

The Patriarchs

Joseph

Patriarchs are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is with them that God promises to make for himself a people who will receive his blessings by following him obediently and ultimately, they will bless all people.

This is what the Bible calls a covenant. It's like a contract between God and each of these men; Abraham, then his son Isaac, and finally, his grandson Jacob. But it's different from a contract in that one part is bonded to his part of the covenant. There is no out clause or loophole. God is bound by his one nature, his own faithfulness to do this no matter what happens. It is God who established this covenant.

Here's one of the instances in the Bible where the covenant that God established with Abraham and his descendants. In this instance, God is speaking to Isaac. ² **The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt, but do as I tell you. ³ Live here as a foreigner in this land, and I will be with you and bless you. I hereby confirm that I will give all these lands to you and your descendants, just as I solemnly promised Abraham, your father. ⁴ I will cause your descendants to become as numerous as the stars of the sky, and I will give them all these lands. And through your descendants **all the nations of the earth will be blessed.** ⁵ I will do this because Abraham listened to me and obeyed all my requirements, commands, decrees, and instructions." ⁶ So Isaac stayed in Gerar. Genesis 26:2-6**

With Jacob getting old, the story focuses on the next generation after these three patriarchs. It's interesting that the next big part of the story tells about one of Jacob's sons, **Joseph**. Since that story covers a number of chapters, I'm going to tell his story. Yes kids, its story time with pastor Bill.

First **born son of Rachel**, the favorite wife of Jacob. He is favored by Dad and **given a coat**; coat was a sign of management, setting him above his brothers. **Keep in mind that he is much younger** than all of his brothers, except one.

Joseph tells his brothers about these dreams that, not so subtly, say that Joseph will rule over his brothers. They were all out in the field tying bundles of grain and your bundles bowed to mine.

One day, Jacob tells Joseph to walk to the neighboring town **to check on how the older brothers** are doing with the flocks. **Brothers want to kill him**, but because not all are comfortable with this, they throw him in a pit and then **sell him to traders** heading for Egypt.

He is sold to Potiphar, who was a captain in Pharaoh's guard, where he distinguishes himself in character and skill and is given control of the whole house. But Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him, and he refuses. She accuses him of rape.

He is placed in a prison where people from the house of Pharaoh are serving. This proves that Potiphar didn't really believe his wife because if he did Joseph would have been killed and not put in one of the nicer prisons.

While in prison again, he distinguishes himself and is basically running the prison. Currently, he demonstrates another skill. He can interpret dreams and what God might be telling someone through their dreams. Two men from Pharaoh's household were put in prison. One was his chief cupbearer and the other his chief baker. They both had strange dreams. Joseph interpreted both accurately. The outcome was that the cupbearer was brought back to his job while the baker was executed.

Joseph is forgotten and languishes in prison for two years.

Pharaoh starts having these strange troubling dreams. One has seven fat healthy cows being eaten by seven skinny cows. The other has seven healthy heads of grain being eaten by seven shriveled, diseased heads of grain. He tells his cupbearer, and he remembers Joseph and his skill for dream interpretation.

Joseph is released and interprets Pharaoh's two dreams....There will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of drought and famine. Egypt must store up grain to get through the famine. And, by the way, I can help you do this.

Pharaoh puts him in charge of this program and elevates him to just below himself in authority. He puts this plan into place.

Seven years later, when the famine hit Canaan, Jacob sends his ten older sons to buy grain in Egypt, which they have excess because of Joseph. When they arrive, Joseph sees his brothers and recognizes them. It's been over twenty years since they threw him into that cistern.

Next, Joseph starts to test them to see if they have changed. He put the money they used to buy the grain in their grain bags. Once they found it part of the way home, they were terrified. They returned and were told they must leave one of the brothers (a human security deposit) and were to return with their younger brother Benjamin.

Meanwhile, back in Canaan, it is not easy to get Jacob (their father) to let Benjamin go to Egypt after losing Rachel's other son Joseph years ago. Finally, he agrees to let Benjamin return with them to Egypt.

They arrive in Egypt to be invited by Joseph to a dinner party where mysteriously their host puts them in oldest to youngest order around the table. And when the food comes there is plenty, but Benjamin's plate is piled highest with food.

When they leave this time, Jacob has his servants put their money back in their sacks of grain and put Joseph's personal silver cup in Benjamin's bag. After they had gone just a short distance, Joseph sent his servants after them. The servant tells them that one of them has stolen Joseph's cup. The brothers plead innocent and go so far as to say, "If you find the cup you may take the life of the one who is carrying that bag." They search the bags and find it to be Benjamin.

