



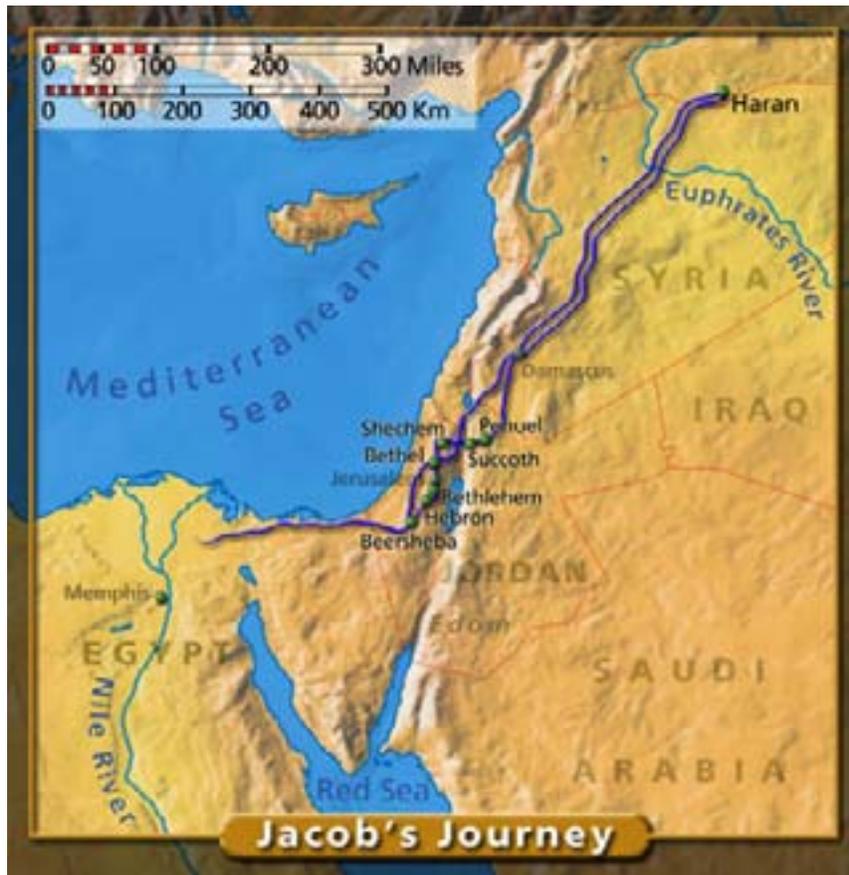
A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— March 2002 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1 Mar	Jacob marries Leah and Rachel; Fathers children	Genesis 29:1–30:24
2 Mar	Jacob's deal with Laban concerning the flocks	Genesis 30:25-43
3 Mar	Jacob departs from Laban	Genesis 31
4 Mar	Esau coming to meet Jacob; Wrestling with God	Genesis 32
5 Mar	Meeting of Jacob and Esau	Genesis 33
6 Mar	The violation of Dinah; Shechemites slaughtered	Genesis 34
7 Mar	Return to Bethel; Death of Rachel; Sin of Reuben	Genesis 35:1-26
8 Mar	Death of Isaac; Family of Esau	Genesis 35:27–36:43
9 Mar	Joseph's dreams; Sold into slavery by his brothers	Genesis 37
10 Mar	Judah and Tamar	Genesis 38
11 Mar	Joseph a slave in Potiphar's house	Genesis 39
12 Mar	Joseph in prison, interprets dreams	Genesis 40
13 Mar	Pharaoh's dreams; Joseph's rise to power	Genesis 41
14 Mar	Joseph's brothers come to Egypt and return home	Genesis 42
15 Mar	Joseph's brothers come back with Benjamin	Genesis 43
16 Mar	Joseph's cup	Genesis 44
17 Mar	Joseph reveals himself	Genesis 45
18 Mar	Jacob comes to Egypt; Joseph's handling of the famine	Genesis 46–47
19 Mar	Blessings upon Ephraim and Manasseh	Genesis 48
20 Mar	Jacob prophesies of Israel in the last days	Genesis 49:1-28
21 Mar	Deaths of Jacob and Joseph	Genesis 49:29–50:26

Starting March 22, there is break in the program for several days. Regular reading resumes April 4. (There are four planned breaks in each calendar year. This allows more time for personal study at these occasions and perhaps an opportunity for you to catch up in the reading if you have fallen behind.)

Highlights to Think About from This Month's Reading



Jacob's Travels: Leaves **Beersheba**; Has vision in **Bethel**; Marries in **Haran**, works for Laban; Wrestles with God in **Penuel**; Builds house in **Succoth**; Builds altar in **Shechem**; Settles in **Bethel**; Buries Rachel in **Bethlehem**; Buries Isaac and Leah in **Hebron**; Settles in **Beersheba**; Dies in **Egypt** (later reburied in **Hebron**).

Laban's Deception (Genesis 29:1–30:24)

March 1

Jacob's arrival in Padan Aram gives us a revealing look at him. From his conversation with the shepherds gathered at the well, we may observe that Jacob was polite, sociable and knowledgeable of the business of herding. Jacob's life "in tents" was not cloistered—he was, as previously stated, civilized and refined, and most likely skilled in the family business. Moreover, Jacob was no pampered weakling. For when he saw Rachel, he went and rolled the stone off of the mouth of the well—and well stones were massive circular stones of considerable weight. Also, notice verse 10's triple reference to "Laban, his mother's brother." Some commentators have taken this pointed emphasis to indicate that Jacob's mind at this point may have been more on attempting to ingratiate himself into the favor of Laban through a favorable report from Rachel, and less on the woman herself. Of course, the tenderness of verse 11 should demonstrate a genuineness of feeling regarding his meeting up with close relatives. That is only natural. Still, putting all the evidence together, it would appear that Jacob is a cultured, sociable, business-savvy and physically imposing man who, though at least sometimes genuine in feeling, is not always genuine in his dealings with others—that he is often looking for a way to further his own ends.

God is about to embark on a long course of knocking Jacob down to a more humble self-appraisal—using Laban as a significant tool in the process. Jacob may have been a smooth operator in Canaan, able to run the family business and outwit his elder brother, but he can in no way compare to the devious Laban. Jacob has unknowingly met his match. When Rachel brought her father the news of Jacob's arrival, Laban ran to meet him—perhaps naturally happy to see a visiting relative (verses 13-14) but also, knowing the type of person Laban is, surely thinking back on the gifts that

were given for his sister Rebekah (24:30). Jacob stayed with Laban for a month, and during that month two things happened: Jacob fell in love with the beautiful Rachel, and Laban observed it. Now Laban had a way to get Jacob into his service; he may have even begun planning something when Jacob “told Laban all these things” (verse 13), which no doubt included the reason for his journey to Haran.

