
January 8 : Scriptures Genesis 23-25

SUMMARY

It's interesting to see that a threatened death is followed by an actual one. Isaac's life is spared (22:12), but Sarah's life has ended (23:1). Now Abraham must find a place of repose for his beloved wife's body. He approaches the locals for a burial plot. They hold Abraham in high honor and offer him the finest funeral accommodations. But all Abraham wants is a modest cave on the edge of Ephron's the Hethite's (Hittite's) field (23:9). In true ancient Middle Eastern fashion, the price is negotiated "on the down-low" through suggestion while maintaining honor as the primary focus. Abraham and Ephron settle on the price of 400 standard shekels of silver (23:14-16) and for the first time we see God's promise to Abraham come true. Abraham and his descendants *officially* own a piece of Canaan, albeit just a grave for now for Sarah, and later for Abraham and other family members.

A wife has passed and a wife must be obtained. Cool parallel, huh? God makes promises, but we often have our part to play to see those promises come to pass. For example, God promises Abraham and Sarah a child to carry on the covenant. He even helps the elderly couple become physically able to bear a child. But it ain't gonna happen unless Abraham and Sarah...you know. And here is another example of the God-person co-operation. Abraham knows Isaac needs a wife to continue the descendant line (24:1-4). The new wife of the arranged marriage must come from the same family line as Abraham. So rather than go all the way back to Ur of the Chaldeans, Abraham puts his chief servant, Eliezer, under oath and sends him back to the family in Aram-naharaim in Aram, modern-day Syria (24:9-10). Side note: This Nahor is Abraham's brother. Both have Terah as their father and Terah's father was another Nahor. Terah named his son after his father. (Names sometimes make things confusing in the Bible. Hang in there!)

Eliezer arrives at the time of day when the women come to the village well to draw water – in the cool of the evening. He asks God for help finding a great woman for his master's son. He even asks God to confirm His pick by having her respond to him a certain way (24:14). *Just then* Rebekah shows up. (Yeah, God is way ahead of Eliezer!) He asks her for water and she responds just as Eliezer asked of God. And yet, he still watches to see if she's the one (24:21). Eliezer asks her name and "Bingo!" she *is* from Abraham's family! Eliezer gives her gifts from Abraham, and Rebekah runs home to tell her family. Her brother, Laban, runs to meet Abraham's servant and invites him home according to classic Middle Eastern hospitality. Long story short (and it is a long story!) Eliezer recounts the entire narrative and then drops the bomb. "Now, if you are going to show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; if not, tell me, and I will go elsewhere"

(24:49). The family agrees to the arrangement. Eliezer showers them with gifts and riches (a dowry) and after spending the night Eliezer and Rebekah head off to Canaan. What a wild 24 hours for Rebekah, eh? One minute she's fetching water. The next, she's heading off with a newly met stranger to meet her forever husband. The two arrive in the south of Israel, the desert region (the Negev) where Abraham and Isaac have their tents. Isaac spots the camels, Rebekah spots Isaac, and together they enter the tent to begin married life (24:67). How romantic!

And now we have *more* family records (25:1-6)! What's interesting to note is that Abraham has remarried at age 140! He will live another 35 years according to Bible reckoning. One of his offspring is Midian, the ancestor of the Midianites who lived in what we know as western Saudi Arabia. Sadly, they will become a bit of a thorn in Israel's side later on. Abraham gives everything to Isaac and gives gifts to his other progeny and sends them off. Why? The covenant land belongs to the covenant son. Abraham dies and is buried by his sons Isaac and Ishmael alongside Sarah in the cave of Machpelah (25:9-10). Ishmael's family is recorded here (25:12-18). Have you noticed by now that family records provide a segue between generations? They indicate one "chapter" closing and another beginning.

