

# Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



## March 2012 Genesis 12:10 – 50:26 Reading & Discussion Guide

### March Dates to Note:

#### MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Person to Contact with Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

#### PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 12:10 – 50:26:

- Mpls:** Monday, March 5, 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** Thursday, March 1, 7:00 p.m., Room 310 CFL Bldg.

### BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

#### 1. Read Genesis 12:10 – 50:26.

- a) We suggest you read through "Genesis 12:10 – 50:26: Theme and Purpose" and the glossary "Who or What Is . . . ?" on pages 4 and 5 before you begin your reading.
- b) Use the "To Guide Your Reading" section on pages 6 - 10 to help you think through what you have read, paying particular attention to questions in boldface. **Reading one long or two short chapters each day will make it quite doable.**

#### 2. If possible, **attend, listen to, or watch the DVD of the Pastor's Introduction.**

#### 3. Read and recite **this month's memory verse** often! **It is:**

*"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good."* – Genesis 50:20a

Our goal and prayer is that you will walk away from each study having had at least one important insight that informs your faith and your knowledge of God's Word. In other words, we hope you will discover a "message" just for you!

# **AT YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING**

## **Welcome**

Welcome to the March meeting of your *Living the Message* Bible discovery group. In order to keep to your agreed-upon time frame, place a clock where it is clearly visible, or ask someone to be “timekeeper” and let the group know when 15 minutes remain for discussion and closing.

## **Opening Prayer**

Pause to quiet your hearts and minds with a few moments of silent prayer. Then have someone open with his or her own prayer, or pray the following together:

*Dear Lord,*

*We know that you are in our midst, and we thank you for your presence and for the gift of your Word. Guide us now as we seek the truth you would have us know and the promises you would have us hear.*

*In your name we pray, Amen.*

## **This Month’s Memory Verse**

Recite this month’s memory verse (including the book, chapter, and verse) together as a group.

*“Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.” – Genesis 50:20a*

## **Getting Under Way**

Take time for each person to share thoughts on the following:

- Share a recent “God moment” in your life, and / or, share one of the stories/characters in Genesis 12-50 that stood out for you.

## **Setting the Scene**

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended, listened to, or saw the DVD of the Pastor’s introduction to Genesis 12:10—50:26 to share highlights from what they learned.

## **Discuss Together**

Go to “To Guide Your Reading” on pages 6 - 10. Discuss together the questions in boldface and/or others of the questions that are of particular interest to your group. Remember, a good discussion on fewer questions is better than rushing through all the questions. If you wish, ask if any of the questions (boldface or not) were of particular interest to someone and begin there.

# Closing Remarks and Prayer

## FOR NEXT MONTH

***Our next meeting will be in April:***

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Person to Contact with Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

***April's Reading Assignment:*** Acts 1 – 12

***April's Memory Verse:***

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses... – Acts 1: 8*

***Save the date! Next Pastor's Introductions:***

- Mpls:** Monday, April 2, at 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** Thursday, April 5th, at 7:00 p.m., Room 310, CFL

## CLOSING PRAYER

Gather requests for prayers, encouraging both things for which God's help and guidance are needed and also things for which people are grateful. If someone is comfortable doing so, ask that person to pray aloud a prayer bringing these concerns to God, or take time for silent prayer during which these concerns can be brought to God. End with a prayer of your own, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, or by praying the following together:

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for this time discussing your word. Thank you for the examples of these forerunners in the faith, and for the promises and assurance we find in their stories. As we prepare to leave, we ask your presence, peace, and strength in our lives, especially for those cares and concerns carried deep within our hearts. Help us to place it all in your hands, knowing that whatever comes, you are there. In your name we pray, Amen.*

## FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

### Ponder

- In what ways and how forcefully did God intervene in Bible history? How about today?

## Genesis 12:10 – 50:26 Theme & Purpose

These chapters of Genesis introduce the patriarchs—the male physical and spiritual ancestors—of the nation of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (later called Israel), and Joseph. Their stories are evidence of God's continued love of and deep desire for relationship with humanity. As we follow their lives and God's actions in them, we learn that God can be trusted to keep his promises, that God desires and grants great blessings to those who are faithful, that God can and will do amazing things even in seemingly hopeless situations, and that God can bring good out of difficult, negative, or unjust situations. Major themes running through these stories include:

**Blessing:** The concept of blessing is pervasive in Genesis. It is a gift of God that empowers recipients to experience and bring forth life, goodness, and well-being. Blessing also can refer to the ancient custom of deathbed promises, which were considered so binding that they could not be reversed. This is the type of blessing Esau was cheated out of by Rebekah and Jacob (Genesis 27).

