

Genesis

Week 2



Monday: Genesis 25-28

Tuesday: Genesis 28-31

Wednesday: Genesis 32-34

Thursday: Genesis 35-38

Friday: Genesis 39-42

Introduction

Last week we observed that the pattern of Genesis flows from Creation to Uncreation to Recreation. God creates something that is good and beautiful and designed for peace. Man, given his free will and propensity towards selfishness, shame, and blame, tends to “uncreate” or mess up the beautiful thing that God has created. God, then, because of His extreme love and patience with us, recreates something new out of the distorted, uncreated mess that man has produced. We see this pattern in ch. 1-5: God creates perfection when He places Adam and Eve in Eden, Adam and Eve disobey and the world is ultimately uncreated in the Flood. Then in ch. 6-11 the pattern is repeated. Noah is a remnant (a sort of starter dough) with which to recreate something. God recreates a covenant of peace with Noah, Ham messes it up resulting in the uncreation of the unity of mankind through the scattering of nations.

This week, in Genesis 12-50, we see the same process at work. God recreates through establishing a covenant, an eternal promise, to Abram. The promise is sealed through the near sacrifice of Isaac. Things are going great. Then...Jacob, the deceiver, comes along and starts uncreating everything.

From the moment of birth Jacob is anything but the example of a humble, God-fearing, child of the Covenant. He is a conniving, deceptive, fear bound, selfish character. He manipulates his brother's birthright, he steals his blessing, and then he works the system to get Laban's flocks. When Jacob encountered God, he did not bow in humility and build an altar as Abram and Isaac had done. No, not Jacob. When Jacob met God he bargained with Him and set conditions on his faithfulness. "God, if you do this, then I will worship you." Yikes. That is like playing with matches in a gun powder factory. That's how distorted Jacob's perspective had already become...only two generations after Abraham. Through this man's actions we can see the threads of God's Kingdom being unraveled and the uncreation process beginning.

As with the previous patterns, in the final portion of this third cycle in Genesis, we see two parallel paths. On the left side we see the path of uncreation and distortion which is highlighted in Judah's sin with Tamar. Jacob's sons were beginning to intermarry with the Canaanite women and the integrity of the chosen people was at stake. Following the path of Judah, Abraham's "nation" was uncreated and thrust into the land of Goshen which would eventually leave them shrouded in the murky waters of slavery. On the right side we see the path of Joseph, another savior, another Noah and Abraham, in whom the promises of God would be carried in the midst of the chaos of uncreation.

Monday: Laughing at God?

Genesis 18:1-15

What observations or questions come to mind about the nature of God from this passage?

What promise did God make to Abraham and Sarah?

What was Sarah's reaction to God's promise? Why?

Food for thought:

Have you ever noticed that the Kingdom of God just doesn't make sense? In our passage today we see an excellent example of this. God promised an old, barren woman that she would have a child. It is one thing to make a promise to a young, newly wed couple that they would be fruitful and multiply and that a great nation would come out of their offspring. That alone would have been a great promise from God that would be reasonable and make sense. But the way God made this promise to Abraham and Sarah just didn't make sense. It was so preposterous that Sarah actually burst out laughing when she heard it.

Be honest with yourself. Wouldn't you have laughed as well? Why would God make such a promise? It just doesn't make sense. Perhaps that is the entire point. Had God used a natural mating between Abraham and Sarah to bring about the chosen people who would be the eternal bearers of His covenant, then Abraham would have been tempted to undervalue the covenant God had made. Even worse, Abraham may have even been tempted to take credit for the propagation of his nation. Remember, Abraham and Sarah did try to force God's hand and bring about His promise through natural methods when Sarah offered Hagar to Abraham. The result of this premature attempt at promise fulfillment was Ishmael. God loved Ishmael and God promised to prosper Ishmael, but he was not the vehicle through which God intended to bring about His kingdom. He wasn't God's plan, he was Sarah's plan. Look what happened as a result. To this day the children of Ishmael -- the Arab nations -- are fighting with the children of Isaac -- the Jews. Thanks allot Sarah.

