was the piece of garment she had torn from him in her final desperate bid to get him into her bed. Even in prison Joseph impressed people. The guard realised that Joseph was responsible so he gave him authority over the other prisoners. Soon Joseph was managing the prison. While still a prisoner, God made him successful.

I love reading about God’s favour on people. We see in this chapter, like in the passage yesterday, God choosing someone to show His grace and love. Joseph is a story of being sent to redeem at a particular time, just like Jesus. Paul reminds us in Galatians 4:4 “*When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son.*” The other important thing I have seen today is how Joseph resisted the temptation that was beating at him. I’m sure there were moments when he thought, “*Maybe...*”, but he held his station and came out a winner in the end. All could have been lost in a moment of madness.

Pray

Father, Your Word says that You will never allow me to be tempted more than I can stand, and that fills me with hope today. In the middle of any part of temptation I have a choice, to serve it or serve You. Help me to continually choose the latter. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Joseph went from managing Potiphar's household to being responsible for all the prisoners. He was obviously a skilled manager. (This is important to remember for the next few chapters.) But Joseph was also a holy man and he knew that his relationship with God was very important. He teaches us a challenging lesson to keep righteous wherever life finds us. Two of his fellow prisoners had strange dreams on the same night. Not knowing the meaning, they were worried and stressed. Joseph told the prisoners that God knew the meaning of all dreams. The butler's dream meant that within three days Pharaoh would free him and reappoint him to his old job. Naturally, Joseph asked the butler to tell Pharaoh about his situation in prison and speak well of him. The baker's dream meant that in three days he would be executed. Three days later, what Joseph had said happened. However, the butler forgot about Joseph and while God's plan was unfolding, poor Joseph had to wait, and wait, and wait. Now there is a word we don't like. Waiting is so hard, especially when we are not sure if God has even heard us.

I think a great lesson in this story is that God always hears. Sometimes the answer is 'Yes', sometimes 'No', sometimes 'Wait awhile', all of which I can cope with. It's the silent treatment I struggle with, when the heavens are brass, when my cries seem to bounce off the ceiling and mock me, when it seems the cries have gone unheard and I question the very essence of my faith. I'm sure you've experienced this too. This brings us back to the fact that we are totally reliant on His grace and mercy. When we understand this truth, we will begin to have a renewed confidence that we are in His hands. May God help us to wait on Him with a fresh measure of contentment, knowing that He is the One who knows the end from the beginning and is working it all out to His eternal plan.

Pray

Father, You are the Master Planner and I know that Your plan for me is to give me a future and a destiny in You. May my life be one that brings glory to Your name, just like Joseph. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love this chapter in which Joseph goes from the prison to the palace in a single day. I have often pondered the first words of this chapter, *“After two whole years...”* We read nothing of those two years, of Joseph’s down days, the days he thought he would always be there, the days he wondered if he had really heard God or if there was a God at all.

Joseph was a prisoner when Pharaoh had two strange dreams. In the first dream, seven thin cows ate seven fat cows and in the second dream, seven weak stems of grain ate seven good stems. Pharaoh tried to get his magicians to understand the dreams but this time the magic failed. So, Joseph’s great friend (not!) the butler suggested that Pharaoh speak to Joseph. Pharaoh took Joseph from the prison into the palace. Joseph himself didn’t know the meaning of the dreams but was confident that God knew the answer. God showed Joseph that both dreams had the same meaning. For seven years the harvests in Egypt would be good, but afterwards, for another period of seven years, there would be a terrible famine. Joseph advised Pharaoh to store food during the good years, and then this food would be available for the next seven bad years. Joseph’s wisdom impressed Pharaoh. He was confident that Joseph’s advice came from God, so he appointed him to be a ruler of Egypt. Only Pharaoh himself was more important than Joseph.

I think that God could be talking to us today about patience. Sometimes I feel like the man who prayed for patience but wanted it right now! I’m reminded of Isaiah 40:31, *“They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.”* How we need to do this in today’s society, to wait on His time in which everything is beautiful, according to Ecclesiastes 3:11. I have experienced this so many times in my life that you would think I should know it, and yet there are many things in God’s Word that need constant relearning and revisiting.

Pray

Father, running ahead of You just brings unnecessary heartache and pain, so today I choose, again, to wait on Your Word, on Your will, on Your timing. In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Like everybody else, Joseph's brothers had to go to Egypt to buy food. How could they ever imagine that Joseph was a ruler in Egypt? They had sold him as a slave and now they had probably assumed him to be long dead. One can only imagine Joseph's emotions when he saw his brothers. He loved them through it all and didn't want them to suffer while the harvests were poor. Joseph wanted to share with them the good things that he had received in Egypt but he realised that this might not be a good idea. He knew that in the past his brothers' behaviour had been self-centred and cruel.

