

THE PATRIARCHS

ENCOUNTERING THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB

Listening Guide

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Introductory Session

God issued this promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2: “I will make you into a great nation.”

Read Genesis 11:1-9.

1. God responded to man’s “Come let us” with His own. The order of the consonants in the Hebrew word for “let us confuse” is n-b-l. The order of the consonants in the Hebrew word for “bricks” is the reverse: l-b-n.

“Will He unbrick what they brick?”

2. The rebellion in Shinar was first and foremost an attempt by the people to make a name for themselves. (See Gen. 12:1-2.) From the resulting table of nations, God birthed a nation to revere His Name and reach the world with His blessing. Interestingly, since *YHWH* (the Tetragrammaton, “LORD”) was considered the unspeakable name, one of the most common titles that God has been called in Jewish tradition is *Ha-Shem*, literally meaning “The Name” (2 Sam. 6:1-2).

3. We commonly identify this chosen nation as “the Jews,” but they were not called by this name for centuries.

Names or Identities:

- Abraham and his descendants were first called Hebrews.
- After God renamed Jacob *Israel* and established the 12 tribes from 10 sons and 2 grandsons, Abraham’s descendants also became known as the children of Israel or Israelites.
- The tribe of Judah and the small tribe of Benjamin, however, remained as the Southern Kingdom known as Judea. After Judea fell to the Babylonians and the people were taken into exile, they became known as the Judah-ites and the religion they practiced Judah-ism. Eventually all Abraham’s descendants became generally known by the name of the largest remaining tribe (Judah) and the name was shortened to Jews.

4. In keeping with His character, God told the history of a nation through individuals.

SESSION ONE

Leave Your Country

1. God ordained Abra(ha)m to be both patriarch and prophet.
2. Those God uses greatly seem to greatly battle fear. Therefore, we may battle fear but we must not let it win.
3. The Hebrew word for *count* means “to score (to mark with a tally.)”
4. On the basis of biblical re-emphasis, God does not mean for us to miss that Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness.
 - Genesis 15:6 records the first mention in Scripture of any form of the word believe. Let’s make our goal to one day see the words “[your name] believed God” in His handwriting.
 - The word *credited* means “to count, impute, esteem.”
 - We can act without belief, but we cannot believe without acting (Isa. 7:9).
5. Elements of the Covenant Ceremony:
 - The Hebrew terminology for “made a covenant,” *karat* means “to cut, cut off; to make a covenant.”
 - Each animal and bird God required in the ceremony was later listed among the acceptable sacrifices under the Levitical law.
 - Since God could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself.
 - The birds of prey represent foreign attack.
 - The word for “passed” is *avar* or *abar* meaning to cross over.

SESSION TWO

The Approaching and Approachable God

I. Comparing verses 17-19 and 20-21. In the first discourse God is speaking to Himself, and in the second He addresses Abraham.

The first discourse:

- Beautifully demonstrates that God's actions are perfectly consistent with His thoughts.
- Positions Abraham once again in the role of prophet (see Amos 3:7).

2. The second discourse is undoubtedly intended to engage dialogue with Abraham. God has deliberately cast Himself in an anthropomorphic role throughout Genesis 18. *Anthropos*—man or mankind; *Morphe*—form or shape.

3. God invited Abraham—a mere man—to walk with Him so that He could teach Abraham how a man can walk like Him.

4. Can God trust Abraham (v. 17) and can Abraham trust God (vv. 23,25)?

- The affirmative answer to the first concern results in Abraham's being cast in a second role: God's friend (Jas. 2:23).

5. Our comfort can be this: what is not sorted out here and now is sorted out then and there.

SESSION THREE

Triumphs and Tests

1. Our tests have our names on them (v. 1). The Hebrew word for *tested* means “to test, try, prove, ... Generally carries the idea of testing the quality of someone or something through stressful circumstances.” Possible meaning for *Moriah*: My teacher is Yah.

2. Our hardest tests involve our dearest loves.

The Hebrew word for *love* means “to love, desire to delight, ... Implies an ardent and vehement inclination of the mind and a tenderness of affection at the same time ... a strong emotional attachment for and a desire to possess or be in the presence of the object of love.”

3. We are not powerless in our tests. How we take them is up to us. The Hebrew *na* is called the “particle of entreaty” and is used by God only in issues of staggering importance often defying “rational explanation or understanding.” Abraham’s only recorded words to God in the chapter: “Here I am” (Heb. 10:7).

4. Obedience is not the hardest part of our most trying tests. Keeping the faith can be hardest of all.

5. Like Abraham, we’re likely to discover that the harder the test, the further reaching the ramifications (vv. 15-18).

- The Gospel was preached beforehand in the promise and portrayed beforehand on the mountain.
- The place was commemorated by the name “The Lord Will provide.”
- The Hebrew word for “provide” also means to see.

The Vulgate: In the mountain the LORD sees.

Septuagint: In the mountain the LORD is seen.

SESSION FOUR

Eyes on Isaac

The intention of our study today is to be biblical rather than political. Our biblical understanding, however, will lend insight to some of the political aspects of “holy war” in our troubled world.

