

For GC Discussion

- How can we remind ourselves of God's absolute commitment to us as His people? When is this likely to be important to us? Can you think of verses that communicate this truth?

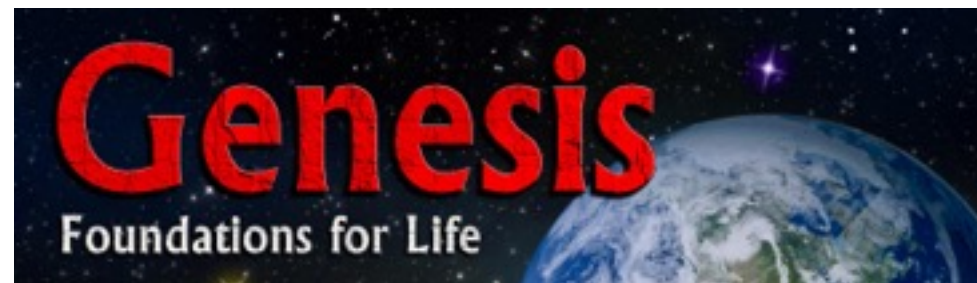
- Can we sometimes become presumptuous about the grace of God? What can we do to prevent this happening?

- How can we get caught into thinking our failure has aborted the plan of God? What truth dispels this lie?

Next Week: we move on to study the life of Joseph as we near the end of our studies in Genesis.

Notes and Questions

For Worship: Listen to *'He knows my name'* by Francesca Battistelli. You can find it on YouTube, or on the Hill City Church blog on the website.



Week 17: Jacob: Passing the Baton

Chapters 34-36

This Weeks Summary

This week we ended our study of Jacob's life as God confirms the name change signifying Jacob's journey this far, and we looked at the passing of the baton from Jacob to his sons.

For Study:

Part of our text this week was God's confirmation of Jacob's change of name from a deceiver who was distant from God, to one who had struggled with Him and ultimately prevailed in receiving the blessing of God. Names are very significant in the Bible, and the verses below all have to do with names being changed or with particular meanings:

Samuel	- 1 Samuel 1:1-20
Ichabod	- 1 Samuel 4:1-22
Solomon	- 2 Samuel 12:24-25
Lo-Ruhamah & Lo-Ammi	- Hosea 1:2-11 & 2:21-23
Jesus	- Matthew 1:18-25
Peter	- Matthew 16:13-20
Barnabas	- Acts 4:36-37, 9:26-27, 11:22-24
Paul	- Acts 9:1-19 & 13:9

This week we finished our study of Jacob and spoke a little about the baton being passed on to the next generation. Here are a few things to pick out of our text, especially chapter 35:

Continuing Obedience of Faith

As with the life of Abraham, Jacob's walk with God is broken up into a number of time periods, all defined by the call of God to move on, and travel to the next stage of the journey. This is what happens in chapter 35 - we're not sure how long Jacob and his family stayed in Shechem, but God calls him to move on and travel to Bethel to the place which could appropriately be called the final stop in Jacob's personal journey of faith. It was here that God first revealed Himself to Jacob and began His transforming work in the life of Jacob the manipulative schemer, and so he has come full circle. God brings Jacob back to the place which may well remind him more than anywhere else of his unworthiness to be blessed as he has been - the place which signifies most clearly to him the radical grace of God that has been at work in his life since the night of that dream many years ago. Just as Abraham and Isaac have before him, Jacob has yet another choice to make - stay in Shechem where his family is settled, or listen to the voice of God and make his way back to Bethel. Jacob's response is exactly what ours should always be - he doesn't question to the call of God, but packs up his family and starts on the journey back to Bethel. It's a journey that is full of danger, especially after Jacob's son's performance in chapter 34, but because of this it's also a journey that reminds us of our next point:

Wherever God calls us He can keep us

I know this is a cliché, but it is also the truth, and it is demonstrated in God's faithfulness to fulfil His promise to Jacob of keeping him wherever he might go. The surrounding cities may not have naturally been too accommodating to Jacob and his travelling party, but God knows very well the danger they are in, and causes a terror to fall on each of those cities so they refuse to pursue them at all. Despite his sons foolishness, Jacob needn't have worried as his God was more than able to look after him regardless of who might want vengeance on him, and we too should be able to have that same kind of confidence. So often God can call us to go to places that make us feel uneasy and afraid, but we can have confidence to go forward because we have a God who will always sustain, protect, empower and keep us wherever we go. As its famously been said, God's work done God's way will never lack God's supply.

A change of Name symbolising a change of Heart

Names can often have a lot of meaning in the Bible and that is certainly the case with Jacob. He is born grabbing on to the heel of Esau, and so is given the name Jacob, which means one who grabs the heel, or could mean one who cheats, and Jacob certainly lived up to that name. However, God has other ideas for the man He's chosen to carry on His promise to Abraham, and over the course of 20 years God puts Jacob through trials and tests culminating in the wrestling match where Jacob acknowledges his desperate need for his blessing to come from God and not through his manipulative scheming. God symbolises this inward change in Jacob's life by removing from him the name pointing to his initial fleshly efforts to obtain the blessing, and re-names him in the light of his struggle with God and man which culminated in his humble acknowledgement of need. The name Israel would now be synonymous with the chosen people of God through the rest of the Scriptures, and where a change of name isn't important for us, it clearly signifies the change of heart that God wants to work in all of His people for His glory.

Confirmation of Faith

Just as a journey of faith involves many steps of obedience to the call of God, so there are many times along the way when God confirms the promises He has already made in response to the continued obedience of those He has called. This is what He does again for Jacob (or Israel now) following his return to Bethel. God reiterates the fact that He is going to bless Israel with many descendants, and that they will inherit the land of Canaan. Jacob responds by setting up a pillar - yet another reminder for himself, and for his sons after him of the promises of God, and His faithfulness to fulfil them. We'd do well to set up our own 'pillars' to remind us of the times God has met with us, spoken to us, and come through for us, and to strengthen us when the next test of faith comes our way.

The continual fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham

Chapter 36 is one of those chapters that doesn't really seem to have much to teach us about God. It certainly has a role in setting up some of the future interaction between Israel and Edom (in the conquest of the land under Joshua, and the book of Obadiah especially), but it also tells us this: God is still faithfully fulfilling his promise to Abraham that nations would come from him (17:5). It's a simple reminder that none of the promises of God from the smallest to the greatest will ever fail.