

## Genesis-by Tommy Lee

### Chapter 1

Our Song for October ("*This Is My Father's World*," printed below) is a beautiful hymn of praise to the Creator of this world, through whom and for whom all things exist. But it pales in comparison to the hymn of praise to the Creator that we find in Genesis 1. As Sir Isaac Newton once said, "*This most beautiful system [The Universe] could only proceed from the dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.*" A few things to ponder from Genesis 1: note the creation of humanity as the climax of God's work. *We* are the crowning touch of God's creative power, a fact emphasized by the length and poetry of vs.26-29, as compared to the other creation comments. Note also that God completes his work in six days; as we'll see later, this is a model and pattern that man was to follow, so that (imitating God) he might then rest. That's part of what it means to "*image*" God. Note the repeated declaration of the goodness of creation. God is good, and the goodness of every part of his world (as it was at the beginning) is emphatically affirmed. Creation is beautiful, full of unexpected surprises.

### Chapter 2

There is one day in seven that God made "*holy*"—set apart, special, consecrated and different from the other days. This fundamental structure of human life is largely forgotten today, even by Christians. But in context, this weekly day of cessation from work so that we might gather together with God's people for worship and celebration and hope and the charitable *giving-of-rest* to others (see the 4th commandment) is as essential to human flourishing as reproduction and food (see the end of chapter 1). In the New Testament this day of robust, life-giving joy that we should look forward to with all our hearts is moved from the 7th day to the 1st, the day of Christ's resurrection. The resurrection changed everything! Also, I can never read of the creation of Eve without remembering this quote from the puritan Matthew Henry: "*The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.*" Glorious marriage poetry.

### Chapter 3

The fall of man. Innocence lost. Paradise ruined. Exile from the garden. The pains of childbirth and the frustrations of toil in a fallen world. Lies, sin, guilt, shame, judgment, evil, suffering, corruption, fears, estrangement, destruction, futility, the curse of death, etc. All of these disasters (and more) come, *not from God's good creation in Genesis 1 & 2*, but from man's rebellion in Genesis 3. This is no longer the world for which we were made. Humanity said, "*Not your way God, but my way!*" And now, as Proverbs says, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*" How did this happen? Satan, "*the father of lies*" (see John 8.44), first persuaded humanity to question God's goodness—even in spite of the fact that they were standing in the paradise described in the previous two chapters—and then persuaded them to doubt God's Word. These are the twin roots of every sin since; indeed, he truly is "*the father of lies*." And yet, right in the midst of the sentences of judgement, God graciously speaks of a Savior who will come to crush Satan and all his work (v.15).

### Chapter 4

The last chapter contained the Bible's first hint of the gospel, in Genesis 3.15. Later allusions to that great verse are found in Romans 16.20, Hebrews 2.14, and Revelation 12. The hint takes on more and more shape and definition and direction as the Scriptures unfold (Genesis 22.18, etc.) And here, in Genesis 4, we see just how desperately the world needs this Savior to come, for humanity is now firmly in the grip of sin. Even after God Himself attempts to dissuade Cain from continuing on the path of sin (vs.6,7), he plunges on, murdering his brother. In God's description, sin is pictured as a wild beast,

waiting to pounce on us (v.7). Later in the Scriptures, the Apostle Peter says much the same thing: "*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*" Note that as culture and technology progressed (the building of cities, the making of tents, music, metal-working, etc.), so did sin (bigamy, vengeance, etc.). And yet, there was a line of the faithful who "*began to call upon the name of the Lord*" together (v.26) in this same era. Worship!

## Chapter 5

Here we have the first of the Bible's extended genealogies, a list of Adam's descendants, through his third son Seth, ending ten generations later, at Noah. The meaning and aim of the vast majority of all the genealogies in the Bible is to point us to Christ, the promised Savior who would rescue this world from the "*curse*" (see v.29) of sin. Note that there are only two genealogies in the New Testament, and they both end at Christ. Meeting the Savior is the whole point of the Bible. Some people scoff at the long lifespans. But, really, if you remember that humanity was not made to die at all (a fact we've forgotten, now that death—the true wage of sin—is such a constant reality) the really remarkable thing is that PEOPLE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF THE ETERNAL GOD DIE! But, in God's grace, the decay caused by sin, leading to much briefer lifespans, only gradually took effect. But there is one man whom the Lord seems to have simply translated into heaven—Enoch, v.24. "*Enoch walked with God.*" Like Elijah (2 Kings 2.11,12), the Lord simply brought his faithful friend into a better country.

## Chapter 6

As we enter into the flood narrative, let's note carefully the reason for this catastrophic judgment. See vs.5-6. Humanity is now firmly bent towards evil: "*every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*" That is an unmistakably, resoundingly, impressively, and frighteningly emphatic statement to make about sinful man. And yet, it's right in line with what the Scriptures everywhere teach us about human depravity (see Psalm 51.3-6; Jeremiah 17.9-10; Matthew 7.15; Romans 1.18-3.20; etc.). Also note God's strong response to this kind of human brokenness: "*it grieved him to his heart.*" The depth and intensity of this language is linguistically akin to the emotions the Bible describes in Genesis 34.7 (brothers hearing that their sister has been raped) and 2 Samuel 19.2 (a father hearing that his son has been killed in battle). Let that sink in; this is God we're talking about: "*it grieved him to his heart.*" God then declares that he will basically de-create the whole earth, and let the world be born again. And yet, there is hope, v.8: "*But Noah found favor [grace] in the eyes of the Lord.*"

## Chapter 7

Note, in v.11, how precisely this accounts dates the flood. (And again in 8.13,14.) One fascinating thing that ancient historians have noted is that there is a story of a great flood—from which only one man and his family escaped, by building a big floating object—in many cultures, from many different people groups, around the world. Which, in the minds of historians, raises the question: did all these societies independently and separately make up different-but-comparable flood stories, just out of their coincidentally-similar imaginations? Or, was there one massive historical event that got corrupted and augmented in various culturally-shaped ways, in the telling and retelling of that story throughout the ancient generations? The closest parallels to the Bible's flood story come from Mesopotamia. A man is advised by his god to build an ark. He then loaded the ark with goods and animals, sent out birds, survived the flood, grounded on a mountain, emerged, & offered sacrifices. For doing so, his god rewarded this man with eternal life. Of course, there are great differences in the stories too. Tomorrow!