Sensing his opportunity, Laban asked an apparently magnanimous question: “Shall you serve me for nothing because you are family? Name your wages” (compare verse 15). Jacob asked for Rachel, as Laban had no doubt anticipated. Laban set Rachel’s price at seven years’ service, which Jacob happily rendered. But on the wedding night, Laban substituted Leah for Rachel. Jacob’s senses and wits may have been dulled by festive drinking (perhaps urged on all the more by Laban). Jacob was further blinded by the darkness of the nuptial tent—darkness probably arranged as part of Laban’s conspiracy, which appears to have involved Zilpah (verse 24). Leah herself must have kept silent, probably on orders from her father. In any event it is clear that Jacob did not realize he had slept with the wrong woman until the morning (verse 25). Laban’s reply when an angry Jacob confronted him: “It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.” *Firstborn*—the word must have been like a dagger in Jacob’s ears, for in his own family, as we earlier read, Jacob had contrived to gain for himself the birthright and blessings that normally would have gone to his own fraternal twin brother, Esau, the firstborn. Jacob’s deviousness was now coming back to haunt him. For committing to another seven years’ service Jacob obtained Rachel the following week, but the die was now cast for a divided, unhappy household. Jacob was reaping what he had sown.

Jacob’s Dysfunctional Family (Genesis 29:1–30:24)

Mar. 1 Cont’d

Jacob’s competition with Esau had brought near-open warfare to Isaac’s household. Now Jacob would live the remainder of his life eating the bitter fruits of his ways. Leah and Rachel vied with each other for the affection of Jacob. Jacob loved Rachel deeply but he lacked love for Leah. Where the New King James Version says Leah was “unloved” (29:31), the old King James Version has “hated.” *The Nelson Study Bible* says that “hated” is the literal translation. According to *New Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*, the Hebrew word here “sometimes means only a less degree of love and regard; to be cold and indifferent to, to show less favor to” (p. 209). In any case Leah was second-rate in Jacob’s eyes, a very difficult position for any woman. Because Jacob treated Leah this way, God blessed her with children (which would seem to indicate that, in God’s eyes, Leah was not principally at fault in the whole mess—her father having forced her into it). In the meantime Rachel was barren and very frustrated in general. She felt betrayed by her father and resentful of her sister, whom she no doubt viewed as an unwelcome interloper in her marriage. Between these two squabbling women, and their maids, Jacob would father 12 sons and a daughter. The sons of the various wives and concubines would likewise squabble and fight. Jacob’s house was in constant turmoil—a classic picture of the dysfunctional family.

Part of the dysfunction in Jacob’s family may have had its roots a generation earlier in Isaac and Rebekah, who fell into a devastating pitfall in parenting—favoritism within the family. Isaac greatly favored Esau; Rebekah favored Jacob. This divided affection produced an unhealthy atmosphere of competition, mistrust, double-dealing, disrespect and lingering resentment. The two sons of Isaac and Rebekah were the unwitting victims, and Jacob likewise repeated the error in his own family: Rachel was favored over Leah, Joseph over his brethren, then later Benjamin over his brethren. Of course this is a lot more understandable in Jacob’s case, since he had not wanted to marry Leah in the first place. Still, she was his wife and they had children together—so he should have done his best to show them all love and affection.

God later gave the following law to Israel: “Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive” (Leviticus 18:18). It does not appear that God had revealed this to be sin to those of Jacob’s day. But Jacob’s life demonstrated the great need for the revelation of this law.

Jacob’s Strange Deal (Genesis 30:25-43)

March 2

Verse 25 of chapter 30 begins a peculiar story that very few seem to understand. But understanding Jacob’s reasoning in his strange deal with Laban can help us to better see Jacob’s character development.

Jacob had served Laban 14 years. Now he wished to depart and return to his father in Canaan. Laban, however, was eager to have Jacob remain, for God had blessed everything Jacob did while in Laban’s household, and Laban had grown rich. “Name me your wages, and I will give it,” Laban said

(verse 28), hoping to entice Jacob to stay. “You shall not give me anything,” Jacob replied. This is essential to understand, for an inattentive reading of the story can make it seem as if Jacob separated the colored and spotted sheep from Laban’s flock and took them for his payment. He most emphatically did not. Jacob took out the colored and spotted sheep and gave them to Laban, whose sons took them away a distance of three days’ journey (verse 36). This left Jacob with only the pure white sheep.

The last clause of verse 32, “and these shall be my wages,” is a little confusing. The Hebrew literally says, “it shall be [i.e., in the future] my wages.” Jacob was not saying that the spotted and colored sheep he removed from the flock would be his wages. Instead, “You shall not give me anything,” were Jacob’s words. The spotted and colored sheep were given to the sons of Laban, who drove them three days’ journey away. Instead, Jacob was saying that *in the future* any spotted or colored sheep born in the flock that Jacob would tend would be his wages. But this seemed *impossible* to Laban—Jacob was left with only the white sheep! How could white sheep bear spotted and colored sheep? That is why Laban so hastily agreed to the deal: “Oh, that it were according to your word!” (verse 34).

Now, the beginning of verse 33 is most important. “So my righteousness will answer for me in the time to come, when the subject of my wages comes before you....” This telling declaration marks a profound advancement in Jacob’s character development. When Jacob arrived in Padan Aram he was a grasping manipulator who relied upon his own innate abilities and craft to obtain what he wanted. But 14 years of service for Laban—during which Laban consistently outwitted him, and during which God blessed him in all that he did—had produced a change in Jacob. He had now progressed to the point where he relied upon his righteous conduct to secure blessings and prosperity from God. That is a dramatic change of heart, a major development in right character!

Verse 37 begins the equally odd business of the poplar, almond and chestnut branches. Many commentators suggest some kind of magic practice, or that the peeled rods were intended to cause the sheep to imitate the partly colored rods by bringing forth partly colored sheep. Yet this is certainly *not* what Jacob was engaged in here. Notice verse 38: “And the rods which he had peeled, he set before the flocks in the gutters, in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, so that they should conceive when they came to drink.” The word “conceive” is translated from the Hebrew *yacham*, literally meaning “to be hot,” and which, when speaking of animals, can mean “to be in heat.” By peeling the *fresh cut* rods (verse 37), Jacob caused the sap-filled meat of the rods to be exposed, thus possibly allowing the sap of the rods to mingle with the water in the watering troughs. Perhaps he believed this additive in the water would help to bring the animals to heat. It has also been suggested that the peeled rods were used as a sort of corralling fence, set up when the flocks came to drink to keep them together longer for mating. Verses 41-42 also inform us that Jacob practiced selective breeding, ensuring that the best of the flock would be subject to his treatment of the water.

But all this *did not* produce the spotted and colored sheep. These actions only aided Jacob in selecting which sheep would breed at what time. *God caused the unusual coloration of the sheep.* As Jacob said: “My righteousness will answer for me.” The production of colored sheep was God’s response to Jacob’s righteousness. Indeed, we later find out that Laban, seeing the results, kept changing the deal about which sheep Jacob would get—and, in every case, God followed suit with the coloration of sheep produced. Jacob explained to his wives: “God did not allow [Laban] to hurt me. If he said thus: ‘The speckled shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: ‘The streaked shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore streaked. So *God* has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me” (31:7-9).

Jacob had matured tremendously while in service to Laban. He had moved away from his grasping, manipulative ways and had come to the point where he understood that prosperity and protection are dependent on righteous conduct before God. And for that, God rewarded and prospered him. Jacob’s character, however, was to be further developed.

