

# God's Message to Us in Genesis 12-50

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## Introduction

Last week we began a new afternoon sermon series called “God’s Message to Us in Every Book of the Bible.”

- The Bible is given to us by divine inspiration, and because it is, it speaks not only to the original recipients, but also to us.
  - Rom 15:4 says: **For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**
  - So in this series, we will look at how each book applies to us in our day.

Ordinarily, I plan to preach one message from each book, but every once in while we will need to have two messages to cover a book.

- Such is the case with Genesis, the first book in the Bible.

Last week, we looked at the first 11 chapters, and even then, it was hard to even do an overview of all that is packed in those chapters.

- In chapter 1-2, the Lord tells us how He made us and how He made the world to be our lovely home—giving us language, marriage, work, even a garden,
  - as well as communion with Himself, creating us in His own image so that we could know Him and worship Him and serve Him.
  - He also gave us a test to see if we would have Him as our God—
    - He forbade us to eat the fruit of one tree to test our allegiance.
    - To eat was to reject God as our God.
- In Genesis 3, the Lord tells us how we did reject Him as our God by eating the forbidden fruit.
  - He reveals to us here that this is where death and suffering come from—the very creation itself was cursed because of what we did and we were driven from the garden—banished from paradise.
- But in Genesis 3, He also tells us how He graciously came with a promise to restore us.
  - He addressed the gloating serpent (who is the devil and Satan) who led us into rebellion.
  - He tells him that He is going to raise up a people who will turn against him—in other words, they will stop following Satan’s rebellion and return to God.
  - He speaks of one Son in particular who will destroy Satan and lead us back to God—and of course we now know that this Son born of woman is Jesus Christ.
    - It is a very remarkable thing to think that a Son born of a woman could destroy a powerful archangel, but now we know that He is the very Son of God who is able to conquer Satan and the curse.
    - By Him, there will be a people for God.
- And then from chapter 4 to 11, our LORD reveals to us these two lines of people.
  - In chapter 4, He tells of us of two sons born to the woman, Cain and Abel—

- Cain represents those who remain with Satan, and Abel represents those who look in faith to the promise of the Son that God will use to turn people back to Him.
- We see that Cain hates Abel because Abel is righteous, and though the Lord graciously pleads with Cain to turn to Him, Cain instead kills Abel.
- And in the chapters that follow, we continue to trace these two lines and through them God reveals two things that we need to know...
  - First, He reveals the wickedness that is in us all by letting sin take its natural course—doing little to restrain it.
    - There is long life, prosperity, and no immediate judgment against sin, so that we see what people are like if left to go their own way.
    - As it says in Genesis 6:5: **Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**
      - I pointed out to you that in chapter 9, God repeats this verdict even though Noah and his family remain.
      - Their acceptance is rooted in God’s acceptance of the burnt offering which testifies of His acceptance of the promised Son we know to be Jesus.
  - Second, He reveals His remarkable power to preserve the people He restores to Himself.
    - We saw that only one family appears to have been reconciled to God in each generation at this time—certainly that was the case in Noah’s day.
      - This shows that it is by God’s grace and power that we are kept for Him through His provision of grace in Christ.
    - We saw how God made a covenant in which He swore to Noah and to the whole creation that He would preserve the earth and not send a flood like that to destroy all flesh.
      - And then we saw Him doing just that by instituting capital punishment to restrain sin in chapter 9
      - Multiplying Noah’s family into 70 nations to populate the earth in Genesis chapter 10,
      - And breaking up man’s foolish efforts at self-salvation at the tower of Babel by confusing their languages in chapter 11.

TRANS> And this brings us to chapter 12 where we pick up today in our survey of Genesis.

- We will be looking at Genesis 12 through 50 today, Lord willing.
  - With chapter 12, we get into the section about Abram, or, as God later names him, Abraham.
  - He is, as we shall see, a key figure in redemptive history.