How many times do we do this to God? We come up with a plan that really makes sense on paper and that will really “make a difference” for God’s Kingdom. We’ve read all the leadership, management, and success books available and have applied sound strategic principles to our plan. We’ve even anticipated all the potholes along the way and come up with plans B, C, and D. Then we hold up our plans to God and say, “Please bless this.” I can imagine God looking at us and saying, “That is a really nice Ishmael. It’s good, but it’s not mine.”

From this story we can learn three important principles:

- 1. Be patient and wait on God’s timing.** When God has a plan He will bring it about in His way, in His method. Our job is to wait and be receptive to what He is doing, not to strategize how to “get the job done.”
- 2. When we try to force God’s plan, it always ends up with disastrous results.** God bears the fruit, not us. When we try to produce fruit it ends up being made of wax. Wax fruit looks pretty on the outside but has no value and will hurt you if you try to eat it.
- 3. When God does work His plan it is always in the least likely way.** For more on this read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Human wisdom is foolishness compared to God’s wisdom. When God’s wisdom operates in the world you can bet that it will always appear as foolishness to the “wise” of the world. As Christians it would do us well to spend less time

reading “success” literature from corporate America and spend more time soaking in the “foolishness” of the Kingdom of God. I’d rather be a “fool” for eternity than a “wise man” for a moment.

Tuesday: Letting Go

Genesis 22:1-19

This is one of the most intense scenes in the Bible. use this chart to track what the main characters' actions and attitudes were, and how they changed throughout the three phases of the scene.

	Actions	Attitudes
Before the knife was lifted		
Abraham		
Isaac		
God		
At the moment the knife was lifted		
Abraham		
Isaac		
God		
After the angel told Abraham to stop		
Abraham		
Isaac		
God		

Food for thought:

Yesterday we discussed how “foolish” the Kingdom of God seems to be. God promised to make a great nation out of the barren womb of an old lady. Today the foolishness seems to deepen.

In order to grasp the intensity of this story you must attempt to crawl into the mind of Abraham as it played out. “Excuse me, Lord, but did I hear you correctly? Did you say that you wanted me to kill Isaac? First of all, isn’t this the son through whom you said you would make a nation? If you brought him into the world only to kill him, why didn’t you just use my son Ishmael and save us all the hassle? Secondly, Lord, isn’t killing my son...well...a sin? Are you asking me to do something that we both know would be morally wrong?” If I were Abraham these would have been my natural responses to God. I cannot even imagine the thoughts and emotions that were racing through Abraham’s mind as he was collecting the wood, lighting the fire, and leading his son to the mountain.

Yet, in testimony to the humility and absolute faith in God, Abraham obeyed. Abraham was actually willing to look logic in the face and say, “No, I will not do the ‘logical’ thing, I will obey the Word of the Lord.” Abram was willing to sacrifice everything, even the very thing that was given to Him by God for God’s purpose, in order to be obedient to God.

The question remains for us; would we be willing to sacrifice anything and everything if God asked us to do so? We see this principle again in the story of the rich young ruler in Luke 18. This rich man said that he had obeyed all the laws. Now his question was

what he must do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus told him to give away his riches. He couldn't do it. Does that mean that everyone must give away all their possessions before God will let them into the Kingdom? Not necessarily. It does, however, mean that God expects all of His followers to be willing to give up everything for His sake. Are we willing to do that? As comfortable Americans it is very difficult to even comprehend the question. Most of us will never be asked this question point blank. Yet, the question persists. Would you be willing to give up your reputation if Jesus asked you to? Would you be willing to give up your status, your job, your creature comforts, your ministry, if Jesus asked you to do so?

This is a sobering story and a sobering question. When we look deep inside our heart, however, it is the core of our faith. If we are not really willing to raise the knife to the throat of our "promised son" then we may not be trusting in God, but in our own ability to reason and perform. Until we can let go of the "stuff" and believe with all our heart that God loves us and desires to be with us we cannot experience the joy. We must trust that God's plan is bigger than our concept of happiness and security, and that if we would just jump off the cliff of faith He will provide a deeper joy and fulfillment (a ram in the thicket) than we can possibly comprehend. That joy and fulfillment may not look anything like our physical, comfort-centered notions. It may even be shrouded in physical pain and suffering, but deep in its core is the eternal Kingdom of God.