Jacob Departs from Laban (Genesis 31)

March 3

Jacob prospered with God’s blessing and his own clever management of the flocks. But as Jacob increased, Laban decreased. This irritated Laban, especially since he thought his deal with Jacob to be overwhelmingly to his advantage. It also appears that Laban had gotten into the habit of living high while God blessed him because of Jacob, and the decrease in revenue meant an uncomfortable tightening of the belt. Indeed, Laban had wasted the bridal price of 14 years’ labor Jacob had paid for his two wives (verses 15-16). In those days the bridal price was kept by the father in behalf of the

daughters as a trust, but Laban had improperly consumed the money. Finally, seeing their father's fortune decline, Laban's sons became concerned that they would inherit nothing if something was not done soon.

With increasing hostility between Laban and Jacob and the possibility that Laban's sons might take some action against Jacob and his family, it was time to leave. Jacob's speech to his wives prior to departure reveals the duplicity of Laban, the faith of Jacob and the providence of God. During the six years that Jacob tended Laban's flocks (verse 41), Laban changed the terms of the deal between himself and Jacob many times. But with each change Jacob faithfully relied on God for continued blessing. And with each change, God provided that blessing. Finally, God commanded Jacob to leave. So Jacob left, but without telling Laban, attempting to avoid a confrontation.

Before he left, though, Rachel stole Laban's household idols. It is possible that she took the idols because it was commonly believed that the possessor of the idols would enjoy the blessing of the gods; Rachel, according to the paganism in which she was raised, may have attempted to "secure" her husband's good fortune. Yet she and Leah had apparently both come to worship the true God, seeing Him as the one who had blessed them with children and wealth and the one from whom to seek direction (see 29:32; 30:22-23; 31:16). Why, then, did Rachel take the idols? A number of commentators point out that the most likely explanation is that she stole them because they represented ownership of Laban's possessions. The one who had the idols could thereby prove himself or herself to be the legitimate owner or heir to the property. For instance, the *Broadman Bible Commentary* states: "The possession of household gods was legal proof of the right to inheritance. Since Rachel believed that the property should be theirs, she 'appropriated' what she considered to be hers by right. This did not make the act any less wrong" (vol. 1, p. 220).

Laban, of course, pursued, angered not only by Jacob's fortune, but also Jacob's sudden departure and the disappearance of Laban's household idols. However, God warned him in a dream not to speak "good or bad" to Jacob. Nevertheless, Laban upbraided Jacob for leaving, feigning that he would have sent them away with a great feast. Since he could not compel Jacob's return, Laban turned his attention to the household idols. After an unsuccessful search of Jacob's goods—Rachel having hidden the idols—Jacob upbraided Laban. Take note of how Jacob attributes his success to God and portrays God as having judged Jacob's cause as righteous. Again, this is more evidence of the character development of Jacob.

In parting, Jacob and Laban erected a pillar stone. This stone, however, was different from the stone that Jacob erected in Bethel. This stone was not a sacred stone, but a memorial stone. It stood in that place as a reminder to all who passed by of the covenant made there between Laban and Jacob.

It should perhaps be mentioned that in spite of Laban's chicanery and double-dealing, he may have been expressing genuine fatherly concern in the end (see 31:49-50, 53, 55). He didn't have to make it part of the agreement that Jacob take no other wives. (It is interesting in verse 50 that Laban does not regard the *maidservants* as wives, as these concubines were looked upon as "surrogate mothers" for his daughters). And it is interesting to note his repeated references to the true God. While he was shaken by his dream to be sure, there would seem to be more to it than that. God had used Laban to bring about a dramatic change in Jacob's character over the course of 20 years. Yet in all that time, Jacob had in turn served as quite a witness to *Laban*—there were certainly lessons in it for him too. Perhaps here at the end—broke, losing his family and seeing everything he had plotted and schemed after for so long now slipping away—Laban had finally gotten the point.

Wrestling with God (Genesis 32)

March 4

As Jacob and his company continued southwest toward the River Jabbok, today called the Wadi Zerqa, Jacob was met by angels and set up camp, calling the place Mahanaim, "Two Camps," as the angels were camped here next to him. God was with Jacob and was returning him to Canaan, just as He had promised (Genesis 28).

Meeting Esau was a fearsome prospect. Jacob knew his elder brother to be an impetuous man who acted first and thought later. Would his rash nature explode in wrath? Would Esau avenge himself by slaughtering Jacob and all he had? If Esau still entertained thoughts of vengeance, Jacob would attempt to appease him with gifts. Perhaps showing deference and humility before Esau, addressing him as "Lord" and sending him presents, would turn Esau's wrath away. Jacob sent out messengers to respectfully inform Esau of his approach. The messengers returned and told Jacob that Esau was coming—with 400 men! Jacob prepared for the worst, dividing his family and possessions

into troops to send out one after the other with himself at the forefront (33:3), hoping in this way to preserve as much of his family as possible should Esau attack. Ahead of them he sent troops of men bearing gifts, hoping waves of gifts would cool Esau's hot head. For the moment, however, Jacob remained at the ford of Jabbok.

What happens next at Jabbok is of profound importance for understanding the character development of Jacob. Before examining the details of the story, though, we must look at Jacob's prayer.

In reading the life of Jacob, we have seen him develop from a cultured and physically imposing young man—who relied on his own cunning and skill to obtain what he wanted, manipulating those around him—into a man who learned that real prosperity, security and peace depends on one's righteousness before God. That in itself is a great growth in character. But by the time Jacob arrives in Jabbok after years of service for Laban's flocks, he has made a quantum leap in character growth. The prayer in verses 9-12 shows that Jacob had now come to see that even complete righteousness before God does not entitle one to God's goodness. "I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant," he confessed (verse 10, New Revised Standard Version). Jacob now sees himself as he truly is—an unworthy man wholly dependent on the mercy and undeserved grace of God. Now, to bring his character to maturity, while Jacob is alone at Jabbok, the strangest wrestling match in history will be played out in the darkness, without a single spectator.

In the middle of the night, a supernatural Being comes down and wrestles with Jacob. This Being, identified as God, must have been the preincarnate Jesus Christ, who, as the "Word" with God the Father from the beginning, was also God (John 1:1-3, 14). It could not have been God the Father since Jacob saw Him and, as the apostle John later stated, "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18)—clearly referring to the Father in this verse. (To learn more about the nature of God the Father and Jesus Christ, request or download our free booklet *Who Is God?*)

At first Jacob may not have known who his opponent was—but before the match was over, Jacob discerned His identity, for he later calls Him God (verse 30). Now why did God want to wrestle Jacob? A better question would be, why did Jacob continue to wrestle once he figured out he was wrestling with God? What would be the point of wrestling with God? God could easily beat His opponent. Or God could simply match His opponent move for move and produce a draw. Or God could deliberately lose. In *any* case, to continue the match would seem pointless. So why did Jacob continue to wrestle? We can't know for sure of course. But perhaps it was simply because *God* wanted to wrestle—as a test of Jacob's perseverance and attitude. The wrestling match, viewed in this context, would seem to have been a test of submission: Would Jacob submit to continuing to wrestle, even when it seemed pointless, just because God wanted it that way? Also, from the conclusion, it is evident that Jacob wanted God's blessing. And God, it seems, wanted to know just how *much* he wanted it. In the end, Jacob demonstrated his deep feeling of total reliance on God's blessing. And he showed that he would hold on to whatever God was doing in his life in order to receive that blessing. In confronting Esau and whatever other obstacles he would later face, his own cunning and ingenuity would not deliver him. He knew that he had to trust in God alone.

