



Small Group Leaders Notes

Genesis 37-50

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Pit Stop - Genesis 37-50

How are we going to study Genesis 37-50?

- 8 studies in Genesis 37-50
- Flexibility
- Last week of each month is deliberately clear.

Why?

(Genesis 50:20-21, Luke 24:25-27, Romans 8:28)

- Recently we have spent a lot of time in the New Testament.
- God appears to be invisible in Joseph's story

"Although God's name is not mentioned and His presence is not seen, he is nonetheless active in everything that takes place." (Liam Goligher)

- These chapters show us Romans 8:28 in action

"This great verse is a promise from God that we are not hapless victims of life, at the mercy of fate or chance. We are not driven along by some blind, impersonal force. On the contrary, we are the objects of God's providential care. We are under his guiding and protecting hand." (Alastair Begg.)

Getting our bearings in Genesis

• The Structure of Genesis - *"this is the account/generations of..."*
(2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, 36:9, 37:2)

- God's Promises to Abraham (12:1-9)
 - People
 - Land
 - Blessing

- Jacob's family (25:20; 29:30-30:24 & 35:16-26; 34:1-31; 35:22)
25:20 - Jacob's relationship with his Father

29:30-30:24 - Jacob's relationships with his wives

ch34:1-31 & 35:22 - Jacob's sons

Important things to remember when studying Old Testament Narrative

- It is a story not a letter
- Just because something happens in the story doesn't mean God approves of it. *e.g.*
37:3 - Jacob's favouritism
- Just because God does something in this story doesn't mean he will always operate in this way.
e.g. God communicating through dreams - 37:6-7,9.
- Look out for Moses' editorial comments

Read 37:1-11. What does Moses want us to understand?

- Jesus stands between Joseph and Us

Look up the following passages. How was Joseph a trailer for Jesus?

- 37:4, 8, 11
- 37:28
- 37:36
- 50:20

Can you think of other ways in which Joseph was like Jesus?

Genesis 37

A lot of the background material for this chapter was covered at our Pit Stop. The notes from that session will help as you prepare. Below I have simply included the big aim of the study and the Bible study questions with leaders notes.

Big Aim of studying Genesis 37 - To see that God's caring, providential hand is always at work for his children even in the midst of human favouritism, hatred and jealousy.

Starter Question - Can you think of times or situations when it has felt like God is distant or unconcerned about your life?

People may be able to think of very specific times when they have felt like this. Perhaps during times of suffering or trials. Equally when life is mundane God can also feel distant and we can wonder whether he really cares about our lives.

Having discussed the question you can explain to the group that we will be studying the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. At many times in Joseph's life God must have seemed distant. In this study we will be looking at chapter 37 where God's name isn't even mentioned. Like us there were times when Joseph didn't know what God was doing and yet many years later he could say to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (Genesis 50:20). In this way the story of Joseph is the classic demonstration of Romans 8:28 "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..."

As we study this familiar story it will help us to trust God's caring providential hand is always at work for his people even when we can't see what he is doing.

Read the whole chapter

§1 Why did Jacob love Joseph more than his other sons?

Here is a nice observation question to get the group started as we are given the answer in v3 - he had been born to him in his old age.

Understanding a bit of the backstory will help to flesh this out. If people are unfamiliar with the story of Jacob, Rachel and Leah then you can either summarise it for them (see Pit Stop notes) or you can get them to turn up Genesis 29:31-30:24 and 35:16-20.

Beware spending all of the study looking at the backstory. Help the group to get a feel for the rivalry and mess that must have been going on in this family. Help them to understand how Rachel's struggle to conceive and then her death in childbirth may have led Jacob to favour Joseph.

§2 How did Jacob show his favouritism?

Again here is a simple observation question - Jacob showed his love by giving Joseph an ornate robe. Don't get bogged down about whether the robe was colourful or not, the big point is that by giving the robe Jacob was setting Joseph apart.

§3 In what ways is Jacob's favouritism a warning to us?

Before we wag the finger at Jacob we need to recognise that we can all too easily show favouritism whether that be as parents or at work or in church. Let's deal with the plank in our own eye before we deal with the spec in Jacob's eye.

The following supplementary questions may be of use but don't feel that you have to use them.