They return to face Joseph and fall on their knees proclaiming their innocents and asking for him to spare Benjamin's life. Judah explains why their father was so insistent upon not allowing Benjamin to go. He had suffered so much at losing Benjamin's full brother that this would surely kill him. He even offers to have Benjamin stay as a slave in Egypt if only to spare his life.

Joseph could stand it no longer, so kills the ten older brothers and takes Benjamin and makes him prince in Egypt! No, amazingly, that's not what happens. This part is so powerful that we need to read it. Story time with Bill is officially over.

Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, "Out, all of you!" So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. ² Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.

³ "I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. ⁴ "Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. ⁵ But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. ⁶ This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. ⁸ So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.

⁹ "Now hurry back to my father and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately! ¹⁰ You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with

all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. ¹¹ **I will take care of you there**, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve."

¹² Then Joseph added, "Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph! ¹³ Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly." ¹⁴ Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same. ¹⁵ **Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.** Genesis 45:1-15

You've got kidnapping, cover ups, human trafficking, betrayal, favoritism, jealousy, sex, a woman scorned, saving face, political intrigue and when the dust settles, what do you have? **You have God's covenant people, Jacob's family safe in Egypt and Joseph is the hero.** He may be the hero, but this story really isn't about Joseph and what it took for him to view his trials and tribulations in a different way. That part isn't possible if not for the basic point of this story which is...God keeps his promises...

He made a covenant where he binds himself to the conditions of his side of the covenant. He will not, cannot wench on this promise.

Why does he keep his promise to such a messed up self-destructive bunch as these? It's because he would have to go against his own nature. **He would have to be something other than the one true God who made everything perfect and will, in his timing, put it all right again.**

⁸ **Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors.** That is why the Lord rescued you with such a strong hand from your slavery and from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. ⁹ Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. **He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.** Deut. 7:8-9

Why did he and does he keep his promises, his covenant? Because of his love for that part of the creation that was made in his image. He loves people. He created everything perfectly because he wanted to demonstrate his goodness and love toward Adam and Eve and their descendants. Deut. says it this way, " **He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.**

This promise has been passed down from Abraham to Isaac and then to Jacob. How is God going to keep this promise? They are supposed to **become a great nation**, be given the land of **Canaan**, and God will use his special people to **bless all people.**

It is because of God's great love for us that he is faithful. God keeps his promises...**Even when there are obstacles.**

How can God bring that last part of the covenant through this group of people who are always ready to self-destruct?

Spoiler alert; we are going to see this pattern throughout the story of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The people he is making into this great nation that will bless all people is a complete disaster.

Obstacles like family favoritism and Character flaws of the heirs. Here's another spoiler alert. The rest of the book is God using unlikely, broken, flawed, unqualified people to achieve his purpose of blessing all people.

These sons of Jacob, who are going to be the **leaders of the tribes that make up Israel**, thought of murdering their little brother. And then amazingly, when that seemed too extreme, they sold him as a slave.

Didn't they leave the land that they were promised Canaan. That's where **Jacob was before** the whole gang went down to Egypt to avoid starving. It's going to be **generations before they get back.** Long after **Joseph is dead and forgotten**, the Pharaoh at that time sees this large and growing group of foreigners living in Goshen. He's afraid of them and decided to enslave them to man his new aggressive building program.

These are not small things to navigate. There are no problems, just **opportunities, right?** No these are problems, at least for anyone who isn't God.

#1. God keeps his promises...#2. Even when there are obstacles **because He is not only good, but sovereign.**

Possessing supreme and ultimate power...Over everything!

This is where it gets tricky. **God is faithful and good and, at the same time, he is over everything; all powerful with authority over everything.** That sounds like oil and water, they don't mix. **If you are over all things, then it is your responsibility to not allow little kids to be thrown into holes in the ground and sold as slaves.**

But wait, let's go back to creation. What happened when sin or disobedience came into the picture? It created **separation between God and the caretakers of the rest of it.** Those people who were **created in his image**, in some way like him. **From that point on, the system was broken.** Nothing worked as it was created to work. **Nature, governments, relationships, families our bodies.** **Separated from the source of life, everything deteriorates.**

God allowed the first people to make that choice because he loved them and wanted them to choose to return that love by trusting him. Everything was there for them, all they had to do was follow obediently.

