



Twelve Stages in the Bible - Patriarchs

Genesis 12-50

1. The Importance of the Patriarchs

2. The Story of the Patriarchs

This morning, we are continuing our series on the 12 stages of the Bible. In this series, we are overviewing the entire sweep of Biblical history, breaking it down into 12 stages or eras or time periods. The stages we will look at are creation, patriarchs, exodus, conquest, judges, kingdom, exile, return, silence, gospel, church, and missions. [\[1\]](#) Over these next twelve weeks, I want to engrain them into your heads. My aim is to help you be more familiar with the major movements of the Bible. If you know the whole story, the pieces can more easily fall into place.

Last week, we looked at "The Creation." My outline last week was twofold. First, we looked at "The Importance of Creation." In this point, I sought to show you of how pervasive the doctrine of the creation is throughout all of the Bible. It is the basis of the Sabbath. It is a prominent reason in why we worship the LORD. It establishes the sovereignty of God. He is free to do with us as He wills. He is the potter; we are the clay. Creation is also a foundation of prophesy. The God who created has control over the events of the world and can prophesy concerning them.

I made the point that the creation account (and all that goes with it) is foundational to the Bible. You take away the creation account, and you undermine Christianity. Furthermore, what was true of the actual creation account (in Genesis 1-2) is also true for the entire book of Genesis, especially chapters 1-11. All of our doctrines has its origin in Genesis 1-11. In Genesis 1-11, we see humanity in its ideal state. We see marriage. We see sin, sacrifice, and death. We see judgment. We see God's goodness and God's sovereignty. So, creation is important.

Our second point from last week was called, "The Story of Creation." In this point, I took you through chapters 1-11, highlighting key points along the way. We spent most of our time in Genesis 1, where we have the actual account of God creating the world. We then spent a bit of time in the fall of man. We then zipped through the flood and the tower of Babel. Overall, I hope that you remember the four events of Genesis 1-11: the creation, the fall, the flood, and the tower of Babel. All of these events set the stage for the rest of the Bible.

This morning, we will look at "The Patriarchs" in much the same way as we looked at "Creation" last week. My outline is going to be practically the same. My first point is (1) The Importance of the Patriarchs. My second point is (2) The Story of the Patriarchs. My first point will be more conceptual. My second point will be more textual. My first point will seek to show how important the patriarchs are. My second point will more reflect upon their life stories. Let's first consider ...

1. The Importance of the Patriarchs

Now, when I say, "The Patriarchs," I mean the patriarchs of the Jewish people, namely, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." This trio of men are mentioned many, many times in the Bible. Not including Genesis, where the story of Abraham is told, Abraham is mentioned over 100 times in the entire Bible, more than 70 in the New Testament alone! (Not including Genesis, where the story of Isaac is told, Isaac is mentioned over 50 times in the entire Bible. Not including Genesis, where the story of Jacob is told, Jacob is mentioned (and this was surprising to me) more than 200 times in the entire Bible. The formula, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" is mentioned 30 times outside of the book of Genesis. The sheer number of references to these men is an indication of their importance in the flow of Biblical history.

The creation account is important because it tells us of our origin in this world. But, the patriarchs are important because they tell us of the origin of God's covenant people. The creation account is important, because it tells us how God deals with all people. The account of the patriarchs is important, because it tells us how God deals with His covenant people. When God mentions "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" in the same sentence, it is often referring to the covenant that God made with the people Israel, and the covenant that God will keep with Israel. For instance, let me give you a few examples.

Four hundred years after the death of Joseph, the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt. They cried to their God for help, and we read in Exodus 2:24, "So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." What God had promised to the patriarchs, He remained faithful, even to their descendents 400 years later. Soon afterwards, God appeared to Moses to tell him how He would rescue the sons of Israel from their slavery, He said to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6). In other words, "I'm going to keep the promises that I made to your forefathers, the patriarchs." But, God's promise to the patriarchs wasn't merely remembered 400 years after the promise. God remained faithful to His covenant through the times of the exodus, the conquest and the judges, even up to the time of David, the king.