We have a new beginning – the second generation after Abraham, the birth of Esau and Jacob. Even from the womb, we're clued in that things are not going to go well between these two brothers (25:22). They will produce two distinct family lines, one will be stronger than the other, and the older brother will serve the younger one. (*Remember this prophecy.* It helps explain what's to come.) The scene cuts to the brothers as young men. Esau (nick-named Edom "Red" because of his ruddy exterior) is an outdoorsy rough and tumble guy, Isaac's favorite. Jacob – well – he's kind of a home-body momma's boy, Rebekah's favorite. One day Esau comes in from the hunt and sees that Jacob is cooking lunch. "Red" wants some of the red stuff Jacob is concocting and Jacob sees an opportunity... a BIG opportunity. He offers to give Esau some lunch if Esau surrenders his "first-born brother" birthright to his younger brother. Esau flippantly agrees. However, God and Jacob take this seriously. It *is* God's plan for Jacob to gain the birthright, but Jacob goes about it his own way, the wrong way. This kid has a lot to learn and God's school of "learn to trust God, not yourself" is coming.

INSIGHT

Once again, we're reminded of the Lord's mercy in Sarah's passing. What? What mercy? After the Fall, God prevented mankind from eating of the Tree of Life (eternal life) while in their sinful state. That was an act of mercy. If they had done so, they would have forever been separated from God. Instead, the Lord allowed death to come to humanity,

a separation that would eventually be overcome, but only according to God's plan. He didn't just want humanity to live, He wanted them to live *with* Him. So, He allowed death to run its course through humanity (and still does). BUT the inoculation from death has been gained through Jesus! Even though we die physically, those of us who embrace Him as the Father's solution for sin and death will live forever *with* Him and with one another. God's plan forges ahead and death will eventually be erased forever! If that ain't a "Hallelujah!" moment I don't know what is.

January 9 : Scriptures Genesis 26-28

SUMMARY

We open this section with the Lord reaffirming His covenant with Abraham's line and a "like father, like son" episode. Isaac has to move from the Promised Land to avoid a famine. But just in case he thinks he's lost the land, the Lord reaffirms His promise to Isaac that He made with his father for land and offspring and blessing to all nations, "because Abraham listened to me and kept my mandate, my commands, my statutes, and my instructions" (26:5). Isaac settles in Gerar, a Philistine town and district in what is today south-central Israel. But the men of the place ask about Rebekah, making Isaac very nervous. If he says she's his wife, he could be killed and Rebekah taken from him. If he says she's his sister, if she's taken then Isaac likely won't be killed and the action would spark tribal warfare. Isaac goes with the "she's my sister" option. Isaac knows God's promise of descendants so he's "helping God" preserve him and his line, just like his dad, Abraham did. Thankfully, Abimelech of Gerar sees Isaac fooling around with Rebekah and makes the connection. Abimelech warns his people not to mess with Rebekah (26:11). But that doesn't prevent other conflicts. Isaac plants his fields and God blesses him with *huge* harvests. God's blessing on Isaac's wealth threatens the locals and they stop up Isaac's wells. Why? No water, no flocks. It was a way to drive Isaac away from them. So Isaac moves away and reopens the wells Abraham dug. But that's not good enough for the locals. They fight over the water that really belongs to Isaac and keep it up until Isaac moves far enough away from them. God *appears* to Isaac and confirms his covenant with him. Isaac affirms the covenant by building an altar to the Lord. Furthermore, Isaac's servants find more water. Hooray! But Isaac's separation is still not good enough for Abimelech. Out of fear that Isaac's power is growing, Abimelech arrives to make a covenant with Isaac (26:28). What's funny is Abimelech's line, "You will not harm us, just as we have not harmed you *but have done only what was good to you, sending you away in peace*. You are now blessed by the Lord." Really? Isaac only moved *because* of the Gerarite-caused strife. This is just a classic case of reframing the narrative to project innocence. But God knows. So a covenant is made and peace settles (26:31). Well, not quite. Now, strife comes from *within* Isaac's tents. Esau has decided to marry outside of the family, two Hittite women (26:34) in fact, and these two Hittite women don't get along with their in-laws. Why is this bad? Because the Lord's wants the covenant to move along Abraham's family lines and not mixed up with other peoples. This is why Abraham sent Eliezer to get a wife for Isaac from among his own people. Esau's inter-tribal marriage disqualifies him from the covenant because it doesn't keep the covenant "in the family" as God intends. In truth, God intended to have it go through Jacob anyway. By marrying the Hittite women, Esau eliminated himself from the equation. This brings up a very important point.