## Chapter 8

Yesterday we considered the similarities between the ancient Mesopotamian flood story and the Bible's flood story. And yet, there are great differences as well. In the Mesopotamian story, the gods (plural)

plot the flood in order to stop human population growth. But one of the gods warned his worshipper (Atrahasis), who took action to save himself and his family. During the flood the gods were all terrified, powerless to control it. After the flood they rushed to the sacrifices of Atrahasis, starving. They obviously hadn't thought through the fact that there would be no sacrifices for them during the flood. One of the leading gods, far from omniscient, was surprised to find that some humans had survived. So... the similarities in the two stories are fascinating, but the differences are vast. The true story got corrupted in a pagan culture of many gods, and yet it's one of many ancient flood stories, surviving as a witness to a massive historical event. In chapter 8, God looks upon Noah's sacrifice, and his wrath is satisfied. This is a shadow of the cross, where God looks upon Jesus' sacrifice and is satisfied.

## Chapter 9

Another big difference between the Mesopotamian flood story and the Bible's flood story: remember, the Mesopotamian gods designed the flood to stop human population growth. Still concerned about this after the flood, they then invent miscarriage and female infertility. Contrasting with this, in the Genesis flood story Noah is urged twice to *"be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it"* (9.1, 7; also see 8.17). Despite enduring human sin (8.21; 9.20-27), God renews his covenant, promising that never again will the earth be destroyed in a flood. The Lord even declared the rainbow to be a sign and symbol of this covenant, much like baptism and the Lord's Supper serve as signs and symbols of the covenant that God made with his people in Christ. Also of interest here, note that the human story before the flood was marked by violence (6.11, also remember the sins of Cain & Lamech); now God introduces a new law, to curb that violence. *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image"* (9.6). See Exodus 21.23-25.

## Chapter 10

At first this chapter may seem like a big bore to the modern reader, but it's actually pretty amazing. It's sometimes called "The Table of Nations," and it sets Israel within the context of the ancient world, defining all the international relationships, one to another. It lists 70 nations. If you look at Numbers 29.12-40, you'll read about the Feast of Booths, a seven-day holy convocation and feast that Israel was to keep to the Lord, every year. If you count up the number of bulls that are offered throughout the week, it comes to 70. Why 70? It corresponds to the 70 nations of Genesis 10. God's people are to bless, pray for, and serve the nations of this world; it has always been so (Genesis 12.2,3; 18.18; 22.18; etc.; Matthew 28.19). Note that in Genesis the non-elect lines are always described to us first (Cain before Seth, Ishmael before Isaac, Esau before Jacob... and here, Japheth and Ham before Shem). Shem, we read in v.21, was the father of all the children of *"Eber"*—from which, linguistically, we get the word for the "Hebrews." Next chapter: the elect line of Noah, through Shem, all the way to Abraham.

## Chapter 11

The covenant of grace God established with fallen humanity (3.15) was renewed through Noah (8.20-9.17), giving our world a fresh start. However, our fall into sin and folly is still a poisonous reality. Babylon was famous for building enormous ziggurats (wedding-cake-like temples), whose tops were supposedly *"in the heavens"* (v.4), storming the very gates of God. However, look at v.5: *"And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man [Adam] had built."* So far from threatening God, the picture we have is God getting down on his hands and knees in order to spot a glimpse of this towering achievement of human impotence. God judges, languages are divided, and the nations are scattered (see how this was anticipated in 10.5, 18-20, 31,32). And now the history of humanity takes a crucial and decisive turn, as the Lord prepares to renew his covenant with fallen humanity through Abraham. Abraham will be the father of Israel, the people through whom the Savior will come. This genealogy is largely repeated in Luke 3. It's pointing to and preparing us for Jesus.

## Chapter 12

Genesis 12.1-3 is foundational to understanding the story of the Bible. There are promises here that the Scriptures will refer to again and again and again, as the renewal of God's covenant of grace through Abraham proves to consist of far, far-reaching horizons of fulfillment that are still being discovered today, as people come to Jesus Christ—Abraham's seed, through whom *"all the families of the earth will be blessed"* (v.3). God literally made world-changing promises to Abraham; in fact, the promise of the gospel would come *through* Abraham. And in vs.7&8, we see Abraham's thankful worship of God, in the altars he built. But, in vs.10-20, we see that this man of faith is also a man of fears. By positioning himself as a brother (through whom a potential fiancée would work out the details of a marriage, see Laban's role in chapter 24), perhaps Abraham was hoping to delay any proposed arrangement with Sarah until they could leave. But, the Pharaoh doesn't network through brothers; he just takes his women. But God rescued Sarah, through Egyptian plagues and a rich exodus (vs.16, 20).

## Chapter 13

In chapter 11 we learned that Lot was Abraham's orphaned nephew, whom Abraham seems to have adopted. When Abraham and Sarah left the rest of the family, Lot went with them. Lot would likely have been Abraham's heir, if Sarah had remained childless and if Lot himself had not moved outside the land of promise. After Lot's departure, Abraham's most likely heir becomes his servant, Eliezer (see 15.2). That's the relationship between Abraham and Lot, which makes the events of chapter 13 quite poignant. The blessing of great abundance has provoked a dispute in the family... as it often does, still today. To settle the dispute, Abraham generously and self-sacrificially gives Lot his choice: *"if you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left"* (v.9). Lot picks the beautiful Jordan Valley, which brings to mind the Garden of Eden (v.10); however, it's largely populated by people who are *"wicked, great sinners against the LORD"* (v.13). Notice how God lavishly reassures and richly repays Abraham for this generosity, in vs.14-17. Wow.

