

The End of the Beginning



SABBATH—DECEMBER 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 41:41–50:26.

MEMORY VERSE: “God sent me [Joseph] ahead of you [Joseph’s brothers] to keep some of you alive on earth. He sent me here to save your lives by an act of mighty power” (Genesis 45:7, NIV).

“IN WORLD HISTORY, WE OFTEN SEE SOMETHING ELSE HAPPEN FROM THE ACTIONS OF MEN THAT THEY DID NOT ORIGINALLY PLAN TO HAPPEN. They may have succeeded in reaching their goal. But something else happened that they did not knowingly plan on happening.”—Adapted from G. W. F. Hegel, “The Philosophy of History,” in *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), pp. 16, 17.

This week we come to the end of the beginning. We will see something of the principle¹ shown in the quote above. It does not matter what plans people make. It does not matter what disappointment, sin, or trouble may appear. We do see “something else happen from the actions of men that they did not originally plan to happen.” That “something” is the Lord working out His plan in human history.

Most of us know the story and how it ends. For this reason, God’s leading as shown in Genesis does not surprise us. But, for those involved in the story itself, it took an unbelievable amount of faith to believe that God would work everything out as promised. No wonder Hebrews 11 says “by faith Abraham,” “by faith Isaac,” “by faith Sarah,” “by faith Jacob.” They trusted in what they did not fully see or understand. They depended fully on God’s promise and nothing else.

Sound familiar?

¹principle—a basic rule of life upon which other rules and laws are based.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 24**GOD IS FAITHFUL
(Genesis 41:41–42:23)**

Overnight, Joseph went from being in prison to the second-highest leader in Egypt. Now, he would face a whole new set of challenges.

What great challenge did this give to Joseph’s faithfulness to God? Genesis 41:45.

Genesis 41:50-52 pictures Joseph settling into his new life. The names Joseph gave his two sons show his own experience. The name Manasseh comes from the Hebrew verb² “make to forget” and shows the thought that his firstborn boy helped Joseph forget the cruel past. Ephraim, the second son’s name, means “twice fruitful.” It shows Joseph’s joyous feelings and the opening of a new chapter in his life.

As we read the rest of Genesis 41 and Genesis 42:1-17, we can see God’s leading opening up. We see the steps leading to the fulfillment of Jacob’s dreams in Genesis 37. Jacob’s dreams (Genesis 37:19) were being fulfilled in a way only God could have arranged. This story is a wonderful testimony to the power of God to fulfill what He says He will do. The famine³ driving his brothers into Joseph’s hands was a clear example of God working out His will.

²verb—a word that shows action.

³famine—not having enough food over a long period of time.

What words do the brothers speak among themselves that show they still felt guilty even after all these years?

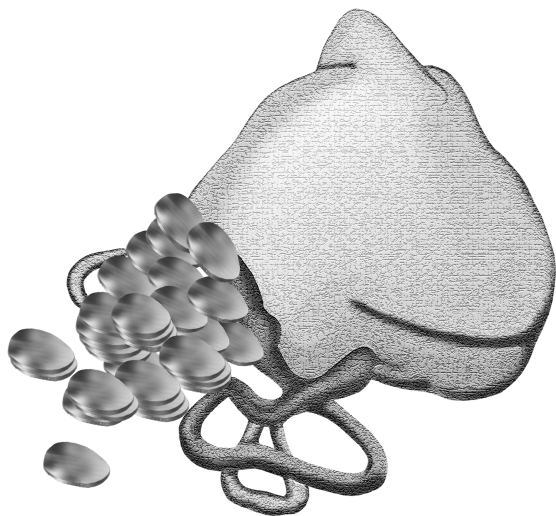
The great suffering of their father over the loss of Joseph made these brothers see the seriousness of their sin. Even worse was that they could not tell their father the truth, that Joseph was not even dead. They did not realize the grief that their actions would bring upon themselves and their family.

If you need to make an important decision, take the time to carefully think about all the possible results of your decision. Why is it so important to make sure any decision you make does not break any principles God has shown in the Bible?