Remember when Esau sold off his birthright? In ancient Israel, the first-born son is granted *the birthright and blessing*. The *birthright* is his responsibility to care for the family when his dad dies. The firstborn son is to make sure mom is cared for, sisters are properly married, and unmarried sisters cared for. He is to “rule” the home and function as a priest for the family, representing them to God and God to the family. Such a large responsibility requires a large inheritance to support the clan. This is the *blessing*. First, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob is now the future “elder brother” in place of Esau in God’s eyes (which God knew and intended 25:23). Regardless of how you feel about the sneakiness of the transfer, God meant Jacob to have it. Second, Esau married outside the family. This shows he had no regard for God or the family covenant. And now comes the moment when the birthright and the blessing come to Jacob for the blessing *must* follow the birthright.

Long story short, Jacob steals the blessing with Rebekah’s help (27:5-17). Yes, the deceptive plan actually works! The one who deceived Abimelech (Isaac) is in turn deceived by his son (Jacob). After Jacob procures the blessing and scoots from the tent, Esau returns to find his father has already blessed his brother. Isaac trembles with anger and fear (27:33), realizing the little runt stole Isaac’s preferred son’s blessing. Esau is also distraught (27:34). Wouldn’t you be if you just found out you don’t get the double-portion of the inheritance and you have to serve your younger brother? “Red” is seeing red and he plans to kill Jacob which would bring the birthright and blessing back to him (27:41). Rebekah knows what’s coming and decides to send Jacob to her home town and family to preserve his life. Jacob is to also find a bride from their own extended family (27:43-45). What a reality show this would make!

So Jacob gets outta Dodge fast with Isaac’s blessing, moving from the southern desert of Israel to Bethel (Luz) on the way up north and east to Aram (Syria). There Jacob has a run-in with God. There will be a lot of that “running into” God because that’s what Jacob is going to be doing. He’s heading into the How To Trust God And Not Keep Trying To Do Things Your Way school. God is building a people who will trust Him and not themselves. Jacob has a lot of growing to do in this area, but God will make it happen. God affirms the Abrahamic covenant and Jacob agrees with the condition that God be with him, give him food and clothing, and return him safely. That’s so Jacob! Always trying to work an angle to his favor. He’s going to learn that doesn’t work on God.

INSIGHT

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). This parable is set in the birthright and blessing issue. The father has two boys which means their inheritance is split into three

parts – two parts for the older son and one part for the younger. The younger son asks for his inheritance before the elderly father dies which was perfectly acceptable in those days. After squandering it, the sadder but wiser younger son returns home knowing he will have nothing. In his beat-up, repentant condition, he asks to be a hired hand in his father's house. But his father will have none of that! He hosts a big banquet to welcome his son home and gives him the tokens affirming that the young man is still his son (best robe, a ring, and sandals – no slave will he be!). The elder son returns home to hear and see what's going on. Out of whose inheritance do you think those gifts came? And who has been restored as a threat to the firstborn's rightful blessing? Now you know why the elder brother was so ticked off, kind of like Esau was. But the point of the story is that it's not about sons, it's about the father. *Both* of the boys completely misread their father, how much he loved both of them, and how everything He had was meant for both of them to enjoy. This is not a parable about us. It's really about our magnificent Heavenly Father!

January 10 : Scriptures Genesis 29-31

SUMMARY

When Jacob arrives in the vicinity of Aram-naharaim (*Ah-rahm-nah-ha-ray'-eem*, fun huh?), he comes across a well surrounded by flocks of sheep. Why? Because water is a scarce commodity. All the shepherds had evidently agreed to water their flocks at the same time so no one flock could take more than their share. See? Accountability. Jacob asks where they're from. Finding out they are from the family neighborhood, Jacob asks if they know his family, Nahor's clan. "Why yes," they respond. "And extremely gorgeous daughter, Rachel, just showed up!" (I added that "extremely gorgeous" part. Judging by how smitten Jacob gets, I figured I could blame it on that.) Anyway, when Rachel arrives, he does her a favor by rolling the *huge* stone away so she can water the sheep (29:10). Personally, I think he's just showing off, trying to impress her. Then Jacob, this strange man from who knows where, plants a kiss on Rachel and begins to weep. He tells her between sobs that he's from the other side of the family, Rebekah's side. Like any sane young woman faced with such a display, Rachel runs home to tell her father, Laban (29:12). Laban is Rebekah's brother as we learned about in 24:29. So if you're keeping score at home, Laban and Rebekah are Isaac's 1st cousins once removed. Rebekah is also Isaac's husband, making Laban Isaac's brother-in-law and Jacob's uncle. The family line also makes Laban is Jacob's 2nd cousin and Jacob and Rachel are 2nd cousins once removed. Got that?