What do you need to let go of today?

Wednesday: Get a Limp!

Genesis 32:22-32

Who did Jacob encounter?

What happened?

What was the final result of the encounter?

Food for thought:

Can you believe the audacity of Jacob? He wrestled with God and actually believed he could win! (For more on Jacob, reread the introduction to this week's devotional.) God had to maim him in order to break him down. Jacob left that struggle with God having a permanent limp. From that moment on Jacob would have a physical reminder that God was God and that he was not. Eventually Jacob did build an altar to God, and became a broken, humbled man in his old age.

Unfortunately we are more like Jacob than we would like to think. We have been programmed by our culture to think that we can do anything we want to do as long as we try hard enough. We believe that we are strong and capable people. Every day we wrestle with God for control over our lives. We want to be smart enough, strong enough, efficient enough, powerful enough, to "get the job done" "be successful," and "make it happen." We battle God for the driver's seat of our lives.

God, being the loving Father that He is, knows that we are not good life-drivers and will drive ourselves into a brick wall if we are at the wheel. If we wrestle with God we can be assured that He will give us a limp to remind us that we are not in control. One of the greatest messages I've ever heard was given by Rick Warren on this passage and on this topic. He titled his message "Ministering from Weakness." In that message he proposed that God will never use you until he has broken you and given you a limp of some kind. Some of us have relational struggles, some have chronic illness, and others have external oppression.

God gives us a “limp” for two reasons:

1. **He wants us to remember to turn to Him every day for strength.** Without a constant reminder that we need His healing touch and strength to make it we would most likely not turn to Him. It’s like the old saying goes, “there are no atheists in foxholes.” People turn to God when they are in need. By giving us a “limp” God has provided a constant reminder of our daily dependence on Him for survival.
2. **He wants to make it so that we are not able to take the credit for the work that He does through us.** Like the baby born to an old woman, our ministry -- ministry that is truly flowing from God and not us -- will be ministry that happens in spite of our “limp.” In other words, our “limp” keeps us humble and makes it impossible for us to take the credit.

Look at the pain that you may be experiencing in your life today. Could it be that your painful experience is not the curse from God that you thought it was, but, rather, it is the loving gift of God that is producing character, perseverance, and humility in your life so that you can be a better servant of Him?

Thursday: Desperate Measures

Genesis 38

How would you describe the ethics of Judah in this chapter?

How would you describe the ethics of Tamar in this chapter?

Who was righteous in this chapter (if anyone)? Why or why not?

What questions arise from reading this chapter?

Food for thought:

To say the least, this story provides the reader with dramatic whiplash. In chapter 37 we plunge into the story of Joseph and are sitting on the edge of our seat to see what happens to this poor boy that is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Then, like a sharp left turn, we step into the sultry affairs of Judah's family. And, by the way, we feel a little dirty when we finish the chapter. Why is this chapter in the Bible? How could Judah be the father of the tribe from which Jesus comes? How could Tamar be considered "more righteous" when she was a conniving, lying, sexual deviant?

Good questions. The following passage from the New Bible Commentary may shed some light on the story:

"The modern reader is...most perplexed by the sexual antics of those involved. Does the narrator really approve of Tamar's behavior? Why did Judah and his sons behave as they did?

In many societies, ancient and modern, the custom of Levirate marriage is known. According to the OT variety, the brother-in-law of a childless widow was expected to marry her to produce children for his dead brother. Dt. 25:5-10 regards such a marriage as desirable but not compulsory. However, in the earlier time of Judah and Tamar the brother had an absolute duty to marry his widowed sister-in-law, and the father-in-law was expected to see this duty fulfilled.

Judah and his sons were reluctant to do their duty, and Onan practiced a kind of contraception.

This contravened the spirit of 1:28, the letter of the Levirate custom and the promise to the patriarchs, who had been assured they would have numberless descendants. So Onan died (10) because he had resisted God's declared will. Judah, who should have been concerned to see his next son Shelah fulfill his legal duty and ensure the promise's fulfillment, did nothing.

