

# Under The Fig Tree



## WEEK 2

As we begin the second week it is a good idea to pause and consider whether you are making the most of these studies. Have you established a good routine for studying at times of the day when you will not be rushed? Have you read the passages carefully and asked God to inspire you? If so you will have experienced the way He will guide and inspire you. The brief notes that you make in your journal or notebook will record what has been highlighted especially for you. If you are not sure whether this has been achieved then consider how to plan differently for your times of study before you begin this new week. Remember that a good routine is to set aside two or more times of the day for study, so that you do not attempt too much at once. These will be times when you are not rushed. One such time is at the beginning of the day and another is at the close of the day. Perhaps you will have other opportunities in the middle of the day as well. Bible study and prayer are high priorities for us every day of our life, and we must not allow ourselves to be robbed of this. As you come to each new chapter read it through quickly to get the general picture of what it contains. Then read the notes for that chapter. This will raise some of the themes that you will find in the chapter. Then comes the most important part of your study and prayer session. Read the chapter again more slowly and carefully, praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration. When you are ready, make notes in your study and prayer notebook or journal. You will find that certain themes will be highlighted for you. Sometimes you will stop and be amazed at what you have understood in a new way, unable to move on from that section of the Bible because of the impact that it has made on you. More and more as you go through the Bible you will also find yourself turning to other passages that come to mind that are linked to the themes that you are studying. The Bible is a tapestry of interlinking themes.

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## Day 1

Chapter 23. If we review the story of Abraham thus far, in human terms nothing of great significance has happened that would be recorded in the history books of the world. He was not a great king, nor a great artist or scientist, nor anything else that the world values. He was a rich and honoured man of his day, but if the Bible did not provide a record of his life we would not know about him and he would probably have died in obscurity. Even the account of his life in the Bible is mainly about the struggles of an ordinary man and his wife who grew old together and who raised a small family. Yet, Abraham's life is highly honoured by God because of his belief in the promises God made to him. His life of faith reached a climax in Chapter 22 of Genesis. We are now just one chapter further on. We are no longer on Mount Moriah and the account returns to a description of what happens to all human beings. It is the account of Sarah's death. This is an important detail and God honours Sarah by the inclusion of this detail in the Bible. On the other hand it seems that Abraham's contribution to God's mighty plan of salvation has

been completed. It has been accomplished in the unseen world of faith. Earlier in the Bible we have read about such dramatic events as the Creation of the world and the great Flood. By comparison, what happened in Abraham's life, particularly on Mount Moriah, does not contain evidence that we can see with our eyes, but what was accomplished had eternal consequences - God has been satisfied. Abraham and Sarah will die in faith and not see the object of their faith in their mortal life, but what was sealed in the invisible was the eternal salvation of millions of people, and the commitment to Yeshua's suffering on the Cross. These unseen things are in God's mind over all history and are of more importance than the physical universe itself. Are we as conscious as we ought to be about God's covenant purposes continuing to be outworked today? Are we conscious of the role that we have in holding them in our hearts by faith, like Abraham, despite our *ordinary* lives? With this in mind, in this chapter we pause to remember Sarah, who died at a good age and was buried in the field bought by Abraham. There is dignity in the death of Sarah. We also have a picture of how bargaining was done in ancient middle eastern culture – all part of a very human picture in the midst of a most significant point in covenant history. Let us, also, live *our* ordinary lives before God and grow in the portion of faith for His purposes that will please Him. What is the object of that faith for you and me? Once our faith has come to maturity, we will come before God in full surrender, and God will be satisfied with our life. Our faith becomes God's opportunity to do for us and His people what He has planned. This is the partnership that God is looking for on our walk with Him. He will do so much more than we can ask or even think when He finds faithful people who are like Abraham, and whom He will call His friends.