## Chapter 14

Four kings and their armies (led by Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, part of modern-day Iran) conquer the Jordan Valley, described for us in 13.10. Thirteen years later, the cities of the Jordan Valley rebel against this coalition of kings... which gets them invaded and conquered once again. And this time, Lot is among the captives. Amazingly, Abraham and the 318 trained men of his household (*~at this point, the careful reader often goes back a couple of chapters and re-reads the Abraham narrative, recognizing for the first time just how wealthy and large Abraham's estate is~*) defeat the coalition and rescue all the captives and their stolen property. In v.20, Melchizedek, king of Salem (which later becomes Jeru-salem) acknowledges just how amazing this military victory is: *"blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"* There is too much going on in this meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham to fully bring out here, but take note and consider: bread and wine (v.18), the priest of God Most High (v.18), blessing (v.19), the tithe (v.20), Psalm 110, and Hebrews 5-7.

## Chapter 15

After the events of chapter 14, Abraham might fear retaliation. Note the Word of the Lord that came to Abraham *"after these things,"* in v.1. And yet, even with the confidence of God's assurance, Abraham still doesn't own any land or have any children. He's not sure how all the (previous) promises of God will be fulfilled. The Lord reaffirms: Abraham will have his *"very own son"* (v.4); in fact, his descendants will be countless (v.5). And then we come to v.6, a hugely important verse for understanding salvation. *"Righteousness"* is the state we must perfectly possess if we hope to be acceptable to God, for there is no *"unrighteousness"* in God (see Psalm 92.15, etc.). So, how do we become "righteous"? Well, you can

perfectly obey the law. Do we have any takers? (No, not even Abraham.) But v.6 says that God accepted Abraham's faith in God's promise "*as righteousness*." Take a look at Galatians 3.6-14. It is faith in God's promise (not our works) that makes us righteous before God. This promise of God is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, who will bear the curse of the covenant for us (vs.9,10,17).

## Chapter 16

*"I mean, really, it's been 10 years since God made the promise! You're now 85 years old! I'm 75 years old! People our age don't have babies!"*... you can imagine the fuller conversations that Sarah had with Abraham, which lie behind vs.1&2. (And this, right after chapter 15, in which God revealed one little part of the far-reaching vision of his promise, describing the next 400 years.) Sarah, obviously infertile, resorts to a perfectly acceptable cultural practice of the day—acceptable in culture's eyes, not God's—in which a child born to the head of the household and a servant-woman could be regarded as the wife's child. This is clearly presented as shameful; see how vs.3&4 are an echo of Genesis 3.6,7—the fall of mankind into sin. And because it was a scheme born of unbelief and sin, it didn't work out well for anyone (vs.4-6). And yet, God still shows himself merciful, doesn't he? He pursues the runaway Hagar, while on her way back to Egypt (v.1,7,8), and shows himself to be a God of seeing (v.13) and caring. Sarah's scheme was an epic "fail"; vs.15&16 stress this is Hagar's child, not hers.

## Chapter 17

13 years have passed since the last chapter. Still no baby. Ages: 99 & 89. The promise of having their own child seems so unimaginable and unreasonable (see v.18; see 18.11). And yet, here God is, reaffirming the promise and even expanding it. For example, not only would Abraham become a "*great nation*" (12.2); he would, in fact, become "*the father of a multitude of nations*" (v.5). Hence, the change in names: *Abram* means "exalted father," but *Abraham* means "father of a multitude." God speaks five separate times in this chapter, illuminating his covenant from various angles. Abraham must have been overwhelmed! But the heart of it all—expressed in various ways—is that God committed himself to Abraham and his descendants. "*I will be your God, and you will be my people*." But remember who the true descendants of Abraham are: "*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham*" (Galatians 3). Note: the "*sign of the covenant*" (v.11) is a rebuke to Abraham's self-effort in chapter 16 (God doesn't need our works). Also, the covenant sign includes our children.

## Chapter 18

This chapter has two parts. In part one, note the grace of hospitality in Abraham's household. This should mark God's people! See Romans 12.13; 1 Timothy 3.2 & 5.10; Titus 1.8; Hebrews 13.2; 1 Peter 4.9. The whole of the gospel can be viewed from one angle as God's hospitality toward us: he makes room for us in his home, in his family, at his table, in his life, in his love. Also note in part one, this continued theme of *laughter* (17.17; 18.12-15). "*Isaac*" (the name God commanded for the child, 17.1) means "he laughs." In the second part of this chapter, note Abraham's prayers of intercession. This is one of the greatest privileges of God's people! We are called to turn our knowledge of God's ways into prayer for this world. God revealed his ways and his plans to Abraham; Abraham turned this knowledge into prayer. And not just for his friends! Matthew 5.44,45: "*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*"

## Chapter 19

Note the grace of hospitality again, this time from Abraham's nephew, Lot. His hospitality contrasts strongly with the behavior of the men of Sodom: they desire the homosexual rape of the guests. See again 18.20,21. Yes, Sodom's reputation for evil is now confirmed. Lot's offer of his daughters rightly

horrifies us. We are relieved that the offer was rejected, but appalled that it was considered. 2 Peter 2.7,8 speak of Lot's righteousness and his distress and torment over the behavior of Sodom. But it certainly appears as if he was starting to compromise with his culture... we'll come back to that at the end. The most we can say here is that he was totally committed to the protection of his guests. It's also disconcerting that the family has be dragged out of Sodom, and that they don't fully appreciate the Word of the Lord. See Jesus' comment: Luke 17.32. This is one of the strongest "judgment of God" stories in the Bible, and this area of the world *STILL* reeks of sulfur today. Back to Lot's compromise: his "tribes," the Moabites & the Ammonites, will continue the culture of Sodom, in many ways.