Even a thousand years after the patriarchs, His promise was still on the minds of the people of Israel. When the ark returned again into Jerusalem during the reign of David, the people of Israel rejoiced, singing, the words of Psalm 105, ...

O seed of Israel His servant, Sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! ...
Remember His covenant forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations,
The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac.
He also confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant,
Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan, As the portion of your inheritance."

They saw the return of the ark as a manifestation of the covenantal faithfulness of God, bringing to mind the covenant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When Elijah was on Mount Carmel, battling with the prophets of Baal, he evoked the name of the Patriarchs in praying to God, saying,
...

1 Kings 18:36-37

O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are the God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.

Elijah wanted to make it clear which God he was praying to. He was praying to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel. Furthermore, in calling these men to mind, Elijah was reminding God of His covenant that He had made to His people. Shortly before the exile, some 1500 years after the promises that God had made, He reminded Israel of His faithfulness to His promises, and His promise of future blessing.

Jeremiah 33:25-26

Thus says the LORD, "If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them."

In other words, "My covenant does stand! I have been faithful in the past. ... I will be merciful in the future, because of the covenant that I made." These are only a few of the examples in the Bible in which the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are repeated together. Time and time again, this theme is repeated throughout the Bible. God is faithful to the promises He made to the Patriarchs.

In Yellowstone national park, there is a geyser, which erupts every 90 minutes. When it erupts, it sends some 4,000-8,000 gallons of water squirting to the sky some 100-200 feet in the air. The outburst of this geyser lasts several minutes. We all know its name. It's called, "Old Faithful." In the same way God is faithful to the covenant that He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

What is true of the Old Testament is also true of the New Testament. On several occasions, Jesus referred back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, lifting them up as the fathers of the faith (Luke 13:28). Peter mentioned Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when preaching to the Jewish people (Acts 3:13). Stephen mentioned them in preaching to the hostile crowds. The writer to the Hebrews listed all of them in the great "hall of faith," Hebrews 11. All of that makes the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, important. But for us, as New Testament believers in Jesus, it goes even further than that. These men are the foundation to our faith.

Paul's epistles often refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham's faith is the pattern for our faith. "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). The covenant to Abraham is the gospel to us. "All the nations will be blessed in you" (Gal. 3:8). Through faith, we sons of Abraham. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29). The important distinction that Paul is making here is that our sonship is based upon the promise of God, not based upon our meriting anything through the law.

Through faith, we are brothers with Isaac. "And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise" (Gal. 4:28). The choosing of Jacob has become proof of our election. "Though the twins [Isaac and Jacob] were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to election would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Rom. 9:11-13).

In many ways, this is why the New Testament is incomplete in and of itself, because it is founded upon the Old Testament. Most highly, it is founded upon the book of Genesis. That's (1) The Importance of the Patriarchs. Let's look at ...

2. The Story of the Patriarchs

The story of the patriarchs begins in Genesis 12. If you haven't turned there already, I invite you to take your Bibles and open them to Genesis 12. From this point on, we'll work our way through Genesis 50 this morning, which tells the story of the Patriarchs. Now, obviously, we aren't going to be able to look at every chapter here. But, we'll touch down on the most important chapters and the most important. My aim is to show you the full impact of the words, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." I want to show you why the Bible would so consistently refer back to "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." I want for you to catch the significance of these men.

Are you familiar with Genesis 12? If you are not, I would encourage you to get familiar with these words. These first three verses set the stage for the rest of the Bible. They set the stage for God's dealing with His covenant people. So, let's begin by considering the first three verses, ...

Genesis 12:1-2

Now the LORD said to Abram, [that was Abraham's name before God changed into his life and changed it to Abraham in

Genesis 17].
"Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

At this time, Abraham was living in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans, in and around what we know today as Iraq. God merely came to him and called him to leave his home and go to a land which God had promised to show him, but which He didn't make known to him initially. The idea of God's call to Abraham is that he was to believe God and follow God, even if he doesn't have all of the details set before him. We see Abraham's faith being manifested in verse 4, where we read, "So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him."