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Chapter 24. Sarah was dead, and Abraham too was very old. So the time came to ensure that his son Isaac would find the right bride. Isaac was now to take forward the ministry of faith for the covenant purposes of God. His children would be born, the physical descendants of Abraham, who would, in turn, be responsible to live in faith before God. This is a wonderful account of the care taken to choose Isaac's bride under the inspiration of God. The bride was already chosen by God and the servant went out to find her and bring her to Isaac. This is an arranged marriage in the culture of the day, but nothing was left to chance. Abraham chose a faithful servant and all was accomplished according to the leading of God. Nothing is written into the Scriptures to draw a parallel with the Holy Spirit being sent by the Father to find a bride for His Son Yeshua, a bride prepared in advance, including all of the family of faith and including us if we live by faith. Yet, we can surely read this story on two levels. One is the ordinary human level. The other is to see this as a study of God's own ways. It is full of imagery, living metaphors, types and shadows of the higher purposes of God. Abraham is the human father figure who reminds us of God the Father. Isaac is the son of promise who reminds us of the Son of God, Yeshua. This is a full part of what we studied in Chapter 22 which records Abraham and Isaac going together onto Mount Moriah, foreshadowing God the Father leading His Son Yeshua up to the Cross on the same mountain two thousand years later. Now we are studying father Abraham preparing to hand over authority to his son Isaac and finding a bride for him. In our day the Holy Spirit has been sent to prepare a Bride for the Son of God, who has been given all authority in Heaven and on Earth. Read this chapter with both the human story and the symbolism in mind.

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Chapter 25. This chapter spans a number of years. Abraham died in the dignity befitting a friend of God. Ishmael and Isaac buried him in the cave that had been purchased. Abraham's purpose on earth had been fulfilled. Now his son Isaac was to be blessed by God with the blessing that had been given first to

Abraham, establishing a pattern of the covenant promise being held in faith by each succeeding generation. We are also in this line of faith. First would come the physical line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and then would come the Nation of Israel, from whom Yeshua the Messiah would be born so that the Covenant promises could be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. Then Gentiles would also be included to inherit both the covenant faith and the blessings of Abraham. Generation by generation God works out His purposes among His people through their *ordinary* lives. This chapter contains a summary of the family of Ishmael, remembered by God while His purposes through Isaac are being worked out. Two children are born to Isaac and Rebekah, and the human struggles go on. God declared at the birth of Esau and Jacob that the older, Esau, would serve the younger, Jacob. This will happen, but it will be in the context of human weakness and controversy, such as begins in this chapter.

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Chapter 26. This is the second time that a famine causes the family of Abraham to go down to Egypt. It is also the second time that fear of Abimelech resulted in a lie. This time it was Abraham's son, who lied about his wife. (Abimelech was probably the title of a tribal ruler and so this would be a new ruler with that title). As in our day one generation does not learn enough from the previous one to avoid the same mistakes they made. Even after all that Isaac experienced and all he was taught by his father this incident still took place. We also read in this chapter about disputes over water rights and the difficulty that Isaac had finding a place to dwell in peace. We learn from this that each generation must learn for themselves. Isaac has inherited the covenant blessing but he must also suffer trials that will bring him to maturity of faith. This finds echoes in the New Testament where Yeshua taught about the trials that would continue on this earth. Many of His disciples, for example, were executed by the Romans. The letter of James reminds us that we should not be surprised at the trials that we go through to develop patience and faith in us. So it was for Isaac, God did not protect him fully from all difficulties, but through his trials caused him to mature in faith like his father, Abraham.

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## Day 2

Chapter 27. It is interesting that much less detail is given of the life of Isaac than of Abraham. We must assume that we are told all we need to know. We learned the main lessons about growing to maturity in the life of faith through the longer account of Abraham. This may be why the account of Isaac is shorter. All of us will have a path of discipleship with the same principles and Isaac would have had his personal experiences, most of which are not listed here. Even so, in his old age when he was almost blind, he had not fully grasped all that he could have understood. Jacob, not Esau, was to be the heir of the covenant blessing for reasons best known to God. Rebekah seemed to understand this more than her husband. Perhaps it was because it was to her, rather than to Isaac, that God had spoken when Esau and Jacob were born and so she remembered this. She seems to have made Jacob her favourite, but perhaps this was mainly because she was protective of him, knowing God's plan. Later in the Bible we will read about God's own attitude to Jacob and Esau – *Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated* (Malachi 1:2-3). We are beginning to see this through Rebekah's attitude, because she knows something of God's plan. We must study the key words *love* and *hate* carefully, if possible from the Hebrew language. They are *ahav* and *sanay*. *Ahav* is the covenant love of God. The word has very intimate connotations and is first used in relation to Adam's love for his wife Eve. It is also used in relation to Abraham's love for Isaac. *Sanay* implies no such close relationship. Esau, like all those who are separated from God, go their own way without close relationship and attention from God, until they turn to Him and are included in the covenant family. Such contrasts are beginning to be drawn for us in this early chapter of the Bible. It may be hard for us to understand, but we must accept that this is what God wants us to know. He teaches us through the contrasts that are drawn in our lives and the lives of those who went before us. In this chapter we continue to see how the covenant plan of God goes forward despite human failings. We also see the importance of the blessing spoken over Jacob by his father, and it could not be amended, resulting in a prophecy over Esau which would hold great consequences for both himself and his descendants.