As the match progresses, Christ sees that He is not prevailing against Jacob. This does not mean that Jacob was winning and Christ was losing. It simply means that Jacob had not yet given up. He was still wrestling. Then Christ makes it far more difficult for Jacob to continue by striking his hip socket. In pain and even in tears (Hosea 12:3-4), Jacob *still* does not give up. Finally, Christ tells Jacob to release Him as the day is dawning. But Jacob says he will not let go until Christ blesses him. This is almost certainly not disobedience, as it might appear to be. Rather, it is apparent that Jacob understood his holding on until receiving the blessing to be the reason God engaged him in the contest to begin with. In faith, we are to hold God to His promises to bless us until He does so—for that is what He has told us to do. In doing this, Jacob prevailed with God and was renamed Israel, meaning "Prevailer with God." This does not mean that Jacob won and Christ lost. Indeed, the match ended before either of them was pinned. Of course, Christ could have pinned Jacob at any moment. But that was not His desire—nor was it the point. The point was to see if Jacob could persevere with God in the face of adversity. And he did. So who won the match, Jacob or Christ? The truth is that both won. God *always* prevails. And now Jacob prevailed *with* Him. It must be the same with us.

Reconciliation (Genesis 33)**March 5**

In the morning, Jacob departed, and after a short journey he caught sight of Esau advancing with 400 men. Jacob had ordered his family, dividing the children among their mothers, placing the concubines first, followed by Leah, with Rachel trailing the caravan. This was done to provide maximum protection for Rachel (possibly pregnant with Benjamin) and Joseph. For if Esau attacked, perhaps he would have had enough of slaughter by the time he reached Rachel. Jacob positioned himself at the head of the caravan, alternately walking and prostrating himself as he approached Esau, thereby showing the highest regard and deepest humility.

The meeting with Esau, however, was anything but hostile. Esau was genuinely glad to see Jacob. Twenty years had significantly moderated his feelings and, given the size of the fighting force accompanying him, it appears that Esau had achieved a good deal of personal success—enough, at least, for him to feel sufficiently blessed. Jacob presented gifts and introduced his family, but wisely begged-off accompanying Esau back to Seir, perhaps anticipating that Esau’s mercurial nature would once again change and he would revert to his former embitterment over the evil Jacob had done to him.

After departing from his encounter with Esau, Jacob came to Shechem (verses 18-19). Here he bought a parcel of land and dug a well. This is apparently the same well at which, long afterward, Jesus Christ met and talked with a Samaritan woman—the place at this much later time being known as Sychar (John 4:5-6), near today’s city of Nablus in the West Bank. Jacob, renamed Israel, also built an altar to God here, which he named El Elohe Israel, meaning “God, the God of Israel” (Genesis 33:20). Jacob’s “conversion process” is well underway at this point. No longer does he look upon God as simply the God of His fathers. Rather, he sees God as *his* God—seeming to indicate that he has developed a personal relationship with Him.

The Violation of Dinah (Genesis 34)**March 6**

Genesis 34:2 says that Shechem took Dinah and “lay with her, and violated her.” Does this indicate that Shechem raped Dinah or was what happened consensual? Verse 1 says that Dinah “went out to see the daughters of the land.” Some commentators suggest that she was in her late teens and was possibly going to attend some kind of public affair or celebration. It is then suggested that, perhaps because she had no sisters, she was seeking to fit in a little too much with the other girls her age and got herself into a situation she was not ready to handle, losing her virginity not by violence, but by indiscretion.

Still, the vengeful reaction of Dinah’s brothers might imply that Dinah had not wanted this to happen. It is possible that Shechem had plied her with alcohol or wouldn’t back down from any protestations she gave—at which point she didn’t fight. Perhaps it was what we today often call date rape, which is itself a hideous offense. And considering that Dinah appears to have been around 14 or 15 years of age, we would today also call it the crime of statutory rape. Yet that was often considered marriageable age in the ancient Middle East—the society of arranged marriages of that day being often unconcerned with the maturity of those matched together.

Shechem *clearly* did wrong by taking advantage of Dinah and not betrothing her with her father’s consent prior to their physical relations. However, the violation seems non-violent as he spoke kindly to the young woman after the event and even “loved” her (verse 3). (Contrast Shechem’s attitude to Tamar’s rape by Amnon in 2 Samuel 13, where Amnon wanted nothing to do with Tamar after he violated her by force.)

Further, Shechem seemed very willing to meet all the demands of Dinah’s brothers in order to marry her, as painful as the conditions would turn out to be. His men’s willingness to go through the same sacrifice on his behalf could perhaps lend credence to his reconciliatory attitude—though they were also persuaded by the prospect of sharing in the wealth of Jacob’s family, which circumcision would make possible. However, verse 19 does say that Shechem was “more honorable than all the household of his father,” seeming to indicate this was a good-faith attempt to right the wrong he had done. Perhaps the omission of any objection by Dinah could possibly indicate her feelings about what had happened.

Jacob’s attitude also seems to indicate that he did not see it as a violent rape, though he surely was not pleased with the situation. He had done business with Shechem’s father, Hamor, in the past (33:19) and was certainly disturbed—perhaps even enraged—at what had now happened. However, he was clearly willing to give Dinah as wife according to the agreement his sons offered, as she was found in the city with her new husband after the arrangement was made (verse 26). God later instructed the

nation of Israel on how to handle this kind of situation, leaving it in the hands of the father whether the offender could still marry the woman, the offender having to pay a financial penalty regardless of the father's decision (Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:28-29). So Jacob could have refused to give her as wife if he really felt strongly that this marriage should not have taken place—which he probably would have felt had there been a violent rape. Indeed, God equates the heinousness of rape with that of murder (Deuteronomy 22:25-27).

Cruel and Unusual Punishment? (Genesis 34)

Mar. 6 Cont'd

Simeon and Levi's violent revenge was not looked upon favorably by their father. He believed that their treachery would give the family a bad name and that their neighbors might unite and destroy his household. It was Esau who was to live by the sword (27:40), not Jacob. The brothers' attack seemed exceedingly brutal, since not only did they kill Shechem, the one who committed the offense, but they slew all the men in Shechem's hometown.

Although Jacob's sons offered justification for their behavior, their father's displeasure was not abated. For even after Jacob's prediction that his family would be wiped out did not come to pass—due to God's protection (35:5)—Jacob still showed deep disapproval with Simeon and Levi's actions long afterward. Shortly before his death, Jacob delivered this prophecy from God: "Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their habitation.... Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel" (49:5-7). Here we see that family traits are passed down, probably through a combination of heredity and family upbringing. And in the case of Simeon and Levi, God judged that their descendants would be too volatile to be all together, having their own nations. Indeed, more than likely, this would only spell trouble for the rest of the world.

Later, we will see the fiery, emotional demeanor of the family of Levi channeled into a zeal for serving God.

Aftermath of Shechem's Fall; Reuben Loses His Birthright (Genesis 35:1-26) March 7

Just as God protected Israel (Jacob) from the sword of Esau, He also protected Israel from the revenge of his neighbors in Canaan. By referring back to the deliverance from Esau (verse 1), God reminds Jacob that he does not need to be afraid now, that Israel should travel to Bethel, and that God will provide him protection once again. True to His word, terror is upon the cities of the land and the inhabitants do not pursue Jacob's family.