**Covenant / Promise.** In Genesis, *covenant* is basically divine promise. It refers to both universal promises such as those to Noah and all creatures, and specific promises to the elect family of Abraham. God thereby assumes obligations to remain forever committed to the world and to this family, with attendant blessings. In the stories of Genesis, we come to know a God who is faithful to his promises through thick and thin.

**Election.** God "elects" or chooses creatures in and through which he will work in the world. The special election of Abraham (and his descendants) is for the sake of "all the families of the earth" (12:3). This divine promise that seems exclusive initially is actually for the sake of a maximally inclusive end.

**Judgment.** Judgment may be defined as the divinely mediated consequences of sin. Initially in Genesis, sin and judgment come to a climax in the flood. In the wake of this disaster, God promises never to allow for such an extensive judgment again (8:21; 9:8-17), though more targeted judgments on sin will continue (for example, Sodom and Gomorrah, 18:16-19:29). It is wise not to refer to such judgments as punishments; rather, they refer to the natural consequences of sin that are integral to God's creational moral order, an order that God continues to mediate.

**Relationship.** God is a relational God, present and active in the world, who enters into a relationship with a world that is created as an interrelated entity. The relationship between God and our world is a living and dynamic reality, more comprehensive than covenant, within which both parties are affected by the realities of genuine interrelatedness over time.

**Righteousness.** Righteousness has two different, though related, understandings in Genesis. On the one hand, it refers to being in a right relationship with God (so, for example, Abraham is righteous, 15:6). On the other hand, it refers to the actions of those who do justice to the relationship with God in which they stand (so Abraham's descendants, 18:19).

*Information on this page and in "Who or What Is . . . ?" is drawn primarily from Luther Seminary's [www.enterthebible.org](http://www.enterthebible.org)'s introduction to Genesis, written by Professor of Old Testament, Terrence Fretheim. Used with permission.*

## Who or What Is . . . ?

**Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah.** God chose Abraham (formerly Abram) to go to the land that God would show him, and promised to make of Abraham a great nation. Believing she never would have children, Abraham's wife **Sarah** (formerly, Sarai), urged Abraham to have a child with Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant. The son that Hagar bore was **Ishmael**. When God told Sarah that she would indeed bear a child in spite of her old age, she laughed, and so when that son was born, she named him **Isaac**, which means "he laughs." Following Isaac's birth, a jealous Sarah asked that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away. God told Abraham to assent to this, and God preserved Hagar and Ishmael in the desert. When Isaac is grown, Abraham has **Rebekah** brought from his home country of Haran to be Isaac's wife.

**Esau and Jacob/Israel.** These were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah and grandsons of Abraham and Sarah. As firstborn, Esau had a birthright to a double share of inheritance, but he sold this birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Close to death, Isaac asked Esau to bring him a meal of wild game, after which he would give Esau the blessing. While Esau hunted, Jacob disguised himself as Esau, brought food, and received the blessing meant for his older brother. Afterward, fearing Esau's anger, Jacob fled to live with his uncle Laban. There, he fell in love with Laban's daughter, **Rachel**, whom Laban said Jacob could marry if he first worked for him for seven years. After the seven years, however, Laban sent **Leah**, Rachel's older sister, into Jacob's tent in place of Rachel. When Jacob awoke and found himself married to Leah, Laban told him he had to work another seven years for Rachel. In addition to his two wives, Jacob had two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah. With these four women, Jacob had twelve sons who became the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob became wealthy working for his uncle, causing such envy among Laban's sons that he was forced to return to Canaan. On the way, he wrestled an angel all night. In the morning the angel **changed Jacob's name to Israel**.

**Joseph.** Born to Jacob and Rachel, Joseph was his father's eleventh son. As a boy, Joseph received an elegant coat from his father, and had a dream indicating that someday Joseph's family members would bow down before him. Jealous, his brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, and placed blood on his elegant coat so that their father would think Joseph was dead. In Egypt, Joseph rose to a position of influence, and eventually was given responsibility for Egypt's food stores. When famine struck, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for food. Joseph disguised his identity, held one of his brothers hostage in prison, and demanded that the rest of them bring their youngest brother Benjamin to Egypt. When they returned, Joseph revealed his identity and brought his father Jacob to live in Egypt. After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers wondered if he would hold a grudge against them, but Joseph replied, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people. . . (Gen 50:20)."