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Chapter 28. In this chapter Jacob begins his own walk before God in a serious way. He leaves home and begins a new path of learning beginning with his journey to Padan Aram, where, like his father, he is to find his future bride from among his own people. He goes away with the covenant blessing spoken over him and God meets with him to confirm the promises first made to Abraham. He meets God at *Bethel*, which in Hebrew is *Beit El*, the *House of God*. Ishmael, by contrast drifted away from his family and away from close fellowship with God, marrying one of Ishmael's daughters as well as the other wives he had taken from the area in which they lived. Two pathways began to open up in the lives of the twins. In this chapter we read about Jacob's personal response to God. God spoke to him and showed Himself to him, and Jacob responded. This is the second time that we read about tithes. We recall that Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek. Tithing to the gods of the nations was already an accepted practice. Melchizedek was the Priest of the Most High God. At the time of Abraham mankind was aware that there was a God above all gods. It was some time since Adam and Eve lost fellowship with the One True God and also some time since the Flood, so mankind needed to learn again about the One who created all things. They would have known about Adam and Eve and about the God of creation but needed a gradual and full restoration not yet accomplished. Melchizedek was the Priest of the God of Creation, who was known as the Most High God. Abraham was chosen by God and then, progressively through Abraham's line, God revealed Himself more and more, finally and fully through His Son Yeshua HaMashiach. Abraham tithed to God through the hands of Melchizedek in the best way that he could.

Now we find that Jacob's response to God was to promise his tithes. He began to trust God for all his needs and, in the walk of faith, would respond by giving back to Him the tithe (tenth) of all that God had given to him. This expression of faith and fellowship is the purpose of tithing. Abraham knew it and Jacob practiced it. Later, in the Book of Malachi, we discover that the principle of tithes and offerings went wrong for the Children of Israel. Tithing to God was a matter of the heart for Jacob and a response to a close walk with Him. When fellowship with God breaks down so does the heart intent of tithes and offerings – and God knows. Jacob resolved to find ways of giving back to God through what had been given to him. He would need inspiration for how this would be done, just as we do, and that is also part of our need to walk closely with Him. The family of God is one of giving and receiving, giving back to God out of what He has given to us.

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Chapter 29. God is calling a family from all mankind. That is the central purpose of His covenant plan. We learn about His family plans from the way He teaches us in our human families. So here we have an account of Jacob finding the wife prepared for him by God. It is a wonderful story set in the rural surroundings of the middle east of his day. It is a story which allows for the human characteristics of Jacob, the one who can scheme to gain his own ends, and Laban who can plot and scheme as well. God knows all this but it is still a story inspired by God in the context of human weakness to be recorded in the Bible. Jacob will learn many lessons through his years serving Laban. This is the way with all of us on our road of discipleship. God looks after us on the path of life if we are willing to let Him, but we also make mistakes along the way. In the end God's purposes are still fulfilled. Abraham had two sons instead of one. Jacob had two wives and two concubines instead of just one wife whom he loved, but still twelve tribes were to emerge as the Children of Israel.