### **I. With Abraham, God teaches us that true happiness (blessing) is not of us, but of His grace.**

- A. It is very helpful to notice that what God first promises to Abraham is almost identical to the things the people were seeking at Babel.

1. Look at the first three verses of Genesis 12.
  - **Gen 12:1-3: Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**
    - There is the promise of becoming a great nation.
    - There is the promise of acquiring a great name.
    - There is a promise of being in a situation where you are secure—the people who are for you (bless you) succeed, and the people who want to harm you (curse you) fail.
    - There is also the promise of being a source of blessing to others—to have happiness to share.
2. Now look back in Genesis 11 and the tower of Babel and you can see that the families of the earth were looking for essentially the same thing.
  - Look at verses 1-4:
    - **Gen 11:1-4: Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. <sup>2</sup> And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. <sup>3</sup> Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. <sup>4</sup> And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”**
    - You see that they want essentially the same thing that God promised Abram—a great city, a great name, prosperity, and security—they don’t want to be scattered.
3. Of course it is the same today. Everyone wants blessing, success, salvation, security, happiness—whatever you want to call it...
  - We all want to be delivered from our troubles and fears, and we all want things to go well for us—
    - This is where we can have common ground.

B. But there is a huge difference that is clearly visible here between Babel and Abram.

1. The people at Babel wanted to make a great city and a great name and security and blessing for themselves...
  - Yet, God the LORD tells Abram that *He* will make Abram’s name great and bless him and bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him—and make him a blessing to all the families of the earth.
  - In the one case, it is something man does, in Abram’s case, it is something God does.
2. This is the essential difference between God’s people and those who remain cut off from God—whom we may call the ungodly.
  - a. The ungodly are still following Satan’s way—the way of independence.
    - They do not want to have the true God as their God.
    - Don’t get me wrong—they may want divine help—supernatural help—but they want it on their own terms.

- They may be religious, they may even be willing to make great sacrifices to get their gods to do what they want.
    - But at the end of the day, what they want is control.
  - Just this week, there was some talk on the news radio about assisted suicide and how it was helping people to feel as if they had control of their lives.
    - That is the ultimate desire for those living independently of the true God...
      - Adam and Eve broke away from God so they could have control of their own lives instead of living to please God.
- b. But when God calls the people He has chosen to salvation, all that changes.
- He calls them to come to Him on His terms and to come under His authority as their gracious LORD and heavenly Father.
  - They come with the love and the trust that is due to God, not to negotiate with Him or to manipulate Him or to try to control Him,
    - but to fully trust Him—to put themselves and their children in His hands, knowing that He will bless them.
  - They return to God as their God.
    - For Abram, trusting in the promise that God made to restore a people from the rebellion of our first parents, and looking to God for the promised blessing through the Son that He promised to bring forth from a woman that would deliver us from Satan.
3. Note well that it is God who calls us to Himself for this blessing.
- a. Abram was from one of the seventy families that was separated at Babel—
- God divided the nations at Babel, as we saw, to prevent them from becoming wicked like the people were before the flood.
  - If nations get on well without faith, it is always that case that they are soon overcome with violence, immorality, oppression, and idolatry.
    - That is why all through history, the Lord only allows proud nations to go so far in their achievements before He tears them down.
- b. But you see, Abram was from one of the families that was separated.
- He was no better than the others...
    - God came to him in sheer grace and called him to come to Him and be blessed by Him.
    - Abram did nothing to deserve this—it was all of God’s grace.
      - He had nothing to boast about—only thanksgiving to offer because God could have left him in unbelief as He did the other families of the earth at this time.
- c. If you have come to God for salvation, it is just the same with you.
- You have no grounds for boasting in yourself—only in God.
  - You came to Him because He called, and the blessing that He promises to give you is from His mercy and power and might and wisdom, not from your own cleverness or strength or goodness.
    - That is what we should learn from Abram’s call.

TRANS> But there is more as the narrative of this history continues.