MONDAY—DECEMBER 25**JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS
(Genesis 42; Genesis 43)**

Joseph’s plan for his brothers showed he was trying to teach them a lesson. And he wanted to learn more about his family.

Notice the brothers’ reaction at finding the money in their sacks (Genesis 42:24-28). What does it show about their faith and understanding of God?



What does Genesis 42:36-38 tell us about Reuben's character?

“During the years since Joseph had been separated from his brothers, Jacob’s sons had changed in character. At first, they were jealous, rebellious, dishonest, cruel, and revengeful.⁴ But now, they were shown to be unselfish, true to one another, faithful to their father, and, themselves middle-aged men, under his authority.”⁵—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 225.

Jacob’s answer to Reuben’s offer helped show the pain he had suffered at the loss of Joseph. But the famine was so bad that he had no choice (Genesis 43:8). Only then, he agreed to let his youngest son go back with them.

⁴revengeful—full of revenge. Revenge is doing or saying something bad to someone who has hurt you.

⁵authority—influence that creates respect and trust; power.

⁶confession—admitting you have sinned.

What was Joseph’s purpose in making the feast in Genesis 43:31-34?

Much to their surprise, Joseph sat his brothers down in the order of their birth. Joseph gave Benjamin the most food. Benjamin was the youngest brother. Joseph did this in order to “see if the other brothers would be jealous of Benjamin and cruel to him, as they had been with Joseph.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 228. Instead, the brothers ate and drank with Benjamin (Genesis 43:34). This showed Joseph that they really had changed.

No doubt a great deal of suffering had changed those brothers. How has suffering changed you? How can God use suffering to bring about something positive in someone?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 26

FAMILY REUNION (Genesis 44–47)

Joseph still was not done. The final test came (Genesis 44). Judah’s confession⁶ and willingness to take Benjamin’s place all for the good of his father was proof that Joseph’s brothers were changed men. It was only then that Joseph told them who he really was.



Joseph put his brothers through one more test.

Read Joseph's words to his brothers in Genesis 45:1-13. What does he say to show that his faith had remained strong?

Joseph's faith in God during the dark years was now rewarded. What he could not see before suddenly became clear to him. God had worked it out in ways he could not have imagined. This is a good lesson for all of us. If we always stay faithful, God will work things out in the end, even if it is at the very end (Revelation 21:1).



"I am Joseph!" (See Genesis 45.)

The rest of Genesis 45 is about getting ready to put Joseph's family together again. When Jacob hears about Joseph (Genesis 46), he begins the long journey to Egypt. On the way, Jacob stops at Beersheba, where his grandfather Abraham had worshiped and his father had built an altar. There God repeated His covenant⁷ blessings (Genesis 21:33; Genesis 26:23-25). As Jacob renewed his covenant promise to God, God told him again about the covenant promises made at Bethel. God also added the promise that Jacob's family would grow into a nation in Egypt (Genesis 46:1-4).

After Jacob and his family reached Egypt, a glad reunion took place (Genesis 45:29, 30). Why did Joseph want his family to tell the Egyptians they were shepherds, a job that Egyptians did not like? (Genesis 46:31-34).

Genesis 46:31-34 does not explain clearly, but Joseph must have known the negative influence Egypt could have on his family. By keeping his family separated from the Egyptians, Joseph tried to protect the spiritual purity of his family. Clearly, Joseph knew something of his family's spiritual responsibility. No doubt, how Joseph and his family were together again told him that this spiritual responsibility was real.

⁷covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 27**FATHER JACOB'S BLESSINGS
(Genesis 47:28-49:28)**

After spending 17 happy years in Egypt with those dearest to him, Jacob felt death was near. He called his sons to him for a last farewell.

Read again the promises God gave to Jacob over the years. Genesis 28:12-15; Genesis 35:9-15; Genesis 46:2-4. With the conditions and circumstances that surrounded Jacob now, why should it have been easy for him to believe that God would fulfill these promises? Also read Genesis 46:26; Genesis 47:27.