## **Chapter 20**

Several things here. For one, note that Abraham—even after the reassurance and "close up" encounter with God in chapter 18—still returned to his misleading half-truth about Sarah being his sister (remember, he did this earlier in chapter 12). Perhaps his fear was stirred up again after the dreadful judgment that fell on Sodom; he truly was living in a pagan land. Secondly, note that once again God proved himself faithful to protect and keep his covenant with his people. Keep in mind that if Sarah is taken away from Abraham, the whole covenant promise is at stake! The hope of the gospel itself is jeopardized! But God is sovereign over absolutely everything (see v.6); the birth of the Christ child will have to overcome even greater obstacles than Abimelech! Thirdly, note that once again Abraham's prayers are effective (vs.7,17,18). Lastly, note the irony of Abraham's prayers. God hears and answers Abraham's prayers for Abimelech's wives and female slaves. Their infertility is lifted. They are once again able to bear children. But what about Sarah? Will she ever have this long-promised child?

## **Chapter 21**

After the long, long wait (25 years, see 12.4 & 21.5, and do the math), Isaac is finally born. It always seems to me that his birth is reported in a surprisingly understated manner, after ten chapters of waiting. But then again, the birth of Christ also seems rather understated after the long, long wait for the Messiah. And yet, in both cases, God has been faithful to send the promised child of his covenant, hasn't he? God's faithfulness to his promise is actually noted three times in vs.1&2 Take heart, Christian: we can trust God's Word. While you're here, see how other parts of the Bible refer back to this moment in history: see Romans 4.19 (and surrounding context) & Hebrews 11.12 (and surrounding context). When Isaac was weaned (typically around age 2 or 3), Ishmael was around 15 or so. Have you ever seen a 15 year old boy mock someone? It's not pretty. In v.9, that's what Sarah saw Ishmael doing, towards Isaac. He was "*Isaacing*" Isaac, laughing at Isaac. Sarah gets demanding (v.10); Abraham gets angry (v.11); but God reassures (vs.12,13). Ishmael will also become a nation (v.13).

## **Chapter 22**

This chapter overfloweth. God is testing Abraham (v.1; see Deuteronomy 8.2,16, Hebrews 11.17-19). Isaac, the one through whom all these promises must come, the one whom Abraham loves (v.2), is in mortal jeopardy. Step by agonizing step, we see Abraham rise early in the morning, saddle his donkey, call Isaac and two men, cut the wood, and journey to Moriah, seeing it on "*the third day*" (always the day of decision—and reversal—in the Bible). He comes to the final step, raising the knife to slaughter his son, before God announces that the test is over. But this is not merely a test; it's also a shadow. It's "foreshadowing" the cross. How? At the cross a Substitute is provided in the place of the sinner (Romans 5.6)... a Father is willing to sacrifice his Son (Romans 8.32; John 3.16)... a Son who could have resisted submits (Luke 22.42) and allows Himself to be bound (v.9; Matthew 27.2)... etc. And where did this take place? On Mount Moriah, where the temple would one day be built (2 Chronicles 3.1). This was the first sacrifice there... Jesus was the last (John 1.29). See vs.8,14.

## Chapter 23

We are reminded that up until now, Abraham doesn't own a single square foot of ground in the land that God had first promised to him 62 years earlier. (Doing the math from the fact that Abraham was 10 years older than Sarah, see 17.17... Abraham was 75 years old at the first promise, see 12.4, making Sarah 65... & now she dies at 127, see 23.1...  $127-65=62$ .) At the end of chapter 21 Abraham secured legal rights to a well that his own men had dug, so he had a small foothold there. But still no land. And now, with Sarah dead, he must have a place to bury her. The negotiations are interesting. It's the first account of both a burial and a commercial transaction in the Bible. Abraham starts by asking the Hittites to let him establish ownership of some property. They offer him anything he wants. He requests that Ephron give him a particular piece of real estate "*for full price*" (v.9). Ephron offered to give the field freely, but a gift does not secure ownership as substantially as a purchase. Abraham insists on buying, Ephron names his price, and the promise starts to be fulfilled. 2 Corinthians 1.20.

## Chapter 24

This chapter contains Abraham's last recorded words in the Bible, and note what they are about: how important it is to see our children marry faithful believers. Isaac must not marry a Canaanite, Abraham says. But his wife must be willing to settle *in the land of Canaan*, simply because she believes God's promise (vs.5-9). And this is so important, the story is basically told twice in this one chapter... much to the chagrin of hurried readers. Also note what a loyal and persuasive man this servant is! But he does not rely upon his own natural gifts and abilities; rather, he is a man of prayer, who relies on God. When he arrives at the well, he prays (vs.10-14). And God begins to answer before he even finishes praying (v.15; and see Isaiah 65.24 & Ephesians 3.20), and his answer is even more generous than the request—for, in addition to everything else, Rebekah is beautiful (v.16). But beauty is not the chief thing to look for in marriage. In this chapter, a readiness to serve (v.20) and a love for hospitality (v.25), and faith in God like Abraham's (v.58, and see Matthew 19.29) are what we look for.

## Chapter 25

God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a multitude of nations (17.4-6). One way this promise was partially fulfilled is seen in the genealogy of 25.2-4: these sons of Abraham go on to father various tribes that live on the fringes of Canaan. For example, we see Midian (son of Abraham, v.2) later in all of the Midianites (see 37.28,36; see also Exodus 3.1, the tribe that Moses marries into; etc). Abraham is also father of all the Ishmaelites, a group of 12 tribes—exactly as God prophesied in 17.20—who live in the deserts to the south and east of what is later Israel. As also prophesied in 16.12, there will be hostility between Israel and these tribes. If God has fulfilled his promised word with respect to Ishmael, how much more will he fulfill his promised word with respect to Isaac! The Jacob & Esau stories begin in the later half of this chapter. We see right away—starting with a rough pregnancy—that there will be trouble... and many things to learn. "*See to it.... that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.*" Hebrews 12.15,16

## Chapter 26

Abraham's story took many chapters of Genesis, and Jacob's story will take several chapters as well, as will Joseph's. But Isaac just gets this one chapter, a collection of snapshots from his life, the snapshot in vs.6-11 perhaps even taking place *before* the births of Jacob & Esau that were recorded in the previous chapter. Why do you think Isaac only gets one chapter? Hold on to that question; we'll come back to that. But one thing we see is that God graciously and enormously confirms his promises to Isaac, for Abraham's sake (v.5). And Isaac is lavishly blessed (see v.12!) in this chapter... so much so that his great prosperity provoked bitter jealousy and fear among the inhabitants of the land. And the fact that he keeps moving to avoid conflict reminds us that this family still owns no real land to speak of; just a cave

for their dead. But look at vs.34 & 35, which introduce the next chapter. Do you remember Abraham's insistence that Isaac *not* marry a Hittite/Canaanite (24.3)? And yet, Esau marries *two* of them, which reminds us of Lamech (4.19-24). This is not very promising at all.

