

In the Beginning, God...

Introduction

We began with the generations - took a break and looked closely at sacred geography, and we now return to the final generational narrative in the book of Genesis.

Genesis 2:4 (ESV) 4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

Genesis 5:1 (ESV) 5 This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.

Genesis 6:9 (ESV) 9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.

Genesis 10:1 (ESV) 1 These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

Genesis 11:10 (ESV) 10 These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood.

Genesis 11:27 (ESV) 27 Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot.

Genesis 25:12 (ESV) 12 These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham.

Genesis 25:19 (ESV) 19 These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac,

Genesis 36:1 (ESV) 36 These are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom).

Genesis 37:2 (ESV) 2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

Each word 'generations' comes from the Hebrew word תּוֹלְדָה *tôwledâh*, It carries significance in that it fundamentally refers to the story or genetic line that came from a person or event.

More precisely, it encompasses "genealogies, genealogical records," and even history, stories within the specific history, family history, or genealogical history—words describing a family or line of descendants.

The word's actual usage in Scripture reveals its deeper significance. In the Old Testament, Toledot refers to what is produced or brought into being by someone, or follows therefrom.

The Toledot heading introduces the historical result of an ancestor and could be loosely rendered, “*This is what came of ...*” or “*This is where it started from.*” This means the term doesn’t simply list ancestors—it describes the outcomes and developments that flow from them.

There are two significant standouts within the Toledot narratives written into the book of Genesis.

First is that Abraham lacks a Toledot heading. Unlike others, Abraham’s story is introduced under the Toledot of Terah.

Secondly, The way the Toledot heading of Jacob is written is unique among the writings in that it begins with Joseph and it will end with Joseph in chapter 50:22-26.

Our focus over the next number of weeks will be on Joseph whose life will set the stage and preserve the children of Israel when vengeance and retribution would be the normal human response.

Message:

1. The story of Joseph

Joseph's story is about far more than colorful coats and Egyptian prisons. It is the story of a man who continues to trust God while almost everyone around him chooses jealousy, deception, revenge, and selfishness.

Every chapter presents Joseph with another opportunity to become bitter. Yet every chapter reveals another reason he chose faith instead.

The story of Joseph is one of living faithfully while others take advantage or outright lie and deceive. It is a story of one man choosing forgiveness while others accuse, take vengeance against those who have done wrong and murder those who are considered enemies.

It is also a story of adversity and the choice of faith above the choice of despair and bitterness. Joseph is wronged by his brothers, then Potiphar and his wife, finally he is wronged by the cupbearer who failed to honor a promise made while in prison.

It is the story of the human experience after the fall and one man's decision to remain faithful to God in the midst of opposition and every circumstance that demanded a different response.

2. The Stage is Set

Genesis 37:3–5 (ESV) 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.

4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. 5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more.

Joseph's brothers hated him and did not wish him well. The word peacefully, is taken from the Hebrew word 'Shalom' meaning peace or well being.

There are three reasons scripture point out for their hatred of him. Joseph's immaturity - favoritism and treatment by Jacob - their own sinful jealousy.

The scripture tells us that he had a dream and they hated him more than before.

It wasn't the dream that planted the seeds of hate,

2... Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

It was also the love of a father who chose to make a difference between his sons because of his favorite wife.

If there is ever a good illustration as to why God did not approve multiple marriages this story is that illustration. Favorite wife - loved above all others - favorite son - who thinks he has a secure place in the home, because of his mother and because of how his father treats him.

Everything that happens is a perfect storm of interpersonal relationships, and family dynamics that coalesce into anger - bitterness - hatred and eventually action against a teenage boy.

We might notice that this ‘Toledot’ opens without any mention of God. Instead it points us to the human interaction and how quickly and easily a family that has met with God and has had a relationship with God, can move away from godly pursuits in a single generation.

Finally, the hatred was fueled by Joseph’s own immaturity and lack of wisdom. He spoke ill of his brothers, took a bad report back to his father and made his older brothers look bad. We are not told what they did, nor how bad it was, it may have been little or nothing but Joseph in his desire to please his father, slandered his brothers so they refused to offer him ‘shalom’ peaceful speak.

The idea that they did not want him to prosper any further than he already had, leads to their poisoned speech with the other brothers.

This then sets the stage for the revelation of the dream

3. The Dreamer

Genesis 37:6–11 (ESV) 6 He said to them, “Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.”

8 His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

9 Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?”

11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

This is the birth of the dream. No one including Jacob can see how this will come to pass. Yet, only one, Joseph, believes that it will, because it has come from God.

There is a psychological reality that holds true across the ages. Viktor Frankl wrote in his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning* “*Those who have a ‘why’ to live can bear almost any ‘how’.*”

Despite incredible adversity and wrongs, Joseph found the ‘why’ to survive and to thrive.

Long before psychologists studied hope, God demonstrated the power of hope in Joseph.

In modern psychology there is a theory called ‘Hope Theory’ and C.R. Snyder spent decades studying hope.

His research concluded that hope consists primarily of three elements.

- A meaningful future goal
- Confidence that a pathway forward exists
- Motivation to keep moving toward it

Joseph possessed all three:

1. The Goal - God's Promise in a Dream
2. The Pathway - Trust in God's promised future
3. The Motivation - God had spoken

We should think of this way, the dream that God had given to Joseph became the reservoir he drew from in the darkest days of his life. His faith was from his hearing from the Word of God and believing it above all other circumstances that he faced over the next twenty plus years.

Paul speaking of salvation tells us, Romans 5:2–5 (ESV)2 . . . we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Joseph is for the believer the archetype of hope and faith. In spite of horrific circumstances, the story of his life continued to be one of hope and faith which in the end, brought forgiveness and reconciliation with his brothers.

Conclusion

Sustaining grace isn't a clear path, it isn't the removal of hardship. Often, it is the gift of a promise that allows us to keep walking through difficulty when life gets hard. Joseph won't see the fulfillment of his dream for many years, yet he faithfully serves each master righteously and with integrity.

When his brothers sell him into slavery, they believe they are ending the dream. When Potiphar's wife lies, it seems that the dream is over. When the cupbearer forgets, the dream dims further. Yet each step, each event in the story of Joseph moves him closer to the dream, not further from it.

Through it all, we see God's providence and His sustaining grace, carrying him into the future God intends for him and for the family that betrayed him.