

GENESIS

Why The Beginning Matters

Study 19

Jacob and The Unfolding of God's Plan

Genesis 26-28

Part 1 of 6: Covenant Renewal

Genesis 26:24-25

That night the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

1) Discussion question. God passed on the covenant he made with Abraham to Isaac, and Isaac responded by building an altar. Is building an altar bad?

Gen 27 – The Blessing

Part 2 of 6: What's in the Blessing?

Genesis 27:28-29

May God give you heaven's dew
and earth's richness—
an abundance of grain and new wine.

May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.

Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.

May those who curse you be cursed
and those who bless you be blessed."

2) Objective question. Select all that apply. According to the video lecture, what is the nature of this blessing?

A. A legal last will and testament

B. Deep spiritual discernment

C. Affirmation and Empowerment

D. It is not a prophecy

E. It is made by faith according to Hebrews 11:20-22

Part 3 of 6: God's Sovereignty vs Human Free Will

Genesis 27:33

Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!"

3) a) Objective question. Select all that apply. According to the video lecture, which of the following is true on the subject of God's sovereignty vs human free will in the case of Jacob and Esau?

A. The Lord gave a prophecy in Gen 25:22-23 that the older son will serve the younger

B. Esau sold his birthright in Genesis 25:33-34

C. Isaac didn't know about Esau selling his birthright

D. Esau did not care about keeping his family holy and married not only one, but two Hittite women

E. Rebekah favored Jacob and conspired to defraud Esau, but the consequence is a broken relationship with Esau and he never saw Jacob after that

F. Isaac wanted to have the Primogeniture blessing ceremony in secret, deliberately blind to Esau's unholiness and going against the prophecy

G. Isaac trembled violently because he realized he was fighting against God's prophecy

H. Jacob was exiled as a consequence of stealing the birthright and deceiving the father

b) Fill in the blanks. God's sovereign choice means he makes the ultimate choice in choosing who to use to carry out his blessings to the rest of the world. Fill in the blanks on the reason why the choice was not typical.

God chose	why it's not typical
Isaac instead of	Ishmael, the older son
Jacob instead of	Esau, the older brother
Judah instead of	his 3 older brothers
David instead of	his 7 older brothers
Jephthah despite that	he is an illegitimate son
Gideon despite that	he is the youngest son

c) Discussion question. Since God still uses human free will for his sovereign choice, does that mean that ‘the ends justify the means’? Or asked it another way, was it okay for Jacob, and Rebekah to lie or for Esau to sell his birthright for a meal since God still used it?

d) Reflection question. We as Christians inherit the firstborn blessings that Jesus has while he inherits our curses. Christianity is a journey where we grow to appreciate God and His love more and more. Rate how you currently feel about this inheritance at this point in your journey. Rating scale:

1= “I don’t understand this trade. I rather earn my own blessings and suffer my own curses, not sure why God bothered making this unfair deal.”

5= “Meh. Got also can, don’t have also can. I don’t feel much about it. Not even sure exactly what the blessings are. But free mah, I take loh.”

10= “Wooooooowwwww!! I can’t believe God did this for me! I can’t wait to live in His way and share to others about this!!!”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Gen 28 – Jacob’s dream: From Deception to Destiny

Part 4 of 6: God comes to us when we are at our lowest

Genesis 28:10-15

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

There above it stood the Lord, and he said: “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

4) a) Discussion question. According to the video lecture, how does Satan use “pain” or “pleasure” to assault the glory of God in our lives?

In pleasure, Satan makes us think God is not necessary. In pain, Satan makes us think God is powerless or that God does not love us.

b) Comprehension question. According to the video lecture, write down the significance of the dream and the event.