There are some things the previous chapter has told us which are important here. Joseph was dressed as an Egyptian; he had shaved, unlike the Canaanites; he spoke the Egyptian language; he even had an Egyptian name. Joseph remembered his dreams and knew that this event was God's plan. Around twenty years had passed from he had set eyes on his brothers, and Joseph must have thought, 'Wow, I had the message right when I shared my dreams, but boy, I got the timing wrong.' Now he was responsible and would not allow his brothers to cause trouble in Egypt, so he made a plan that would test them. He needed to be sure that their attitudes had changed and if they were humble. If they respected him, he could give them honour and wealth, but if their attitudes were still wrong, Joseph could not help them.

Verse 21 records something the writer did not tell us before, that Joseph had begged for mercy when they threw him in the hole. Joseph had not known until now that Reuben had tried to save him. Now Reuben thought that God was punishing the brothers. While Joseph knew that they were feeling guilty, he was not sure their attitudes had really changed. Isn't it funny that when things look the very worst, it actually might not be as bad as you think? Something very good was about to unfold in God's big plan.

Pray

Father, the big thought throughout this incredible story is TIMING – Your perfect timing, never too early and never too late. Your plans are perfect and past finding out. Help me to trust You always. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It is not clear how long it had been from the brothers' first visit; some suggest a year but we don't really know. What is clear is that the famine was still raging and Jacob's family became desperate for food again. But Jacob still would not let Benjamin go to Egypt and the other brothers did not dare go without him. The Egyptian ruler had warned them not to enter Egypt without Benjamin. In the end, Judah persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go, promising that he would accept the blame if anything bad happened. Jacob ordered the brothers to take a gift for the Egyptian ruler and then blessed them.

When the boys arrived in Egypt, Joseph prepared a classic surprise for them. He wanted to show his kindness to them, extending special honour to Benjamin, who was Joseph's closest brother. Now the events of Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:7 really happened as they all bowed before him. Joseph's first question was about his father. This question was loaded with love for his dad. How he longed to see him! Joseph arranged for his brothers to sit in order of their age, a custom that showed honour to the older. This astonished the brothers. They could not explain how the Egyptians knew the correct order. Joseph's table had the best food. The steward passed this food to Joseph's brothers, serving them in order, but when it came to Benjamin, he received much more than anyone else.

If there is a lesson we could learn from this today, it is how God had taught Joseph not to act hastily. Too often I have run ahead and trusted everyone, only to my detriment. People are people all over the world and we need to be careful who we bare our heart to. Other people can so easily distract or divert a dream. I often pray that God will bring alongside me those 'balcony people' who will cheer me on, speak words of caution when needed, and even call foul in my life when they feel I have strayed.

Pray

Father, this is what I love about You – Your plans and purposes are perfect. Your Word is truth and it cuts and divides, piercing right to the heart. In Jesus' strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is the chapter before the big revelation. It's almost crunch time. Joseph's plan to test his brothers was simple but well thought out. In chapter 37, Jacob had given the birth-right to Joseph and as a result, the boys were jealous and hated him, so they sold him to be a slave when they had the opportunity. Now Joseph would give his brothers the opportunity to make Benjamin (who had become Jacob's favourite son and now had the birth-right) a slave. Joseph was going to see if they were jealous of Benjamin and if they wanted him to lose the birth-right too. The massive question hanging in the air was, would they sell Benjamin out for the birth-right? It was like a turning back of the clocks and these boys were about to get a second chance.

We saw in the previous chapter that Judah accepted responsibility for Benjamin's safety. Judah was the brother who actually sold Joseph as a slave, but now his attitude had changed. Judah wanted to become a slave himself so that Benjamin could be free. He offered to lose everything in order to rescue his brother. The same sun that hardens the clay also melts the ice, and while these boys previously had hard hearts, now it seems the melting process had begun. *Years, mistakes, and God* can bring such a change to a hardened heart, especially when one is open to the claims of God.

A big lesson today is the need to allow God into the dark recesses of our heart – those places that we've guarded even from Him. If we could only grasp what the Father can do with one who has yielded all, yielding afresh to the unfolding, eternal claims of God on us, recognising it is good news for our lives. Scripture reminds us that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. I love that this story is recorded as proof that a heart can change.

Pray

Father, today I give it all to You again. You, eternal God, are the Creator, Maker, and Mender of all hearts. You are most certainly the Potter and I am the clay. Mould me and make me after Your will. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

At long last the test is complete. Judah had shown that the brothers had changed. They were not willing to sell or leave Benjamin in order to save themselves. Poor Joseph couldn't control his emotions, so he quickly ordered his servants to leave the room. His weeping could be heard throughout the house. Even when Joseph spoke to his brothers in their own language, they didn't immediately recognise him. One can only imagine the fear in these guys at this point, the thought of, 'Oh dear, what now?' In some translations it says the brothers were "*dumbfounded*" meaning they could not speak because they were so surprised, afraid and confused! You can see how much is thought of Joseph when Pharaoh heard that Joseph's brothers had come from Canaan – he wanted the whole family to live in Egypt and even sent wagons to help the weaker members of the family make the journey.