### Chapter 27

Back in 25.23, the Lord clearly revealed that the chosen line of the covenant blessing would continue through the younger son, Jacob. Not the older son, Esau. And yet, when Isaac sensed that his days may be drawing to an end (v.2), he summons Esau—his personal favorite (25.28)—to pass on to *him* the covenant blessing, rather than obeying the word of the Lord. This same Esau who, as we saw in 26.34,35, had married *two* Canaanite/Hittite women (contrast with Abraham's concerns in 24.3). This same Esau that Hebrews 12 refers to as "*sexually immoral*" and "*unholy*" and condemns for selling his birthright for a single meal. Perhaps this is why Isaac really only gets one chapter to himself in the book of Genesis? But, in a way that reminds one of Psalm 18.26 & 2 Samuel 22.27, God sees to it that the blessing is passed on to *Jacob*, according to his revealed will. Note how Isaac understands this blessing to be irrevocable: once pronounced over a certain son, it could not be removed (v.37). Yet all this deceit will leave a mark, as we will see. Jacob has to flee; but God will meet him there.

### Chapter 28

On his way to Haran, Jacob lay down and dreamt. In his dream he sees a ladder (or stairway), going from earth to heaven, with the angels of God "*ascending and descending on it*" (v.12). This ladder represents the reunion of God and man, heaven and earth. And in John 1.51 Jesus says it ultimately points to himself: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*" Jesus is this ladder; it is Christ himself who reconciles God and humanity, both within his own person and through his sacrifice on cross: "*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself*" (2 Corinthians 5.18). And in Jacob's dream, he hears the Lord himself renewing the promises first made to Abraham and then repeated to Isaac. But something new is added: "*Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land*" (v.15). God loves to make the promise of his presence to his people: Exodus 3.12; Joshua 1.5; Judges 6.16.... Matthew 28.20; Hebrews 13.5-6. "*Immanuel,*" God with us! (Matthew 1.23)

### Chapter 29

We can't help but remember how Jacob deceived his father Isaac when we consider how Jacob is himself now deceived by his father-in-law, Laban. And yet, as our hymn for this month puts it, God is moving in a mysterious way his wonders to perform; the nation of Israel is beginning to take shape, as the 12 patriarchs are coming into the world. From Leah six of the twelve tribes are descended... including the tribe of Judah—the kingly tribe, the tribe of the promised Messiah. We'll consider more of the tragic family dynamics (bigamy, concubines, an unloved wife desperate for her husband's affection, etc.) tomorrow. For today, note God's faithfulness to his promises to Jacob: a wife is given. And, interestingly, this good gift of God is again provided at a well (see 24.11ff). And there will be more meetings of wives at wells to come (Exodus 2.15ff). This theme (like all the themes of the Bible) will culminate in Christ, who meets a woman at a well in John 4. And what do they talk about? Marriage. And the greater thing to which marriage points: Christ and the church (Ephesians 5.32; Revelation 19.6ff).

### Chapter 30

The promises to Abraham are leaping forward with the births of these boys, the future patriarchs for whom the tribes of Israel will be named. But what a mess! Jacob had nothing (unlike Abraham's servant in chapter 24), so he had no "bride price" (a marriage present given by the groom's family to the bride's



family) to offer Rachel's family—as was the custom of the day. So, remember, he offered to work seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage. But the next day he discovered that Laban had given him Leah's hand instead! (What with the bridal veil, the darkness, and perhaps some "merry making" alcohol, Jacob didn't realize this until the morning.) Laban then immediately allowed Jacob to marry Leah as well, but there must be another seven years of labor. It was also the custom of the day for fathers to give their daughters a large present on their wedding day (dowries); hence, the maid servants Zilpah and Bilhah. So... we have bigamy, an unloved wife, an infertile wife, concubines, consuming jealousy, outrageous bartering for the husband, and much unhappiness. But God blesses (v.43).

### Chapter 31

Earlier it was friction with Jacob's brother, Esau, that caused him to flee from his home. Now it's friction with his brothers-in-law (v.1) that presents another crisis in his new home. But the Lord once again assures Jacob, *"I will be with you"* (v.3), and tells him it's time to go back. Yet Jacob can't make the return journey as easy as he made the first journey, for now he has four wives, lots and lots of children, many servants, with large flocks and herds of animals. So, it won't be easy... but he has a plan. First he consults with his wives, reminding them of how the Lord has been true to his promises and has not allowed Laban's money-obsessed, cheating schemes to harm them. Then he picks a time when Laban will be away from home, giving himself a three-day head start. Eventually, however, Laban comes after them. There could have been a bloody battle, but the Lord appears to Laban in a dream warning him not to harm Jacob. Go back and read the promise of 28.15 again. Yes, God is faithful to his promises. Jacob and Laban eventually make a covenant and part ways peacefully. But...