To show God the proper respect and praise for this promise of protection, Jacob makes sure to command his household to put away the foreign gods among them. These were most likely the idols Rachel had earlier stolen as well as household idols of some value that Simeon and Levi probably took in their plunder of Shechem described in the preceding verses (compare 34:29). Once Jacob reaches Bethel, he also builds an altar in honor of the true God to thank Him for His blessing. God seems pleased with Jacob's faith and obedience, as He reaffirms with Jacob the promises made to Abraham and Isaac. God even repeats His renaming of Jacob with the new name of Israel, having originally done so in chapter 32.

God gives again the promise of a line of kings (given before in Genesis 17:4-6). But in giving the promise of national blessing, God adds something mentioned for the first time in Scripture—the promise of a single nation *and a company* (or "group" in the Moffatt Translation) of nations. The Ferrar Fenton Translation says, "a Nation and an Assembly of Nations." The New International Version reads, "a nation and a community of nations." We will see more about this prophecy when we get to Genesis 48, where the birthright blessing passes on to Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh—Manasseh becoming the great single nation and Ephraim becoming the company or group of nations. (These prophesies are fully explained in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

We are also told in chapter 35 of the death of Rachel in giving birth to Benjamin and her burial at Bethlehem. This tragic event is followed by the shameful incident in which Reuben defiles his father's bed by sleeping with Bilhah, the mother of his brothers, Dan and Naphtali. Reuben was Jacob's firstborn by Leah, which bestowed on him the double-portion birthright inheritance. Yet as just mentioned, the birthright would actually pass to the sons of Joseph. According to 1 Chronicles 5:1-2, this sin of Reuben is what caused Israel to give the birthright to Joseph instead. So not only was this a sin of defilement and adultery, it had long-lasting consequences on future events, determining the ultimate recipients of the promises of wealth God made to Abraham.

Death of Isaac; Family of Esau (Genesis 35:27–36:43)**March 8**

When Jacob returned to Hebron, his father Isaac was still alive and would live another 15 years or so before dying at the age of 180.

When Isaac died, Esau and Jacob came together again to bury him with his father, mother and wife—that is, Abraham, Sarah and Rebekah—at the cave of Machpelah (compare Genesis 49:31). Leah and Jacob would later be buried there also (49:29–50:13).

All of chapter 36 is a record of what happened to the line of Esau. As far as the birthright was concerned, Esau was rejected. But he was not forgotten. Indeed, it is interesting to consider that Moses, though of the line of Israel, had this record of Esau's family descent in hand hundreds of years later in order to set it down as part of the book of Genesis. (Of course, it is possible that Moses did not have the record and that God wholly inspired him in producing it—but this would only demonstrate God's interest and concern with Esau's descendants even more.)

Sadly, the descendants of Esau—or Edom (verse 1)—would come into frequent conflict with the descendants of Israel over the ages. We will see more about this in the book of Exodus and then as we continue through other books of the Bible. It might be surprising to know that the conflict has persisted even up to modern times. Later in the Bible Reading Program, when we get to the book of Obadiah, a prophecy about Edom, we will consider the identity of the Edomites today.

Setting Major Events in Motion (Genesis 37)**March 9**

Chapter 37 of Genesis details the story of how Joseph's brothers became jealous and sold him into slavery. Jacob's favoritism of Joseph is the obvious cause of this jealousy, and the many-colored tunic he gives to Joseph is not well received by the others at all (verse 4). But what seems to be the final straw for the brothers is Joseph's recounting of his dreams, perhaps with some haughtiness. Not only are the *brothers* incensed at Joseph, but even his father rebukes him.



Joseph's Journey: Born in **Haran**; Travels from **Hebron**; Sold by brothers in **Dothan**; Taken by caravan to **Egypt**; Marries a wife from **On**.

As the story eventually unfolds, the dreams come true and Joseph's family is eventually subject to him. And since the dreams come true, we know that they are no ordinary dreams—they are sent by God as prophecies. Yet the dreams are not only significant for the specific events they foretell,

but for their instigation of further circumstances leading to one of the most renowned events in history. For these dreams of Joseph serve as a catalyst that sets in motion events that will not culminate until more than 250 years later with the Exodus from Egypt.

Remember Genesis 15. There God conveyed a prophecy regarding the descendants of Abraham—still called Abram at the time. God told Abram that his descendants would be strangers in a land that was not theirs and, further, that for a time they would be made slaves and afflicted (verse 13). So not only will Joseph's dreams set in motion events that will enable the family of Israel to survive a future famine, but these same events will provide the means for bringing Israel and his sons to Egypt, where their descendants will eventually be made slaves, become a large nation, and ultimately be delivered in great miraculous power.

So here in Genesis 37, we get a glimpse of how God does His work and how He brings prophecy to pass. He takes an existing situation (Jacob's favoritism and the resultant family jealousy) and then introduces a new element (Joseph's dreams) to steer events toward His ultimate plan (Israel to Egypt and the Exodus). In this way, He brings prophecy about, all the while allowing those involved to make their own decisions along the way. It is truly amazing to see His power in action.

Incidentally, though there appears to be some confusion in the chapter as to whether Joseph is sold to Midianites or Ishmaelites, a simple explanation is given in the *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary's* note on verse 25: "a company of Ishmaelites—They are called Midianites (vs. 28), and Medanites, *Hebrew* (vs. 36), being a travelling caravan composed of a mixed association of Arabians."

Also of note concerning this passage are facts uncovered by archaeology that argue against the idea that early Bible stories like that of Joseph were made up many hundreds of years after they were supposed to have occurred, as the biblical "minimalists" argue. Notice this from a recent book titled *Is the Bible True?* by a writer for *U.S. News & World Report*, Jeffery Sheler:

In Genesis 37:28... Joseph, a son of Jacob, is sold by his brothers into slavery for twenty silver shekels. That, notes [professor Kenneth] Kitchen, matches precisely the going price of slaves in the region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries BCE, as affirmed by documents recovered from ancient Mesopotamia and from Mari, in what is now modern Syria. Other documents show the price of slaves rising steadily during later centuries. By the eighth century BCE, the price of slaves, as attested in ancient Assyrian records, had risen to fifty or sixty shekels, and to ninety to 120 shekels during the Persian Empire in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. If the story of Joseph had been dreamed up by a Jewish scribe in the sixth century, as some skeptics have suggested, argues Kitchen, "why isn't the price in Genesis also ninety to one hundred shekels? It's more reasonable to assume that the biblical data reflect reality." (1999, pp. 73-74)

Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38)

March 10

The story of Judah and Tamar is of notable significance. It is placed here in the middle of Joseph's story, not because it is directly related, but because the events took place after Joseph was sold into slavery and before the sons of Jacob traveled to Egypt. As can be seen, the end of the account is the birth of twin sons, Perez and Zerah, to Tamar. These two boys become important fathers in the lineage of future kings. If Onan and Judah had had their way, Tamar would not have given birth to the very son whose descendants include both King David and Jesus Christ.

Although the account does prominently show some of Judah's shortcomings, that is not its main purpose. This account is about proving lineage. Both Luke 3:33 and Matthew 1:3 show that Perez is the son of Judah through whom Jesus was descended. The Messiah would be a descendant of Judah (see Genesis 49:10). But why the detailed version of this lineage? Many of the other lineages in Genesis simply list who fathered whom—wouldn't that suffice? No, for without the story of how Tamar conceived and Judah's subsequent public acknowledgment of fatherhood, the Jewish heritage of the descendants of Perez, including Jesus, may have been unknown or disputed.