## II. Next, the LORD shows us how He builds us up in our faith even after He has called us and we have come to Him.

- He shows us this in the lives of Abraham, of Abraham's son Isaac, and of Isaac's son Jacob, and then of Jacob's twelve sons.
  - Each one of these has a large portion of Genesis devoted to telling their story—to strengthen our faith and to show us how He strengthens the faith of His people.

### A. Let's begin with Abraham.

1. We have in the first part of chapter 12, the promise that we saw to make Abraham great, to bless him, to keep him safe, and to bless the nations through his descendants, or seed.
  - As an expression of initial trust in God's promise, God calls Abram to leave the land of his father and go to the land that God will show him.
    - Already, he is learning to put himself in God's hands.
  - Abram goes, but then he finds that things are not so straightforward about trusting God as he might have thought.
    - Let's look at several things that happen.
2. First, no sooner does he get to the land God told him to go to and there is a famine there (Gen 12:10)—and Abram has a large household to look after—
  - He does not have any children yet, but he has lots of servants and a wife as well as his nephew.
    - He goes down to Egypt (without asking God), and because of fear that they will kill him to take his beautiful wife, he lies to them and tells them she is his sister instead of praying (12:11-13).
      - He forgets that God promised to bless those that bless him and to curse those that curse him.
    - As it turns out, the Pharaoh does want Sarah for his harem, but no sooner does he start to prepare her than God plagues Pharaoh so that he is terrified and returns Sarah to Abram, cross with him for lying to him (12:14-20).
      - Abram is learning that he can trust God.
        - He goes back to the land and his nephew Lot separates from him and God promises to give him the land of Canaan to Abram as the place where He will bring forth the promises...
          - the promises to make him into a great nation with a great name and bring forth through his descendants the Son He has promised who will bless the world.
  - 3. But there is another huge challenge to Abram's faith—he is getting old and his wife is still barren.
    - How can he become a great nation that brings blessing to the nations if he doesn't even have a son?
      - In Gen 15:2, Abram asks: **“Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”**

- a. In chapter 15, God does something amazing—He swears with an oath upon His own name that He will multiply Abram’s descendants from his own body like the stars that cannot be counted.
    - He tells him that these descendants will come from his own body (15:4).
    - In 15:6, we are told: **“And he [Abram] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”**
      - He was trusting God to bless him, to bring forth through him a godly people that would bring forth the Son that God had promised to deliver them from Satan and sin.
  - b. But then in chapter 16, many more years go by and still Abram has no son.
    - So he takes matters into his own hands and disobediently takes the maid of his wife Hagar to have a son by her—and he gets one—Ishmael.
    - But in chapter 17, the LORD comes to him to tell him that this son of Abram’s self-effort is not to be the heir of the promise.
      - He tells him on no uncertain terms that his wife Sarah will bring forth a son in one year.
        - He gives Abram the sign of circumcision to confirm the promise as a perpetual sign that He will make him into a great nation in Canaan and will bring forth the Son of promise through them.
          - It is at this time that God changes Abram’s name to Abraham which means father of a multitude.
      - In Genesis 21, God gives Abraham a son by Sarah... even though she is 90 years old and Abraham is 100...
        - all to show that the salvation God has promised is not by human ability and effort, but totally by His grace and power.
        - We cannot bless ourselves, nor can we manipulate God to bless us on our terms, but we must look to God to bless us.
4. The final test of Abraham’s faith comes in Genesis 22 when God commands him to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering on Mt. Moriah (where Christ was later crucified—2 Chron 3:1)
- From all appearances, offering up Isaac would certainly destroy all hope of bringing forth a great nation in Canaan through Isaac from which the Messiah would come.
    - Yet, without hesitation now, after learning to trust God without question, Abraham takes his only son Isaac and proceeds to offer him... until the Lord stops him, promising that He will provide the required sacrifice.
  - In Heb 11, God tells us in verses 17-19 why Abraham was willing to do this:
    - **17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.**
    - He now knew that trusting God was better than trusting in his own wisdom.
      - God had taught him that he could be sure of Him.
      - We are to learn from Abraham to have such faith in God!