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Chapter 30. Here are the details of the names of Jacob's children, the name of mother of each of the children and the meaning of their names. It is a good idea to make a careful study of this, noting down the details, because the tribes that came from the sons of Jacob are the focus of much of our Bible. Indeed, if we are grafted by faith into the family of Israel, in some sense this is an account of *our* family by adoption. We can be familiar with our family history because it is recorded here. In this chapter we also study how Jacob began to acquire flocks and herds for himself. There will be many questions as we read about what happened. At Bethel God had promised that He would look after him wherever he went. We see Jacob's scheming in the way he built up his own flocks and herds, but we also see that this was from God. Did God inspire the idea of the placing of rods before the animals as they conceived their young? After all, God had created all animals and He knew that He had given them characteristics so that they would adapt to their surroundings. Did he reveal this secret to Jacob? Perhaps, being so much closer to creation than we are, animals in Jacob's day displayed this tendency to adapt to their surroundings more than we see today. It was God and Jacob cooperating together to build up the flocks. It is important for us to realize that God is working with Jacob despite Jacob's struggles and immaturity, just as it was with Abraham and Isaac. This is an important lesson for us. God knew, even before Jacob and Esau were born, which of them was chosen as suitable for the covenant blessings. He did not choose Jacob because he was perfect of himself, but he knew that he could mould him along the way, like clay in a potter's hands. He looks for people who have a commitment to walk with Him, not wanting to make mistakes, but willing to learn from mistakes that are bound to happen, wanting

above all to please God and fulfill His purpose in their lives. This is the path where faith that pleases God grows in us.

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## Day 3

Chapter 31. At the human level we are shown Jacob's struggles with Laban. If we had no other information on which to form a judgment, we would not be sure who was right and who was wrong. There is the issue of Laban's animals and Jacob's trickery, on the one hand. On the other hand there is the issue of twenty year's work that Jacob has done for unfair wages. There is the additional problem to consider when Rachel stole the family ornaments, which were used as idols. This is a very human story of deceit and struggle. Yet, we also know that God made a covenant promise to Jacob. An Angel appeared to Jacob in a dream to remind him that God was with him. We know from the Bible that, on one hand, God does not show favoritism but, on the other hand, He is outworking His Covenant purposes. In later days, including our own day when the physical descendants of Jacob are back in their Land after nearly 2000 years of exile, we would be wise to consider these things. At the end of this chapter a pillar and a stone were set up as boundary markers between Laban and Jacob. Even these markers may continue to have meaning over history. What is God saying to us through these passages? We will not understand every aspect of His covenant plan when we study these passages today, but we must come back to them and other relevant passages as we continue to study their meaning for us. One important principle that we will see time and again is that God is faithful to His Word. Another principle is that His ways are not the same as our ways, so let's be careful of our reading and of our understanding.

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Chapter 32. The human story of Jacob moves forward in this chapter and so do God's plans for Jacob. With Laban behind him and Esau in front of him, with the threat of 400 men to face, there is no escape for Jacob. His difficulties have to be resolved in one way or another. He thinks of a scheme to appease the wrath of his brother, but goes to sleep at Peniel, very worried, nevertheless. This is God's opportunity to meet with him, transform him and bless him. A damaged hip and a limp may not seem like a great blessing but Jacob had to be humbled so that he could be a man of faith rather than a schemer. Jacob the schemer and supplanter must become Israel, one who fights with God, and who is a Prince with God. His name change reflects the change of character. This encounter with God along the path of discipleship is reflected in all of God's people in one way or another. The crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land is another symbol and later we understand this in relationship to baptism. We, like Jacob go through struggles because of our human nature, but if we trust in God He will change us and transform us into people of faith.

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Chapter 33. We can only guess whether God had already made preparations for Esau to be friendly to Jacob or whether Esau set out to harm his brother and changed his mind at the last minute. Esau had prospered in Jacob's twenty year absence and so perhaps time had healed the rift between them. They parted on friendly terms but went their separate ways. Jacob continued in God's plan for him, settling at Succoth - the Hebrew word for booth or tabernacle - and Esau returned to his own land. It is not the end of Jacob's troubles, but now with his new name, Israel, there is the beginning of a new era, back in the Land where he grew up with Isaac and Rebekah.