Jacob probably saw for the first time how God had been able to work out all that He promised. No doubt this knowledge gave him peace and comfort.

Before his death, Jacob foretold the future of his family (Genesis 49). God's power led Jacob to declare the truth, no matter how painful it was. Jacob withdrew the rights of the first-born from Reuben and announced a curse for the crime of Levi and Simeon. The later history of Levi's family shows how a curse can turn into a blessing.

The Bible shows both the good and the bad, the failures and successes of humans. The Bible does not hide the faults or the victories of its most

respected heroes. The Bible pictures God's men and women as having the same human feelings as we have (James 5:17; Acts 14:15).

Jacob showed the future to his family. This future included individuals with free will and free choice, especially in their relationship with God. In the same way, each of us experiences free will. The prophecies God makes about nations and their future are not the same as prophesying that individuals are to be saved or lost. God's foreknowledge of our choice is not the same as pre-deciding those choices. Those choices are only ours to make.

How do you understand the idea that "character is destiny [future end]"? How does your own character influence the decisions you make? What character changes would you like to make in your life? How can you make these changes?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 28**THE END OF THE BEGINNING
(Genesis 49:29–50:26)**

Genesis 50 is the end of the beginning. Genesis went from Creation, to the Fall,⁸ to the Flood, to the covenant promises God made to Abraham and to his seed (children). At first, it was probably difficult to see how these promises ever could be fulfilled. But by the time Genesis ends, we can

⁸the Fall—when Adam and Eve first sinned.

see the groundwork set for everything God had promised. The children of Abraham as a great nation are living as “a stranger in a land that is not theirs” (Genesis 15:13). They are a people who will one day be called out of Egypt in order that “all the nations of the earth [shall] be blessed” (Genesis 22:18).

What very human feeling did Joseph’s brothers show? Genesis 50.

Their plea for forgiveness was not necessary. Clearly, Joseph had forgiven them a long time ago. Now, finally, they could see just how true his forgiveness was. We see here again another example of Joseph’s character and honesty. In this way, Joseph acts as a symbol of Christ. Joseph forgives people for what many would think is unforgivable.

Read Joseph’s answer to his brothers in Genesis 50:19, 20. How is his answer a key theme of both Genesis and the whole Bible? What great principle is shown here? What hope should we get from it?

It is often difficult for us as humans to see it. In the same way, it was difficult for Abraham on Mount Moriah or Joseph in prison. But God is working out His plans to bring out “good” and to “save many lives” (Genesis 50:20, NIV). Whoever we are, whatever our situations are, we must remember

that the same God of Genesis is the same God of Revelation. Revelation is a book about our times and our story (Revelation 12:17).

Finally, Genesis began with the miracle of Creation. It took a miracle to create this world. In the same way, it will take a miracle to save it. We have seen that miracle suggested first in Genesis 3:15 and in Genesis 22. It is the miracle of Jesus crucified, brought back to life, and coming again.



FRIDAY—DECEMBER 29

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 224–240; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, comments on Genesis 41:41–50:26.

“Jacob had sinned, and had deeply suffered. He had suffered many years of hard work, worry, and sorrow since the day his great sin caused him to flee his father’s tents. He was a homeless escapee, separated from his mother, whom he never saw again. He worked seven years for Rachel. But he was cheated and ended up working twenty

years in the service of a cheating relative. Jacob saw his wealth increasing. He saw his sons rising around him. But he found little joy in the divided and quarreling family. He was discouraged by his daughter's shame, by her brothers' revenge, by Rachel's death, by Reuben's crime, by Judah's sin, and by the cruel treatment of Joseph. How long and dark is the list of evils spread out in his mind! Again and again Jacob reaped the fruit of his first wrong action. Over and over he saw his sons repeating his own sins. Jacob's punishment was very bitter. But it did its work. The punishment finally brought forth 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness [holiness].' Hebrews 12:11."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 237.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ If there is one important theme that you could get from the book of Genesis that you can use in your life today, what would that theme be?
- ❷ Much of the suffering we have seen in Genesis was caused by people's own actions. It is the same with suffering we see today. Does that make any difference in how we should treat those people and try to help them? Be sure to defend your answer.
- ❸ Ask people in class to choose a story from Genesis that gives them some useful truth in helping them deal with whatever personal situation they are facing.