To simplify things, Uncle Laban hears about Jacob's arrival and runs to meet him, hug him, and kiss him (29:13). Don't think Laban is being affectionate. The Rabbis don't have a high opinion of Laban and see him as the conniver he will soon prove to be. They say Laban likely remembered Abraham's fancy-schmancy gifts brought by Eliezer to purchase Rebekah for Isaac. The rabbis joke about Laban getting close to Jacob to frisk him to see if he had any more goodies on him. Finding none, Laban brings Jacob home per the aforementioned hospitality and puts him to work. After a month, Uncle Laban negotiates Jacob's wages. Apparently, Jacob had been working for just room and board. Jacob says he will gladly work for his uncle for seven years in exchange for his *younger daughter* Rachel's hand in marriage (29:18). Get that? *Younger daughter*. Uncle Laban agrees and time flies by for Jacob. The wedding day arrives and Jacob readies himself for the wedding night. Uncle Laban, the deceiver, and manipulator that he is, substitutes his *older daughter*, Leah (the Hebrew idiom "weak eyes" implies, "the homely one") for the extremely gorgeous *younger daughter* Rachel. (Hey! It was dark, there was wine and one thing led to another...) It was a classic bait and switch. Why? Uncle Laban knew the first daughter (Leah) had to get married before the second daughter (Rachel). Since Leah was no beauty, Uncle Laban would likely get stuck with both daughters to support into their

old age. This way, he can unload both, playing off Jacob's love for Rachel (29:25-27). Jacob's ability to work a situation to his advantage has finally met its match in Uncle Laban.

And the children start arriving! God's blessing on Abraham's line kicks in. Not only does Jacob have children by Leah and Rachel, but he also has children by their maidservants (the surrogate wife thing again). All in all, he has 11 boys and 1 girl during his time with Uncle Laban. And not only does the Lord bless his family life, but He also blesses His work. The flocks under Jacob's care flourish (30:30)! Jacob wants to go back home to Canaan. But Laban likes the prosperity Jacob brings. So they make a deal. Jacob will separate the sheep and goats into distinctive colorations to designate ownership. Laban agrees. What Laban doesn't know, this was God's plan, not Jacob's plan (31:10), and God is going to step in to enrich Jacob. Plus, Jacob is learning to trust God! Jacob's flocks explode in numbers and vitality while Uncle Laban's flocks languish. Soon, it becomes clear Jacob is no longer welcome (31:2), so he takes his household and flocks and flees (31:17-18). Laban pursues Jacob and catches up with him (31:30), accusing Jacob of desertion and stealing his gods (31:30)! Jacob invites Laban to search for himself. Finding none, Jacob dresses down Uncle/Father-in-law Laban for cheating and abusing him (31:41). Laban's response? The Truth comes out! Uncle Conniver says everything Jacob has really belongs to him (31:43). Jacob and Uncle Laban make a covenant (31:48) to set peace and protection terms and they part company.

INSIGHT

The major theme we see stretching from Adam and Eve to Jacob is this, "Will you do things your way or God's way?" The Lord is looking for people who will follow His ways. Human nature is to do things our way, even if it means manipulating or finagling an outcome. It took nearly twenty years for God to break Jacob of that trait. Jacob has almost graduated, but his biggest test is yet to come. Let's face it. We're all in that school, aren't we? The test comes to us daily when faced with the same question, "Will you do things your way or God's way?" Our decision reveals quite a bit about our relationship with God.