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Chapter 34. By this time Jacob's twelve sons and one daughter are growing up. Just as our attention gradually moved from Abraham to Isaac, and from Isaac to Jacob, so now Jacob's children move into the centre of the Bible account. Jacob's wrestling with God had taken place, marking a change in his character, but his children had had no such transformation. Another problem arose, this time between the Tribe of Hamor and Jacob's family. It begins with a disgraceful act by Shechem, concerning Dinah, and ended with terrible injustice inflicted by Levi and Simeon. This will have ongoing consequences throughout the generations of the Children of Israel, as we read in Genesis 49:5-6. We are learning that it is not only Jacob who wrestles with God but all of his children have a fallen human nature with which God has to deal. This is all part of covenant history, God is fulfilling His purposes and does not abandon His promises, but they lead to incidents due to human sin, which bear great consequences. The entire history of the Children of Israel bears witness to this. Be careful to make note of all that you read and later you will remember it as you continue to meditate upon the difficult path through history of God's chosen people.

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## Day 4

Chapter 35. Despite all the problems that Jacob has encountered, and despite all his mistakes and those of his children, God's Covenant promise remains firm. God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and, despite the sin of the entire world, He had a plan of recovery. From Adam's time to our time God has been fulfilling this covenant plan despite Adam's sin, Jacob's sin and our sin. We must not be complacent about our sin. Indeed, as Yeshua said, we must hate our lives in this world and, as we learn from the Bible time and again, we must repent of our sin. Nevertheless, we can be encouraged that we, like Jacob, if we have faith, will not be abandoned by God – His promises are firm and are fulfilled completely in the sacrificial death of Yeshua HaMashiach. Notice, in this chapter, how Jacob makes another step towards maturity. He learns through his latest impossible situation brought about by his sons Levi and Simeon, and so he returns to Bethel where God first spoke to him directly. He knows of his need and he remembers God's promise to him. This is over twenty years later. We too can sometimes return to God, remembering the promises He has made. If we return in faith, like Jacob, we will find Him ready to greet us. This is the path of discipleship. We, like Jacob, in taking a step forward, might put away something that has become an idol to us. Despite it being wrong, we find no comment in the Bible concerning the idols that Rachel stole. God knew the time would come when these idols would be rejected. He waited for this time and spoke to Jacob, at this time when he was in great danger from the surrounding people. He told him to return to where he first met with him and build an altar. When Jacob obeyed, God protected him from the surrounding people, renewed the Covenant with him and reminded him of his new name, Israel. It is interesting that it is only from this point on that this name is used for Jacob. Jacob has two natures represented by his two names and sometimes we see the human nature and sometimes the transformed nature. This is rather like us when we receive rebirth by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Sometimes the "old man" still dominates even as we grow stronger in our reborn nature. Jacob's second meeting at Bethel could be likened to the meeting of Abraham on Mount Moriah where faith that pleased God was shown to be mature. It is such faith that God wants for all His people and, if we are willing, we will find God helping us on our path of discipleship to grow to maturity. This must be a great encouragement for us. It also gives us insights into God's ongoing purposes for the Nation of Israel. We will study more about God's ongoing covenant promise to the physical descendants of Israel as our Bible readings continue. From Jacob's struggles and God's faithfulness in his life, we can be assured that, despite all our struggles, God will eventually bring all whom He has called to their personal experiences of faith and surrender, which can be compared, in a spiritual way, with what happened at Moriah, Bethel and Peniel. This is the family tree, into which all are grafted who have been called to live by the same faith as the natural branches of the tribes of Israel.

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Chapter 36. God made sure that we have an account of the family of Esau. Just like God shows that He has not forgotten him despite the way both Isaac was chosen in a special way for God's covenant purposes. Surely God takes careful note of all the families of the earth. Esau's descendants became great tribes as time went on. Both the descendants of Ishmael and the descendants of Esau are on earth today, identified among the Arab nations. God has a plan for them too. The descendants of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob and the Twelve Tribes are prominent in covenant history, but the ultimate intention is to call some from every tribe to faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As we read about Esau's family tree today we might ask God for insight as to the balance of His purposes in redeeming fallen mankind through His covenant plan. Do not go too quickly through this list of names.

God includes you in such lists stored up in Heaven, and look how carefully He has remembered you in His eternal plans.