- **In what sort of situations can favouritism occur? What are some of the dangers of it?**

§4 Why did Joseph's brothers hate him?

Again this is an observation question, encourage the group to look carefully at the passage rather than just answering this question from memory. Notice that as well as the robe there was also the bad report that he gave about them in v2.

§5 How did their hatred grow and spread? What other sins did their hatred give birth to?

This question naturally follows on from the previous question. Help the group to see the progression from hatred to jealousy in v4—> v8—> v11.

James 1:14-15 tells us that "each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown gives birth to death." We see something of this progression in this chapter as hatred leads to jealousy leads to plotting to kill their brother, selling him into slavery and then faking his death and a lifetime of lying to their Father.

§6 In what ways are the brothers a warning to us?

They are a graphic demonstration of how 1 sin inevitably leads to another if sin is left unchecked. Hatred in our hearts will inevitably come out in our behaviour towards others - see Matthew 15:17-20.

The following supplementary question could be useful but could be left out if time is short...

- **Can you think of a time when someone else was chosen or promoted instead of you. How did you feel? How did you react?**

Again we can be quick to condemn the brothers but how do we react when others are favoured over us.

§7 Think about what has happened to Joseph in this chapter. In what ways is Joseph a trailer for the Lord Jesus?

See the Pit Stop notes and consider the ways in which Joseph was hated, rejected and sold by his own. In this way he is something of a trailer/forerunner of Jesus who came to his own but his own did not receive him (John 1:11.)

§8 God's name is not mentioned but where do we see his finger prints on this chapter?

The more you look at this chapter the more you see God at work;

- *He gives Joseph his dreams as prophecies of the future*
- *When Joseph arrives at Shechem he 'just happens' to meet a man who knows exactly where his brothers have gone.*
- *Ultimately in light of 50:20 we see that God was at work using the hatred, deceit and murderous intent of the brothers to accomplish his ultimate plan which was the saving of many lives including Joseph's undeserving brothers!*

§9 How will the things we have seen in this chapter help us to walk by faith even when God feels distant?

- **How will they help us to respond graciously when others are chosen instead of us?**
- **How will they help us during times of suffering and trials?**

Although these application questions are the last questions it is really important that you give enough time to these questions. This chapter has given us a wonderful example of God's sovereign care and providence through the mess and sin of everyday life. We live in a world that is just as messy and sin-ravaged as Joseph's. What an encouragement to see that God doesn't retreat when life gets messy but instead he continues to work for the good of his people and to accomplish his ultimate plans.

As you pray after the study encourage the group to pray for each other as we walk by faith whether life is mundane or difficult.

Genesis 38-39

Context

• **Chapter 37**

Chapter 37 closed with Joseph being sold to Potipher in Egypt. We are expecting chapter 38 to tell us what happened to him in Egypt, but before that there is a delay. Chapter 39 picks up the story of Joseph in Egypt but before that we are told about Judah leaving his family and going to marry a Canaanite woman. The big question is why?

On one level the delay builds tension in the story of Joseph, we want to know what happened to him. The bigger reason for including chapter 39 is that it provides us with a very clear contrast between Judah and Joseph. Judah succumbed to sexual temptation by sleeping with Tamar. In contrast Joseph repeatedly resisted sexual temptation (contrast 38:38:15-16 with 39:6-12.) There are further contrasts in the chapter. Judah's son Er was wicked in the sight of God (38:7) and Onan did what was wicked in the sight of God (38:10). In contrast Joseph refuses to sleep with Potipher's wife because he knows that it would be 'such a wicked thing and sin against God' (39:10.)

• **God's promise to bless the world through this family**

As we read these chapters of Genesis we need to keep God's great promises to Abraham in mind (Genesis 12.) Firstly, God had promised that he would make Abraham and his descendants a great and numerous nation. This helps us begin to see why Onan's refusal to provide offspring for his brother was such a wicked thing in the sight of the LORD. More on that later. Secondly, God had also promised to give Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan so when we find Judah leaving his family to go and live with and marry a Canaanite (38:1) this should set off warning bells. This is not what God intended. Thirdly God had promised that he would bless the world through this family. We see something of this through Joseph where twice in chapter 39 his Egyptian masters are blessed by God because of Joseph (see 39:1-6 and 20-23.) As we look at Joseph we see God keeping his promise to Abraham.