January 11 : Scriptures Genesis 32-34

SUMMARY

It's been 20 years since Jacob left his home in fear of being dispatched by Esau over the birthright and blessing issue. Yes, Jacob took advantage of both his foolish brother and his blind, elderly father to obtain what God had already said would be his. But God taught Jacob a lesson about what it's like to be defrauded and manipulated. Have 20 years healed the sibling rift? In fear of Esau's anger, Jacob sends messengers to announce his return (32:3). Esau responds by coming to meet Jacob – with a small army of 400 men (32:6)! This does not bode well. So, Jacob wisely divides his family into two camps. He prays, calling on God to honor His promise to prosper him and bring forth descendants (32:9-12). *Note to self:* It's always a good idea to pray God's word back to Him. This is not to remind Him (as if He would forget anything!), but to *affirm* to Him and yourself that you are lined up with His word and will. Afterwards, Jacob wisely sends a magnificent gift to Esau in installments to soften him up by the time they meet (32:13). But his supposed impending struggle with Esau is nothing compared with what the Lord has in store for Jacob. God in human form (remember, He's done it before with Abraham, Genesis 18:1-2) "jumps off the turnbuckle" and the wrestling match with Jacob is on! Amazingly, the "Man" can't (or won't) pin Jacob. But the point is not the win, it's the test of Jacob's character. For decades Jacob has wrestled through life trying to get ahead even if it meant some shenanigans. God didn't want that for him. All Jacob wanted, God already promised. Jacob had to learn that God's promises had to come God's way, *because when we try to get the things God has promised our own way, we muck things up...right, Abraham?* Jacob passes the test! He's a changed man. And a changed man needs a new name to reflect that change (32:28). Jacob the Supplanter (the Replacer) becomes Israel (*Yisrael* – He struggles with God). God affirms Israel's changed nature. But when Israel asks God for His name, God refuses to reveal Himself further. Israel carries the reminder of Who is Boss and Provider for the rest of his life – a limp (32:31).

"Firstborn" meets Firstborn, Israel meets his brother. Is the sibling conflict resolved? Just in case, Jacob prepares his family. But then the surprise comes! Esau runs to embrace, not kill, his estranged brother! The two blubbering guys weep at their reunion (33:4). Esau meets Israel's large family and invites Israel to follow him to his home, the area around Mount Seir. To orient you (open your Bible to the map section in the back), Jacob/Israel is coming south from Aram (today's Syria). Esau is coming north from just south of the Dead Sea area (today's Israel). They meet in the Jordan river valley about halfway between the Dead Sea (south) and the Sea of Galilee (north). I point this out because Esau wants Israel to go all the way south to be with him in his home area. But God promised Canaan to Abraham, Isaac, and *Jacob/Israel*. So, Jacob *says* he will join Esau, but turns right

(west) to live where God wants him to live (31:3). Get it? Israel and his family take up residence in the middle of Canaan near a town called Shechem (34:18) where Israel buys a piece of land. This is the 2nd piece of the Promised Land that the people of Israel legitimately own (Abraham, the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron is the 1st).

Well, things turn ugly here. The son (Shechem) of a local tribal chief (Hamor the Hivite) takes an intense liking to Jacob's daughter, Dinah. He rapes her, then wants her as his wife (34:3). Nice start to a relationship – *not!* Jacob/Israel hears about it along with his sons. Dinah's brothers were just a little ticked off that this stranger had done this to their little sister (34:7). Hamor asks for Dinah's hand in marriage to his son and Shechem offers to pay whatever Israel and his sons demand (34:8, 11) for a dowry. And here's where the deception begins, on both sides. The sons of Israel agree to the marriage, but only if all the Shechemite males get circumcised to fit in with the new family's custom (34:13). The Shechemites agree because they intend to assimilate the Israelites and gain all their wealth (34:23). Three days post-circumcision, while the men (read *warriors*) are still incapacitated with pain, Israel's #2 and #3 sons, Simeon and Levi, launch an attack, killing all the men in retribution. The rest of the clan swoop in and take the spoils (34:27). Jacob is upset because he believes he and the family will get attacked by the other Canaanite tribes sympathetic to the Hivite clan. But the sons justify their attack due to Shechem treating their sister "like a prostitute" (34:30-31).

INSIGHT

Jacob's wrestling match with God resulted in a limp which remained with him for the rest of his life. Although not mentioned again, it would have always reminded Jacob of his struggle with God and the lessons he learned. We get those some "limps" when God allows us to wrestle Him and His plan for our lives. Limps show us our limitations. Limps make us rely on stronger things to support us. And some of God's best people have very pronounced limps. Rather than a mark of weakness, it's a mark of strength. It shows an ability and willingness to trust God more than ourselves.