(For further information on the descendants of Perez and Zerah, including the significance of the breach and the scarlet thread, please see "The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future" at www.ucg.org/brp/materials.)

Another interesting item in the account is Judah's statement: "She has been more righteous than I." This was certainly true. Notice that although Tamar did dress as a prostitute, it was Judah who solicited her. Yet later, Judah sentenced Tamar to be burned as punishment, even though he had been

very willing to go into one whom he thought was a harlot and participate in such a sin himself. In contrast, Tamar was ensuring that an heir would be raised up to her husband (compare Deuteronomy 25:5-6), a responsibility that Judah had willfully abandoned (Genesis 38:14).

Joseph in Potiphar's House (Genesis 39)

March 11

Joseph was sold again by the Arabian traders to an officer of the Egyptian pharaoh. God surely had a hand in Joseph being sold to Potiphar, "in order that in the house of one so closely connected with the court, he might receive that previous training which was necessary for the high office he was destined to fill, and in the school of adversity learn the lessons of practical wisdom that were to be of greatest utility and importance in his future career" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary*, note on verse 1).

Although Joseph prospered in Potiphar's house, this was not God's ultimate purpose for Joseph in his human life—God had a greater design for him. To reach that intent, Joseph had to be thrown into prison, creating the environment where God would later exalt Joseph to the right hand of Pharaoh. This illustrates something very important for us to remember: Sometimes Christians must endure hardship and trial to reach God's final outcome. Keep in mind that God has created us for an awesome purpose. While Joseph would eventually be taken from prison and given a position in Egypt equivalent to what we would call the nation's prime minister, we will eventually be taken from this physical, limiting existence and, along with Joseph, will be made co-rulers with God over the entire vast universe! So if it takes suffering and tribulation to help us attain that purpose, God will allow us to be subjected to it. Yet, although things may look quite bleak at times, God will never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5). So we can be patient in times of trial, trusting God and continuing to serve and obey him, knowing that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28) and that He will not allow us to be tried beyond what we are able to endure (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We can learn *many* lessons from Joseph's example. Take some time to look up the following scriptures and notice their relation to this trying period of Joseph's life: Proverbs 22:29; 10:4; 12:24; Matthew 25:21; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Peter 3:17; Romans 5:3-4; 8:35-39.

One important lesson is that obeying God in all circumstances ultimately works out for the best. Joseph knew that adultery was sin and refused—even though it may have cost him his life—for He trusted in God to bless those who obey Him. (And even if Joseph had lost his physical life, God would have blessed him in eternity.)

Incidentally, this particular episode brings up something else we should notice. Joseph's response to Potiphar's wife's seduction provides us with important information that has sometimes gone overlooked. Joseph asks, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Many today believe that the Ten Commandments were not in place before the time of Moses. Yet not only do we see Joseph's virtue in his response, but we also find proof that God's law was known at the time. According to Romans 5:13, "Sin is not imputed when there is no law." Yet Joseph clearly calls adultery sin, thereby showing that God's law was in force prior to its codification around 250 years later at Mount Sinai.

Joseph in Prison (Genesis 40)

March 12

It is not clear how long Joseph was in prison, but we can deduce that the total time of his service to Potiphar and his imprisonment to this point was around 11 years. It had been that long since he was sold by his brothers at age 17, making him about 28 when the same Potiphar, captain of the guard who was over the prison warden, makes Joseph serve Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker during their confinement. Home may have seemed a distant memory for Joseph by now, given the time he had been away and the trouble in which he now found himself. Being in prison, he was a long way from having his family bow down to him—but he continued to make the best of the situation at hand, and God blessed him for his efforts.

Knowing that God had some big plans in mind, we can assume that these events are His doing. It surely was no accident that two high servants of Pharaoh's court were both placed in the same prison as Joseph. If they had been servants of any lesser government official, one may not have been in a place to later tell Pharaoh about Joseph's gift of interpretation. After hearing the prisoners' dreams, Joseph explains their meaning—and the events come to pass just as he foretells. Perhaps after this divine fulfillment, Joseph remembered his own dream, pondering his past and his future.

It actually seems a little hard to believe that the butler, after seeing Joseph's interpretation of the dream come true before his eyes, would actually forget about Joseph's request for a mention to

Pharaoh. Perhaps he was so elated to be restored to his high position that he forgot what Joseph had asked of him. Or maybe after getting his job back as chief butler, he didn't want to give someone else the limelight, or perhaps he feared to remind the pharaoh that he had previously sent him to prison. Whatever the reason, God was still orchestrating events to His timetable—leaving Joseph imprisoned for another two full years before delivering him, illustrating once again that we should be patient as we wait on God. It may take some time, maybe even a *lifetime*, but He *will* come through on His promises.

Supplemental Reading: “Joseph: Faithfulness Brings Blessing,” *The Good News*, Nov.–Dec. 1997.

Historical Evidence of the Famine and Joseph (Genesis 41)

March 13

When Joseph is 30, after another two years of imprisonment, God brings about another major step in the plan He is working out. He gives Pharaoh a prophetic dream that no one is able to explain. Finally, the butler remembers the amazing events relating to his prison dream and Joseph's interpretation. Joseph is summoned by Pharaoh and tells him the meaning of his dream: Seven years of plenty were to be followed by seven years of famine.

Historical confirmation of this time of abundance succeeded by a long period of great food shortage is believed to exist. The following is from a book titled *The Signature of God* by Grant Jeffrey, 1996, pages 42-43:

A fascinating inscription confirming the Bible's account of the “seven years of great plenty” followed by the “seven years of famine” (Gen. 41:29, 30) was discovered during the nineteenth century in southern Saudi Arabia. This inscription was found on a marble tablet in a ruined fortress on the seashore of Hadramaut in present-day Democratic Yemen. An examination of the writing suggests that it was written [in the patriarchal age].... This inscription was rendered in Arabic by Professor Schultens and was later translated into English by Rev. Charles Forster. This is his translation of this ancient inscription:

We dwelt at ease in this castle a long tract of time;
nor had we a desire but for the region-lord of the vineyard.
Hundreds of camels returned to us each day at evening,
their eye pleasant to behold in their resting-places.
And twice the number of our camels were our sheep,
in comeliness like white does, and also the slow moving kine.

We dwelt in this castle **seven years of good life**

—how difficult for memory its description!

Then came years barren and burnt up:

when one evil year had passed away,

then came another to succeed it.

And we became as though we had never seen a glimpse of good.

They died and neither foot nor hoof remained.

Thus fares it with him who renders not thanks to God:

His footsteps fail not to be blotted out from his dwelling.

While remarkable, this should not surprise us too much. After all, the Bible is the Word of God—and it *is* true despite the arguments of skeptics. The following is also taken from *The Signature of God*, pages 44-45:

As the book of Genesis recorded, the seven-year famine was so severe in Egypt that Joseph, as chief administrator, had to be very careful in selling food from the precious grain reserves to satisfy the hunger of all the inhabitants of the surrounding countries. Joseph could not sell the grain reserves of Egypt for gold and silver to everyone because of the danger that the grain would run out. When the famine was at its peak, grain was much more valuable than gold or money.