**The twelve tribes of Israel** traditionally are held to have descended from the sons and grandsons of Jacob, whose name was changed by God to Israel. The names used for the twelve tribes actually include fourteen names: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh. The first twelve of these are sons of Jacob; the last two are Joseph's sons. The reason for this is that in some places, Levi and Joseph are named, but not Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. In other places, Levi is not named because the Levites were assigned priestly duties and spread throughout Israel. When Levi is named, the Joseph tribes are counted as one; when Levi is not named, the Joseph tribes are counted under Joseph's sons' names—Manasseh and Ephraim (Numbers 26:4-51). To add to the confusion, Simeon is counted as a tribe even after it becomes part of Judah, and Manasseh is considered one tribe even after having split into two.

## To Guide Your Reading

Use the following divisions and questions to guide your reading and personal reflection, jotting down your thoughts in the space between each question. For those who wish, we have suggested a three-week schedule to help you in your reading and reflection. **Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest for consideration at your small group meeting.** Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest.

### **WEEK 1 – Genesis 12:10 – 25:18 The Story of Abraham and Sarah**

God calls Abraham and makes promises to him and his descendants through both Hagar and Sarah and their sons Ishmael and Isaac, though it is only through Isaac that the covenant is established.

1. When Abram is called by God, he also is uprooted and sent into a new land. Throughout his journey, God constantly stands by and guides Abraham. When in your life have you felt uprooted and needed a sense of God's presence and guidance?
  
2. **In 12:1-3 (last month's reading); 15:5-7; and 17:1-8, God makes three main promises to Abraham and his descendants. What are they? As part of the agreement with God, what does God ask of Abraham and his descendants (17:9-14)? Imagine yourself in the place of Abraham and Sarah. How do you think you would react to each of these? What would make trusting difficult?**
  
3. Who are Ishmael and Isaac (16:1-16; 21:1-8)? What happens to Ishmael (21:9-21; 25:12-18)? All things considered, were you surprised to see that Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham together (25:1-11)? Why or why not?

Week 1 questions continued on next page.



2. What do you find fair and unfair in the stories of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:19 – 28:9? In the ancient world, the firstborn son normally received both the birthright and a blessing. While the birthright could be sold, a spoken blessing could not be undone. This put Isaac in the difficult position of having very little left to bestow upon Esau. At some point in their lives, most people find themselves in a situation where they wish they could take back something they said, undo something they did, or find a way to compensate for something someone else has suffered that might have been avoided if they had acted differently. When that is not possible, what are some things they can do?
  
3. What promises does God make to Jacob (28:10-22; 35:9-15), and what does Jacob promise in return?
  
4. **Sometimes God gives individuals new names as he did for Abram and Sarai (Genesis 17) and Jacob (“Israel”) at the River Jabbok (32:22-30) and again at Bethel (35:9-11). How is it that a new name from God actually can announce or call forth a new person, even today?**
  
5. What evidence do you find in Chapters 31 – 35 that God has worked a “new” heart in Jacob? Are there moments when the old “trickster” returns? Jacob spends a long night wrestling with a man (angel), after which God changes Jacob’s name to Israel (32:22-30; 35:9-11), the name by which Abraham’s descendants will become known. What do you think the wrestling signified?

### **WEEK THREE – Genesis 37:1 – 50:26 The Story of Jacob’s Sons, Especially Joseph**

The story of Joseph becomes the prism in and through which the development of Jacob’s family is portrayed. Egypt is the primary location of this story.

1. Who was Joseph (37:1-4)? Why are Joseph’s brothers jealous, and what do they do (37:2-36)?
  
2. **Though Joseph ends up in jail, good comes of it (39:1 – 41:57), in great part because God gives him the ability to interpret dreams (40:8; 41:15-16, 28, 37-39). After reconciling with his brothers and reuniting with his father, Joseph says, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good” (50:20). Have you ever witnessed a situation when God has used a surprising or unexpected means of bringing good out of a bad situation?**
  
3. Compare the stories of Jacob’s blessing Manasseh and Ephraim (48:1-22) with Isaac’s blessing of Esau and Jacob (27:26 – 28: 5). What reactions do you have to Jacob choosing to give the greater blessing Joseph’s younger son and Joseph’s reaction to it (48:17-22)?
  
4. Looking back on the book of Genesis, where do you see God keeping his promises in spite of humanity’s failings?

Week 3 questions continued on next page.