This is faith, obeying God, even when you don't have all of the details. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Abraham hadn't seen the land. Abraham didn't know the land to which he was going. But, he believed God and obeyed God, even "not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8).

In verse 1, Abraham was told to go. By verse 7, Abraham had arrived in the land. And the LORD appeared to him (again) and said, "To your descendants I will give this land" (verse 7).

Various other times in the book of Genesis, such a promise is repeated (13:15, 17; 15:7; 17:8). The promise of the land becomes a focal point throughout much of the Bible. Abraham lived there, "dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob" (Heb. 11:9). Eventually, the people of Israel would move out of the land to survive a famine (Gen. 46-47). During the days of Joshua, the Hebrew people would come and conquer the land, claiming what God had promised to them. Toward the end of the days of the kings, Israel was captured and the people of Israel lost the land. During the time of the exile, the land was still precious to them. They sang songs like Psalm 137, ...

Psalm 137:4-6
How can we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
May my right hand forget her skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
If I do not remember you,
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.

When they came back into the land, they sang songs like we read this morning in Psalm 126, ...

Psalm 126:1-2
When the LORD brought back the captive ones of Zion, we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting;

Their joy was in the fact that they had come back into the land! The land of Israel plays a crucial role in Biblical history. The land of Israel today plays a crucial role in our present day. You pick up a newspaper. It's almost every day that something is written of the conflict in Israel over the land. And it all comes back to Genesis, chapter 12. The Jewish people trace their origin back to Abraham through Isaac and claim this promise for themselves. The Arab people trace their origin back to Abraham through Ishmael, and claim this promise for themselves. As a result, they battle. But, the entire origin of the battle comes from Genesis 12, where God initiates communication with Abraham. That's why Genesis 12 is important. It helps you to know what's going on in the world around us.

Now, it's not merely verse 1 that's important. Verses 2 and 3 are equally (if not more) important. Verse 1 speaks about the land to which Abraham was called. Verses 2 and 3 speak about the blessing that will be poured out upon Abraham. Verse 2, "And I will make you a great nation. That is, from Abraham, would come a great host of people, all of whom can trace their lineage back to Abraham. This nation will be a blessing to the world! (verse 3).

In Genesis 15 (and verse 5), we see God elaborating upon the promise. The LORD took Abraham outside and said to him, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." This is the promise made to Abraham. It's large. It's vast! In those days, the stars at night shone more gloriously than most of us see today, as the light of the stars didn't compete with the city lights. Abraham would have been overwhelmed by the grace of God in this statement.

And then, in verse 6, we see the great trait of Abraham: His faith. "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." This verse here is the hope of the gospel. We, by believing God, obtain righteousness. Notice here that it's not because Abraham is righteous that he is considered righteous by God. Because, in fact, when you trace through the life of Abraham, you see some

ways in which he isn't righteous. He came from Ur of the Chaldeans, a land ripe with idols. According to Joshua 24:2, his family served other gods, and not the true living God. Jewish tradition holds that Terah, himself, was an idol maker. But, God, in His grace, came and called Abraham, not because of anything in Abraham, but, because of God's great mercy and kindness.

Even after God appeared to Abraham, he was far from perfect. In chapter 16, we see Abraham engaged in sexual immorality. In chapter 20, we see Abraham fearful and deceiving a pagan king. That's why this statement in Genesis 15, verse 6 is so encouraging to us. It's how God deals with us. God makes us righteous by faith in Christ. We believe in Jesus (in His death, burial, and resurrection) and God takes our faith and credits it to our account as righteousness.

