



Revenge?

Followers of God faithfully remember His plans and purposes.

GENESIS 50:15-26

Making plans and following schedules are a part of everyday life for most people. Some people are locked into their plans and become distressed when those plans don't work out as they expected. Others can just roll with the flow. The Bible reveals that God has plans and purposes for all things; therefore, we need to trust His plans and purposes. Genesis 50:15-26 indicates that Joseph finished life well because he trusted God's plans for him and for His people.

- **How does remembering that God has a plan and a purpose change the way we approach life?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

GENESIS 47:1–50:26

This final section of Genesis does several things. First, it explains how Jacob and his family came to Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen. Joseph directed his family to go to the land of Goshen. Then he took five of his brothers along with his father to present to Pharaoh. The interchange that took place demonstrated again how God’s hand of favor was on Joseph. Pharaoh was pleased for Joseph’s family to settle “in the best part of the land” (Gen. 47:11). Jacob was 130 years old, and he described the years of his life as having been “few and hard” (47:9). It was a grim statement but true, much because of Jacob’s own doing. Second, the narrative shows how Joseph continued being a blessing to Pharaoh, to his own family, and to the nations as he directed the distribution of food during the famine (47:13-26). Third, this final section of Genesis contains narratives about the death and burial of Jacob and his last words to his sons (48:3-5,13-20).

Jacob summoned all his sons and delivered his blessings to them in an orderly fashion. Reuben was the oldest and Simeon and Levi were next after him. Yet because of their sin and violence, Jacob passed over them and pronounced that the royal line would come through Judah, his fourth eldest son. Thus, the Messiah would come from Judah. Jacob faithfully believed in God’s plans and purposes for his offspring, just as the Lord had promised him. It would be important for his sons and their descendants to remember God’s plans and purposes for them in order to keep the faith as they would endure hardships in their not-so-distant future.

Jacob requested that, when he died, his family should return him to the promised land of Canaan and bury him where Abraham and Isaac were buried (49:29-33). Genesis 50:1-14 relates how Joseph fulfilled his father’s wishes.

- **As you read Genesis 50:15-26, look for ways that remembering God’s plans and purposes impacted how Joseph thought and lived.**
-
-
-

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

MESSAGE SENT (GEN. 50:15-18)

¹⁵ When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said to one another, “If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him.” ¹⁶ So they sent this message to Joseph, “Before he died your father gave a command: ¹⁷ ‘Say this to Joseph: Please forgive your brothers’ transgression and their sin — the suffering they caused you.’ Therefore, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when their message came to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came to him, bowed down before him, and said, “We are your slaves!”

VERSE 15

After Jacob’s death, Joseph’s brothers expressed to one another their worry that Joseph had been *holding a grudge* against them, waiting for their father’s death before exacting his revenge. They apparently thought Joseph was going to do to them what their uncle Esau had planned to do to their father Jacob once Isaac was deceased (Gen. 27:41). Nowhere in the text did the brothers ask for or receive an explicit statement of forgiveness from Joseph. In fact, this is the first time Moses recorded the brothers’ admission of guilt for what they did to Joseph.

During their sojourn in Egypt, the brothers had time to learn about the suffering Joseph endured as a slave in Potiphar’s house because of them. Surely they learned how Potiphar’s wife had falsely accused him. They must have discovered that Joseph then spent the next thirteen years of his life in Pharaoh’s dungeon (40:1–41:14). Given the deep love Joseph expressed for Jacob and his younger brother Benjamin when he was reunited with them, they witnessed how deeply they had wounded Joseph by separating him from those whom he loved.

Consequently, it was incomprehensible to them that Joseph could forgive them of these offenses and not *repay* them for their wrongs. Joseph was certainly in the position to exact revenge. He had demonstrated this when they first came to Egypt seeking food (42:1-17). No doubt, as Joseph’s brothers resided in Goshen, they had opportunities to witness the authority Joseph wielded in Egypt. Joseph had the power to do whatever he wanted with them.

○ Why is it sometimes hard to accept forgiveness?

VERSES 16-17

The brothers sent Joseph a *message* through an intermediary. The *message* they relayed to Joseph indicates it came from *your father* instead of from “our father.” This emphasizes Joseph’s obligation as a son to obey the command of his father. Given Joseph’s love for and loyalty to Jacob, they apparently thought communicating the message this way would carry more weight with Joseph. Also, the brothers made it sound as if this was one of Jacob’s last requests before he died, communicating just how important this was to Jacob and, therefore, how important it should be to Joseph.