### Chapter 32

Yesterday's reflection ended with: *"Jacob and Laban eventually make a covenant and part ways peacefully. But..."* That was my attempt at being ominous, for now Jacob must meet Esau again; remember the last we heard of Esau, he wanted to kill Jacob (27.41). Back at 28.12ff Jacob had a dream in which God spoke to him, and many angels were present. Now, upon returning to the land, he is given a vision of the angels again (v.1). Perhaps these are the angels assigned to guard Jacob; see Hebrews 1.13,14; Matthew 18.10; 26.53. Jacob makes contact with Esau, and hears that Esau is on his way with 400 men (v.6). Fearing the worst, Jacob first takes steps to protect his people (vs.7,8), then he prays an exemplary prayer to God (vs.9-12), and finally he sends a series of generous gifts (vs.13-21), hoping to soften their meeting. That night he puts his family in a place of safety (vs.22,23), and then something really mysterious happens: God attacks him, but is unwilling to defeat him. In the end, Jacob has a new name (*"Israel"*), and new insight. We wrestle with God, who himself delivers us.

### Chapter 33

Having wrestled with God and men and prevailed (32.28), Jacob now confidently limps out (32.25), ahead of his wives and children, to meet Esau. It's an emotional reunion—reminding one of Luke 15.20—and Jacob says that seeing Esau at peace with him is like seeing the face of God (v.10). We remember earlier how Jacob came into possession of both Esau's birthright (25.29-34; see also Hebrews 12.15,16) and blessing (chapter 27; but... remember that God had earlier declared that this blessing belonged to Jacob, see 25.23). But now, as Jacob returns to Canaan, he gives Esau a great many flocks and herds (see 32.13-15), with the words, *"please accept my blessing"* (v.11). We see that in the end, Esau gets much of what he "lost" back. Remember also that part of Isaac's blessing to Jacob was *"may your mother's sons bow down to you"* (27.29), but note who is bowing to whom in v.3. Seven times, in fact! Jacob politely declines Esau's offer, perhaps partly out of a concern that Esau's forgiveness wasn't fully genuine. But also because that's not where God commanded him to go.

## Chapter 34

In yesterday's reading (33.18-20) we saw that Jacob bought land in Canaan. Remember, this is only the second piece of real estate in Canaan that the people of Abraham now owned, though God has promised that one day it will all be theirs. But after the events we read about today (chapter 34), Jacob won't be able to stay there; at the beginning of chapter 35, the Lord commands him to move to another part of the land. This story is shockingly awful and dreadful, in many ways. Dinah is raped. The rapist is the "*prince*" of Shechem (v.2), presumably one of the very best men of the land. He and his father appeal to the household of Jacob for marriage. Dinah's brothers are rightly shattered over what has happened, but they come up with a savage scheme for revenge that goes well beyond what would be just punishment. But the prince appeals to the greed of his people, falling for the scheme completely. And yet, this is a foreshadowing of Israel's future conquest of the land. See Leviticus 18.24 & 25, in the context of a chapter on sexual immorality. See also Deuteronomy 9.5.

## Chapter 35

In 34.30, Jacob feared that Simeon's and Levi's attack on Shechem would bring reprisals from the people of the land, but the Lord commands him return to Bethel (where he made his earlier vow to God in 28.10-22) and the Lord also gave the Canaanites a sense of terror with regard to Jacob's sons (v.5, see also Exodus 23.27)—all in fulfillment of the great promise in 28.15. And speaking of God's promises, God appears to Jacob again in vs.9-12 and reaffirms and expands them marvelously. But after that high point, tragedy strikes the family. Twice. Back in 30.24, Rachel had prayed for another son. Here her prayer is answered, but she dies after giving birth. Then Reuben (Jacob's oldest son) defiled Bilhah, one of his father's concubines. Later in Israel's history, that kind of incest would merit the death penalty (Leviticus 20.11; 18.8). Jacob doesn't make any comment here in the text, but wait till we get to 49.3,4. Once again, we see what a mess this family is. Our hope for redemption is clearly only in God's mercy, not our merit. Reading Romans 9.10-18 right now is very eye-opening.

## Chapter 36

Genesis alternates accounts of the "non-covenant line" (Ishmael, see 25.12-18 & Esau, see here) with accounts of the "covenant line": Abraham (chs 12-25) & Isaac (ch 26) & Jacob (chs 27-35, etc). A few things we learn: like Lot back in 13.5-12, Esau moves out of Canaan for economic reasons (vs.6-8). In v.9 Esau is named "*the father of the Edomites*," the ancestor of a long line of sons, chiefs, "*sons of Seir*," kings, and more chiefs. We meet the Edomites often in the Bible (see, for example, Obadiah); and whenever we do, remember this: Edom is a "brother nation" to Israel. We see the ancestry of the nation of Amalek (v.12), Israel's bitter enemy (see Exodus 17.8ff, etc.). One indirect thing we note in this chapter is that God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob are being fulfilled: Esau's migration out of Canaan means that Canaan is being kept for Jacob. The very next verse (37.1) states this plainly: "*Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.*" Also note that God is fulfilling all of his "lesser" promises to Esau. How much more will he fulfill his "greater" promises!

## Chapter 37

So much here: Note that the Joseph story is the main reason behind our choice for the song for November (see below); enjoy that song this morning, considering how God is here using the dreadfully evil deeds of sinful people to save the world, through Joseph (see 50.20)... *and that is why Jesus can be considered the "Greater Joseph."* But returning to the beginning of the story, parents will want to take note of how paternal favoritism gradually disintegrates a family. Children will want to take note of how Joseph's "tattling" (v.2) and impudent pride (vs.5-9) didn't win him any favor with his brothers. But the reader, like Jacob (v.11), will want to keep Joseph's dreams in mind throughout the rest of the story. We note the depths of sin's grip on the human heart: the brothers are determined to kill Joseph, and only

change their minds when they realize they could instead make some money off his hide. We see again the shattering heartbreak of sin and death. Also, we observe yet another irony in Jacob's life: he deceived his father with a goat (27.9,16); now his sons deceive him with a goat (vs.31-35).