• **Judah's role in God's salvation plan**

Judah comes out of chapter 38 with very little credit (he does at least acknowledge that Tamar has acted more righteously than him 38:26.) When we compare Judah and Joseph we can feel fairly confident that it will be Joseph's family line that God uses to bless the world.

Yet as so often, God's ways are not our ways. As we read on through the storyline of Genesis and the rest of the Bible we find that God uses Judah to bring about his eternal King who will ultimately bring blessing to all the nations (Look up Genesis 49:10, Matthew 1:1-16 and especially v3, and Revelation 5:5.) The Lord Jesus is a descendant of Judah and Tamar not Joseph! The LORD uses the messy sinful line of Judah to give the world his Messiah. When Matthew 1:21 tells us that Jesus will save his people from their sins it includes sinners like Judah! No matter the sin or scandal in our lives, God is so gracious and sovereign that he can save and use us for his purposes.

• **God's purpose in Joseph's life**

We need to keep the big picture of this section in mind. 50:20 tells us that God was orchestrating the events of Joseph's life so that ultimately the family would be saved from

the famine and God's salvation plan for the world could be accomplished. Keeping this in mind will keep us from going down the wrong lines of application. For example, it keeps us from thinking that God will always bless our work and make us prosperous if we are faithful to him.

Notes

- ***Judah left his brothers... met the daughter of a Canaanite... and married her (v1-4)***

From the context of Genesis this is not a good thing. In 24:1-4 Abraham didn't want Isaac to marry a Canaanite. In contrast Esau did marry a Canaanite and it grieved his parents (26:34-35.)

- ***Wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death (v7&10)***

We are not told what made Er wicked in the sight of the LORD but it must have been serious for the LORD to put him to death as this happens so rarely in the Bible (e.g. Acts 5:1-11.)

Onan is also put to death because what he does is wicked in the LORD's sight but this time we are given more detail. Some background will help us understand why his actions were wicked. In those days and in that culture if the firstborn son died then it was the responsibility of the next son to provide offspring and descendants for the eldest son. This would ensure that the family line of the eldest son continued and these descendants would receive the birthright of the firstborn son. Onan knew that any children he had with Er's wife would not be his, they would belong to Er and they would therefore inherit Er's birthright and estate. If Er didn't have any offspring then all that belonged to Er would transfer to Onan and his descendants. Can you start to see why Onan didn't want to provide offspring for Er?

Onan thinks that what he is doing is secret, but as Joseph knows, God sees everything. God has said that he will bless Abraham's descendants and make them into a great nation, yet here is Onan deliberately trying to thwart God's plan by not providing children for his brother. That is what makes his repeated action so wicked in God's sight.

- ***Judah denies Tamar her right (v11)***

Judah clearly thinks that the problem is Tamar and so, despite his promise (v11) he refuses to give Tamar to his third son, Shelah. By doing this he was denying Tamar her right to be the mother of Judah's heir. Although this all sounds very alien and strange to us, it is this right of Tamar's which is key to understanding what she does next.

- ***Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute so that Judah will sleep with her (v13-23)***

Tamar realises that Judah is not going to keep his promise to her (v14) so she pretends to be a prostitute and waits for Judah to approach her. She clearly knows what sort of man her father-in-law is because as soon as he sees her he wants to sleep with her (v16.)

Judah has nothing to pay her with so he foolishly gives her his staff and seal (a bit like a signet ring but worn around the neck) as a pledge. The result is that Tamar becomes pregnant. Finally she will be the mother of Judah's heir.

- ***Tamar's exposure and Judah's hypocrisy (v24-26)***

When Tamar's pregnancy exposes her, Judah is quick to condemn her even though he was happy to sleep with a prostitute. Tamar now plays her trump cards by sending the Seal and staff to Judah showing him that he is the one who had slept with her.

Judah's response is interesting. He acknowledges that Tamar was more righteous than him because he lied and refused to give her to Shelah as was her right. We are also told that he did not sleep with her again. Was Judah truly repentant? We're not told.