There is no indication Jacob actually gave this command to his sons. It is possible that while Jacob was on his deathbed the brothers expressed their concerns to him regarding Joseph’s potential revenge. It is certainly possible that Jacob told them to communicate this command to Joseph. It is just as feasible that they made the whole thing up because they were terrified of what Joseph might do to them.

The brothers’ message contained two parts. The first and most important was Jacob’s command to Joseph. It called for Joseph’s obedience to his father and provided Joseph a reason to listen to the second part of the message. The second part contains the brothers’ own plea for Joseph to *forgive* them for their *transgression* against him. The vocabulary of both parts of the message highlights the *sin* and *suffering* they had perpetrated against Joseph. Exposing the egregious nature of their deeds and describing them in a comprehensive way, the brothers fully confessed their mistreatment of Joseph, begging for his forgiveness.

They referred to themselves as *the servants of the God of your father*, hoping Joseph would recognize they were part of God’s divine plan for Jacob and his offspring who would become the nation of Israel. This statement also recalls the blessings Jacob bestowed upon his sons just before he died (49:1-27). The men hoped to appeal not only to Joseph’s loyalty to Jacob but also his loyalty to God. Hearing their message, *Joseph wept*. He realized that his relationship with his brothers had not healed and restored as it needed to be. Joseph had been good to them and had promised to take care of them. Nevertheless, their guilt made it hard for them to embrace his forgiveness and provision.

VERSE 18

Only after Joseph had received their message did the brothers face him in person. When they came to him, they ***bowed down before him*** and offered themselves to be his ***slaves***. This recalls Joseph's dreams as a boy, the men's first encounter with him, and the time when they were brought back to Egypt by Joseph's steward (37:7-9; 42:6; 43:26; 44:14). Many years back, Joseph's brothers had done everything they could to make sure Joseph's prophetic dreams could not become a reality. Now they were bowing at his feet. It demonstrates that God's plans and purposes will be fulfilled in the lives of His followers. No one can thwart them.

 **What impact does guilt have on our ability to relate to others?**

***God's plans and purposes will be fulfilled
in the lives of His followers.***

TRUTH DECLARED (GEN. 50:19-21)

¹⁹ **But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?
²⁰ You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result — the survival of many people. ²¹ Therefore don’t be afraid. I will take care of you and your children.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**

VERSES 19-21

Don't be afraid was the message they needed to hear. Because God is faithful to His promises and purposes for His people, they need not be afraid. God had communicated this truth to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob (15:1; 26:24; 46:3). Now, the heads of the tribes of Israel needed to learn this truth as well.

Joseph then asked a rhetorical question that communicated God is in control—no one else. He realized God alone had the authority to deal with his brothers according to their sins.

Joseph did not deny their ***evil*** intentions. However, he understood God had used their sinful actions to bring about a great deliverance

for many people, including them. Similarly, we can see how God used the wicked actions of sinful men to bring about the greater and more expansive salvation of believers through the person and work of Jesus (Acts 2:22-24). Many Bible teachers see similarities between the life of Joseph and Jesus. Both were rejected, betrayed, endured suffering for the good of others, and offered forgiveness to those who did not deserve forgiveness.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. (See Luke 24:27; John 5:39.)

Joseph's response to his brothers in verses 19-20 summarizes the entire message of the Joseph narrative: do not be afraid but trust in God, because He is faithful to accomplish His plans and purposes in the lives of His covenant people. Joseph realized only the hand of God could have accomplished what he witnessed in his life. Proverbs 19:21 speaks to it well, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decrees will prevail." Because of his confidence in God, Joseph was able to point his brothers to Him.

In verse 21, Joseph again repeated to his brothers not to be afraid. Then he reassured them that he would continue to take care of them and their families. He ***comforted them and spoke kindly to them***, which in Hebrew is literally, "he spoke to their hearts." Joseph assured them that the death of their father changed nothing concerning his loving kindness toward them.

 **How does staying focused on God's faithfulness help us demonstrate faithfulness to others?**

PROMISES ASSURED (GEN. 50:22-26)

²² Joseph and his father's family remained in Egypt. Joseph lived 110 years. ²³ He saw Ephraim's sons to the third generation; the sons of Manasseh's son Machir were recognized by Joseph. ²⁴ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will certainly come to your

aid and bring you up from this land to the land he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”²⁵ So Joseph made the sons of Israel take an oath: “When God comes to your aid, you are to carry my bones up from here.”²⁶ Joseph died at the age of 110. They embalmed him and placed him in a coffin in Egypt.

