

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward Jr., Rector

***“Maximize Your God-given Potential:
A Study of the Life of Joseph” (part 1)***

STUDY SCHEDULE

10/08 – #1: Beginnings (Messianic Prophecy & the Abrahamic Covenant)
10/15 – #2: Joseph’s Dreams and Enslavement (Gen. 37:1-39)
10/22 – NO STUDY due to Harvest Party
10/29 - #3: Potiphar, Imprisonment, and Pharaoh’s Dream (Gen. 39-41)
11/05 - #4: Joseph’s Exaltation and Reunion (Gen. 42-45)
11/12 - #5: Joseph Settles His Brothers and Father in Egypt (Gen. 46-47)
11/19 - #6: Endings (Gen. 48-50)

“BEGINNINGS – Setting the Stage”
(Messianic Prophecy & the Abrahamic Covenant)

I. GOD’S Redemptive Plan: *Keep Your Relationships Bigger than Your Problems!*

A. God’s Promise to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:14-15) – *“The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life; 15And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, (lit. crush) and you shall bruise him (lit. strike) on the heel.”*

Despite man’s rebellion against God and the subsequent breakdown in his relationship with God, because God is a loving God, He sought to restore the relationship. First, directly with Adam and Eve by making animal skins to “cover” their shame and guilt (Gen.3:21), but then promising to restore all of mankind through the “her seed”. The Hebrew “zarah” for “seed” in the Bible always refers to the male’s role in the progeny of the species. However, in this context, with no mention of a male, the reference points us to the Virgin Birth of Christ (the Messiah). God was promising that through Adam and Eve’s offspring a man (“he”) would be born who would reverse the curse from the Fall.

B. God’s Promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) – *“The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. 2“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. a 3I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

Abram (exalted father) is called by God to follow by faith and God promises him a son through which all the nations of the world will be blessed. The covenant God makes with Abram is highlighted in Abram’s name change to Abraham (“*exalted father of many*”). Abraham will continue the line of Eve to prepare the way for the birth of the Messiah (Jesus Christ).

C. Jacob’s Birthright and Esau (Gen. 25:19-34) – there is a pattern where the matriarchs are initially barren (Sarah and now Rebekah, and later Leah and Rachel). Without God’s help the fulfillment of His promise is impossible. Rachel anticipates the future struggle between Jacob and Esau with her prophetic

word in v. 23. The struggle between brothers is nothing new in the Genesis narrative! We see it all the way back to Cain and Abel, the sons of Noah, Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, and Joseph and his brothers. The sin problem is most acute and challenging within the family! Another common theme is ***“the older will serve the younger.”*** Again, part of the word Rachel received in v. 23. God continually chose the younger and weaker sibling to accomplish His work and receive His blessing. Abel’s offering was chosen over Cain’s. Seth, the still younger brother, was the chosen line (Gen. 4:26-5:8). Isaac was chosen over Ishmael, Rachel over older Leah, Joseph over all his older brothers, and Judah over his older brothers (Gen. 49:8). Why this trend? **To highlight God’s sovereign plan of grace!** God’s blessing is not a “natural right” like the right of a “firstborn” deserved by anyone. Rather it is given freely to all undeservedly so, and only can be experienced by faith (Rom. 9:10-13)!

Esau is willing to sell his own birth right for a bowl of stew. A hunter and “man’s man” Esau represents pride and the life of the flesh. Jacob was a mama’s boy, a quiet man, who lived among the tents but his heart still yearned after God’s ways. Though his name means “supplanter” and “deceiver” he still sought to walk with God. God would use Jacob despite his character flaws. What does that mean for you and me?

D. The Stolen Blessing (Gen. 27:1-40) – while there is really no injustice dealt to Esau with the “stolen blessing” for he demonstrated his lack of concern for spiritual things, what Jacob did in tricking his father was wrong. Though he was put up to it by his mother Rebekah he still engaged in deception and yet God allowed it to accomplish His divine plan. Even after we are born again, we rationalize sinful behavior. The good news is that while we will suffer for it, God is still working in us His plan and bringing us through the fire to be refined further in the likeness of Christ. God’s promise of blessing upon the line of Isaac through Jacob will come to pass regardless of Jacob and Rachel’s efforts. They wanted to “help” God out and demonstrated a lack of faith at that moment. Later Jacob himself would be deceived by his soon to be father-in-law Laban when Laban gives his older daughter Leah in marriage to Jacob rather than his younger daughter Rachel whom Jacob really loved. Deception would also be a characteristic in the Jacob household as time went on.

E. Jacob’s Wives and Sons (Gen. 29- 30:24) – there is competition between Jacob’s wives Leah and Rachel for sons and his affection. So much so that both women had Jacob conceive children with their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. Leah bore Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. Rachel bore Joseph and later Benjamin after which she died (Gen. 35:16-20). Bilhah, Rachel’s maidservant bore Dan and Naphtali while Leah’s maidservant Zilpah bore sons Gad and Asher.

F. Jacob Wrestles with God (Gen. 32:23-32) – Jacob wrestles with an angel of the Lord highlighting his desire to see things through with God! After Jacob could not be overpowered, he is given a new name, *“Israel”* which means *“one who strives with God.”* It symbolizes the struggle Jacob had to endure to secure the blessing of God, a struggle that included “wrestling with God” (trying to understand His ways) and struggling with man. It represents that the life of faith is a struggle of enduring hardship, setbacks, and uncertainties as we learn to trust God in the midst of things we don’t and can’t understand.