TRANS> But that is easier said than done.

- We can come trusting God for His promised blessing like Abram did when God first calls us to Himself, but it is over time that God works in us to deepen our faith.
- B. And so we see with Isaac, Abraham's son. He learns to trust God in the way that he needed to learn it.
1. He begins well from his childhood, even offering no resistance to his father on Mount Moriah when he is to be the sacrifice.
    - We see some weakness in him when he lies about his beautiful wife as Abraham did to save his own life and then experiencing God's deliverance—
    - But overall, we see him a praying man, pleading with God in Gen 25:21 when his wife Rebekah is barren until she conceives twins...
    - And we see him trusting God to provide for him among the nations.
  2. But then we see his area of weakness—with his sons—where he wants to take control of the blessing.
    - In an oracle at the twin's birth, God had said that the second-born son, Jacob, was to be the heir of the promise rather than Esau, the firstborn (25:23).
      - Just as Abraham brought much trouble into his life by taking matters into his own hands with Sarah's maid,
        - so now Isaac brings much sorrow by trying to manipulate matters so that Esau is the heir of the promise of God instead of Jacob.
      - If he had accepted God's oracle, he might have rejoiced in what God had promised to Jacob, and he might have led Esau to trust in the salvation that was to come through Jacob...
        - but instead he sought to put the blessing on Esau...
    - By failing to teach Esau to trust in God for the blessing of God where God had put the blessing—in Jacob,
      - Isaac turns Esau into a profane man who wants what he can get in this world and does not care about the salvation that God has promised.
        - He becomes like the people at Babel who looks to make a name for himself instead of looking for blessing through Jacob—that is, through Christ.
    - It should be said that with this poor teaching, Jacob, although chosen to be the heir of the blessing, shares his father's desire to control the blessing...
      - The only difference is Jacob is the one God has purposed to give it to.
        - But for years, Jacob thinks that he has to obtain it by his own clever tricks and deception...just like those who use tricks and manipulation to do evangelism and end up destroying the churches they lead.
      - In the end, Isaac learns to accept what God has decreed and submits to it.
        - Esau, on the other hand, being far more successful than Jacob in this world (Gen 36) becomes content in an ungodly way...
          - He is no longer hostile toward his brother because he does not want the blessing that will come from Christ in the future—he wants blessing now and he feels that he has it.
          - So he is a man satisfied with the world—he has his portion in this life.

TRANS> So from Isaac, we are taught that we cannot control God's blessing.

- We must receive it on His terms instead of trying to establish our own terms for getting it.

C. With Jacob, there are two great lessons that we are taught.

1. The first lesson is to look to receive blessing from God not by trickery, but by the prayer of faith.

a. We have already seen that he starts out trying to control the blessing.

- God keeps promising that He will bless him, but Jacob keeps on trying to secure the blessing by his own cleverness and brings much sorrow to himself.
- After deceiving his father so that his father blesses him instead of Esau,
  - Jacob ends up having to run for his life because of Esau's anger.
    - This is before Esau had become content with his worldly success.
- So Jacob is sent away with the blessing of his parents, not only to escape Esau who wants to kill him, but also to find a wife among his relations.
  - God appears to Jacob at Bethel as he is on his way to Padan Aram and promises to bless him with the blessing promised to Abraham and Isaac.
    - This is in Genesis 28, and Jacob marks the place with a stone and promises to worship the Lord there if the Lord prospers him and brings him back safely.

b. However, he still has a long way to go as far as learning to really trust in God.