Genesis 25:12-18: Ishmael and his descendants:

- Ishmael’s descendants became Arabian nomads or Bedouins.
- Ishmael had strong ties to Africa through Hagar (16:1) and his wife (21:21).

The Biblical Roots of Political Conflicts Involving Ishmael’s Descendants:

I. Ishmael’s insecurity: No matter how blessed we’ve been, our natural tendency is to want the blessing we do not have (see Gen. 17:20). According to Dr. Ergun Caner, “The entire Islamic religion is based on making Ishmael the inheritor of the promise.” Over 2200 years after the events on Mount Moriah, Mohammed changed the character in the historical scene from Isaac to Ishmael.

2. Ishmael’s hostility:

A. Compare Genesis 16:11-12 and 25:18.

- Genesis 16:12 reads: “And he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.”
- Genesis 25:18 reads: “And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.”

Time has an uncanny way of turning a he into a they. We unearth an important application when we ask ourselves: What do we want our descendants to be like? Let’s pursue becoming what we hope our descendants will be.

B. Islam’s hostility toward Christianity.

- Our belief system is blasphemous to them because they do not believe God can have a son. Importantly, Mohammed also wrote in Sura (Chapter) 4:157-159 of the Koran that Jesus was never crucified.
- They believe Christians live in the “train of blood,” chiefly because of the Crusades. In other words, they view us as a violent people.

Loving individuals help break long-term stereotypes.

We are the spiritual offspring of Abraham, and through Abraham all nations are to be blessed.

Though nation may war with nation, individual Christians can become part of that blessing by making our goal to win individual Muslims to the love and security of Jesus Christ.

SESSION FIVE

The Heel Grabber

The NIV “reached” could be translated more closely with the words happen upon or strikes upon. It emphasizes the randomness with which Jacob chose this place to pass at night.

1. A place we think we’ve randomly happened upon can be a divinely scheduled venue for an awesome encounter with God.

2. God’s first stated purpose for the encounter was to tell Jacob that the God of Abraham and Isaac was to be his God as well.

3. Representations in Jacob’s dream:

- The ladder’s obvious purposes of connection and access. After the dream Jacob described the place as the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:17).
- The dream coming specifically to Jacob who would soon be renamed Israel. (See Ps. 105:8-10.)
- Peter said of Christ, “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (1 Pet. 2:6). Peter would have well remembered that Christ also promised to build His church upon a rock (Matt. 16:18). The emphasis of Genesis 28:14 is clearly upon descendants.

4. Jacob’s reaction could compel us to ask God to increase our awareness of His glorious presence.

5. Jacob set up the stone as a pillar.

- It became unacceptable later when God’s people treated memorials as idols rather than symbols.
- Due to such misuse, the prophet Hosea renamed Bethel (meaning House of God) Beth Aven meaning House of Nothingness (Hos. 4:15).

6. Jacob poured oil on top of the standing stone. Both *The New International Commentary* and *The Beginning of Wisdom* treat Jacob’s action as an anointing and translate the word “top” as “head.” A more literal interpretation of Genesis 28:18 would be:

“He poured oil upon its head.” A Jewish scholar by the name of Sacks: “Jacob’s deed anticipates the need for priests and kings who will later be ‘the gate of heaven’ for the people.” Keep in mind that both words *Messiah* and *Christ* mean “the Anointed One.”

SESSION SIX

For the Love of Jacob

- “I will pacify him with these gifts:” “I may cover his face.”
(The word *kapar* translated “cover” is also the word for “make an atonement.”)
- “with these gifts I’m sending on ahead:” “... gifts that go before my face.”
- “later, when I see him:” “when I face him.”
- “perhaps he will receive me:” “he will raise my face.”
- “So Jacob’s gifts went on ahead of him:” “the gifts went on ahead of his face.”

The point? Jacob was terrified to face his brother.

Genesis 32:22-31. *Peniel* means “the face of God.” When we dread facing something or someone, what we need most is to honestly face God.

Jacob’s Face-to-Face Encounter:

1. An honest appraisal. Verse 24 tells us Jacob was let alone. We are who we are without our gang and our game.
2. An honest fight.
 - The basic idea behind “could not overpower him” is that he could not make him quit.
(Compare Hos. 12:3-5.) God taught Jacob how to face up and fight honestly.
 - Sometimes in the dark of our night seasons, we don’t know with whom we’re struggling until the light begins to dawn.
 - When God allows or even invites us to wrestle with Him, His constant goal is to make us overcomers. Even when God appears to be against us, He is for us.
3. An honest blessing. The name *Jacob* means deceiver and cheater.
 - In every struggle do not let go until the blessing comes.
4. An honest name (v. 28). Few things define us more than how we struggle. When we struggle through the crisis with God all the way to the blessing, we are gloriously redefined.

SESSION SEVEN

God of the House

- We might be wise to keep some of our dreams to ourselves.
- God's exaltation of a man is never for the man himself.
Its purpose is the glorification of God and the edification of others.

Segment One: Genesis 37:12-14

The patriarch told Joseph to check on the “shalom of your brothers.” Jacob underestimated the ramifications of his partiality.