G. God’s Covenant Reaffirmed (Gen. 35:1-15) - God reaffirms the covenant He made with Jacob’s grandfather Abraham. We read in Gen. 35:10-12, ***“Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. 10God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” Thus, He called him Israel. 11God also said to him, “I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. 12“The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.”***

Note how God names Jacob, “Israel,” a second time but this time without the mention of the “struggle with God.” It might be that God was emphasizing that His promise to Jacob would not be dependent upon struggling with God but rather with doing battle with the flesh! Regardless when we trust God we can be confident that He will accomplish His will for our lives.

H. Joseph’s Amazing Life

In our subsequent studies we will see how God molded and shaped Joseph into the man he was supposed to be and how his faithfulness resulted in great blessing for himself and for his family. His faithfulness paved the way for the preservation of the Abrahamic line and the coming of the Messiah. Here is a quick overview of his life:

1. Birth to age 17 (Gen. 30:24-37:12)
2. Age 17 to 30 (Gen. 37:2-41:46)
3. Age 30 to death (Gen. 41:46-50:26)

II. Three Main Characteristics that Made Joseph Great - *and will make your life great!*

A. Faith – we will see how faith in God plays the crucial role in Joseph’s spiritual journey. Joseph learned to have the right view of God, himself, and life, and acted accordingly. He learned to be faithful in the worst and best of times.

Heb. 11:1-3, 6: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2For by it the men of old gained approval. 3By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible...And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

B. Integrity – Joseph’s life was marked by integrity. He was faithful to the Lord and to those around him. His private and public lives meshed. The one thing that no one can take away from you is your integrity. It is, however, the one thing you can give away! Jesus put it this way in **Lk. 16:10:** *“The one who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much; and the one who is unrighteous in a very little thing is also unrighteous in much.”* The Apostle Paul said in **I Cor. 4:1-2,** *“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”*

C. Forgiveness – God’s love is demonstrated in His willingness to forgive. It is at the heart of the Gospel and it is one of the primary reasons Jesus came to earth – to show us our need for forgiveness and our need to forgive others when they wrong us. There is no other way to maintain loving relationships in this fallen world. We will see that Joseph’s story is not only one of faithfulness, but one of amazing forgiveness.

The prophet Micah summed it up when the Spirit of the Lord told him, *“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you; but to do justice, to love kindness (“hesed” or “merciful love” in the Hebrew), and to walk humbly with your God?”* We strive for justice (right living/integrity) but love mercy (forgiveness) and to maintain them both we need to have a humble spirit. We will see how the Lord taught Joseph humility which is the key to unlocking the power and blessing of God.

III. What Does It Mean for Us?

A. Our situations are similar to those we see in Joseph's life and the life of his family – Jacob's family was very dysfunctional. There were many shortcomings and failures yet God did not give up on them and they did not give up on God. God was still able to use them to accomplish his purpose and will. While they suffered for their missteps and sins, when crunch time came, they turned back to the Lord and sought to work on their familial relationships. They learned how to keep their relationships (with God and others) more important than their problems.

B. How do we respond to life's circumstances both good and bad? The key is always in our response! There's the old saying that life is not so much what happens to us but how do we respond when life happens to us! At the same time, we can learn to be prepared for life's challenges that will come our way sooner or later. Rather than be reactive, we need to learn to be proactive. Joseph demonstrated this approach time and time again. He took the initiative but did so under the guidance of the Lord.

C. What is the basis of our response?

1. private vs. public life - if we can develop a solid private life, it will impact the world around us (public) in a greater way. In other words, private victories will lead to public victories. Where do such private victories begin? In our homes! When do they begin? Every day. If we develop discipline in the four areas of the human person – 1) the physical 2) the intellectual 3) the emotional and 4) the spiritual, we will begin to gain momentum in our private life and this will, in turn, make us more effective in our relationships with others.

2. the foundation is spiritual - in order to develop a successful private life – a life of faith, integrity, and forgiveness we need to have a firm foundation that is grounded in our values and principles, not our feelings or circumstances. Of course, our values (and the principles that flow from those values) should come from our relationship with God, and specifically our walk with Jesus Christ who is *“the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”*

Jesus affirmed this at the end of His greatest sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, when He stated in **Mt. 7:24-27**: *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25“And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27“*The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.*”*

Once we are grounded in this foundation – then we need a plan of action – which means we are called to take the initiative – don't let life happen to you – you happen to it. And that means again being proactive not be passive or reactionary. Second, it means doing everything with the end in mind. We should ask ourselves the question, “What are we trying to accomplish in life?” How is what we're doing affect us personally as well as those around us, and how do our actions further God's Kingdom? In other words, is our daily lifestyle a help or hinderance to our spiritually, intellectually, physically, and emotionally growth.

Finally, to maintain a firm foundation means **to learn to prioritize**. In other words, **to keep first things first**. Keep tabs on those things that are most important for our life and your growth and make sure you are doing them. And what should we prioritize more than anything else? Faithfulness in our relationships – with God and with others!