Back at the ranch, so to speak, the news from Egypt astonished Jacob, but when he saw the luxury transportation, he believed. He saw that the events in Joseph's dreams had actually come to pass. He was probably remembering the promises that God had given concerning his family. While Benjamin had been able to comfort him, the wonderful news about Joseph changed everything for Jacob and at last his spirit felt strong again.

Today I'm amazed at how good news revives one's spirit, just like Jacob, whose life had been full of loss, and now in his old age finds replenishment of soul. There is good news for us too as children of a King, heirs of God. We inherit heaven as our home along with all the wealth and splendour of an everlasting kingdom that sin will no longer have an effect on or in. There will be no more partings, no more pain or tears. All the former sufferings will pale into insignificance in comparison with the glory we will share with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If that doesn't revive your soul, you must be dead!

Pray

Father, today I think about how Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us, and in the same way He went, He will return and bring us home to live forever with You. I love this thought. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jacob was planning to leave Canaan and go to Egypt, but Canaan was the country that God had promised to him and his family, so he needed to be sure God wanted him to leave. On the way to Egypt, he stopped at Beersheba, a special place for him as God had spoken to his father there. Isaac had gone to Beersheba because God told him *not* to go to Egypt. So you can understand why Jacob was being cautious. In a dream, God spoke to Jacob and told him not to be afraid to go into Egypt as He had a plan for his family there.

I find the end of verse 4 amazing, *“Joseph’s hand will close your eyes.”* At first read, one might find this a tad morbid, but for an old man like Jacob, who hadn’t seen his boy for the guts of twenty years, he couldn’t have heard better words from the Lord. To tread with caution, always listening for God’s direction and for His whispers is an incredible thing to do. Even when the thing seems right, it is still important to always lay it before God. Verses 8-27 contain a list of Jacob’s sons and grandsons, seventy people, a big family. This family would become a great nation as God had promised Abraham that they would be like the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5).

Imagine the emotion and sheer delight of Jacob and Joseph seeing each other again. Until now, Joseph was probably the only person in Egypt who served the real God; Egyptians were idol worshippers. Because Egypt had an ancient religion, holding strong opinions about other people, Joseph used his God-given wisdom in advising his brothers what to call themselves when they went before Pharaoh. I also have an inkling that after a conversation with dad, he did not want his brothers to work in the government, but rather continue as shepherds, so Joseph didn’t suggest city life for them. Joseph had, without a doubt, forgiven them, but he was not about to forget some of the silly decisions they had made in the past. This is a great lesson.

Pray

Father, I want to be led by Your Spirit. After all, I am Your child and Your love for me is awesome and above everything. In Jesus’ strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Joseph had to introduce his family to Pharaoh. He chose five brothers on behalf of the whole family, then he introduced his father. We do not know how he chose those five. In the Hebrew text it says he chose them “from the edge”, meaning that he chose from all the brothers. I have no idea who he chose or why just five. Pharaoh respected Jacob for his age and also gave honour to him because of Joseph. It is easy to see that after this blessing of Jacob on Pharaoh, Joseph became much more important as a ruler. This happened because of Joseph’s great skill and the favour of the Lord.

When the people of Egypt ran out of money to buy food, Joseph took their animals, then their land, then themselves as slaves for Pharaoh. When all those resources ran out, Joseph arranged to lease their land back, but taking regular taxes, making Pharaoh even wealthier. Incredible leadership, I have to say! People respect governments that look after them carefully.

It’s lovely that Jacob got seventeen years with Joseph – the same length of time he had at the beginning of Joseph’s life, which is interesting. At the end of the chapter, Jacob was very old, 147 to be exact, and he called Joseph, asking him to promise to bury him in Canaan. Jacob wanted his descendants to realise that Egypt was not their permanent home as God had promised Canaan to them. Joseph made the promise. In fact, Joseph would ask his own descendants to make a similar promise about his own body.

God gave this man Joseph such wisdom, as he had done with Moses, David, Solomon, the Apostle Paul, and others. Today my prayer is for continued wisdom that comes from above. I thank God that He is no respecter of persons and that He can do today what He has done in yesteryear because He never changes. In Him there is no shadow of turning.

Pray

Father, I need so much wisdom to live for You in a broken world. I need so much wisdom to raise my kids/grandkids. I need wisdom in my studies and in my job. Would You pour it out upon me today, Father, in liberal abundances? Thank You. I receive it. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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Live

The blessings that Jacob gave to his family start in this chapter. These blessings were prophecies about the future which Jacob spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many of the blessings are difficult for us to understand as some phrases could mean different things, but we need to remember that the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. Often the words in the blessing describe the places where the tribes would live in Canaan. Remember that Joseph received the birth-right because of Reuben's sin, so Jacob gave a special blessing to Joseph.

