

RIVALRY AND RESCUE

THE SONS OF JACOB
IN GENESIS 37-50

Bible Study Guide
Term 2 2021

The logo for All Saints North Epping Anglican Church. It features a stylized white cross with a crescent moon-like shape at its base, set against a dark background. The text 'ALL SAINTS' is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the cross. Below it, 'ANGELICAN CHURCH' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. To the right of the cross, 'NORTH EPPING' is written in a white, sans-serif font.

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Study 1: Genesis 37

Welcome back to the world of Genesis and the early generations of God's people we began looking at in 2018. The major characters in Genesis 37-50 are the sons of Jacob so we'll begin by re-acquainting ourselves with this family.

Read Genesis 35:9-12

1. What important information do we learn here about Jacob?

Read Genesis 35:21-26

2. What is notable about this family tree?

Read Genesis 37:1-4

3. What do you notice about:
 - a. Jacob/Israel
 - b. Joseph
 - c. The brothers

Read Genesis 37:5-11

4. What idea do the two dreams have in common?

5. How do the family relationships develop?

Read Genesis 37:12-30

6. Two of Joseph's brothers are mentioned specifically here. Which ones are they? What do they do? What are their motives?
 - a.

 - b.

Read Genesis 37:31-36

7. If you did our previous series of Genesis studies, can you remember an earlier scene where a father was deceived? How does this scene compare and relate? (Hint: see Genesis 27:7-10)

8. All Jacob's "sons and daughters" (likely daughters-in-law) came to comfort him. As readers, what do we know that Jacob doesn't?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 2: Genesis 38

Warning: Adult scenes ahead! In this chapter the Joseph story is paused while we hear more about the life of his brother Judah. Because the first-born Reuben (35.21-22) and second- and third-born Simeon and Levi (34) have displeased their father, Judah as the fourth-born becomes significant in the family, and he will have a notable role in the chapters to follow.

Read Genesis 38:1-11

“Levirate marriage” was a common practice in the ancient near east. If a married man died without a child his brother was expected to take his wife. Children of this marriage legally counted as children of the first husband (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10) so his name and land ownership would continue. This practice is distasteful to modern readers! But for a widow in a male-dominated society without social security, children were the key to being looked after in old age. Having children in this way would have been considered preferable to being childless and destitute.

1. In the previous generations, it was considered very important for Abraham’s family not to intermarry with the Canaanites (ch24). What does Judah leaving his brothers and marrying a Canaanite suggest about his spiritual state?
2. Draw a family tree with Judah at the top. Put a cross on the characters who are dead by verse 10.