- ***The birth of the twins (v27-30)***

Again we might wonder why we are being told about the birth of these twins. Why not get on with the Joseph story? Ultimately it is only in the light of the New Testament that we see the significance of these events as the Lord Jesus is a descendant of Perez.

All in all this is a very messy chapter full of human sin and yet when we stand back and take in the whole sweep of the Bible story we see that God was at work. Even out of the wickedness of Judah and his sons God was bringing about his good salvation purposes. Genesis 38 is part of the Lord Jesus' family history.

- ***The LORD was with Joseph... (v1-6, 19-23)***

This chapter begins and ends with the same pattern. Before you carry on reading these notes, look at v1-6 and v19-23 and see if you can spot the repeated words and phrases...

The big thing to notice is that the LORD was with Joseph (v2, v3 and v21 and v23.) He wasn't with Joseph because Joseph was faithful to him. The LORD was with Joseph because of his grace and kindness.

Next we see that the LORD gave Joseph success in everything he did for his masters (v3 and v23.) As a result Joseph found favour in the eyes of his masters (v4 and v21.) In both cases Joseph was put in charge of everything (v4, v5, v6 and v22.) Neither Potipher nor the Prison Warder needed to concern themselves with anything, they could trust Joseph completely (v6 and v23.)

One final detail to highlight - look closely at v3. Potipher saw that ***the LORD*** was with him and that ***the LORD*** gave him success in everything he did. It wasn't just that Potipher saw that Joseph was good at his job. Potipher knew that this came from the LORD. How did he know? We aren't told, but the most obvious answer is that Joseph was unashamed to identify as one of the LORD's people. We see this again in 39:9 when he says that sleeping with Potipher's wife would be wicked and sin against God. Joseph is a great example of someone who didn't hide his faith. Even in a hostile foreign land he was open and honest that he served the LORD. He was clearly prepared to credit his success at work to the LORD.

- ***Joseph resists sexual temptation where Judah succumbed (v6-20)***

Joseph was a good looking lad and this attracts the attention of Potipher's wife. She repeatedly and persistently tries to get him to sleep with her. She didn't just try once but kept trying to entice him day after day (v10.) Eventually her efforts escalate so that she tries to grab him when no-one else is around (v11-12.) Despite her efforts Joseph will not

give in to temptation. He is clear in his mind that he would not only be betraying his master (v8-9) he would also be sinning against God (v9.) In the end he would rather flee and face the consequences than give in to temptation.

There is therefore a very stark contrast between Joseph and Judah. Judah was tempted once and happily gave in to temptation. Indeed you could even say he went looking for temptation. Joseph in contrast, repeatedly resisted temptation. Judah thought that what happened in secret was fine. Joseph knew that the LORD who was with him sees everything.

Tricky Bits

- **The size of the passage**

If we were to study 2 chapters in great depth our study would last several hours. We will therefore need to be selective and focus on the key parts of each chapter and the overall message that comes from both.

- **The cultural details of chapter 38**

The idea of Onan having to provide offspring for his dead brother and Tamar having the right to be the mother of Judah's descendants can all seem quite alien to us. You may need to briefly explain this to your group to help them being to appreciate what is going on.

- **Why is the story of chapter 38 included?**

The narrative would flow naturally from 37:36—> 39:1. As mentioned above the inclusion of the story of Judah builds suspense but also provides a contrast between Judah and Joseph and their response to temptation. In the bigger story of the Bible this story is important because from the union of Judah and Tamar will come the Lord Jesus Christ. Once again we are being taught about God and his ways. He really can bring great salvation out of the very worst of human sin.

- **If God is sovereign then is he responsible for temptation?**

One of the big themes through this section is the sovereignty of God. This raises the question of whether God is therefore responsible for the temptations that Judah and Joseph experience in these chapters. If God is responsible for temptation then can we really be blamed for succumbing to temptation? James 1:13-18 is a key passage in answering such a question. God is sovereign over all things, but he is not morally responsible for temptation. Temptation comes from our own evil desires. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that God always provides a way out so that we can endure temptation. Joseph's way out was to flee Potipher's wife even though it meant leaving his cloak and being thrown into prison. God's way out was not easy for Joseph but he took it in faithfulness to God.