- When it comes to finding a wife, he shows that he has not learned to pray the way Abraham's servant did when he went to find a wife for Isaac (Gen 29).
  - He becomes infatuated with the lovely Rachel, his uncle Laban's younger daughter, but his infatuation makes him vulnerable to his uncle's trickery.
    - In his desperation for her, he agrees to work for Laban for seven years, only to have Laban trick him by giving him his older daughter Leah.
      - Only to then demand another seven years to obtain Rachel.
- Because of his desperation to have Rachel, he foolishly agrees to this and acquires two wives.
  - This leads to all kinds of domestic troubles that haunt him for the rest of his life.
- Plus after working for Laban those additional seven years, it is only to realise that he has no way to support his growing family without working for more years—as Laban refuses to send him away with anything but his daughters.

c. The drama increases when God causes Jacob's agreement for income to transfer much of Laban's wealth to him, and then Jacob decides to sneak away while Laban is out of town.

- He is still living in fear instead of in faith.
  - Laban comes after him in hot anger to do him harm, and is only stopped by God, which Jacob discovers...
- But now in returning home with his goods, he has to face Esau who as far as Jacob knows still wants to kill him.
  - This is where he finally learns to depend on God instead of his own cleverness.



- In chapter 32, the LORD comes to wrestle with him at Penuel as he is crossing over to meet Esau,
    - And in 32:26 when the LORD has disabled him, Jacob clings to him and the LORD says, **“Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he [Jacob] said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”**
      - It is here that his name is changed from Jacob to Israel, for he has learned that blessing comes only from God!
      - That is the lesson that Israel, the people of God, are taught by God!
2. The second lesson he learns is to rest in God as a loving Father.
- a. We find that Jacob, even after he learns that blessing comes only from God, still has to go through years of bitterness in which he is very displeased with God’s dealings with him.
    - Because of the strife in his home with now four wives, having let his two wives each talk him into taking their maids as they compete to have the most children...
      - He ends up with a very divided family...
    - His favoured wife Rachel dies giving birth to her second son (Benjamin), her firstborn Joseph being Jacob’s favoured son,
      - And because Jacob shows decided favouritism to Joseph, the household strife only increases to the point that the brothers cast Joseph out and sell him to Egypt as a slave, making Jacob think he has been killed by a wild animal.
    - Then famine comes and Jacob’s family is starving and has to go to Egypt to buy bread—only to be accused of being spies and forced to leave one of their brothers behind and bring Benjamin to prove that they are not spies.
      - Jacob sums up his whole attitude at this point in Gen 42:36 where he says to his sons, **“You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me.”**
        - That is what I mean when I say that he has not learned to rest in God.
  - b. But to Jacob’s amazement, in chapter 43, the brothers go to Egypt with Benjamin and then return with carts and gifts (Gen 45) from Joseph who has become the vizier of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh!
    - Just when Jacob had thought all was lost, he finds out that God has been working out His purposes to save them all from famine through Joseph!
      - He learns that his gracious heavenly Father can be fully trusted to bring about His gracious purposes!
      - He dies in Gen 48 & 49, not in bitterness and despair, but with assurance and blessing on his lips as he blesses each of his sons,
        - believing that God will bring about all that He has promised!
  - c. It is the same lesson we learn by the cross of Jesus.
    - God sent Him to the cross and it seemed to His disciples at the time that all was lost—but only to discover in the end when He is resurrected (like Joseph was in a way) that God had sent Him there deliberately, that He might die for their sins!
      - What was an object of discouragement and despair turns out to be God’s way of salvation.

- And so it is in our lives...we go through life and we suffer and all seems to be lost—
- but then the Lord raises us up again and we realise that He was at work the whole time to bring forth His purposed salvation in us.
- He is a gracious heavenly Father in whose care we can safely rest.

TRANS> But there is much more that God teaches in the Joseph section of Genesis.