Tamar, a widow, had no legal redress against her father-in-law's injustice. So she contrived to trap him. She outwitted him and obtained her rights under the Levirate law and two sons for the household of Jacob. Indeed, one of her sons was the ancestor of David and Jesus. In the process she made a fool of Judah and showed up his hypocrisy, so that ultimately he was forced to confess, 'She is more righteous than I' (26). This is not to say that sleeping with one's father-in-law is approved of; 'And he did not sleep with her again' (26; cf. Lv. 18:15) shows it was not. Tamar's irregular behavior was, however, in this instance, warranted because of her father-in-law's much greater negligence of morality and theology. It was her offbeat act that brought Judah to his senses."¹

There are some principles to learn from this story:

1. **We must always keep in mind the culture in which the story takes place when judging the "righteousness" factor.** Sexuality, marriage, and gender roles were extremely different in the days of the patriarchs. Sex and marriage was not as much about romance (actually, it had very little to do with romance) as it was

about propagating the family name. The most important value in the ancient world was to propagate the clan. People believed they lived on through their family. To cheat a dead brother of carrying on his family line was a heinous crime. While Tamar may not have been “squeaky clean,” she was considered righteous because she placed the needs of her clan above her own disgrace or displeasure in sleeping with her father-in-law. It was her right and her duty to bear a child to her dead husband’s name, and she was willing to do whatever it took to do what she considered to be right.

2. **This story is not a story intended to demonstrate how things *should* be done in God’s Kingdom.** In fact, it is intended to demonstrate just the opposite by serving as a contrast to the Joseph story which follows. Judah was evidence of the unraveling of God’s covenant and Joseph was the “ark” and the “savior” who would preserve the remnant in the midst of the chaos.
3. **God can bring about His plans even in the midst of extreme sin and distortion of His truth.** Even though Tamar was not pure or righteous, God still used her faithfulness to the family line to bring about the line that would eventually bring Jesus into the world. Isn’t that just like God? If you trace Jesus’ family line he has Tamar, a lying adulteress, Rahab, a gentile prostitute, and Ruth, a Moabitess. From this rag-tag bunch of people, God brings about his plan. In this we can take comfort and hope.

Friday: Run Away!

Genesis 39:1-23

How would you describe Joseph's situation in the beginning of this chapter?

What did Potiphar's wife want from Joseph?

What was Joseph's response to her desire?

What was the result of Joseph's actions?

How would you have felt if you had been treated as Joseph had been treated?

What was Joseph's attitude toward his circumstances?

Food for thought:

Joseph found himself in a situation that many adolescent boys have dreamed about. A beautiful woman seduces you. No one is around. You can have what you want and no one will ever know. What would you do if you were in that situation?

Unfortunately, many of us would not have behaved as Joseph did. Our natural tendency is to flirt around with these situations. We would tend to stop and chat with Potiphar's wife. "What will a little small talk hurt", we might ask ourselves. Then the next day we stop for lunch. In our minds we play out the scenario and allow desire to grow. We dance on the line and see how much pleasure we can get from the scenario without crossing over it.

Not Joseph. He said, "NO!" He didn't just say no with his body, he said "no" with his actions. When she grabbed his cloak, he bolted for the door. When it came to doing what is right, Joseph made it a black and white issue. He didn't want to have anything to do with that scenario...and he went to prison for it.

We can learn two things from this:

- 1. When temptation presents itself...run away, full steam!** Paul told Timothy to flee youthful lust. Solomon told his sons to flee from the adulteress and the seductress. As followers of Christ we don't have time to mess around with sin. Check your heart right now and ask if you are cherishing any desires in your thought life that could be the seeds of sin. If you are, do a "thoughtectomy" and rip those things out of your mind and heart right now. Ask God to

remove the cherished seductions (whatever they may be) and replace them with the clear word of His truth.

2. **Doing the right thing doesn't always pay.** Joseph was willing to go to prison rather than violate a right relationship with God. God never promised us comfort in life. He promised us joy and abundant living in His Kingdom. As a Christian this should be our motto, "I'd rather spend the rest of my life being tortured in a dungeon than to offend the holy relationship I have with my Heavenly Father."

(Footnotes)

¹ Carson, D. A. (1994). New Bible commentary: 21st century edition. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Ge 38:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.