



Lesson 7 / April 2, 2017

## THE PATRIARCHS

Genesis 25-50

### Key Verse

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

Genesis 50:20

### Question 13: What is God's sovereignty?

Short Answer: *God is always in control of all things.*

Full Answer: *God is always in control of all things, so that he accomplishes everything he wills, and nothing happens except by his will, for the purpose of his glory.*

### Discussion Questions

1. How is Isaac significant to the Biblical story?
2. What kind of person was Jacob? Why does God remain present with him when he is so messed up?
3. Does God really elect his people, or do we choose him?  
Consider John 15:16.
4. On what basis does God choose his people?  
Consider Deuteronomy 7:6-8.
5. How does the concept of election effect how we live as Christians?
6. How is God sovereign in the story of Joseph?
7. What significance does God's sovereignty make in our lives today?
8. Do you know God's presence even in the midst of turmoil?

### Question 14: What is God's election?

Short Answer: *God chooses his people who will belong to him.*

Full Answer: *In his sovereignty and grace, God chooses his people who will belong to him, by the pleasure of his will, not because of our own merit, but because of his love.*

## Summary

Have you ever experienced sibling rivalry? Siblings have an amazing ability to be best friends one moment and bitter enemies the next. When Abraham heard God's promise of countless descendants, Abraham probably did not envision the countless instances of sibling rivalry that would come with it! The second half of Genesis tells the story of three generations of Abraham's descendants. In each generation, we find brothers locked in rivalry, but God chooses one brother in each generation to receive the covenant of Abraham. God chooses Abraham's son, Isaac, rather than Ishmael, and he chooses Isaac's son, Jacob, rather than Esau. These chosen ones – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – are known as the *patriarchs* (= fathers) of the nation of Israel, and Jacob's 12 sons will become fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. From the stories of these patriarchs, we learn about God's covenant renewal, his faithful presence, his election, and his sovereignty.

Abraham's son, Isaac, is a chip off the old block. Like his father, Isaac does not have children until he is old, he tries to pass off his wife as his sister, and most importantly, he receives God's covenant promises. God appears to Isaac in Genesis 26:1-5, and God renews the Abrahamic covenant with him (not his brother Ishmael) by repeating the promises of the covenant – promises of blessing, land, offspring, and blessing for all nations. Isaac is like the second leg of a relay team, receiving the baton of the covenant from Abraham and passing it on to the next generation.

Isaac's twin sons begin fighting in their mother's womb. God explains that two nations are actually in the womb and "the older shall serve the younger" (Gen 25:23). The older son, Esau, will become the father of the nation of Edom, but his younger brother, Jacob, will become the father of the nation of Israel. God chooses Jacob rather than Esau to receive the covenant blessings before they are even born! Thus we learn that God's election is based not on human works, but only on the grace of God and his divine right to choose those who will belong to him (see Romans 9:10-13).

Jacob lives a dramatic life marked by sibling rivalry. He first negotiates a shady deal to purchase the firstborn's birthright from Esau (Gen 25:29-34), then he outright steals Esau's blessing from their father, Isaac (Gen 27). Jacob flees from his brother's wrath to another country, where he spends the next 20+ years building a dysfunctional family that makes reality television look tame. He marries two sisters (the first one by accident) and these sister-wives

have their own sibling rivalry in which they compete to see who can have the most children with Jacob, and they even use their maids to bear his children too. Jacob ends up with 12 sons who have four different mothers!

Yet God remains faithfully present with Jacob. As Jacob flees from Esau, God appears to him in a dream and renews the covenant, now with a special promise: "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go" (Gen 28:15). When Jacob finally returns home, God again speaks to Jacob and gives him the name "Israel" (= wrestles with God) because Jacob's life of faith is a wrestling match with God (Gen 32:28). God may not spare his elected people from turmoil, but God is certainly present with us in the struggle.

God is likewise present with Joseph, son of Jacob, when Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt. His brothers resented Joseph for being their dad's favorite son, and Joseph provoked them by telling them about his dreams in which they all bowed down to him. His brothers would have killed him had they not realized he was worth more alive than dead! Joseph endures years as a slave in Egypt, separated from his family, and his suffering multiplies when he is falsely accused and thrown in prison. But God is present with Joseph and through a series of unlikely "circumstances," Joseph ends up in a powerful position next to Pharaoh, where Joseph leads Egypt in storing up food for a coming famine. When Joseph's brothers come looking for food (20 years after selling him!), he reconciles with them and affirms to them God's sovereignty whereby God was always in control of Joseph's circumstances, even using his brother's evil intentions to bring about God's good purpose of saving lives, including the lives of his covenant people (Gen 50:20). The book of Genesis ends with God's people living in Egypt under the care of Joseph.

Before we leave the book of Genesis, we should point out one special prophetic promise lurking near the end. Jacob blesses his son, Judah, with these words: "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" and "to Judah shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Gen 49:10). A *scepter* is a staff held by a king as a symbol of his royal power and right to rule. Jesus, who is "the lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5), fulfills this prophecy. Jesus will reign forever over us, his people, and we direct our obedience to him.