VERSES 22-23

Joseph’s long life and the record of his family’s continuance from one generation to the next highlights God’s providential care for His covenant people in Egypt and His blessing of Joseph in particular. To live a long life and see one’s grandchildren, much less one’s great-grandchildren, was a sign of God’s favor (see Job 42:16). These verses also indicate that Joseph and his family never returned to their home in Canaan. This is important information as Moses continued his writing of the Pentateuch, anticipating the beginning of the book of Exodus.

VERSES 24-25

Joseph believed in the promises of God, just as his forefathers did. As he was about to die, his thoughts were directed to the promised land of Canaan, just as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s thoughts were on their deathbeds (Gen. 24:1-7; 28:1-4; 49:29-33). Furthermore, twice Joseph told his brothers, ***God will certainly come to your aid.*** First, this indicates there would be hardship in their future. God would come to their aid because they would need His aid. Second, Joseph expressed this truth as emphatically as he could. Through Joseph’s prophetic word, God guaranteed that, in His perfect timing, He would keep His promises to His covenant people.

Joseph’s brothers needed to learn from the example of Joseph’s life. God can be trusted, and those who trust God must continue to trust Him even when circumstances in life are difficult. Joseph knew that God would some day lead His people back to the promised land. With this in mind, like his father Jacob, he wanted to be buried in Canaan. Therefore, he required his brothers to take an oath promising to take his bones back to Canaan and bury him there with his forefathers when they would someday leave Egypt and settle in the promised land.

VERSE 26

Verse 26 repeats that Joseph ***died at the age of 110.*** They ***embalmed him and placed him in a coffin in Egypt.*** It is interesting to note that Joshua was the same age as Joseph when he died (Josh. 24:29).

Joshua was the one who eventually brought Joseph's remains to Canaan and both of their burials are recorded at the conclusion of the book of Joshua (24:30-32). Joseph was at the beginning of Israel's time in Egypt, Joshua witnessed its conclusion. In the meantime, with *Egypt* as the last word in Genesis, it anticipates what is about to follow in the book of Exodus.

○ **What responsibility do we have to share God's faithfulness to future generations?**

BIBLE SKILL: *Look for ways the Old Testament points to Jesus.*

Bible students have observed similarities between Joseph's life and Jesus's life. The practice of recognizing such similarities or parallels is called typology. A type is a character, event, or institution that has a place or purpose in history but by God's plan corresponds to a later character, event, or institution. Typology helps us see God at work in all of history. Although Joseph was not the unique Son of God, he demonstrated some Christlike characteristics, and some events in his life parallel those of Christ. Joseph's willingness to forgive his brothers instead of exacting revenge is one parallel (see Luke 23:34). Another is that both were stripped of their robes (Gen. 37:23; Luke 23:34). Although their suffering had different purposes, both knew God was at work in it (Gen. 50:20; Matt. 16:21-23). What other parallels can you suggest?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can accept forgiveness from others.
- + Believers can faithfully exhibit God's character to others.
- + Believers can assure others of God's eternal faithfulness to His people.

○ **Discuss why God's people should continually recall His plans and purposes. What responsibility do we have to teach future generations about God's faithfulness? What are some ways we can do so?**

○ **What does Genesis 50:20 reveal about God's purposes for your life? How does it impact the way you relate to others?**

○ **Memorize Genesis 50:20.**

Prayer Needs

Sibling Rivalry as a Biblical Theme

By T. J. Betts

Siblings fight. This seems to be a universal and timeless truth. When siblings are young, the rivalry may seem harmless. If brothers and sisters fail to mature past such pettiness, however, the contention can become irreparably destructive.

Four of the five notable narratives in the Bible depicting sibling rivalry are in Genesis. They highlight the consequences of sibling rivalry gone awry.

CAIN AND ABEL

The first sibling rivalry occurred between the first siblings. Genesis 4 records the birth of Adam and Eve's first two children, Cain and then Abel. Cain became a farmer, while Abel was a shepherd. From the beginning, Eve recognized God's hand in Cain's birth. In the Hebrew text, she literally said, "I have been caused to get a male (child) with/by the Lord." She may have been referring to God's promise that the seed of the

woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

From the start, not only was Cain the firstborn son, the place of prominence in ancient culture going forward, but something was also special about him in Eve's eyes. She apparently set him apart from all his siblings after him. Having such high standing in his mother's eyes may have contributed to the staggering shock Cain received when God rejected his sacrifice but received Abel's sacrifice. Cain's anger and despondency and his murdering his brother because God rejected his sacrifice indicate Cain's sinfulness and arrogance from the beginning. The offering of the arrogant and faithless is always unacceptable to God (Heb. 11:4).