The blessing of this is huge! We don't stand before God based upon our own righteousness. Rather, we stand before God based upon the righteousness of Jesus. We merely need to believe in Him to receive this blessing. It couldn't be easier for you today. Do you want to be righteous before God? You aren't going to get there by church attendance or Bible reading or praying or doing works of righteousness. All of these things are good things. However, you won't get into heaven by any of these things. Rather, you are going to get there by believing in Jesus Christ. Just as Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. So also, do we need simply to believe in Jesus, and God will reckon it to us as righteousness.

Such blessing to us was promised back in Genesis 12. God's blessing to Abraham would be so vast, that it would cover the planet. God told him, ...

Genesis 12:2-3
And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

The key phrase that I want for you to see in these words are the last one, "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." This is the promise of the gospel to us. Through Abraham came the Messiah. The Messiah brought blessings to the world, even beyond the physical descendants of Abraham. As we believe in the Messiah, we receive His blessings. Through faith in the Messiah, we become heirs of the promises made to Abraham! But, it all comes back to Abraham. It all comes back to God's grace upon His life, and that's why Abraham is important to us.

What's encouraging about Abraham is that his faith wasn't perfect. It's encouraging, because God doesn't require perfect faith in order to obtain perfect righteousness. As we continue on in Genesis, we see Abraham's faltering faith. God promised that Abraham would be a great nation in chapter 15. In chapter 16, we see Abraham disbelieving the promise. Rather than believing God, that He would raise up these descendants from his wife, Abraham went into Hagar, Sarah's maidservant (Gen. 16:4), thereby engaging in sexual immorality. She conceived and bore to him a son, named Ishmael.

In verse 12 we read about Ishmael, "He will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand will be against everyone, And everyone's hand will be against him; And he will live to the east of all his brother." This is an amazing verse. Because, what was true of Ishmael, is true of the entire Arab world today. Arabs are descendants of Ishmael. Arabs are known far and wide for their antagonistic spirit. Predominantly, they live to the east of the Jewish people in Israel, and there is no peace with them. These troubles have come because of Abraham's small faith, trusting in his own flesh, rather than in the true and sure promises of God.

God's blessing to Abraham wasn't to go through Hagar and Ishmael. God's blessing was to come through Sarah, Abraham's wife. In chapter 17, God makes that clear.

Genesis 17:15-22
Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. "I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."
Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"
And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!"
But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year."
When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

Here we see Abraham faltering in his faith. "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? Will a child be born to Sarah, who is ninety years old? God, you have got to be kidding me!" But God said, "No, it's through Isaac that your descendants will come. My covenant will be established with him." A similar conversation comes in chapter 18, when three men come and told him again that Sarah will have a son in a year's time. Sarah, overhearing the conversation, laughed, just as Abraham had done (verse 12). We get no indication from this chapter that Abraham was standing firm in his faith, urging his wife to believe this incredible promise. But, according to God's promise, sure enough, it

came to be true.

Genesis 21:1-3

Then the LORD took note of Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God has spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. [Which means, "Laughter."]

And thus was born the second of the key patriarchs. Abraham was the first and Isaac was the second. Isaac was born a miracle child, to a mother who was ninety, and to a father who was a hundred. The key role that Isaac plays in the story of the patriarchs isn't so much what he did, as much as it is how he put forth his father's faith for us all to see. Though Abraham may have faltered in his faith, he did pass the greatest test of faith known to man. The story is recorded in Genesis 22. Here's the test, ...

Genesis 22:1-2

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

What an incredible test! God called Abraham to offer up as a sacrifice his precious son, Isaac. Verse 2 really sets up the extent of the sacrifice. "Take now your son, your *only* son." It is interesting here to note that Abraham really had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. But, God didn't consider Ishmael to be Abraham's son. Besides, Ishmael was off living in Egypt at this time (Gen. 21:21). God further describes the one to be sacrificed, "... your only son, *whom you love*." I'm sure that Abraham's love for Isaac was great. He was the miracle child of his old age. God identifies him, "your only son, whom you love, *Isaac*." There was no doubt in Abraham's mind what God was calling him to do. He was to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering.