You and I were born into separation from God, the source of everything. It's not our fault, but it's our reality. Because of that, people are going to choose to act selfishly against what God wants. And he's going to allow that again because he wants those people to see that this is no way to live.

We've never seen anyone given power or authority in this world ever use it properly. Power corrupts and ultimate power corrupts ultimately. Within this amazing mess of people doing what they want, he can achieve his ultimate purpose to rescue and make all things new.

To shed a little light on something that is over our heads or beyond our comprehension we need to add one more statement. Let's put it all together. #1. God keeps his promises...#2. Even when there are obstacles #3. because He is not only good, but sovereign. Therefore, God can use what is intended for evil for His good purposes.

What is his purpose, to make all things new and that includes us.

There's always going to be a faith aspect and a humility aspect to this idea that God is completely good and all powerful. We must trust him.

Remember what got us into this mess in the first place, Eve wanted to know something that only God should know and understand good and evil.

I read an illustration that I thought was helpful. The NIV Application Commentary on the book of Genesis.

The commentator says it this way. Evil and death was brought into the world by people causing separation from God. He describes playing chess against the computer. First of all, the computer always won. The computer would not allow him to break the rules, making a move that was not a part of the game. He couldn't decide that his pawn was a queen and knock out the computer's king. But the computer would allow him to make a stupid, reckless move. To that, the computer would use that bad move against him and win.

In other words, God gives evil a certain latitude, but always outflanks it and achieves his ultimate purpose. That is the story of Joseph.

God uses favoritism, jealousy, false witness, slavery, betrayal, lying, a pagan nation, a famine...and in each case he uses the enemies best moves and uses them against the enemy.

But it gets even better, because Joseph reaffirms this same idea later in chapter 50, but even more specific. ¹⁴ After burying Jacob, Joseph returned to

Egypt with his brothers and all who had accompanied him to his father's burial. ¹⁵ But now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became fearful. "Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him," they said. ¹⁶ So they sent this message to Joseph: "Before your father died, he instructed us ¹⁷ to say to you: 'Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.' So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin." When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept. ¹⁸ Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. "Look, we are your slaves!" they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. ²¹ No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them. *Genesis 50:14-21*

Joseph really believes that God is like this. He always **keeps his promises** even in the **face of obstacles** because he is **not only good, but he is sovereign**. Therefore, he can take what was intended for evil, (**selling your brother into slavery**) and use it for his good purposes (**keeping his covenant people from starving**).

In the end, that is the bottom line of Joseph story, as 45:5-8 clearly articulates. *God's sovereignty and blessing can be found in what appear to be the most heinous crimes and the most disastrous circumstances. This does not mean that God approves of the crimes or that he enjoys bringing disaster into our lives. It is simply a testimony to his ability to bring good out of evil. The depths of God's sovereignty are not demonstrated by his repression of our choices that inevitably reveal our sinfulness and fallen self-will, but by the fact that there is not choice that we can make, however sinful or fallen, that can interfere with his plan. In fact, often enough, as in the case of Joseph, those choices end up furthering his plan. The NIV Application Commentary, Genesis page 696*

Paul says hundreds of years later the same kind of thing. This is a guy who **gave up everything to follow Jesus** and what he got was **shipwreck, multiple arrests/imprisoned** and **beaten unjustly**. Later **executed**. ²⁸ *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with*

himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. Romans 8:28-30

Are we willing to trust him when evil seems to prevail? That means remaining unified during a divisive world. This means playing offense when we are nervous and feel like playing defense or keeping the evil out there. This means not focusing on how the church isn't meeting my needs and focusing on others. Building bridges into this broken world instead of digging motes and building walls.

Are we willing to trust him when our eyes tell us that we should panic and hope some elected official will save us.

Am I willing to trust him when evil seems to prevail? This is making it personal. When bad things happen in your life.

His purposes that are good will always rise out of the ashes.

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. ¹⁸ But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up." Daniel 3:16-18 Even if he doesn't we know that you can't win, what he wants to see happen will be fueled by the evil you do.

⁸ He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. ⁹ God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 That partnership is not simply for the next life, heaven. It's to be his covenant people who he wants to use to bless and reach all people.

Following Joseph

1. Affirm that God's Covenant with Jacob includes you. Continue using the WWJacobD card
2. What would Joseph do if he were me?

¹⁹ But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. ²¹ No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them. Genesis 50:19-21

- Father help me to see how you can make good out of _____.

- Take away my desire to punish

This is a lot of wasted energy.

- Use what was meant to harm me to allow me to bless and serve