JACOB AND ESAU

The second sibling rivalry was between fraternal twins Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Rebekah's sons (Gen. 25:19-34; 27:1-28:9; 32:1-33:17). Their rivalry began in the womb. When Rebekah prayed

concerning the turmoil inside her womb, the Lord told her, “Two nations are in your womb; two peoples will come from you and be separated. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (25:23). When the twins were born, the younger one, Jacob, was grasping the heel of Esau, the firstborn. Esau liked to hunt, but Jacob preferred to stay at home. Accordingly, “Isaac loved Esau . . . but Rebekah loved Jacob” (25:28).

Even though Esau failed to realize it at the time, their rivalry intensified when he allowed his appetite and desire for immediate gratification to cloud any judgment he may have had. He sold his birthright, the right to a double portion of their father’s inheritance, to Jacob for a bowl of stew. The rivalry came to a boil, however, when Jacob and his mother conspired against Esau to steal his father’s blessing by disguise and deceit (27:1-38). The whole family acted reprehensibly in the matter. Isaac disregarded God’s word that the youngest would rule over the eldest. Esau disregarded the oath he swore to Jacob regarding the birthright, and Rebekah and Jacob acted selfishly and fraudulently and independent of God.

LEAH AND RACHEL

The next sibling rivalry was between Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29–31). Both were married to Jacob. Jacob wanted Rachel; but Laban, the sisters’ father, tricked Jacob into first marrying Leah, who was the older of the two sisters. Leah was married to a man who did not want or love her. Jacob instead loved Rachel who seemed to have everything going for her—except she was barren. Leah resented Rachel for taking away her husband and hoped having children would make Jacob love her (29:32-35; 30:14-20). Including the children borne by her handmaiden, Leah gave Jacob eight sons. Rachel was overcome with jealousy of Leah’s ability to have children. Trying to compete with Leah, she gave her handmaiden to Jacob, and she bore him two sons. Finally, God enabled Rachel to give birth to a son, Joseph. To the last, Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, as demonstrated when he faced Esau upon his return to Canaan (33:1-2). Later, Rachel gave birth to Benjamin but died in childbirth (35:16-18).

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Of the sibling rivalries in the Bible, the Bible gives most attention to the one between Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 35–50). Out of Jacob’s many sons, Joseph was

his favorite. Joseph was the son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Jacob gave Joseph a cloak that may have denoted authority over his brothers. It, at least, distinguished him from them as the special object of their father's love. Consequently, "When his brothers saw that their father loved him [Joseph] more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him" (37:4). Joseph's dreams of his brothers bowing down to him intensified their hatred (37:8).

THE PRODIGAL SON

The last story depicting sibling rivalry in the Bible is in Jesus's parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus precedes the story with the parables of the lost sheep (vv. 3-7) and the lost coin (vv. 8-10). Both depict God's love for someone who is lost and the rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. Jesus's audience consisted of tax collectors and sinners, plus Pharisees who were complaining about His receiving sinners. In the parable of the prodigal son, the sibling rivalry comes to light when, with open arms, his best robe, and a ring, the father receives his wayward and younger son who had abandoned his family and completely squandered his

inheritance. Moreover, the father threw an expensive party for the returning son. When the older son returned from working in the fields, he was furious because his father had never thrown such a party for him—even though he had remained with his father all that time. Instead of rejoicing with his father over the return of his lost brother, the older son was jealous and stewing in self-righteousness—even though everything the father had belonged to him.

OBSERVATIONS

A few observations rise out of these stories concerning sibling rivalry. First, they each portray selfishness and jealousy in at least one of the siblings. Second, the stories depict destroyed relationships or potentially destroyed relationships at best—and, at worst—emotional and physical harm. Finally, they show how strongly parenting influences the relationships between siblings. We should not be surprised that God's Word exclaims in Psalm 133:1, "How delightfully good it is when brothers live together in harmony!"

This article originally appeared in the Winter 2018-19 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. T. J. Betts is professor of Old Testament interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

COMING **NEXT QUARTER**

ACTS 1-12

Session 1: **Commissioned** (Acts 1:4-11,23-26)

Session 2: **Empowered** (Acts 2:5-16,36-38)

Session 3: **United** (Acts 2:41-47)

Session 4: **Placed** (Acts 3:12-26)

Session 5: **Emboldened** (Acts 4:8-21)

Session 6: **Accountable** (Acts 4:36-5:11)

Session 7: **Worthy** (Acts 5:29-42)

Session 8: **Serving** (Acts 6:1-15)

Session 9: **Baptizing** (Acts 8:26-39)