Verse	Meaning/Significance
“Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep.”	Jacob had the blessing but he was sleeping in the wilderness alone on a stone pillow.
“He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven,”	In Jacob’s lowest point, God approached him. The stairway indicated access to God and God initiated it by divine revelation and reaching down to Jacob.
“and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”	Angels are messengers that carry out God’s business and royal decrees so that God’s purpose is fulfilled
“There above it stood the Lord”	God’s very presence is there
“ I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, ... All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”	The covenant promise is passed from Isaac to Jacob.

Part 5 of 6: God’s blessings and God’s promises are inseparable

5) a) Discussion question. According to the video lecture, are there differences between God’s promise and God’s blessings? (If he promised, does it mean it is obligated and not a ‘bonus’ blessing?)

Part 6 of 6: God’s transformation enables us to receive His blessings

Genesis 28:16-19

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a

pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

6) a) Fill in the blanks. According to the video lecture, fill in God's intentions in comparison to Jacob's response.

Verse on Jacob	Jacob's response is	Verse on God	God's intention
"If God... then the LORD shall be my God.. I will give a full tenth..."	transactional	"I will give..I am with you and will keep, I will not leave you.."	Unconditional
"If God will be with ME.." "Give ME food...clothes" "I return safely."	self-centered	"I will give to you and your OFFSPRING...ALL FAMILIES of earth be blessed	God will use Jacob as a blessing to others
Jacob promised to take the LORD as his God, to recognize God's house and to give a tenth.	Presumptuous and manipulative	The aseity of God paraphrase this in layman terms	God doesn't "need" anything from Jacob

b) Reflection question. Most of us start out our Christian journey with a transactional idea of God but that idea is slowly changed as we learn more and more about God through the Bible and the help of bible studying. Do you think that God is capable of changing and transforming you to love Him more and in the way He prefers(non-transactional), if you persistently pray for it?

Gen 26 – Passing on the covenant

Part 1 of 6: Covenant Renewal

Gen 27 – The Blessing

Part 2 of 6: What's in the Blessing?

Part 3 of 6: God's Sovereignty vs Human Free Will

Gen 28 – Jacob's dream: From Deception to Destiny

Part 4 of 6: God comes to us when we are at our lowest

Part 5 of 6: God's blessings and God's promises are inseparable

Part 6 of 6: God's transformation enables us to receive His blessings

Case Study

Case 1 – Worship Response

Letitia and Lucinda are twin sisters who attend the Third Baptist Church. However, they differ tremendously in their personalities. Letitia is always serious and studious whereas Lucinda is carefree and has a happy-go-lucky personality.

When asked what worship means to them, Letitia and Lucinda have slightly differing views. Lucinda believes worship is the music that is played on a Sunday morning while raising her hands in a show of praise and surrender. However, she is almost always late and she doesn't dress modestly because she says she is accepted by God for who she is. For her, there are Sundays when she "feels" God's presence and other Sundays when she doesn't. She says it is highly dependent on the music and songs that are selected on a particular Sunday morning.

Additionally, Lucinda occasionally leaves early during the sermons because generally, the preachers are too boring for her. If she does stay, she tends to forget about sermons very quickly because she is not interested.

Letitia believes worship is something reverential and is something that is not just on a Sunday morning. She acknowledges that worship is not isolated to just one day of the week but every day of the week. Additionally, worship to her is adoration to her God that allows her to not just hear but respond to God's Word. She also dedicates her time to praying and studying the Bible besides giving to the poor.

1) a) Discussion question. Whose understanding of worship is more biblical?

Model Answer

Letitia's. Despite music being a part of worship (in singing songs and praises unto God), music is not worshiping in and of itself. There is much more to worship as seen in the character of Jacob in Genesis 28.

Lucinda sees worship as something self-centered and not God-centred – how she “feels” on a Sunday morning, whether she likes the songs or not. She is also not interested to know what God is speaking to her through the sermon.

b) Discussion question. Worship is coming into the “presence of God”. We know that God is omnipresent. If God is omnipresent, what does this special “presence of God” mean?

Model Answer

First, we see that worship is coming into the presence of God.