Big Idea

God is gracious to his people and faithful to his promises. He really is working all things to blessing and salvation of the nations.

Areas of Application

It is important to be clear on some of the wrong applications that could be drawn out of this passage. For example the incident with Onan (v8-10) is not about whether it is right or wrong for Christians to use contraception. The issue here is quite specific and cultural.

Another wrong example would be to look at 39:1-6 and 20-23 and say “if God is with you then he will always make you prosper.” That is clearly not true because the LORD is with Joseph and yet he is falsely accused and thrown into prison. The LORD is always with his people, but that does not mean that life will always be easy for us.

Again, it would be wrong to say that if we honour God then he will always look after us and make us successful at work.

To help us avoid these misapplications we need to keep the big picture in mind. God’s big purpose in Joseph’s life is to save his people (50:20). God is orchestrating the events of Joseph’s life so that he is in the right places at the right times to be used by God.

The big focus of these chapters is ultimately on God’s undeserved grace to Judah (he doesn’t deserve for the Christ to be one of his descendants) and his faithfulness to Joseph. We therefore want to spend as much time as possible in our study focusing on what these chapters teach us about God rather than merely engaging in a character study of Joseph. Having said that Joseph does provide us with a good example of someone who is faithfully serves God in his work and in the way he resists temptation.

Questions

Starter Question -“As we read these chapters think about this question, ‘why is the story of Judah included here? Why doesn’t Moses (the author of Genesis) immediately continue the story of Joseph in Egypt?’”

Don’t expect people to immediately have the answer. Rather leave that question hanging and see whether the group is able to answer it by the end of the study.

As there is a lot of material you need to think about whether to read both chapters all at once, or whether to read and study chapter 38 and then read and study chapter 39. You may decide that to save time you will summarise parts of chapter 38.

Focus on Chapter 38

§1 In that culture it was Onan’s responsibility to marry Tamar and provide offspring for his dead brother Er. Why did he refuse?

v9 gives us the answer “Onan knew the children would not be his.” The notes on these verses might help fill in some of the cultural detail that isn’t immediately obvious.

§2 As Er’s widow, Tamar had the right to be the mother of Judah’s heir. Why did Judah let her marry Shelah?

Again the answer is in the text in v11. You can invite the group to put themselves in Judah’s shoes. Two of his sons have married Tamar and then died. How might he be thinking and feeling about Tamar?

§3 How does Tamar respond when she realises Judah has lied to her?

It’s really important that people understand that she has the right to be the mother of Judah’s heir. When she realises that Judah is not going to keep his promise she tricks him into sleeping with her. Try not to get too hung up on the rights and wrongs of this. Remember Judah’s assessment of Tamar at the end in v26 - she was more in the right than he was.

§4 What does Judah acknowledge at the end of the chapter? What is your overall impression of Judah?

He acknowledges that he was in the wrong and that she was more righteous than him. That isn’t to say that Tamar is completely innocent. Judah does not come out of this chapter looking good. He leaves his brothers, marries a Canaanite, gets a Canaanite wife for his son, then refuses to give Tamar her right, sleeps with a prostitute and then shows his utter hypocrisy by condemning Tamar for prostitution! Perhaps there is a glimpse of repentance in v26 but either way Judah is hardly an impressive character. We will return to this at the end of the study when we see that Jesus comes from Judah’s line not Joseph’s.

Focus on Chapter 39

§5 Compare v1-6 and v20-23. What repeated words and phrases do we find?

See the notes section above to help you with this. The most important thing is to see that the LORD was always with Joseph.

§6 What does this teach us about God and his ways?

God is with his people always. Wherever we go and whatever we face, God is always with us. This is an incredibly precious promise and it is worth pausing on this and helping the group to appreciate this and take it to heart for themselves.

We also need to help the group to see that just because God is with us does not mean that life will be easy for us. The LORD's presence doesn't give Joseph an easy life.

See the Areas of Application for some of the misapplications that we need to avoid concerning God blessing and prospering Joseph.

§7 In what ways is Joseph an example for us in these verses?

Wherever God takes him he works hard and seeks to serve God. Notice that in v3 it says that "his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success..." Somehow Potipher knew that the LORD was the reason for Joseph's success. That seems to imply that Joseph was open about his faith in the LORD.