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Chapter 37. Abraham had a long life and many struggles. He entered into the covenant purposes of God. His struggles did not cease. The object of the path of learning through those struggles was to achieve faith on His walk with God. This brought him to the point of trusting his son of promise to God on the altar at Mount Moriah. After this ultimate act of faith little more is heard of Abraham. In fact, after the death of Sarah, he seemed to live quite an ordinary life. He took new wives and lived to be an old man with nothing else to attain in the purpose of the Covenant. The key issue was that he died in faith in God for the promises to be fulfilled and the story moved on through his son Isaac. Isaac's path of maturing faith was similar and then he died, as was recorded in no especially significant way, at the end of Chapter 35. Jacob was by then centre stage for God's ongoing purposes. Bethel was to Jacob what Moriah had been for Abraham. Before the altar at Bethel, Jacob expressed faith in God after a long and troubled journey in life. Now Covenant history moves on and is expressed through Israel's sons, according to the special calling of God on their individual lives. Each is specially chosen and each will live a life whereby faith grows to maturity and then on to the next generation and the next generation, up to today and beyond. This includes us. We are part of a generation growing in faith in God for His purposes to be worked out in this world and in all eternity. That is why Chapter 11 of the Epistle to the Hebrews is so relevant to us all. In this chapter we find a list of those who went before us. We, like them, have a central purpose in our lives, to grow and walk in faith with the God of Israel. In Chapter 37 of Genesis we find that Joseph is singled out in a special way. His life has many echoes that will be remembered when Yeshua is revealed. Joseph is not accepted by his brothers, betrayed, plotted against, put into a pit, sold, lied about, and yet used as the saviour of the entire family, waiting for the appropriate moment to reveal himself to them. The account begins in this chapter and continues through succeeding chapters of Genesis. Read them all carefully. This story lays the foundational principles that we need to understand. The call of Jacob is now fulfilled through the life of his sons, especially Joseph at this time – "This is the history of Jacob. Joseph..." (Verse 2).

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Chapter 38. Joseph has gone to Egypt, considered dead. It is amazing how, in the midst of the story of Joseph and his betrayal, we have a chapter about Judah. What God is doing through Joseph is completely hidden from him. This account of Judah and Tamar is full of sin, at the time when God is preparing salvation for them. Even Jacob is not aware of what God is doing and believes Joseph to be dead. Consider this fact as you read this chapter and then also recall that Yeshua was born from the line of Judah. Indeed, he was from the line of Tamar through Perez. On the one hand covenant history is proceeds through Joseph. On the other hand through the sinful line of Judah, comes the Messiah. The name Perez is associated with breaking out and is very appropriate name for the break out of the Kingdom of God that will come from his line of descendants. Learning from those days we must be careful to realize that God is still at work in both what is seen and in the unseen, overcoming the sinful deeds that enter into the lives of all His people, in order to bring forth the Kingdom. Many people in the world will be saved out of the spiritual Egypt – the world of sin - because of Yeshua, of whom Joseph was a type. Even a great multitude from the Tribes of Israel and Judah will be saved, despite their present blindness to what their chosen brother, Yeshua, has done for them. He is thought dead and

what He promised is forgotten by many, but He lives and will accomplish the purpose for which He came into this world.

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## Day 5

Genesis 39. The story of Joseph gives us clear details of this important time in the history of the people of God. There are also parallels that point to Yeshua and principles that we can see in our own lives. Because of these principles we can be encouraged on our own walk of faith especially in troubled times. Faith is given to us as we go through life's struggles and find that God's promises are true. Faith in God implies trust for the present and for the future, whatever our external circumstances might seem to be. Joseph had done nothing to deserve exile in Egypt. We can be sure that he had tendencies to sin like every other ordinary human being, but this is not the focus of the story. He was chosen by God and given a promise in the visions he received as a young man in his father's house. His father also made him his favourite because he was the firstborn of his wife Rachel. Rachel died when Benjamin, her second son was born, so it is natural that Jacob had a special concern for Joseph and for Benjamin. It is interesting that at this stage none of the sons, not even Joseph, is singled out in quite the same way that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were, as the one person chosen to be inheritor of the covenant promise. A more general picture is opening out where eventually multitudes of God's chosen people will each have a part in the covenant purposes of God. We will see that the picture widens out to include millions from the physical line of Israel. It will then narrow down to fulfillment of the entire Covenant through the One Special Son, Yeshua the Messiah. It will then widen out again to include all who are chosen from the entire world. Joseph had a prominent role and found himself in Egypt because of no fault of his own. This is part of Torah, the teaching of God, and so when Yeshua later said that in this world we will have troubles our thoughts should turn to this and other accounts of the troubles that beset the Children of God in their path of growing faith and obedience. These accounts also remind us that we are to rejoice in our sufferings that will come upon all who follow the path of faith. The Apostles of Yeshua learned to rejoice that they had been counted worthy to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. As we read the account of Joseph let us make note of the details so that we remember them in our own lives and as we continue to study the Torah (teaching) of God. Joseph was blessed by God in Potiphar's house while seeking to do good, but still was caught up in a false accusation. He found himself in prison but was still blessed by God. God was with him in all circumstances, even though the circumstances were not the ones he would have expected. God builds faith and outworks His purposes in circumstances where His people are learning to trust Him.