3. Look at verse 8. What is the reason given for Onan to sleep with Tamar?

4. Look at verse 9. What is Onan's motivation for his behaviour?

5. Tamar is entitled to have the third brother, Shelah, take her as his wife. Why does Judah refuse?

Read Genesis 38:12-19

6. What do you make of Tamar's actions here?

7. What do you make of Judah's actions here?

Read Genesis 38:20-26

8. At what points does Judah declare a verdict about Tamar? What are they?

9. What does his final verdict say about him?

Study 3: Genesis 39

Read Genesis 39:1-10

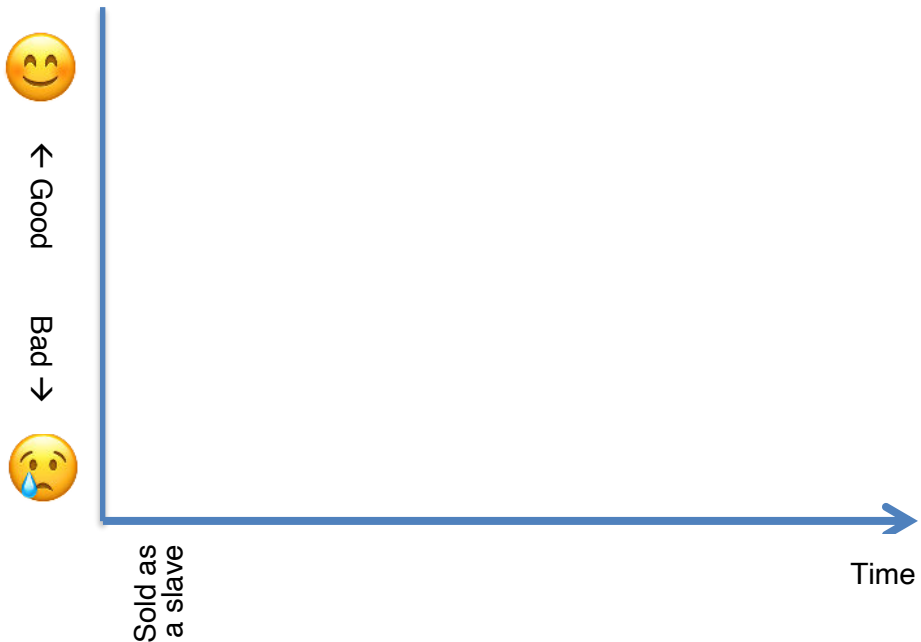
1. According to the narrator, what is the cause of Joseph's success?
2. What reasons does Joseph give for not sleeping with Potiphar's wife?
3. How could this function as a model for our thinking about sin?

Read Genesis 39:11-20a

4. Joseph has been faithful to God and to his boss. What is the result of his faithfulness?
5. What lessons are there for us in this?

Read Genesis 39:20b-23

6. Plot Joseph's experiences in this chapter on the following graph



7. According to the narrator, what is the cause of Joseph's successes?

A question which hangs over the whole of Genesis is "how will God fulfill the promises he made to Abraham?". Those promises made to Abraham in Gen 12 were repeated to his son Isaac and grandson Jacob.

Read Genesis 26:1-4 (promise to Isaac) and Genesis 28:13-15 (promise to Jacob).

8. How does chapter 37 show us God keeping these promises?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 4: Genesis 39:20b - 40:23

Warmer question

1. How do you react when you are poorly treated? Can you think of a time when you were treated unfairly? Share this with the group.

Read Gen. 39:20b-23

1. Joseph is in prison in Egypt, in the prison where the King's prisoners were kept. Recall the reason for this by glancing back over chapter 39.

2. Try to imagine how Joseph was feeling and behaving in prison. Did this affect the way the prison warden treated him? Was this surprising?

Read Gen. 40:1-15

3. The King's butler (cup-bearer) and baker are both in prison with Joseph and both have dreams. What were the tasks of these men in Pharaoh's household?

4. Describe the dream of the butler and its interpretation.

5. African and Asian Christians believe that God speaks through dreams today. But dreams need to be tested by truths taught in Scripture (Deut. 13:1-5; Dan. 2:28). Have you ever had dreams that were significant in your life? Did you test them by God's Word?

Read Gen. 40:16-23

6. Describe the dream of the baker and its interpretation by Joseph. What eventually happened to all three men?
7. What do you think how Joseph is feeling when the butler forgets to tell Pharaoh about him? What impresses you about Joseph in the light of these disappointments? Compare Gen. 37:24 with 40:15.
8. Read James 1:2-4. How do these verses help you if you are waiting for God to answer your prayers as you go through a time of hardship and difficulty?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 5: Genesis 41

Warmer question

1. Have you even experienced a famine? If you haven't try to imagine what it would be like. How does it affect the people going through it?

Read Gen 41:1-40

2. What were Pharaoh's dreams and why did they trouble him?
3. How did Joseph get the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dreams?
4. What is impressive about the way Joseph handles this rapid rise from prisoner to king's advisor?
5. What do Joseph's interpretation of the dreams and his proposal demonstrate (41:17-36)?