Explorers during the last century discovered a number of other fascinating ancient inscriptions in the Middle East that provided confirmation of facts recorded in the sacred Scriptures.... The greatest treasure of all was a fascinating engraved stone tablet [found in the tomb of a rich Yemenite noblewoman of the patriarchal age] bearing her final inscription which confirmed the biblical account of Joseph's

careful management of the remaining food reserves during the seven years of famine in Egypt.

A Yemenite Inscription About a Famine During the Time of Joseph

In thy name O God, the God of Hamyar,
I Tajah, the daughter of Dzu Shefar, **sent my steward to Joseph,**
And he delaying to return to me, I sent my hand maid
With a measure of silver, to bring me back a measure of flour:
And not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of gold:
And not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of pearls:
And not being able to procure it, I commanded them to be ground:
And finding no profit in them, I am shut up here.
Whosoever may hear of it, let him commiserate me;
And should any woman adorn herself with an ornament
From my ornaments, may she die with no other than my death.
(reported in Niebuhr's *Voyage en Arabie*, PL. LIX.
Translation by Rev. Charles Forster).

It should be noted here that the above translation appears quite credible, since Frieslander Carsten Niebuhr was a respected pioneer in archaeological exploration of the Middle East and in translating inscriptions found there, having accurately translated many from ancient Persepolis.

Owning Up and Growing Up (Genesis 42–43)

March 14-15

It had been 22 years now since the brothers had sold Joseph into slavery and deceived their father, Jacob. That is a very long time to maintain a lie, and it seems to have taken its toll on the sons of Israel. Things got a little rough in Egypt when Joseph accused them of being spies. The brothers were clearly shaken. Their crime against Joseph must never have been far from mind, for when Joseph demanded they bring Benjamin to Egypt as proof of their story, they immediately viewed their trouble as punishment for what they did so long ago. Reuben adds an “I told you so” since he had originally planned to save Joseph. But he, of course, had become just as responsible as the others, for he had not told their father the truth either, nor had he attempted to find and free his enslaved brother once he discovered what had happened.

The many years with unresolved guilt have matured the brothers since their earlier misdeed. Contrast the younger and older Judah for instance. In Genesis 37, it was Judah who originated the idea of selling Joseph to the Arabian traders. Now, in Genesis 43, he is willing to offer himself as collateral to protect Joseph's brother, Benjamin. Before, he did not regard his father's happiness. But now he is willing to accept blame forever rather than hurt his father again. Judah will prove the genuineness of his change and the sincerity of his promise in chapter 44.

While the brothers deal with their guilt, Joseph seems to have a number of mixed emotions. At first, he feels a little indignant at them when he recognizes that the dreams for which they hated him so long ago (37:8) have come true. Testing their attitudes, he deals rather roughly with them. But when he hears their sorrow and distress as they discuss their regret, Joseph weeps secretly. He now forgives them in his heart. Although he continues to give them a very distressing time openly, he does kind things for them behind the scenes.

The Cup of Divination (Genesis 44)

March 16

The brothers still have no idea what is happening, but are as cooperative and humble as can be, neither of which seems to help them out much. Joseph frames his brothers with an egregious offense: the theft of the very goblet from which their gracious host had drunk.

When Joseph's servant confronts the brothers for their alleged crime, he is told to ask, “Is not this [the cup] from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination?” (verse 5). Did Joseph really use the cup for prognostication or the interpretation of omens? That would surely not have been approved of by God. About the cup of divination, the *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary* remarks: “Divination by cups, to ascertain the course of futurity, was one of the prevalent superstitions of ancient Egypt, as it is of Eastern countries still. It is not likely that Joseph, a pious believer in the true God, would have addicted himself to this superstitious practice. But he might have availed himself of that popular *notion* to carry out the successful execution of his stratagem for the last decisive trial of his brethren” (note on verse 5). In other words, Joseph may have allowed them to *think* he practiced divination with this cup to instill more fear in them—as it

would look to them like they would be charged with the theft of something of great importance in Egypt.

Also notice that Joseph did not order his steward to tell a direct lie—rather, he simply told him to ask a question. The real answer would have been no. But the brothers didn't know this.

Parallels in Scripture (Genesis 45)

March 17

One can see a thematic parallel between the entire story of Joseph and the story of Jesus. Joseph was sent in bonds to Egypt so that ultimately he would be exalted and his family enabled to survive the famine. In like manner, Jesus was sent ahead to suffer for others, has been exalted to the highest office and will deliver all mankind from death as a result.

Joseph saw God's hand in everything that had happened—from his first visionary dreams to his enslavement, imprisonment, exaltation and, at last, reconciliation with his family. In chapter 50, he tells his brothers, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (verse 20). And permeating Joseph's pronouncement of God's guidance of events was the expression of forgiveness for all that they had done to him. Similarly, the covenant that offers us eternal salvation through Jesus Christ is surrounded by forgiveness—of those who brought about the necessity of His death. With this in mind, we should all take special heed to Joseph's petitioning his brothers to "come down to me, do not tarry" (45:9), for Christ likewise calls us to follow and abide with Him—let us not delay in doing so.

Chapter 45 ends with wonderful news for Jacob. For more than two decades he has believed that Joseph his son is dead, and has never gotten over it (compare 42:35, 38). Now concerned about the fate of the rest of his sons down in Egypt, they return with the happiest announcement imaginable—in fact, beyond his imagination: "'Joseph is alive,' they shouted to him. 'And he is ruler over all the land of Egypt!'" (45:26, Living Bible). This seemed utterly and hopelessly preposterous. "Jacob was stunned at the news—he couldn't believe it" (verse 26, New Living Translation). Slowly, though, he finally came around. "But when they had given him Joseph's messages, and when he saw the wagons loaded with the food sent by Joseph, his spirit revived. Then Jacob said, 'It must be true! My son Joseph is alive! I will go and see him before I die'" (verse 27, NLT). Yes, it was possible after all—beyond all hope, beyond all reason, beyond his wildest dreams—because the God of Jacob and Joseph was, and is, the Ruler of heaven and earth. And with Him *all things* are possible.

Israel's Journey to Egypt (Genesis 46-47)

March 18

Once again, God spoke to Israel (Jacob) to reassure him of His divine protection. Just as Joseph had recognized, God confirms that it was His plan all along to bring the family of Jacob to Egypt, where he would make of them a great nation. Only God knew everything He still had in store for Israel's descendants—events to be recorded in the book of Exodus.

In Genesis 45:28, Jacob expressed the desire that will make his life complete: to go to Egypt and see his son Joseph again. That is enough. Here, God comforts Jacob in a way that must have brought the deepest and greatest joy to him. God promises not only that Jacob's family would be made great in Egypt, but He confirms that Jacob's last hope will be fulfilled—he will most certainly see his long-lost son. The firstborn of Rachel will be by his side on the day of his death. Their reunion at last arrives and with many tears of rejoicing, Jacob's sorrow has finally ended, his life is fulfilled and he can face the day of his death in peace.

Jacob's life has been a long and painful struggle of reaping the seeds of corruption sown in his youth. His own sons had deceived him about what had happened to Joseph using the same items with which he himself had deceived his father Isaac to receive the birthright—a slain goat and a special coat. And for more than 20 years Jacob had believed the lie that Joseph was dead. Jacob told the Egyptian pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the years of my life" (47:9). So sad—and yet so true.