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Chapter 40. It is beyond our ability to fully understand God's ways. This requires more than our human minds can achieve. Greek philosophy can be an enemy of faith because it seeks to reduce all understanding to our human level. Hebraic faith deals with what is illogical in human terms. We learn to trust God for wisdom higher than ours. How can we tell in what way the butler and the baker ended up in prison, one to be later executed and one to be restored to serve Pharaoh? God does not sin, nor cause anyone to sin, and yet there is a course in human life that is beyond chance happenings. God prepared Joseph to trust him for the interpretation of dreams and all this in advance of the incidents while he was in prison. So, in ways in which we can only wonder and which results in worship of God, we read of what happened in the prison. We learn what Joseph himself was learning. The long time in prison, the seeming paradox of interpreting the dreams and yet still not being released is part of God's teaching for Joseph and for us.

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Chapter 41. It took two more years before God acted once more. How amazing that the course of history can change through the simplest of things when God finally intervenes. In this case the course of history changed through Pharaoh's dreams, and now we realize that God had made all the necessary preparations for the future. The preparations were not in great empires nor great inventions, but in the preparation of one man, Joseph. It might cause us to laugh at adversity to think about this powerful work of God going on while Joseph is in the impossible situation of a prison sentence with no way out – humanly speaking. Yet, in the space of one chapter and in the course of two dream interpretations Joseph is taken from being in the hopeless situation of prison to being the second in command of one of the most powerful nations! Notice a hint in the timing - Joseph was thirty years old when this happened. This, later, was to be the age when Jewish Rabbis could assume their teaching ministry, and this was the age when Yeshua began His public ministry. Joseph becomes a type of saviour for his people from this point on. The account contains many symbols as the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine take place. Make note of these things for further meditation when we come to parallels later in Scripture. We are still setting foundations in the teaching programme of God, the Torah, outworked for us through the history of the world and of His people.

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Chapter 42. Over these years of Joseph's pilgrimage he has become wiser through experience. He has found that God's ways are not our ways. While this is being taught to him in Egypt his family have been living out their own lives in the land of Canaan. The famine is the prompt God has prepared to bring the entire family down to Egypt. First ten sons come down to buy some grain. We do not have the full explanation of the way Joseph dealt with his brothers, but after all he had experienced he would surely know that God's promises were being fulfilled. He was reminded of his own dreams, but he did not jump to conclusions. He had once shared his dreams and been misunderstood. Now he is more cautious and we sense that he is acting on the wisdom of God. So he is careful. He seems to play a trick on his brothers, but he knows that God has an end in view that will come about according to the dream and it will all be for good in the end. We can sense, in Joseph, the love of God for his brothers as we read this account of the first journey down to Egypt for the grain. We might stop and consider this in relation to today when God's plans are still being outworked for His people. One day, at the fulfilment of the Covenant plan, when Yeshua returns, there will be multitudes who will come to faith including multitudes from Israel's tribes. Even though, at present, many do not sense His love for them as the world brings its trials all around, one day they will have their eyes opened and know Him for who He is. We are moving towards a picture of this as the story of Joseph and his brothers progresses in our readings.