### Chapter 38

We expect to continue reading about the sad plight of Joseph this morning, but instead we find ourselves reading about his older brother Judah. Why is that? We want to know what happens next with Joseph, who at the end of chapter 37 was *"sold... in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard."* We are momentarily kept in suspense regarding Joseph; the events of this chapter must first be woven in. Judah. The son and tribe of Israel through whom Jesus will be born. When we get to chapter 44, we will see Judah's Christ-like willingness to lay down his life and sacrifice himself for Benjamin. *But that's not the Judah we see here.* Here he is a hard-hearted, dishonest, sexually immoral man who refuses to give his youngest son to his widowed daughter-in-law, as was the custom of the day (see Deuteronomy 25.5-10)... even though he conveniently considers her to be betrothed to his youngest son when it appears that she's committed adultery and gotten herself pregnant. Tamar outmaneuvers Judah, who then humbles himself and confesses his great hypocrisy and sin (v.26).

### Chapter 39

We now return to Joseph. His time in Egypt is divided into three seasons: serving in Potiphar's house (39.1-20), serving in prison (39.21-40.23), and serving in Pharaoh's palace (chs 41-50). The first two seasons begin with the assurance of God's great promise to his people: *"the LORD was with Joseph"* (vs.2 & 23). And yet, both of those seasons end sadly for Joseph: he is thrown into prison at the end of the first and forgotten at the end of the second. But the third season of Joseph's life in Egypt will be different; it will begin with him in prison and end with him basically ruling the world. As our hymn for the month puts it, *"God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform... deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill he treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head."* Also of important note here is how furiously a godly man will want to flee the temptation and/or seduction to sexual immorality (see vs.7-12, Proverbs 5-7; Matthew 5.27-30; etc).

### Chapter 40

The Joseph story is full of tragedies, as life in this fallen world often is. As he says in v.15, he was unjustly *"stolen out of the land of the Hebrews"* (by the scheming of his own brothers) and then in Egypt he had *"done nothing that they should put [him] into the pit."* Actually, it seems that Potiphar didn't even really believe his wife's tale of attempted rape. That kind of charge (a slave attacking the master's wife) would have normally merited the death penalty—swiftly, punctually, and expeditiously. But rather than execution, Potiphar puts Joseph *"in the place where the king's prisoners were confined."* All of this unjust suffering in the life of Joseph reminds us of another who also suffered... for righteousness' sake (Matthew 5.10-12; 1 Peter 2.21-24). Consider the Lord Christ as a "Greater Joseph"—one who also rescues the world through his suffering and (unjust) condemnation. As in Potiphar's house, Joseph is likewise rapidly promoted in prison, such that he ends up attending to the royal servants and advisors to Pharaoh. Hopes are raised that he will be rewarded and released! He is not.

### Chapter 41

37.2 tells us that Joseph was 17 years old when he was *"pasturing the flock with his brothers."* Verse 46 of this chapter tells us that he was 30 years old *"when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt."* Think about that. He spent **13 years** in slavery and imprisonment. 13 years. What was your life like back on November 30, 2002, when George W. Bush was less than two years into his first term as

president, when John Paul II was still the pope, when Nick Saban was still coaching at LSU, and Auburn had beaten Alabama 17-7 exactly one week earlier? 13 years. That's a long time to endure slavery and unjust imprisonment. And yet, Joseph remained faithful to God throughout (vs.16, 38). And one day, rather abruptly, it all comes to an end. Official-looking people rush him out of prison, clean him up, shave him, change his clothes... and bring him before Pharaoh. And now God's designs in all of this start to take focus. Joseph is a suffering servant, through whom the world is saved (v.57) and to whom every knee must bow (v.43) And in *all* of those respects, he is a picture of the Christ.

## Chapter 42

Back in 41.51, Joseph named his firstborn "*Manasseh*" (which sounds similar to the Hebrew word for "making to forget") saying, "*God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.*" And yet... does not the very fact that he gave his son such a name imply that he had not really forgotten? And in 41.52 we saw that the name he gave his second son was still in reference to his "*affliction.*" Even though he's now risen (through slavery & imprisonment) to become Pharaoh's right-hand man, the past is still very much with him, it would seem. And then one day the past invades the present: ten of his brothers show up in Egypt. It's now been over 20 years (the 13 years we counted yesterday, plus the 7 years of plenty, before the famine began). He recognizes them; they do not recognize him. And now Joseph—who has correctly interpreted pairs of dreams twice now: the doubled dreams of cupbearer and baker, and the doubled dreams of Pharaoh—remembers his own pair of dreams (v.9, see 37.5-11). Apparently, God's purposes in all of this have not yet reached their climax...

## Chapter 43

It's very interesting to reflect on all of the turns in this story from the brothers' perspective. They are clearly haunted by guilty consciences, having never confessed and repented of their sins with regard to Joseph. Every time something unexpected happens, they immediately start to panic, sure that this is the moment when God's just judgment will at last fall upon them. See 42.21,22... see 42.28... see 42.35. And in this chapter, see their fear in vs.18 & 23. When we confess our sins to the Lord, we are delivered from fear: "*I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears*" (Psalm 34.4). "*Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments!... He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid*" (Psalm 112.1,7,8). By contrast, the guilty conscience is always suspicious and afraid. "*The sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight, and they shall flee as one flees from the sword, and they shall fall when none pursues*" (Leviticus 26.36). Back home, Jacob is praying for mercy (see v.14).

## Chapter 44

Look at v.14. Why is Judah being singled out among the brothers? Do you remember the "Judah parenthesis" that was woven into this story back in chapter 38? The Judah we saw there was a hard-hearted, dishonest, sexually immoral man. (We also remember back in 37.26 & 27, it was Judah who suggested that they sell Joseph into slavery.) But at the end of chapter 38, Judah seemed to have repented. What do you think? Is he really a changed man?... Joseph devises a test, to see if his brothers would turn their backs on Benjamin—*whom, like Joseph, was also a son their father's favorite wife, Rachel*—as easily as they turned their backs on him. And Judah now rises to meet that test; verses 18-34 actually make up the longest speech in the whole of Genesis. And what a stirring and passionate speech it is! The crowning point comes in vs.33 & 34: "*please let your servant remain instead of the boy... let the boy go back with his brothers.*" Judah offers to take Benjamin's place and bear the punishment for Benjamin's (alleged) sin. Judah—the forefather of Jesus—lays down his life.