Of course, the Bible assumes the omnipresence of God. He is everywhere (Psalm 139). But Biblical worship assumes there is a special presence, the “face” of God. That is why Jonah can “flee from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:3) and yet turn around and confess that God is everywhere, Lord of all heaven and earth (Jonah 1:9). There are many ways to speak of this “presence”, his relational nearness.

In the New Testament the disciples had a prayer meeting and as a result, the house was shaken and the fullness of the Holy Spirit came down upon them (Acts 4:31). David speaks of having “gazed upon the beauty of the Lord” in the temple (Ps 27:4) “seeking your face” (Ps 27:8). Moses was told that he could not look upon the face of God and live (Exodus 33), so David is probably not talking of a direct vision to his physical senses but an experience of the presence of God. To be in the presence of God is to sense his reality, and to have intellectual concepts (such as his love, power, and glory) become vivid, affecting, clear, delightful, consoling, and transforming. That is why David can say, “I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Your steadfast love is better than life...” (Psalm 63:2-3) That is what it means to enter God's “house”.

Jacob has never experienced the presence of God. It is his first personal encounter. Before, his religion was second-hand. The sense of “awe” he refers to is the difference between a sense of being in the presence of the holy and majestic God and the intellectual belief that He is holy and great.

So we see that worship is not primarily the following of a ritual form nor just a time of teaching and instruction, nor just a time for fellowship. None of these things are the primary

goal or essence of an act of worship. Worship is coming into the presence of the Lord, through his grace.

God's sovereign grace and presence turn a nowhere place ("a certain place" v.11) into the house of God. Buildings are not important. The presence of God amidst his people who are called by grace — that is the true 'sanctuary'.

c) Discussion question. Worship consists of hearing from God and then responding to God. Is it possible to truly worship God without connection to God's Word?

Model Answer

Second, we see that worship consists of hearing from God and then responding to God. Jacob's acts of worship are a response to the promise and words of God. Worship does not start with us seeking God and then God responding to us after. Worship starts with God's Word. When his Word penetrates and convicts us, it evokes the awe and worship that we see in Jacob. Another interesting example of this is in 2 Samuel 7, where God sends a prophet to give David a word from the Lord. David turns and says: "O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant... Therefore your servant finds this prayer in his heart." (2 Sam 7:27).

Hearing God's Word deep in the heart creates — adoration, confession, petition, and thanksgiving. This is the essence of the 'rhythm' of any personal or corporate act of worship. This has always been the basic dynamic in the structure of any Biblical worship service. We hear the Word (by reading it, chanting it, hearing it, preaching it) and in response, we give back to God our prayers and gifts.

d) Discussion question. Worship is giving God what He is worth. What should we give God? Consider what Jacob gave to God in worship.

Model Answer

Third, we see that our worship response is giving God what he is worth. Notice all the things that Jacob does. First, he gives God the stone on which he laid his head. He honors it, setting it apart with oil from ordinariness to commemorate the grace of God. (v.18). It was a way of saying 'everything about this place is now precious to me. Second, he gives God his income — he promises God a tithe of his money (v.22b) Third, he gives God himself — "The Lord will be my God". So we see that in response to the Word of God we are to give God all — our sins (through confession) our hearts (through dedication) our resources (through offering) our

needs (through petition) our love (through praise and thanksgiving). The old English word for this was originally “worth-ship”. An act of worship has two parts: a) seeing the worthiness of God (through his Word) and then b) giving him what he is worth.

Case 2 – Recovery

Gregory Lau was a very powerful preacher of the word and pastored a mega church in Penang. He was married to a prominent lawyer with 3 young children. His church was thriving and they planted 10 other churches in the 10 years he was with them. He was always convicted of God's plan for him to bring the gospel to every part of Penang.