Jacob chose a special way to show that Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, belonged to his family. He adopted them as his own sons. That is how they became tribes as well. Although Manasseh was the oldest, Jacob mentioned Ephraim first. These two boys were probably around 17 years old. Jacob's act when he crosses his arms to bless the boys illustrates a truth. Jacob makes the symbol of the cross and sets aside the first and gives power to the second, just as at the cross God set aside the sin of Adam (the first man) and gave power to Christ (the second man). It is a type and shadow.

With all the names through Genesis, it makes me thankful that God is interested in my name. I'm not sure if even eternity will make me understand why God has gone to such measures to include me in His plan; I'm just pretty thankful that He did. What amazes me about Joseph is that he was more concerned about heavenly things than earthly. He wanted his sons blessed more than he wanted blessed himself. I'm sure, like me, you desire to be like this too. We can get concerned about the earthly things and forget to seek first God's eternal kingdom and all its righteousness. When we do that, everything else will be okay.

Pray

Father, Your blessings for me are rich beyond measure. You adopted me as Your child, a spirit of son-ship whereby I can call You 'Abba'. Thank You that in Christ all Your fullness dwells and You have given me the right to be called Your child. In Jesus' strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jacob did not give a blessing to all twelve sons. Reuben, Simeon and Levi didn't deserve a blessing because of their evil acts, but Jacob did prophesy over them, so there was a future for their tribes. We know, for instance, that Moses came from the tribe of Levi.

The tribe of Judah became a very large and important tribe with David, and ultimately Jesus, coming from Judah. Jacob said that trade would be important to the tribe of Zebulun, and this tribe's land included part of the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Men from the tribe of Issachar would become farmers. Their land would be very good, and, like the donkey, they would work hard. Dan's name means 'judgement' and Jacob was saying that God would use the tribe of Dan to fight for His people (Samson came from the tribe of Dan). Many enemies would attack the tribe of Gad. These enemies belonged to the nations of Ammon, Moab and Aram, but the people of Gad fought them successfully. The tribe of Asher received good land. When Solomon became king of Israel, the tribe of Asher provided food for the palace. Naphtali is pretty poetic. Barak came from here, and a beautiful poem is recorded in Judges 5. I love the bit about Joseph; he was a righteous man and his life did not only benefit himself. In fact, because of Joseph, God blessed Pharaoh, all of Egypt, and Joseph's whole family. The son who had the birth-right received a double share of his father's possessions, so while each of Jacob's sons became a tribe, Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, became two tribes, both large tribes. People from Benjamin would have a tendency to fight. Many years later, the first king of Israel, Saul, came from the tribe of Benjamin. Paul too was a descendant of this tribe (Phil. 3:5).

We read about the end of Jacob's life, a long life mixed with blessing and trouble, deceit and wisdom, good decisions and some really bad ones. Sounds familiar. The longer I live the more I relate to this sort of stuff.

Pray

Father, today I am reminded of the fact that all blessing comes from You. You are the Potter and I am only the clay. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jacob had asked his sons to bury his body in Canaan, so Joseph arranged for the funeral to be held there. It was not only Jacob's family who attended; many Egyptians came too, showing how many people respected Jacob. There was a special love between Joseph and Jacob for several reasons. Joseph was the son of Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife, and they had to wait many years for him to be born. Also, Jacob and Joseph had been tragically parted for many years. But I think they felt a special love for one another because they both served God with a similar heart and attitude. Joseph was the chief person by his father's bed. Remember, God had promised that Joseph would close Jacob's eyes when he died (Genesis 46:4).

After the funeral, Joseph's brothers became afraid of him. They misread Joseph yet again, thinking that his kindness to them was only while dad was alive. It's important to note that seventeen years had passed. Fear is a horrible thing and it is the direct opposite of faith, which is the only thing that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). When Joseph heard about their fears, he wept and explained that God had placed him in Egypt in order to do God's work. Their actions had been evil, but they could not prevent God from doing something good. Joseph promised to provide for his brothers' families; they would continue to be safe throughout his whole life.

The life of this man Joseph has inspired me greatly while studying these chapters. I have been learning so much about trusting God in the bad times as well as trusting Him in the good times. God is an incredibly faithful Father in whom there is no variableness or any shadow of turning. His Word is final. And so, on it alone we should place our trust, our life, our all. May it be said of us like it was said of Joseph: *"A fruitful bough whose branches run over the wall, the archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him and harassed him severely yet his bow remained unmoved."* What a book, what a story!

Pray

Father, how I long to be unmoved when it comes to loving and serving You. I love You and I love the strong name of my Saviour, Jesus. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