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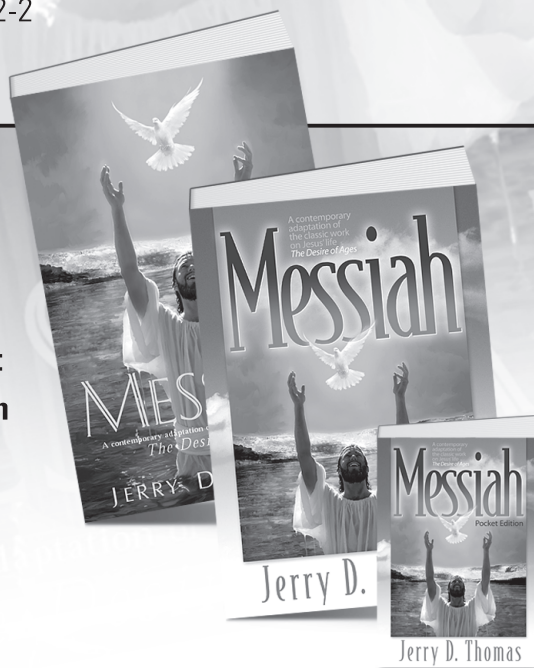
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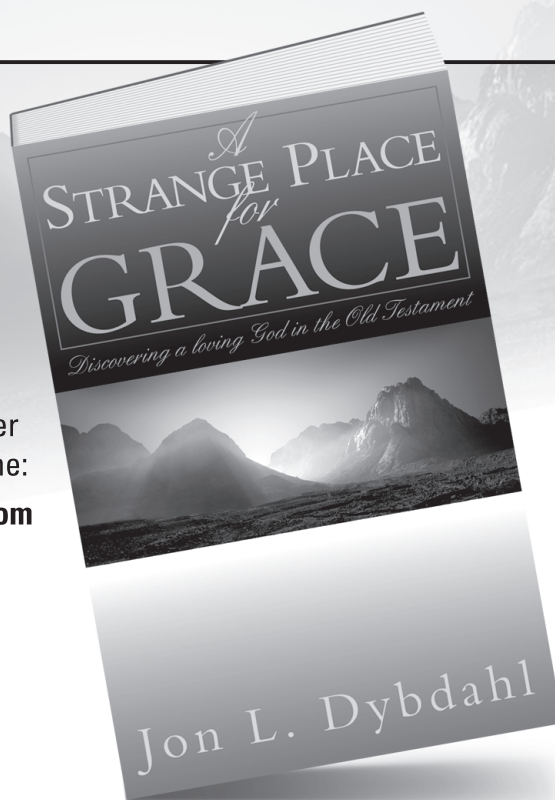
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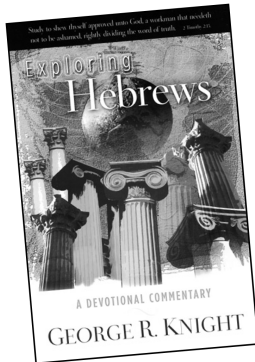


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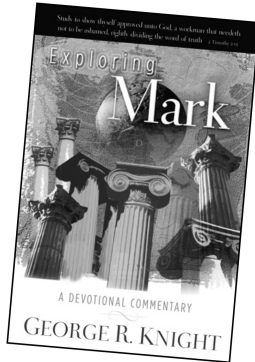