## Chapter 45

This is one of the most poignant chapters in the Bible. A few things: Note what it took to heal this shattered family of all the bitterness and sorrow and guilt and grief; it took a picture of the gospel, seen in Judah's (Christ's forefather) readiness to sacrifice himself for his brother, Benjamin. May our hurting families be healed by the same Christ-reflecting grace. When Judah realized that the world of lies was collapsing ("*God has found out the guilt of your servants,*" see 44.16) and began to humble himself, that's when forgiveness and reconciliation began to bloom. Note also Joseph's confident faith in God's overruling providence (vs.7,8). Yes, the suffering and the hurt were real; but God is powerfully able to use even our evil deeds to accomplish his saving purposes. Indeed, God's often-repeated promise to Abraham that in his "*offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*" (22.18) enjoys a partial fulfillment through Joseph's saving the world from famine. Also, v.6 (along with previous indicators we've looked at) tell us it's been 22 long years since Joseph was enslaved. Jacob awakens!

### Chapter 46

This is the third "journey to Egypt" story (42.1ff, 43.1ff, & here, 46.1ff), and more people make the journey each time; this one involves the whole family, 70 people in all. (*And remember from our reflection on Genesis 10... the number 70 in the Bible is symbolic of all the nations of the world! With that in mind, consider Psalm 22.27; 86.9; Revelation 15.4*). God himself appears to Jacob in a vision, assuring him that all is well with his leaving the promised land: "*Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again*" (vs.3,4). If you look back at 15.13,14, you'll remember that God prophesied all of this to Abraham many, many decades earlier. The Jacob and Joseph reunion scene is full of deep emotion, isn't it? I love the Bible. Jacob is ready to depart in peace, having seen and held his boy Joseph again (v.30). This reminds us of the old man Simeon in the temple when Jesus was presented (see Luke 2.25-32). *We can also depart in peace...* because the Greater Joseph is truly back from the dead.

### Chapter 47

Hebrews 7.7 says, "*It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.*" Notice here that it is Jacob who blesses Pharaoh, and not the reverse. Twice, in fact! Jacob, carrying the promise of the covenant (the promise of the Christ) is the one who has a blessing to share with "*all the families of the earth*" (see 28.14). It's very affecting to hear this 130 year old man review all the great sadnesses of his life in v.9, but like the wine at the wedding (John 2.10), God has saved the best part of Jacob's life for last. Joseph's actions in vs.13-26 may sound like harsh exploitation to modern readers, but it was just the opposite in this culture. These people gladly exchanged ownership of their herds, their land, and their service for grain. That is genuine gratitude in v.25! In the ancient world, this kind of servitude was not at all like the detestable early American form of race-based chattel slavery. It could be considered an act of charity to buy the land of the poor and destitute, and grant them life-long security as your servants/employees. Remember, Joseph is himself a "slave"... & he is ruling the world!

### Chapter 48

In vs.3ff, Jacob is recalling all of God's promises and goodnesses to him, and how he has now seen so much of God's promise come true (compare "*fruitful and multiply*" in v.4 with 47.27). And v.11 is especially moving. Do you remember Jacob's prayer back in 43.14?—"May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin." Remember, the "*other brother*" there was Simeon and "*the man*" (though Jacob didn't know it) was Joseph. But God answered Jacob's prayer beyond all imaginings (see Ephesians 3.20). It may seem odd that Joseph—even though he is Jacob's favorite son—does not have one of Israel's 12 tribes named after him. But the answer is before us: Joseph actually has two tribes named after him, for Jacob adopts Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. They become Jacob's sons in the same way that his first two sons, Reuben and Simeon, are

Jacob's sons (v.5). They become two of the larger tribes, in fact (see v.20). But once again the second son is promoted over the first. (Christ over Adam, Romans 5.12-21.)

## Chapter 49

In chapter 49 Jacob is given a vision of the future, when the 12 tribes that would descend from his 12 sons would inhabit different parts of Canaan, the promised land. It's all interesting, but let's look at vs.8-12, the blessing pronounced over Judah. **Verse 8:** Judah will be praised, triumphant, and honored. **Verse 9:** Judah will be mighty; you would be as well advised to challenge a lion as you would to challenge Judah. **Verse 10:** Kings will come from Judah. In fact, the kingship will never depart from Judah; tribute and obedience will always be given to him. **Verse 11:** Abundant grape harvest and abundant wine are signs of God's blessing in the Old Testament. Judah will have so much of God's blessing that he can tie his donkey to the choicest vine and not worry about him chomping down; there's plenty. He will have so much wine, he can wash his clothes in the stuff. **Verse 12:** These are images of beauty in the ancient world. **Who is all of this about?** From the tribe of Judah comes David.... and Solomon... and ultimately... Jesus of Nazareth, *"the Lion of the tribe of Judah"* (Revelation 5.5).

## Chapter 50

What we have in this last chapter is an acted-out prophecy of the future. Back in Genesis 15, God made a promise to Abraham: *"Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions."* That happens in the book of Exodus; but it is foreshadowed right here in Genesis 50. Jacob (*"Israel"*) is brought out of Egypt and returns to the promised land, according to God's promise (46.4). Even the going-out-of-the-way route that this *"very great company"* (v.9) took—*going around the Dead Sea and entering Canaan from the east, on the other side of the Jordan*—foreshadows the route that the *"multitude"* of Israel (Exodus 12.38) would later follow, under the leadership of Moses. Genesis ends on this note of great confidence; God's promises can be trusted. See also Joseph once again beautifully express his faith in God's sovereignty, v.20 (compare with 45.5-8). Great time to read Hebrews 11.

## Reflecting on Genesis-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Genesis. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Genesis before we move forward?

*"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."* 2 Timothy 3.16,17