January 12 : Scriptures Genesis 35-37

SUMMARY

After the terrible Shechem incident, God calls Jacob to Bethel for a recommitment to the covenant (35:1). Jacob's worries about being attacked by the Canaanite tribes are unfounded as God places a great fear of the Israelite family on them all (35:5)! Along the way, Jacob's mom's nanny dies (35:8). Once they arrive at Bethel, God reiterates His covenant with Abraham to Jacob. Again, this includes descendants, nations, and kings coming from his family line, and the Promised Land for their possession (35:11-12). God leaves and Jacob names the spot (which he had originally stopped at when fleeing Jacob so many years ago), Bethel. Beth-el means "God's House." Now Rachel is pregnant with her 2nd child, and things go very wrong. As she is dying, she delivers a son and names him Ben-Oni (Son of my Sorrow). Wouldn't you just love a name that reminds you of causing your mom's sorrow (and death)? Thankfully, Israel changes his son's name to Benjamin/Ben-Yamin (Son of my Right Hand, the right hand being the hand of strength). Benjamin is proof of his strength and vitality in his old age.

Then comes a little incident that gets overlooked but has big repercussions. Reuben, sleeps with one of his dad's concubines (35:22. An auxiliary wife. Please don't make me explain it. Okay, fine. A concubine is a secondary wife of subservient rank. Happy?) Why is this important? Because a father's concubine can become the son's concubine after the father's death as part of the firstborn's inheritance. In a very real sense, Reuben (although messing around) was doing so in an "assuming the inheritance early" way. For this firstborn son, his deed will have *BIG* consequences! The chapter wraps up with the list of Jacob/Israel's sons in "mom order" followed by Isaac's death (35:27).

Chapter 36 is a *long* list of genealogies. Go ahead, read through them. I just want to point out a few names of interest. The first family list is Esau's family who went south and lived in the land of Seir, between the Dead Sea and the east fork of the Red Sea (go ahead, look at your Bible maps). A noteworthy name is Esau's grandson, Amalek. This guy's descendants will be a thorn in the nation of Israel's side (the Jewish people). Amalek will attack Israel (Exodus 17:8, Judges 6:3), will be a cause of King Saul's downfall (1 Samuel 15), and produce a murderous wretch named Haman who will try to destroy the Jewish people in the story of Esther (Esther 3:1. Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of Amalek). Nice legacy, huh? There is also speculation that Eliphaz the Temanite (36:15) may be the same one from the Book of Job (Job 2:11). The 2nd list is of the sons of Seir among whom Esau's family lived (36:20). The 3rd list covers the kings of Edom (Esau) (35:31) and the 4th list notes the chiefs of Esau's family (36:40). As you can see, the Lord's blessing on Abraham for kingly offspring and many nations truly was effective!

And now we launch into one of the longest sections of Genesis – the story of Joseph. There's a principle the rabbis have for the scriptures, especially the Torah, the Five Books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy). The longer the story, the more important it is. Not only does Joseph's story have much to say to and about the Jewish people, but it also has much to say to us Christians. It's remarkable to see how many parallels there are between Joseph and Jesus. Do an internet search and you'll find extensive lists of those parallels. Try it. You'll love it! Anyway, the account picks up with 17-year-old Joseph tattling on his older brothers. In birth order, Joseph is the 2nd youngest. His brother Benjamin is the baby of the family. Not only that, Joseph and Benjamin are sons of Israel's preferred wife, Rachel. The older brothers are sons of the not so favored wife, Leah, and the two wives' servants, Bilhah and Zilpah. Get this! Joseph is ratting on the brothers from the servant women (37:2). Yup. Scoring big points there! Then we find out Israel loves Joseph more than the rest of his brothers (37:3). You got it. The brothers start to hate Joseph and can't speak peaceably with him. And to top things off, Joseph starts getting dreams. Firstly, about his brothers bowing down to him (37:5-6) and secondly, the whole family doing the same (37:9). What you have to know is that dreams were often regarded as communiques, prophecies, from God. Since the brothers don't believe they're real, they think Joseph is just being a jerk because he's Daddy's Favorite. On the other hand, Israel knows a thing or two about dreams and visions and encounters with God. He keeps these dreams in mind (37:11).