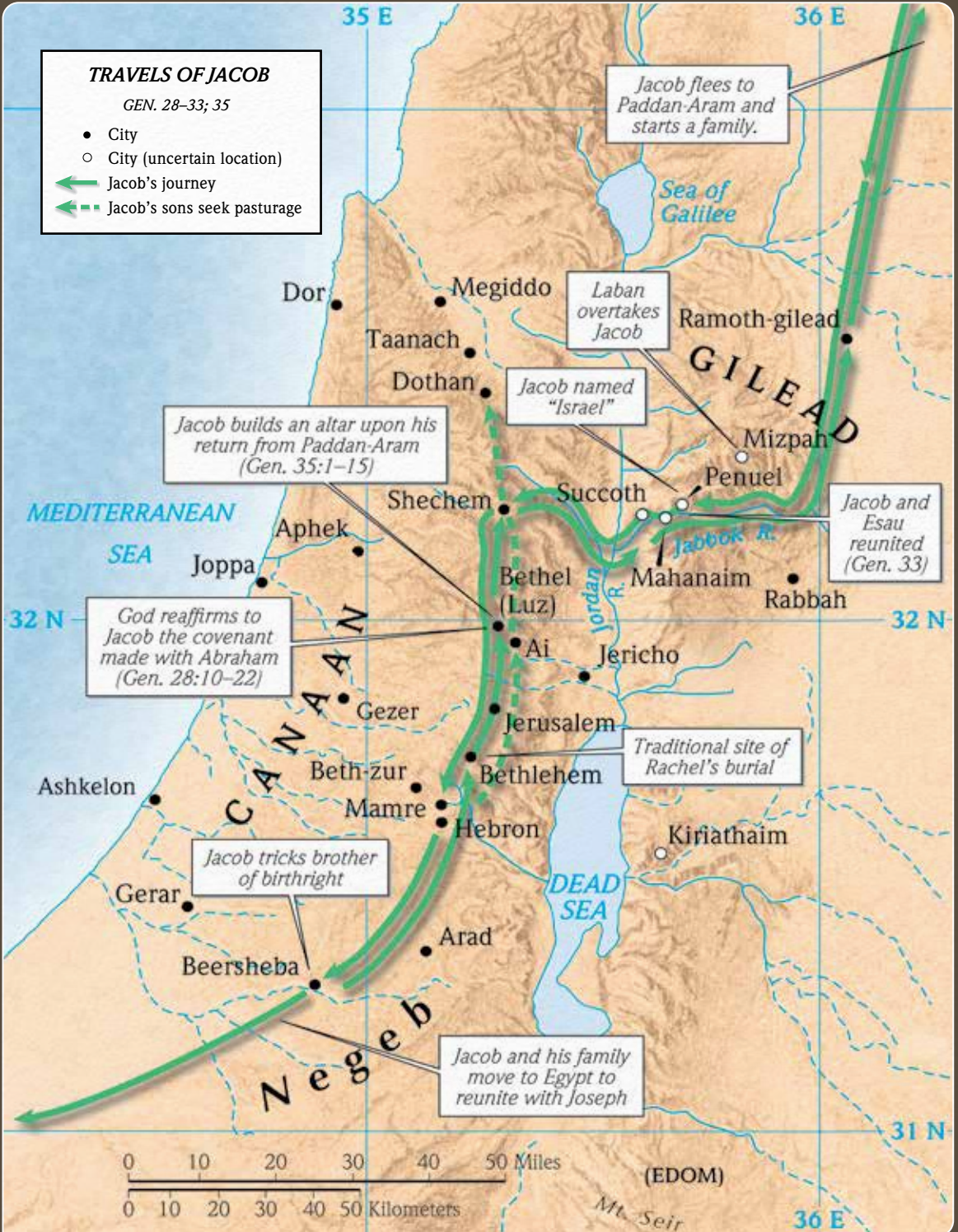
Session 10: **Calling** (Acts 9:3-16)

Session 11: **Healing** (Acts 9:32-43)

Session 12: **Including** (Acts 10:34-48)

Session 13: **Praying** (Acts 12:6-18)

The Travels of Jacob



"The Travels of Jacob" is adapted from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1990), 48. Used with permission.

GENESIS 20–50

For many, family makes all the difference. Our families shape us and test us. In big and small ways, we are who we are because of them. In Genesis 20–50, readers get a deep dive into one particular family: the descendants of Abraham. Through these patriarchs, God built the nation of Israel and established a line to the Savior. What’s more, their examples of faith continue to resonate with Christ followers today. And these studies bring their stories to life.

Lifeway adults

goexplorethebible.com

RELIGION / Biblical Studies / Bible Study Guides