In Hebrews 11:17, we find out that this entire plan was a "test" for Abraham. As contradictory as this seemed to Abraham, shines! He believes God. As the story unfolds, Abraham rises and takes his son to the top of Mount Moriah, which is probably where the temple mount is in Israel today. He places Isaac upon the altar and is about to kill him. But, God stopped him because he passed the test. God said (in verse 12), "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Instead, God provided a ram in the thicket as a sacrifice instead of Isaac (verse 13).

Abraham passed the test, demonstrating his faith in God. He was willing to follow Him anywhere and believe anything that God said, even when he didn't fully understand God's plan. The writer to the Hebrews gives the divine commentary on Abraham's reasoning. "He considered that God is able to raise people, even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type" (Hebrews 11:19). Abraham was convinced that the promises given to him went through Isaac. If God said to sacrifice him upon the altar, then certainly, God would raise him from the dead to fulfill God's promises.

Hebrews says that the sacrifice of Isaac upon the altar was a type of Christ. It foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice and resurrection. Everything that God called Abraham to do, God, Himself did. God sacrificed His only Son, whom He loved, even Jesus. Only Jesus found no substitute. There was no ram in the thicket in the garden of Gethsemane. Instead, God went through with the sacrifice, Jesus was the lamb that God had provided. He was slain for our sins. As difficult as it was for Abraham, it was equally difficult for God to send His Son. But demonstrated His love in doing so for us, that through faith, we might share in the inheritance of Abraham.

At this point in Genesis, the life of Abraham winds down. The story of Isaac continues on, but only shortly. The significance of Isaac's life is that the promises to Abraham continue through Isaac. They didn't continue through Ishmael, even though he was technically the firstborn. See, "It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants" (Rom. 9:8).

But, such are the ways of God. He often chooses the least significant to pour his blessings through. When gathering a church in our day and age, God didn't choose the wise and the mighty and the noble. Rather, God has chosen the foolish and the weak and base things. He does this, "that no man might boast before God" (1 Cor. 1:29). This is evident among the patriarchs. There is no boasting before God. None of them can say, "I'm the firstborn! I deserve it!"

We see this again take place in the lives of Isaac's sons. In chapter 24, God provides him with a wife, Rebecca. In chapter 25, their children were born to them, Jacob and Esau. They were twins, who struggled together in the womb. God explained this in chapter 25, verse 23, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger."

"Though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger'" (Rom. 9:11-12a). This is not what we would expect. We would expect God to choose the firstborn to receive the promises. But, God's ways are not our ways. In this case, God chose to bless the younger, the one with no rights. In verses 25 and 26, we see the account of their birth.

Genesis 25:25-26

Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob [which means one who supplants or deceives].

These verses set the stage for the lives of these brothers. They were in constant conflict with each other. Perhaps one of the reasons why was because they were complete opposites. "When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a

peaceful man, living in tents" (verse 27). Esau was the manly man. He was the one out there hunting, providing game. He loved the great outdoors. He love the wind and the dirt. Jacob, on the other hand, was a gentle man. He was the office worker who went to work each day in a tie. He preferred cooking over hunting. He liked to be in the tent rather than on the field. What were these boys going to find time to do together? Jacob wants to stay inside, but Esau want to go out and hunt some deer. It would certainly have caused some conflict.

Perhaps another reason why they were in conflict with each other was because of the favoritism of their parents. "Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (verse 28). Parents at odds with over their children is bad news. Playing favorites with your children is a surefire was of causing conflict between your children.

But, the greatest reason for the conflict between Jacob and Esau was Jacob's character. He was a deceiver. He was a manipulator. He was relentless. The next few chapters in Genesis put forth the conflict between these two men. The first of the major conflicts come in verse 29, ...

Genesis 25:29-34

When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom.

But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."

Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?"

And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Thereby, Jacob supplanted Esau's birthright. To us, this might not seem to be a big deal. But, to them, it was a bit deal. The birthright is the path to the father's blessing.