Help the group to think about where they find themselves in life at the moment. It may not be where they expected to be or where they want to be. Joseph didn't want to be a slave in Egypt or a prisoner in jail and yet he worked hard to serve his earthly and heavenly masters. What a great example to us!

§8 Look at v7-18 and compare the different ways Judah and Joseph responded to temptation?

Hopefully here is where the group can begin to see why the story of Judah has been included. Judah is tempted once and succumbs, Joseph is tempted many times and resists. Judah almost goes looking for temptation, Joseph is chased by temptation and resists.

The following questions may be helpful to think further about Joseph's example in the face of temptation?

- God will always provide a way out of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13.) What ways out did he provide for Joseph?

In the end Joseph's way out was to leave his cloak and flee. It wasn't easy and it led to false accusations and imprisonment. Taking God's way out was costly, but Joseph would rather suffer than sin against God! What a challenging example that is to us!

- How did Joseph resist temptation? What did he tell himself? What did he do? How can we learn from his example?

Joseph repeatedly resisted temptation because he was very clear that it would not only be wrong against his master but also against his God. He knew that God sees everything (contrast with Judah and his sons.) In the end he was prepared to suffer to avoid sin.

§9 God had promised to bless the nations through Abraham's family. How do we see this being fulfilled in Joseph?

Here we are beginning to try and wrap up what has been a long study by focusing not on the human characters but on God and his faithfulness. We see a partial fulfilment of the promise in the way that Potipher and the Warder (both Egyptians) are blessed through Joseph (vv5-6 and v23.)

§10 God ultimately blesses the nations through Jesus. Read Matthew 1:1-3. In light of what we have read in Genesis 38-39, why is Jesus' family tree surprising?

- **What does this teach us about God and his ways?**
- **What does it teach us about Jesus and the sort of saviour he is?**

After what we have seen of Judah and Joseph we would expect God to choose Joseph and his family line but instead God chooses Perez, the offspring of Judah and Tamar. Out of such appalling human mess and sin God brings the saviour of the world! Here we see our key verse of Romans 8:28 demonstrated! We are left marvelling at God's grace that he should use sinners like Judah. If God can bring good out of Genesis 38 then surely he can be trusted to bring good out of any situation.

When Matthew tells us that Jesus will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) we see that it includes sinners like Judah. We are being taught that no matter the sin or scandal in our lives God can save us and use us. Jesus ancestors shows him to be our humble saviour who was not afraid to be associated with sinners (as in his baptism) because he has come to save sinners.

§11 What will you take away from having studied these chapters?

Having covered so much in this study a question like this may help people to focus on one or two things that have been most helpful to them.

Genesis 40-41

Context

- **“But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him...” (39:20-21)**
The end of chapter 39 reminded us that, even in prison, the LORD was with Joseph. That is still true even though we are in a new chapter and some time has passed (40:1.) “The LORD was with him” stands over these 2 chapters as the LORD enables Joseph to interpret the four dreams in these two chapters.
- **The Egyptians believed that the gods communicated with people through dreams.**
The LORD uses this belief not only to get Joseph released and promoted, but also to reveal himself to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.
- **The LORD’s promises to Abraham.** We need to keep remembering the promises (People, Land & Blessing) as we read the Joseph narrative because the LORD is fulfilling his promises. Here in these chapters we again see the LORD blessing the nations (Egypt) through Abraham’s offspring (Joseph.) Notice too how the passages finishes in 41:57 with all the world coming to Egypt to buy grain *from Joseph*. The LORD is using Joseph to bless all nations, not just Egypt.
- **Joseph is put in charge... again.** Twice in chapter 39 Joseph was put in charge because the LORD was with him (v2-6 and v21-23.) Here again, Joseph is put in charge, only this time he is put in charge of the whole land of Egypt (41:41-43.) We mustn’t see this as a reward for Joseph. The LORD is moving Joseph around, putting him in these different roles to accomplish God’s saving purposes (41:53-57 and 50:20.)