Jacob's life should be a lesson to us about reaping what we sow (see Galatians 6:7). Of course, all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23). And we can be thankful that, upon our repentance, God will relieve us of some of the consequences of sin. But He won't remove *all* of them in this life—so that we may learn important lessons, as Jacob's story shows. His life, in the end, wasn't *all* bad. After all, he became a man whose name was changed to *Israel*, meaning "Prevailer with God" (Genesis 32:28). Though he was ready to die upon seeing Joseph, God gave Jacob 17 more years to spend with Joseph and the rest of his growing family (47:28). Indeed, in our next reading we will see Jacob state at the end of his life that God had "redeemed [him] from all evil" (48:16), at last finding happiness in his final years.

Still, it was a long and difficult road in getting there. But it didn't have to be—if Jacob hadn't sown the corrupt seed he did in earlier years. This lesson is “written for our learning” (Romans 15:4). If *we've* been sowing bad seed, the answer is to stop now—asking God's forgiveness—and to start, with His help, sowing *good* seed to reap a better tomorrow. The choice is ours to make.

Finally, Genesis 46 catalogs the names of all the members of the family of Israel that immigrated to Egypt. Once there, counting Joseph and his family, the total came to 70 persons. We know from the book of Exodus that this small group of people will grow to 600,000 men at the time of their deliverance from Egypt (12:37), which probably indicates a total population of two to three million people. Joseph settles his father's family in the land of Goshen—the part of Egypt closest to Canaan and a land well watered with rich soil and well furnished with pastures for their herds—where the family and its descendants will live until the time of the Exodus.

Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48)

March 19

Before dying, Jacob laid hands upon Joseph's sons to bless them with the birthright, similar to the manner his father had done to him when he was young. At the same time, Jacob adopted the boys as his own sons, and thus they were to actually be considered full sons of Israel and full brothers of the others. Joseph thought that Jacob was making a mistake by placing his right hand on the younger of the two boys. But this was quite deliberate—requiring Jacob to actually cross his arms to bless them as he did.

God was using this situation to indicate that He had special plans for the descendants of the sons of Joseph, and that Ephraim would indeed be greater in wealth and power than his older brother, Manasseh. As the chapter begins, they were mentioned in order of age, “Manasseh and Ephraim” (verse 1). But a point is later made of a switch in name order. Jacob “blessed them that day, saying, ‘By you Israel will bless, saying, “May God make you as [note the order] Ephraim and Manasseh!”’ *And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh*” (verses 18-20).

Furthermore, we see clarified here that the national birthright blessing of a nation and company of nations given in Genesis 35:11 did not refer to the tribes of Israel generally. Instead, Manasseh was to become the great single nation and Ephraim the company of nations. Indeed, as incredible as it sounds, Manasseh is today the United States of America—the greatest single nation the world has ever seen. And Ephraim comprises the prophesied “company of nations”—the related Commonwealth nations of Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and a small segment of South Africa and other former British colonies. Prior to America's national greatness, Britain ruled over the largest empire in the history of the world. (To learn the amazing story of how this came to be, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.) We will see more details of the tremendous blessings that were to come upon the family of Joseph in our next reading, Genesis 49.

Supplemental Reading: “Joseph's two national identities” and “Blessings for Joseph's descendants,” *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, pp. 10-11.

Israel in the “Last Days” (Genesis 49:1-28)

March 20

Genesis 49 details Jacob's last words to his sons shortly before he died. Jacob, under God's inspiration, describes the state of his descendants in the future—each of the 12 sons of Israel is mentioned. Some commentaries look for the fulfillment of these prophecies for each tribe by looking at the history recorded in books of the Old Testament. Of course, some of the characteristics and destinies outlined by Jacob were fulfilled in small measure during those times. However, note when Jacob said these prophecies would come to pass: “Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you *in the last days*” (verse 1).

The phrases “in the last days” and “in the latter days” appear around 20 times in the Bible. They refer to the period of time at the end of the age leading into the establishment of God's Kingdom on Earth (e.g., Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; 2 Peter 3:3). So, rather than foretelling the condition of the tribes at the times recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles, Jacob describes the circumstances of the tribes at the end of the age. This tells us something very interesting: All of the tribes of Israel will exist as distinct peoples at the time of the end, shortly before the return of Jesus Christ—except for Simeon and Levi, of course, who will exist as peoples, but will be scattered throughout the other tribes.

Many of the prophecies about individual tribes prove difficult to apply with a specific meaning, due to the broad scope of the language employed. Of all the particulars mentioned, verse 10, regarding Judah, is more readily interpreted. Since the “scepter shall not depart from Judah,” we know

that a succession of kings descended from Judah would exist until a specified time, being that a scepter is a symbol of kingship. The specific time frame mentioned is “until Shiloh comes.” Shiloh is interpreted as “Peaceable and Prosperous One,” or as the “Savior,” or even as “To Whom It [the Scepter] Belongs,” all of which are clear references to Christ, to whom would be the “obedience of the people.” Since the royal line would exist until the “last days,” the coming of Shiloh here must indicate Christ’s second coming. Indeed, this prophecy explains that Christ will assume the throne of Judah in the end time—meaning that there has to be a throne of kings of Jewish descent in existence for Him to return to. And indeed there is. (To learn more about it, please refer to “The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future” at www.ucg.org/brp/materials.)

Verses 22-26 give details about the blessings that would later come upon the descendants of Joseph. To see more about this, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

Years later, other details about the future of the tribes would be given by Moses in Deuteronomy 33, shortly before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. In fact, Moses, in relating the future of Joseph in that passage, actually quotes Genesis 49:26.

Death and Burial (Genesis 49:29–50:26)

March 21

After his father’s death, Joseph fulfilled Jacob’s request to be buried in the same cave in which Abraham and Isaac had been entombed at the time of their deaths. Joseph, who had sworn to take care of this, did as his father had asked, along with his brothers and even the Egyptian elders and the servants of Pharaoh. Mourning the death of Jacob with Joseph as they would for Egyptian royalty illustrates the great respect the Egyptians had for Joseph, the man whom God had used to save them from famine and by whom their nation was greatly enriched.

Joseph also wished to eventually be buried in the land of his fathers. Knowing that God would later bring the children of Israel out of Egypt and back to Canaan, he made them swear to “carry up my bones from here” (verse 25). However, as a national figure in Egypt, he was first put in a coffin in Egypt rather than being buried in his homeland right away. That Joseph anticipated his burial in Egypt and the Exodus as well is clear from the obligation he bound on the descendants of Israel. Moses would make good on the oath more than 200 years later by taking Joseph’s bones out of Egypt during the Exodus (Exodus 13:19). The bones remained with the children of Israel until they entered the Promised Land and were eventually buried in Shechem (Joshua 24:32).

The bones of the patriarchs being buried in the land of Canaan may well have symbolized their future inheritance of the Promised Land, itself representative of God’s coming Kingdom—and indeed that is where they will awaken at the *inauguration* of God’s Kingdom when Jesus Christ returns. Of course, regardless of where our bones might be buried, the saints of God will all be awakened at Christ’s return to establish the true Promised Land, God’s Kingdom, over all the earth.

Starting March 22, there is break in the program for several days. Regular reading resumes April 4. (There are four planned breaks in each calendar year. This allows more time for personal study at these occasions and perhaps an opportunity for you to catch up in the reading if you have fallen behind.)