Read Gen 41:41-57

6. How did Pharaoh equip Joseph for the massive task ahead of him?

7. Why do you think Joseph accepted a new (Egyptian) name and agreed to marry the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On?

8. Describe how Joseph, now 30 years old, fulfilled his duties as second in command of the land of Egypt.

9. What do the names of Joseph's two sons tell us about the way he compared his present situation with his previous sufferings? Compare what Paul wrote about forgetting the past and pressing on with God's plan (Phil.3:13).

10. Perhaps you would like to share with your group a way that God has blessed you after a period of difficulty or suffering and given you hope for the future.

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 6: Genesis 42

Warmer question

1. Can you think of a time when external pressures have exacerbated interpersonal tensions in your family? Or in a workplace or other group of people?

Read Genesis 42:1-17

2. Ask one of your group to review the story of Joseph having dreams, being thrown into the cistern by his brothers and taken down to Egypt by the Midianites (Gen. 37).
3. Summarise the events which lead to the brothers being taken into Joseph's presence in Egypt. How does this fulfil the dreams he had as a teenager? (Gen. 37:5-11).
4. Why do you think Joseph accused his brothers of being spies?

Read Genesis 42:18-28

5. How do the brothers recognize that their previous sin of sending Joseph to Egypt has now caught up with them? How do they feel about that act now? (42:21).

6. How does Joseph ensure that the brothers will return to Egypt? What happens as they return home?

Read Genesis 42:29-38

7. How do you think Jacob felt when the brothers arrive back in Canaan, find money in their sacks and tell their father they have to take Benjamin back to Egypt?
8. How does Reuben try to placate the situation?
9. “If it had not been for this famine the brothers would not have known how much they loved their father” (Baldwin). Do you agree with this statement?
10. As we try to build up godly families in our homes how can some of the lessons learned from the story of Joseph help us? Think about the actions of the brothers and the effect this had on their old father, Jacob. What can we do to promote godly relationships in our families?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 7: Genesis 43-45

The famine has now become very severe in Canaan and Jacob's family again find they need more food. So, they make careful preparations for this second journey to Egypt. Israel (Jacob) sees the whole situation in terms of its effect on him.

Read Genesis 43:1-14

1. Explain why Israel's instruction to his sons to return to Egypt and buy more food was not welcomed by his sons.

2. a. Who has become spokesperson for the brothers?

b. Compare the words of Israel in verse 6 with those of Judah in verses 8-9. What is revealed about the character of each man in his words?

3. a. How does Israel try to ameliorate the situation into which he is sending his sons?

b. What do his words in v.14 indicate about his understanding of God?
(See also Genesis 17:1-2)

7. Review the narrative of the departure from Egypt. List the elements of the scenario Joseph set up to test his brothers.

8. How did the brothers respond to the possible loss of Benjamin?

9. Reflect and discuss: To what extent are we prepared to learn from, and, if possible, make amends for past mistakes?

The certainty that God's will, not man's, was the controlling reality in every event shines out as Joseph's guiding light and the secret of his astonishing lack of rancour – see verse 5.

Read Genesis 45:1-15

10. a. Describe Joseph's demeanour at the time when he told his brothers his name.

- b. What was the immediate response of his brothers?

11. a. What is Joseph's understanding of his previous treatment by his brothers?

b. What does he now require his brothers to do for him?

12. Reflect and discuss: Is it always necessary to explicitly state forgiveness?

Read Genesis 45:16-28

13. How do we know that Joseph was held in high esteem by Pharaoh?

14. Describe Jacob's response to the news about Joseph.

Summing up:

15. Throughout his life Joseph saw God at work for good according to His purpose. How can we have this attitude when so much around us seems so far from what God desires? Consider also Romans 13:1-14

Notes & Prayer Points

Read Genesis 46:28 – 47:12

Judah is now selected to be the mediator in the forthcoming reunion between father and son by way of reparation for his previous lead role in separating father and son (Genesis 37:26ff).