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## Day 6

Chapter 43. Later in the Bible we will read of Jacob's greater trouble and how he will be saved out of it. This is much later on when the names *Jacob* and *Israel* refer to the entire nation of his descendants. In the present account of Jacob we know that there is a wonderful covenant promise and blessing in his life, yet times are very difficult for him. He believed that Joseph had been killed, and now with Simeon in captivity, he was asked to send Benjamin down to Egypt. In human understanding, things are going from bad to worse. The Bible records more than Jacob understood at that time. God had not abandoned His promise to Jacob. Through Joseph, He was ensuring that all that He had promised would be secured. The family of Jacob were being humbled according to the vision that Joseph had received when he was a boy, and they would soon all be gathered together in Egypt just as Abraham had been told. Jacob was taken to the limits of his abilities to cope, yet God would soon show Himself faithful to His promises. Just as this was the case for Jacob in those days so God's promises for Israel as a nation will be fulfilled over all history. Despite famines, earthquakes, wars and all other testing events on this earth God will fulfill all of His promises. We are learning from our studies of Jacob and his family important lessons that apply to our lives and the lives of all God's people today.

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Chapter 44. The lessons that we learn about Joseph teach us about Yeshua. Joseph was chosen by God to save his family from the famine. A place was prepared for them in the Land of Goshen to be sustained through the famine. There is still much more to be learned from further Bible accounts, so this is not the full picture of what will be accomplished in covenant history. It is a type and shadow, showing us the heart of God for His people throughout all the trials on this fallen earth. God's heart is revealed to us through Joseph, just as it was later revealed through Yeshua. Famine, and other earthly trials can be seen in terms of judgment, but God's judgments can also be seen as having the long term goal of redemption and we must trust Him through all our trials. Jacob's family experienced hunger, and many other trials came upon them. For example, two of Judah's children, Er and Onan, died in the Land of Canaan. This family did not escape the troubles that come to this world, yet a plan of salvation was in mind and this plan transcends all the troubles of this world. As the Apostle Paul would say much later in his letter to the Romans (at the end of Chapter 8) that he was persuaded that nothing, including matters of life and death and all the struggles to survive on this earth, would separate God's people from His love that was expressed in Yeshua HaMashiach. The chapters that we are reading in Genesis are part of the teaching that God has prepared for us to understand these things and to grow in faith through the trials of our own lives. Joseph's love could not be held back much longer. Judah became an intercessor and Joseph came to the point that he could hide his true identity no longer. In our brief study we find deeply relevant issues to consider.

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Chapter 45. Despite all that his brothers did to him, Joseph realized that it was also God's way of taking him to Egypt to prepare a place for his family. He understood this and did not diminish his love for his family. Read the details carefully and don't move on until you have understood that this comes out of the heart of God for His people later to be expressed fully through the life of Yeshua. All of the symbolism points to Him and this is the main purpose of what God did through Joseph. What a wonderful day it will be when the Israel of God meets their Saviour face to face and understands the trials that they have been through were preparations for that day. Just as Joseph's brothers bowed the

knee to Joseph so there will be a greater fulfillment when all of God's people are gathered around the throne to bow the knee to Yeshua. The trials of this world are because of the human sinful nature in us that must be broken. We must be humbled before we can be exalted.

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Chapter 46. Time and again Jacob must have wondered about the Covenant blessing that was passed on to him by his father. He must have thought about his long path of life and all his troubles. He would remember meeting with God at Bethel. Yet there had also been many years of silence. The history of God's people is more dramatic than any story we might read. It contains all the elements of human emotion and drama such as no playwright could construct. There are joys and there are sorrows. God prepared Jacob for the moment when he would hear that Joseph was alive and, out of the silence, God spoke to him again in visions of the night. Our own experiences of our walk with God will help us to understand how Jacob must have felt when God spoke to him again and told him all was well and that he was to go down to Egypt to his son. So it was that what God had told Abraham (Genesis 15:13) also came to pass. Jacob and all his family, seventy in all, travelled down to Egypt. Read Genesis 15:13 and the following verses. There would be much more to happen in Egypt as we shall see. All this was being fulfilled. When we read the Prophets we will find additional information that God has told us of what He intends for His people. Learn from Jacob how we too may have to wait for the promises of God through perplexing times, but how those promises will never fail. Heaven and Earth may pass away but His Words will never pass away.

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## Day 7

Take time to assess what you have studied this week and prayerfully consider what to study in the Bible today to supplement your reading. Joseph's life is a shadow of what God would fulfill through Yeshua so you might consider reading one of the Gospel accounts with this in mind.

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