However, as time went on he began to become more arrogant and would not listen to advice. He was caught having an affair with one of his intern pastors in the church and was forced to step down. His wife divorced him and took his three children away to live with her parents. He took to drugs and tried to kill himself by almost jumping off the Penang bridge at the Chinese New Year last year but at the last minute, he was met by Jason from the First Baptist Church who managed to talk him off the bridge.

Gregory was not bitter against God but felt his life was over, his vision which he believed was God's plan for him to lead the megachurch and spearhead the revival in Penang was irreparably damaged. He felt massively guilty for letting the Lord and his family down and there was not much to live for.

2) a) Discussion question. If you were Jason, how could you use the Jacob story here to counsel Gregory to carry on serving the Lord?

b) Discussion question. If you were the elder of a church, would you consider giving Gregory a job in the pastoral team again? Factors to consider:

i) Under what circumstances and why?

ii) What impact would re-hiring a person like Gregory have on the church?

iii) What impact would that have in the eyes of society?

Case 2.1

Gregory recovered from his depression and started an outreach for drug addicts and even started a chain of homes for drug rehab that spanned 10 countries in Asia making a huge impact in the communities. When he was interviewed by a newspaper he told them it was God's will for him to have the affair because if it wasn't for that he could not have come to

start this new ministry.

c) Discussion question. What do you think? Does God's will involve us sinning and if so how can be we blamed for this?

Case 3 – Transactional Faith

Mr. Krabs is a very astute businessman in the manufacturing industry producing burger patties and is always finding for new clients who will sell his product. Despite his hard work, he does not have a lot of money from his business.

As a Christian, Mr. Krabs always prays to God and asks for God to provide him with more. He also gives thanks to God for giving him all that he has. Having said that, Mr. Krabs is not regularly attending church or giving to church because he spends so much time looking after his business and is very tight on his expenses.

One day, there was a very large potential business deal worth RM15 million that was offered to him by Krusty Burgers. It will set Mr. Krabs up for retirement if this deal goes through.

Mr. Krabs prayed to the Lord and promises that he will attend church faithfully and give 10% of the amount if the Lord provides him with this transaction.

3) a) Discussion question. What sort of faith is Mr. Krabs having?

Model Answer

Mr. Krabs has a transactional faith. He will do things for God if he gets something in return.

b) Discussion question. Mr. Krabs seems to be bargaining with God. Does this indicate mature or immature faith?

Model Answer

Immature. He does not yet understand God's character and has a poor view of who God is.

c) Discussion question. If Mr. Krabs persistently pray for God to mature his faith, do you think God will answer it? (refer to Colossians 4:12)

Quick verse reference

Colossians 4:12

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

d) Discussion question. Jacob also bargained with God in Genesis 28 in a similar manner to Mr. Krabs. Does that mean it is acceptable for us to do the same?

Model Answer

It is true that Jacob seems to be bargaining. There was never a contingency clause in anything God said at all. He never said: "I'll do this if..." Yet Jacob starts his vow with "if". Some people have felt that there was nothing wrong with what Jacob said at all. Derek Kidner thinks that "the vow was no more a bargain than any other vow — the 'if' clause is inherent in the form" (p.158) but I don't think that is right. God was able to avoid the word "if", and this audacious bargaining attitude fits in perfectly with what we know of his character, He is not going to change on the spot! He has just had his first encounter with the living God, and he is responding as best he can. Joyce Baldwin's insight is better (and comforting!) when she says: The terms of his vow sound calculating... Jacob was dull and unresponsive to the loving reassurance of god. Before he could commit himself completely Jacob wanted the circumstantial evidence of the outworking of God's promises in his life... 'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails...I will not believe,' said Thomas with the same desire for tangible evidence (John 20:25). Marvellously patient, the Lord meets us where we are. – Baldwin, p.119

This does not mean that it is 'all right' to come to God with conditions! It just means that God so often accepts our half-hearted and fitful efforts at the point of dedication and helps us purify them over time.

e) Discussion question. What sort of faith should Mr. Krabs have?

Model Answer

Discuss