3. Contrast the emotions of Joseph and Jacob at their reunion.

Despite Pharaoh's invitation for Joseph's family to come and "enjoy the fat of the land" (Gen. 45:18) note the careful planning by Joseph to ensure the acceptance of his family by Pharaoh.

4. When the family meet Pharaoh, what does he offer them?

5. What is most significant in Pharaoh's meeting with Jacob?

Read Genesis 47:13-31

6. Describe the extent of the famine.

7. How did Joseph show his business acumen, ensuring wealth for his family and for Pharaoh?

8. Despite the benefits that accrued to them, what indications are there that God's people were living in a hostile environment? See also Genesis 43:32; 44:34 & 47:25.

Reflect and discuss

9. a. To what extent are we caught in the mix of prosperity and hostility in our society?

- b. How do we balance these competing pressures on our faith?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 9: Genesis 48-50

This study brings us to the end of our series and the end of Genesis. Genesis 37-50 has been the “account of Jacob’s family line” (37:2) and in these final chapters we see the final words and actions of both Jacob and his favourite son Joseph. With three chapters to cover, we’ll need to spend much of our time simply reading and taking it in, with only limited discussion of the details.

Read Genesis 48:1-22

1. In verse 4, Jacob recalls a promise God made to him. How does this set the scene for what he says next?

2. What attitude towards God does Jacob display in this section? Which verses reveal it?


3. Compare Genesis 27:1-10 – another old man with failing sight blessing his offspring. What is similar and what is different?

Read Genesis 49:1-28

Like Isaac’s blessing of his sons back in chapter 27, Jacob’s words here are both a prediction (v1) and a declaration (“blessing” v28) of what will come. His speech “is potent as well as informative” (Kidner).

4. How is the collection of brothers referred to in verse 28? How does this reveal the significance of the blessings uttered by Jacob?

5. Complete the table below to compare the length of Jacob’s speech to each son, and considering how you would react to such a “blessing”.

	How many verses	How would you feel if this was you? 
Reuben (Cf Gen 35:22)		
Simeon and Levi (Cf Gen 34:25-26,30)		
Judah (Cf Rev 5:5)		
Zebulun		
Issachar		
Dan		
Gad		
Asher		
Naphtali		
Joseph		
Benjamin		

6. From the tribe of Judah came the great king David and the greatest king Jesus, who in Revelation 5:5 is celebrated as the “Lion of Judah”. How does Jesus fulfill what is predicted here for the Judah tribe?

7. Joseph, his father’s favourite son, receives a long blessing in verses 22-26 including that he will be “prince among his brothers”. In the end, who will be greater: Joseph or Judah?

Read Genesis 49:29 – 50:14

8. Consider what Jacob has said earlier about the land of Canaan. He is not just concerned with being buried alongside his relatives. What else would be on his mind?

Jacob, “[t]he one who had kicked his way out of the womb (25:22–26) and “conned” his way into God’s promise (25:29–34; 27:22–29) is at rest in the plot of promise and is honored even by the empire. In an understated way, the narrative speaks of a complete inversion. The “last one,” the one desperately hungry and grieving and so often hopeless, has become the “first one,” honored in his death even by the Pharaoh.” – Walter Brueggemann

Read Genesis 50:15-21

Joseph had told his brothers back in Genesis 45:5 “do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you”. But now with Jacob gone, they are worried afresh and resort to inventing commands from Jacob to protect themselves.

9. Why do you think Joseph wept when he received their message (v17)?

10. What empowers Joseph to forgive his brothers and treat them kindly?

11. How does the story of Jesus illustrate the principle of verse 20?

12. How can these insights help us to respond with forgiveness when we are wronged?

Read Genesis 50:22-26

13. Why is Joseph so insistent that he not be buried in Egypt?

14. Joseph had confidence that God would continue to fulfill his promises after his death. What would it look like for us to do the same?

The family of Abraham and the tribes of Israel