Chapter 27 tells the story of how Jacob received the blessing. Isaac is about to die. He is ready to give the blessing to Esau, the firstborn. But, before he does so, he sends him out to hunt and "prepare a savory dish" (verse 3) for him. Then, he would bless him. So, he goes out "to the field to hunt for game" (verse 5). Rebecca had overheard this conversation and brought Jacob in to talk with her. Since Jacob was her favorite, she developed a plan that would deceive her husband, so that Jacob would receive the blessing.

Here's the plan. Since Isaac was old and couldn't see very well (verse 1), Jacob would take a goat from the barn and bring it to Isaac. Jacob would come dressed in Esau's garments to help convince Isaac that he was Esau with the odor of his garments. Since Esau was hairy and Jacob was smooth, he would use the skins of goats on his hands and neck to deceive him. This would all take place quickly before Esau returned from the field. Then Jacob would receive the blessing. As you read the story below, try to count the number of times that Jacob had an opportunity to repent and tell the truth, but rather, he continued in his deception. The story is recorded in these words, ...

Genesis 27:18-29

Then he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?"

Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me." Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?"

And he said, "Because the LORD your God caused it to happen to me."

Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not."

So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?"

And he said, "I am."

So he said, "Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you." And he brought it to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank.

Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come close and kiss me, my son."

So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed;

Now may God give you of the dew of heaven,

And of the fatness of the earth,

And an abundance of grain and new wine;

May peoples serve you,

And nations bow down to you;

Be master of your brothers,

And may your mother's sons bow down to you

Cursed be those who curse you,

And blessed be those who bless you."

Jacob, thereby lives up to his name. He's the supplanter. He's the deceiver. I count five times in which he had an opportunity to tell the truth, but continued to lie (verse 19, 20-21, 22-23, 24-25, 26-29).

Such actions caused great friction between Jacob and Esau. You can see this later in the narrative, "So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (verse 41).

Rebecca heard about this and told Jacob of how he needs to flee to Laban, her brother. But, she doesn't want him merely to run away. So, again, Rebecca schemes against her husband, Isaac. She manipulates him by saying (in verse 46), "I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?" So, Isaac sent Jacob away to Laban (28:1-5).

I trust that you will see the deception and the wickedness among the patriarchs and their wives. These people are far from being a righteous family. There were deceivers and manipulators. There was strife, not peace among the patriarchs. Anyway, on his way he had a dream.

Genesis 28:12-15

He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

What an amazing dream. It was almost a repeat of Genesis 12! He would get the land (verse 13). His descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth (v. 14). Through him, "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (verse 14).

Think about it. This guy had just swindled his brother out of his birthright and blessing. He had bold-faces lied to his father. His mother was manipulating her husband to help these things take place. He joined into the plan. And then, he receives the assurance from God, that he will be blessed!!! How can this be? This is the covenant faithfulness of God! "If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

By His grace, God promised to bless Abraham and his children. By His grace, God said that this blessing would go through Isaac, even though he wasn't Abraham's first offspring. By His grace, God said the blessing would go through Jacob. None of these guys deserved a thing! But, that's the point! The patriarchs weren't the most righteous men that ever walked the planet. When you read through the story of Jacob, you realize just how terrible things were with these guys. It goes from bad to worse.

In chapter 29, we read of how Jacob went to Laban and met Rachel. He wanted to marry her, but Laban (from Rachel's side of the family) wouldn't allow it until Jacob had worked for him for seven years. And then, the night of the marriage, Laban swapped Leah for Rachel. So, rather than marrying Rachel, whom he loved, Jacob married Leah. Jacob was probably so intoxicated that he didn't find out what happened until the next morning.

When Jacob confronted Laban regarding these matters. He had worked for Laban for seven years for Rachel. It was obvious to all that it was for Rachel that he worked. All could have seen the attention that Jacob paid to Rachel, not to Leah. Surely, it was clear in everyone's mind. So, why the switch? Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn" (Gen. 29:26). What deception! Laban did make a concession, however. He gave Rachel to Jacob a week later in the promise that we would work for him for another seven years. See, Laban was clearly aware of God's blessing upon Jacob's life and wanted to keep Jacob helping him. And so, a week later, he married Rachel. Take note here that this is polygamy, not such a righteous thing to do.