### **III. There is so much of Christ and the cross here.**

A. Like Christ, Joseph is rejected by his brothers because of jealousy (Gen 37).

1. Like Christ, they hate him because he is loved by their father and faithful to him, and because he exposes their wickedness when he comes around.
  - Furthermore, it is revealed to him by prophecy that his brothers will bow down to him... this makes them hate him even more.
  - So they sell him as a slave to band of merchants on their way to Egypt.
    - Joseph is cut off and as good as dead—separated from his father.
2. And then in Egypt he is rejected again, for righteousness... in chapter 39.
  - He serves his master in Egypt with such faithfulness that his master entrusts all that he has to Joseph's management...
  - But his master's wife accuses Joseph of trying to rape her when in fact she was trying to force him to lie with her.
    - Now Joseph is cast into an Egyptian prison.
      - But even there he continues to trust in God and serves so that he becomes a favourite of the prison warden and is put in charge of the other prisoners.
      - Like Christ, the more he is oppressed, the more his righteousness is seen.
  - 3. And then Pharaoh's chief baker and chief butler are cast into prison (40), where they meet Joseph, and Joseph interprets their dreams as a prophet of God.
    - He asks the butler, who is to be restored to Pharaoh (the baker was to die), to remember him when he gets out, but the butler does not tell Pharaoh about Joseph, leaving him in the prison for two full years...
      - But still Joseph trusts God.

B. But then, just as Christ was raised up to reign, so is Joseph.

1. It comes about that Pharaoh has a dream that no one can interpret (Gen 41).
  - And the butler remembers Joseph and Pharaoh calls for him and sure enough, by God's Spirit, Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream, telling of a great famine.
  - And not only that, but by God's Spirit, he also gives Pharaoh sage advice of how to manage the famine so that there will be bread in Egypt...
  - And he obtains such favour that Pharaoh raises him to sit at his right hand...
    - Just as Jesus was raised to sit at the Father's right hand.
2. And it is from there that Joseph not only saves Egypt from famine, but also his father Jacob's household as we have already seen.
  - But like Christ, he saves them in such a way that he brings them to repentance.
  - The details are too much to cover here, but in short Joseph does not reveal himself to his brothers when they first come to Egypt to buy grain in the famine (Gen 42).

- Instead, he accuses them of being spies and keeps back one of the brothers, telling them to bring Benjamin if they wish to see him again, to prove their story that they have a younger brother at home (42).
  - And when they do bring Benjamin (43), Joseph accuses Benjamin of stealing his cup and insists on keeping him as a prisoner (Gen 44).
- It is then that Judah, who had promised his broken-hearted father that he would look after Benjamin, steps up and offers to take Benjamin's place!
  - His beautiful display of repentance reduces Joseph to sobs of joy, and he immediately reveals himself to his astonished brothers.
  - This is when he sends them back to their father Jacob with gifts.
  - With Judah, we have a beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ as a substitute—taking our punishment so that we might go free!

C. In the end, Jacob and all of his sons come to trust in the Lord...

1. Jacob, in blessing his sons, promises that though some will lose privileges because of their sins, all of them will inherit the land—
  - the land that God had promised to Abraham.
    - Though they would not personally live in it, they will obtain it through their sons and, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the resurrection.
2. And in blessing them, Jacob points to Judah as the one through whom the son of promise who will save the world will come.
  - Yes, from him a king will come who will reign forever.
    - In 49:10, he says: **“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”**
    - And of course this was fulfilled—David was from Judah and he became king, and Christ was the Son of David who came generations after—
      - And He is this Shiloh to whom all of God's people not only from Israel but from the nations come to obey as LORD and to trust as Saviour.
3. The book closes out with Joseph assuring the family of Jacob on his deathbed that God will surely visit them (Gen 50:24).
  - He is so sure of this that he makes them swear that they will carry up his bones to Canaan when that day comes.
    - He is sure that God will raise them up to be a great nation there from which the Son that blesses all nations and crushes Satan will come.
  - The book closes with this great assurance of faith that God will surely visit His people and do all that He has promised.
    - That is the great lesson for us from the book of Genesis.

**Conclusion:** See that this great lesson is not lost on any of you.

- Genesis teaches us to trust in God as the one who will at last fill the earth with godly people through the Son of promise.
  - It is for us to rest in His promise by faith, and to walk with Him in trusting obedience as each stage of our redemption is unfolded until the promise is completely fulfilled at the last day.