Segment Two: Genesis 37:14-18

- A. Ironically, Joseph turned out to be safer with the Shechemite than with his own brothers.
- B. In his lifetime Joseph will look for his brothers' approval, respect, mercy, apology, possibly their appreciation, and finally their welfare.

Segment Three: Genesis 37:18-25

- A. We must be very careful what we plot at a distance, lest we follow through when close. Nothing is harmless about a grudge. The Greek word for “nursed a grudge against” means, “to be held in or by anything; to be entangled in something, be enmeshed, to be subject to.”
- B. We might find that we are capable of doing some harmful things corporately that we might not have done individually. “Stripped” (Hebrew *pasat*) in “priestly texts is used of the skinning or flaying of a sacrifice.”

Segment Four: Genesis 37:25-36

- A. The means of deliverance was already on its way before Joseph was in the pit.
- B. Ironically, a goat was slaughtered both when Jacob deceived and when he was deceived. “An evil beast hath devoured him.” Jacob then cried, “Torn, torn is Joseph.”
- C. Jacob's sons underestimated the ramifications of their prejudice.

SESSION EIGHT

Dreams and Disappointments

Genesis 41:33-35 and Genesis 41:37-49.

1. Throughout biblical history God has strategically sought to place His representatives in positions of public influence.

2. God can gift and skill people for public service and business in ways that exceed formal education.

God can endow people in public positions with . . .

- The “spirit of God.” (v. 38). “The Spirit of God that hovered over the watery mass rests upon . . . Joseph.”
- Discernment. The Hebrew word for *discernment* means “to discern, perceive, observe, pay attention to, understand; to be intelligent; to heed . . . The word implies discernment, distinguishing between good and evil.” Please don’t miss that we have to pay attention to discern. Otherwise, we’re only giving a dignified name to the undignified practice of jumping to conclusions.
- Wisdom. The Hebrew word for *wisdom* shares many concepts with “discernment.” A few additions are “experienced, clever, skillful.”

3. When God makes the opportunity, take the opportunity.

4. No one is better suited for places of authority than those who have proved they can submit to authority. The Matthew 25:21 principle: If we prove faithful in the small and few things, God may place us in charge of many.

5. Nothing serves us better in places of high position than our lessons in low position.

6. Never mistake harvest years for leisure years. “A dream together with its interpretation is only a prediction, a potential but not yet an actual event. Its realization depends in part . . . on the action of the dreamer.”

SESSION NINE

A Fragile Band of Brothers

Segment One: Genesis 45:1-3

- A. Some moments are family moments. No one else can understand.
- B. God alone can give us the confidence to be transparent when everyone else is still covering.

Segment Two: Genesis 45:4-11

- A. Joseph framed the entire picture in the sovereignty of God. It was their only hope of healing.
- B. Feelings of distress and anger toward others sometimes can't rival those we harbor toward ourselves.

The Hebrew word for *distressed* means “to worry, grieve; to afflict, cause pain . . . denotes mental and physical discomfort.” The Hebrew word for *angry* means “to burn, be kindled, to be angry . . . act zealously. Points to the fire or heat of the anger just after it has been ignited.”

- C. Our great pain can mean someone else's deliverance, even someone who helped imprison us.
- D. If we refuse God's means of our deliverance, we could easily find ourselves destitute (v. 11).

Segment Three: Genesis 45:12-15

In God's process of restoring interpersonal relationships, don't expect to reach the same emotions at the same time. “The resurfacing of dialogue between Joseph and his brothers spells out the end of alienation.”

Segment Four: Genesis 45:16-24

- A. Joseph's forgiveness is not in word only. He demonstrates it in action.
- B. Nothing can ignite a family feud faster than a skeleton in the closet suddenly springing to life.

Segment Five: Genesis 45:25-28

Stunned translates “he was numb, for he did not believe them.” The basic meaning “seems to be that of being frozen or numbed, a condition of inability to function.”

Final point: A fresh anointing of faith restores feeling.

SESSION TEN

Epic Endings to the Beginning

Our God is *El Olam*, the Eternal God, who focuses more on inclusions than conclusions.

We want God to tie things up. God wants us to grasp how He ties things in.

Read Genesis 50:15-26 and consider the following:

- I. In His inconceivable sovereignty, God tied in the harm of Joseph's brothers to the benefit of their deliverance (vv. 19-21).

2. In Joseph's final recorded words, God tied in His original promise to Abraham, then Isaac and Jacob to the exodus (v. 24).
 - A very close literal rendering of Genesis 50:24: "God will surely take notice." A more literal rendering of Exodus 3:16, "I have taken note."
 - The Hebrew word for "coffin" in Genesis 50:26 is the same word translated "ark" in the Exodus, "ark of the Covenant." Though a detour seemed to await Joseph, its ultimate outcome was to allow him to indeed see that all was well with his brothers.

3. In the Gospels Christ tied in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the present and the future.

4. The Hebrews "Hall of Faith" ties in the complete fulfillment of the first patriarch's promises with ours.

5. God ties in our personal present with our future through an inner unrest Scripture calls a longing.