Eventually, he had children from four different women. First of all, God blessed the womb of Leah, the unloved, as God often does. She bore him Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and later, Issachar and Zebulun. When Rachel saw that Leah was bearing these children, but she, herself was unable to bear children, she gave her maidservant, Bilhah, to Jacob to cohabit with. She bore him Dan and Naphtali. Leah, then did the same with Zilpah, giving her maidservant to Jacob to bear children. She bore him Gad and Asher. Finally Rachel then bore him Joseph, (and later) Benjamin. These sons (with the exception of Benjamin) are listed in chapter 30.

And now, we have the twelve tribes of Israel. Please note that these children haven't come righteously. They have come from a polygamous relationship as well as several adulterous relationships as well. Do you think that these sons are righteous people? No, they aren't. When you read through the Biblical account, you are shocked at the wickedness of these men.

For instance, in chapter 34, we read the story of the wickedness of Shechem upon their sister Dinah. When Shechem expressed a desire to have her in marriage, Jacob's sons required that the men of the city all be circumcised. Then, they would dwell together with them (Gen. 34:15-17). Such a plan was clearly against the plan of God, who wanted Israel to be a distinct, separate people. But, their plan never came about, because Simeon and Levi took matters into their own hands. "on the third day, when they were in pain [from their circumcision], Simeon and Levi ... each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male" (Gen. 34:25). Treachery and murder was par for the course with these men.

In chapter 38, we read of how Judah committed adultery with Tamar and tried to cover it up. This is the one through whom the line of the Messiah would come (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah). It's coming through this sexually immoral man.

In chapter 37, all of these brothers sell their brother to a passing band of Ishmaelite travelers. Following this, they lie to their father about his fate, claiming that he was killed by a wild animal. This lie would continue to haunt them throughout their lives, even decades later when they came into Joseph's presence. You can see this clearly in the last chapter of Genesis.

I hope that you can see that these patriarchs aren't righteous people. The origin of the 12 tribes in Israel were not righteous people. Yet, God was still true to his promise to bless their great-grandfather through them. This is the point of the patriarchs. God was faithful, despite their unfaithfulness. God overruled their sin and continued to bless the sons of Jacob (as wicked as they may be).

Although the sons sold Joseph into slavery, God intended this wicked act for good. God eventually blessed Joseph's life to the point where he became the second in command in all of Egypt. It was to Egypt that the sons of Jacob fled in looking for food to survive. Eventually, it is revealed to them that Joseph, the one who they sold into slavery, was the one in charge of the famine relief.

Shortly after Jacob died, they were worried about a possible grudge that Joseph might hold against them. Yet, even here, they appear to be deceptive. Here is the Biblical account.

Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!"

So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father."

And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones."

So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

God had sent Joseph ahead (Gen. 45:5, 7, 8, 9) to provide for the twelve brothers, their wives, their children, and their descendants. Such was the kind care of God for the twelve tribes. Furthermore, in forgiving them, Joseph dealt with the brothers as God dealt with the patriarchs. The patriarchs did much evil, but God did much good.

I believe that Joseph was able to forgive them like this because he understood the covenant that God had made with the patriarchs. His dying words to his brothers (which are often the most important thing for anyone to remember) was all about the covenant that God had made.

Genesis 50:24-25

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob."

Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

Joseph understood God's covenant to eventually give their descendants the land. In faith, "He gave orders concerning his bones" (Heb. 11:22). When you think of the patriarchs, don't think of righteous men. Rather, think of sinners who received the mercy of God. This is who we are. By faith, we are sinners who receive the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 31, 2009 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] These stages are from the book, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, by Max Anders. It's an excellent book to help you grasp the main storyline of the Bible.