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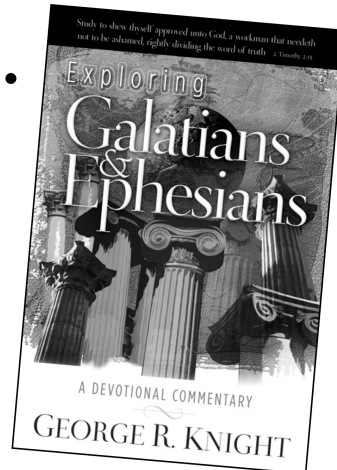
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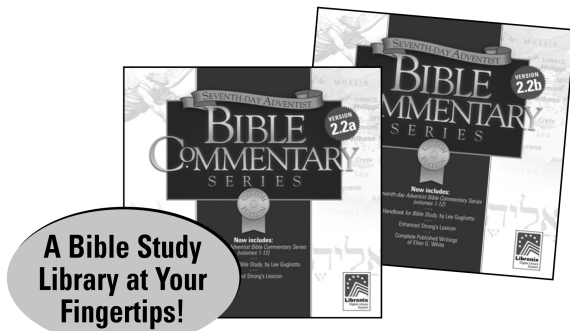
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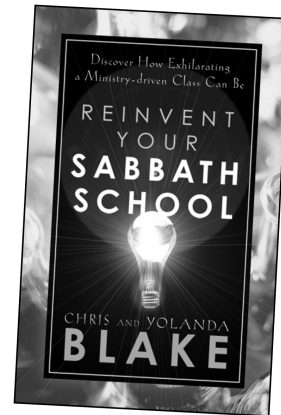


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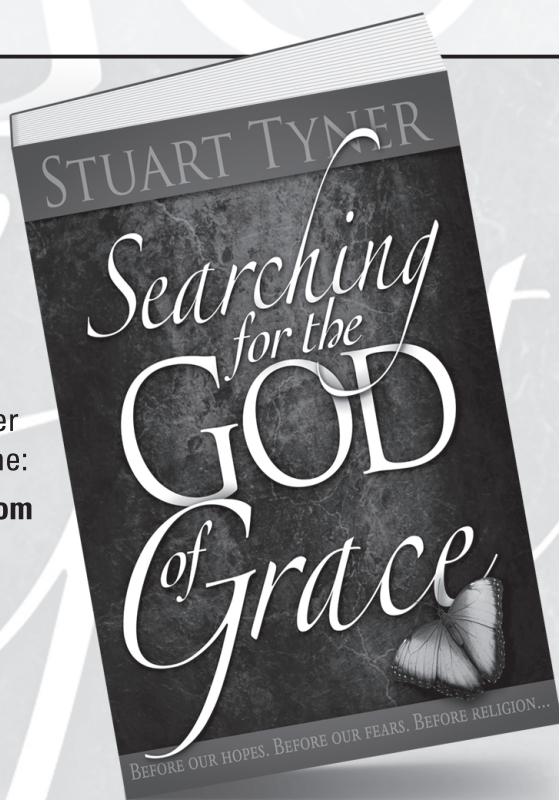
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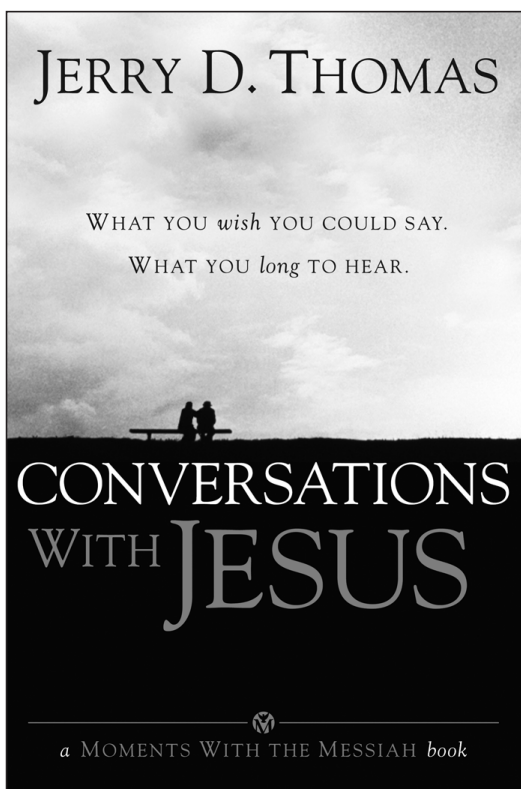
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