

by being willing to sacrifice himself for Benjamin. The one who sold a brother as a slave now offers to become a slave in place of another brother. His loving sacrifice makes him an ideal king, and he is given the promise of a kingly line when his first three brothers are disqualified by grave (unkingly) sin.

Joseph is rewarded with the portion of the firstborn (not given to Leah's firstborn but to Rachel's). His two sons are reckoned as Jacob's sons and the youngest (Ephraim) will become a dominant tribe.

The family of Jacob/Israel migrates to Egypt as an embryonic nation, living in the choicest part of the land under the favor of the pharaoh. But the promises of Canaan are not forgotten and the book concludes with Jacob's burial in the patriarchal cave and Joseph's insistence that he be buried in the Promised Land.

GOING FURTHER

How is the blessing/covenant passed from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to the twelve sons?

Read Gen 49:8-12. What does the blessing to Judah mean and how will it be fulfilled?

In what ways does the book of Genesis prepare the reader for the book of Exodus?

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Exodus 1-18. Give special attention to 6:1-8.

How does God reveal his character in these chapters?

Think about why God chooses to deliver Israel in the way that he does.

Think about the "redemption" of Israel. How does the redemption apply to the nation as a whole and to each individual? (Or does it?)

GENESIS 25-50: GOD'S PRESERVATION OF HIS PROMISES TO THE PATRIARCHS

PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Genesis 25-50. Keep an eye out for anything related to the covenant (land, seed, blessing). Pay extra attention to any conversation between God and man. Notice how God is sovereign in election. If you have extra time, trace the character development of two figures in particular: Jacob and Judah. Be prepared to be amazed at our awesome God and his wonderful revelation!

OUTLINE

- I. The account of Ishmael's family line: The family of Ishmael lives outside of the Promised Land and outside of the promised blessing (25:12-18).
- II. The account of Isaac's family line—**Jacob**: God chooses Jacob and develops his character and faith through crises (25:19-35:29).
- III. The account of Esau's family line: Esau's descendants live outside of the Promised Land and their kingly line foreshadows the kings who would rule in Israel (36:1-43).
- IV. The account of Jacob's family line—**12 sons, especially Judah and Joseph**: God preserves the chosen family from death or assimilation by providing for them in Egypt (37:1-50:26).

QUESTIONS THE READERS HAD

Who is this Yahweh?

What is the relationship of Yahweh to us and our ancestors?

Who are the patriarchs and what were they like?

Why did God choose us?

How did the patriarchs relate to God, and how should I?

Why is our world the way that it is?

THE FAMILY LINE OF ISAAC (GEN 25-35)

Isaac's life is skipped (there is no "family line" of Abraham in the book; there is one for Ishmael!). Isaac attempts to thwart God's sovereign election of Jacob.

The story of Isaac's line begins with notice that Rebekah is barren. Barrenness is a condition that only God can solve, and he graciously gives this trial to each of the wives of the patriarchs so that their descendants will be reckoned as gifts from God.

The Lord gives Rebekah twins in response to Isaac's prayer, and before the boys are born, the Lord declares that the boys represent two nations, and that the older would serve younger. Esau is characterized as one who cares not for the great promises that God has made to Abraham and Isaac, and he discards his birthright for a meal. In this way, God's sovereign will is reconciled with human responsibility, and the readers understand not only why Esau and Jacob become separate nations (unlike the 12 sons who together formed a single nation), but also why God chose the younger.

Isaac tries to thwart God's revealed plan by passing the divine inheritance on to the one who despises it. God's plan prevails, albeit through deception, and Jacob is granted superiority over his brother and the Abrahamic blessing. The cost of the deception is family estrangement for the next 20 years, but even in this God is working to provide Jacob with a family.

While on his way out of the Promised Land, God appears to Jacob and makes him the recipient of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac. That this choice is clearly of grace is evident from the defects of Jacob's character: self-reliance, prayerlessness, and deceptive ways. Yet God blesses Jacob abundantly, giving him numerous children and extensive flocks.

The real transformation in Jacob's character occurs when he wrestles with God and prevails by divine dependence, desperate for God's blessing.

Jacob's return to Bethel highlights the complete transformation of Jacob from his first visit, now accompanied by a large family and one who has put aside self-sufficient ways. In response, the Lord confirms his promise to make Jacob (now "Israel") into a mighty nation who owns this land. In addition, we have here, as we did with Abraham, notice that the patriarch will beget kings. This raises the question of which son will produce the kingly line.

THE FAMILY LINE OF JACOB (GEN 37-50)

The final section of Genesis explains (1) how God protected Jacob's 12 sons from intermarrying with unfaithful foreigners; (2) how Jacob's family ended up living in Egypt; (3) how Judah came to be chosen as the family of kings; and (4) how discord in Jacob's family was healed by grace and repentance.

The selling of Joseph into slavery shows (1) the father's inappropriate favoritism; (2) the sons' murderous hearts; and (3) God's sovereignty over evil.

The story of Judah and Tamar shows (1) the real danger of Jacob's sons intermarrying and assimilating with the Canaanites, thus threatening the promises; (2) Judah's disregard for carrying on the family line; and (3) God's protection of the family line through a faithful Canaanite woman.

While Joseph's stellar character through his years in Egypt is to be commended (and emulated), the real hero of the story is Judah. Joseph essentially functions as "God" in the story, testing his brothers to reveal what is in their hearts. He is largely a static character, the foil against which we see the transformation of his brothers and particularly Judah. The true character of the repentant brothers is evident in the way they treat Benjamin, even when he is favored by their father and (apparently) by Joseph. Their treatment of him in a manner opposite to the way they treated Joseph proves their heart change.

Judah is the leader of the brothers, first convincing his father that the livelihood of the family depended upon their journey, and then