One day Joseph heads out to take some lunch to his brothers in the fields – a long way off. Upon seeing him, the brothers plot to kill him (37:18). That way, his dreams will *never* come true and prove him to be the liar they think he is! But the firstborn responsible son, Reuben, "rescues" Joseph. "Don't kill him," Reuben suggests, "just put him in a pit to scare him a bit." You know, like brothers do. Job done. While Reuben was away the brothers see a caravan of Ishmaelites and get the grand idea to sell Joseph off and make a profit. So, the next train of Midianites comes by and Joseph is gone (37:25, 28). Done and done. (See? I told you to remember names! These guys are going from what is Jordan and Saudi Arabia today to Egypt.) Reuben returns, Joseph is long gone, and the brothers decide to conceal their rotten betrayal by bloodying Joseph's unique outer garment and telling their father, "We dunno what happened to Joseph. Seems some animal ate him." Nice kids. Israel is understandably distraught and morns for Joseph (37:36). The chapter ends with Joseph being sold in Egypt to Potiphar, "an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard." What ever will happen next?

INSIGHT

As I wrote above, there are a boatload of parallels between Jesus and Joseph. For this

insight, here is just a sample copied from <https://kdmanestreet.com/2016/09/23/parallels-between-joseph-and-jesus/>.

- Both men were greatly loved by their fathers (Genesis 37:3; Matthew 3:17).
- As shepherds, they both took care of their father's sheep (Genesis 37:2; John 10:11, 27).
- Both Joseph and Jesus were sent to their brothers by their father (Genesis 37:13, 14; Hebrews 2:11).
- Both men were ridiculed and rejected by their brothers (Genesis 37:4, 19-20; John 1:11; 7:5).
- Both were sold for the price of a slave (Genesis 37:28; Matthew 26:15).
- Both were taken to Egypt (Genesis 37:25; Matthew 2:14, 15).
- Both were falsely accused and condemned (Genesis 39:13-20; Matthew 26:57-68; 27:11-25). Both were placed with two other prisoners; one was saved and the other lost (Genesis 40:2, 3; Luke 23:32).
- Both men were 30 years old at the beginning of public recognition (Genesis 41:46; Luke 3:23) and were exemplary servants (Genesis 39:1-6; Philippians 2:7).
- Both were tempted. While both Joseph and Jesus didn't give into the temptation (Genesis 39:7-12; Matthew 4:1); Jesus also *never* sinned (Hebrews 4:15).
- Both were stripped of their robes (Genesis 37:23; Matthew 27:27-28). Joseph was thrown into a pit (37:24) and later cast into a dungeon (Genesis 39:20). Jesus was condemned to death before descending to hell (John 19:23; 1 Peter 3:18-20).
- Both forgave those who wronged them (Genesis 45:1-15; Luke 23:34).
- While men plotted evil against them (Genesis 37:20; John 11:53), God used it for good (Genesis 50:20; 1 Corinthians 2:7-9).
- Both saved not only their people, but also many others (Genesis 45:7; 50:20; Matthew 1:21; Luke 24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11).

January 13 : Scriptures Genesis 38-40

SUMMARY

Surprise! The camera pans away from Joseph in Egypt to Judah in Adullam, not far from Hebron, great-grandpa Abraham's burial plot. Things don't seem to be going well. Judah marries a Canaanite and has 3 sons (38:3-5). He procures a wife (Tamar) for his eldest son (Er). Because his son was wicked, the text says God sent him to an "Er-ly" grave. ("Thank you! I'll be here all week!") According to custom, Er's brother is supposed to take Tamar as his wife to raise children in Er's name and to continue with Er's inheritance. Onan decides he isn't going to comply and God kills him, too (38:10). (No, I'm not going to discuss this right now. It's just a summary.) So Shelah is left for Tamar to marry, but he's just a kid. Judah tells her to go live as a widow in her father's house until Shelah is old enough for marriage and producing kids (38:11). But the real reason is Judah thinks she's a Black Widow. By the time Shelah has grown up a few years later, Judah's real intent becomes clear for he doesn't give Shelah to Tamar. Now understand this next concept before you read on and condemn Tamar for her actions. Being a widow with no children brings shame upon the woman plus a total lack of support in her old age when her father or husband dies. Got it? She's desperate and figures out if Judah's sons won't come through, she'll get children from the last family source – Judah, her father-in-law –to fulfill her duty to continue the family line. The men won't do their duty, but Tamar will. Fascinating. Not the wicked woman you thought she was, huh? She dresses like a prostitute at sheep-shearing time when the money and celebrating flows (38:15). Judah, in great spirits, sees this "prostitute" and decides to have a good time, leaving his signet, cord, and staff as a promise for payment. In a manner of speaking, she has Judah's credit card and ID. Afterward, Tamar leaves. When Judah can't find her, he figures he's been taken (38:23). Months later, it becomes obvious Tamar is pregnant (38:24). Word gets back to Judah and in self-righteous indignation, he demands she be killed for refusing to follow the custom. But who's at fault here, really? Judah demands to know the identity of the baby's father. Tamar responds by showing him his credit card and ID. Oops. Busted! Judah, realizing his fault and her proper claim, accepts her as part of the family but never touches her again (38:26). Tamar gives birth to twins. One (Zerah) sticks out his hand and a string is tied to his wrist to distinguish him as the firstborn. But WAIT! He pulls his hand in and his brother (Perez) comes out first (38:29)! Here's a case of a "firstborn" being replaced by a second-born, thus becoming a firstborn. See a pattern here? It repeats throughout scripture. *There are firstborns by birth and firstborns by choice.* Perez, the second baby to emerge, but the one truly born first, becomes the ancestor of King David, a descendant of Judah's line. Either by Judah's offspring or by Judah himself, God will have His way.

The camera now pans back to Egypt. The Lord's blessing is so strong on Joseph that Potiphar puts him in charge of his house (39:4). In fact, God's administrative blessing was so strong on Joseph that Potiphar leaves everything in Joseph's hands. So much so "Potiphar did not know what he had except for the bread that he ate" (39:6). Now that's trust! Joseph was not only an accomplished administrator, but he was also handsome. Potiphar's wife thinks she'll have a little tryst with Joseph which Joseph refuses. But she kept pestering him. One day she catches him alone in the house and goes after him. When she grabs him, Joseph's only godly recourse is to run out of his clothes and then outside, presumably "nekked as a Jay-bird" (39:15). When Potiphar comes home, she falsely accuses Joseph and Potiphar throws him into prison (39:20) where the Pharaoh's prisoners *just happened to be* locked up. What a coincidence! Anyway, Joseph again proves his worth to the point where the warden puts everything in Joseph's hands. Joseph prospers again. Gee, almost like God's training him for something!

Speaking of training, a couple of Pharaoh's servants get new lodgings – in prison – the same prison Joseph is overseeing (40:1-3). Somehow, they had offended Pharaoh. Joseph becomes their overseer (40:4). One night the two have dreams which make them sad because they have no one to interpret them *or so they thought!* Joseph sees their depressed faces, asks them what their dreams are and promptly interprets them. But it's a "good news, bad news" situation. It's good news for the cupbearer (40:13) and bad news for the chief baker (40:19). The point is that Joseph accurately interprets the dreams. And even though Joseph tries to finagle his way out of prison, "Hey cupbearer. Could you put in a good word for me?" (40:14), God still has some humbling and training left to do in Joseph. He remains in prison *for two full years* (40:23)!

INSIGHT

Some people have a hard time figuring out what the story of Judah and Tamar is doing right in the middle of Joseph's story. One way of finding connections in the Bible is the rabbis' way. They look for common themes, phrases, and even words to help make connections. Here we have one that stretches backward. When Israel's sons present Joseph's bloodstained garment to their father, they say, "Examine this" (37:32, Hebrew *nakar*). When Tamar confronts Judah, she produces his seal on the cord and his staff and says, "Examine this" (38:25, *nakar*). Same word! When Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of attacking her, she presents his garment to her husband. Now while she doesn't use the same word, the idea is the same. The conclusion? Just as Judah worked a deception on his dad, Jacob, so Judah would himself be deceived and trapped by the same word he used to cover his own deception. And just as Joseph's brothers present his garment to deceive their dad, so Potiphar's wife uses Joseph's garment to deceive her husband,

Joseph's boss. And so, by word and action, we have connected Judah's story into Joseph's.
Fun, huh?