Notes

- **Read 40:1, 40:4, 41:1, 41:46, 41:47 and 41:53-54.** These chapters cover long periods of time. Look how old Joseph is in 41:46 and compare it to 37:2. Whilst lots happen to Joseph in these chapters there are also long periods of time when nothing seems to be happening (especially in chapter 40.) God is working his purposes out, but not instantly. We are not good at waiting, but time and again, the people of God are called to wait upon the LORD.
- **Read 40:3 – who assigns the cupbearer and the baker to Joseph?** (37:36 and 39:1 will help.) Do you think it is significant that Potipher, as captain of the guard, assigns them to Joseph? Is it because Potipher knows that Joseph will do a good job looking after these important people? At the very least we can see that God was orchestrating things and bringing the right people into Joseph’s life at the right time to fulfil God’s plan.
- **Joseph repeatedly tells people that the interpretations come from God. See 40:8, 41:11-16, 41:25, 41:28, 41:32.** Pharaoh comes to acknowledge this – 41:38-39. Here again we see that the LORD is with Joseph as he reveals the meaning of the dreams to him. (See Tricky Bits for more on God revealing through dreams.) These chapters again show us Joseph’s openness to talk about God. He was open with Potipher and his wife about his faith in God (see 39:3 and 39:9.) Joseph is someone who is quick to direct people’s attention away from himself and towards God. Does this show us a way in which God was changing Joseph? Think back to when we first met him in chapter 37. When he told his Father and brothers about his dreams there was little mention of God

and instead the emphasis fell on how Joseph would be exalted. Perhaps the LORD used these difficult years to humble Joseph so that he was less concerned about himself and more concerned about God and his glory?

- **Joseph's unjust suffering (see 40:14-15, 40:23, 41:51-52.)** Read carefully what Joseph says to the cupbearer in 40:14-15. Can you hear the sense of injustice at being sold as slave and now imprisoned? Can you hear the desperation in his voice to be released? Remember how long Joseph has been suffering. Don't let our familiarity with the story (and the breathless pace of the musical) obscure the very real and raw injustice that Joseph endured. Look as well at the names Joseph gives to his children. Look at their meanings. What do these names tell us about Joseph, his suffering and his faith in God through his suffering? Notice too how even in his suffering Joseph goes out of his way to help others (40:6-7.) It is Joseph who sees they cupbearer and the baker are dejected and he takes the initiative to ask what is wrong. Joseph had suffered terrible injustices, he didn't owe these men anything, and yet instead of retreating into himself and becoming a passive victim, he moves towards others in their sorrow and uses his God-given gift to serve others. There is a lesson for all of us here. Even when we are suffering, God can use us to help others who are in trouble. God did indeed make Joseph "fruitful in the land of my suffering" (41:52) and he can make us fruitful in times of suffering so that we are a blessing to others. This fruitfulness is often in unexpected ways.
- **"The chief cupbearer... did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." (40:23, 41:1, 41:9-13.)** Joseph suffers another injustice. Having graciously helped the cupbearer by favourably interpreting his dream, the cupbearer didn't help Joseph in return. "How could he forget Joseph after what Joseph had done for him?" We are certainly left asking that question, and no doubt Joseph would have been left asking that question for the next two years. Finally the Cupbearer does remember Joseph, and at just the right moment, because Pharaoh has now been troubled by his dreams and no-one can interpret them. Here again, the LORD uses the bad memory of the cupbearer to ultimately bring about good as Joseph is brought to Pharaoh at just the right moment.
- **God not only reveals the future, he controls the future (41:25, 41:28, 41:32.)** God can reveal the future and the interpretations of the dreams to Joseph because God is in control of the future. Notice the repeated phrase "God has shown/revealed... what he is about to do." God's in charge, God is going to send seven good years and then seven bad years and so that is why he can reveal the future through dreams and interpretations. Let's not miss how the sovereignty of God comes again and again through these chapters of Genesis.

Tricky Bits

- **These are two long chapters.** You will need to think about how you read the passage. One suggestion would be to ask the group to read the chapters in advance. This way you don't have to read the whole passage when you meet and can instead focus on key parts.
- **How does God communicate and reveal things today? What is the place of dreams?** There is the potential for this study to be side-tracked into a discussion on the place of dreams today. Hebrews 1:1-2 is key for steering our thinking about God's revelation. Hebrews makes it clear that God's full and final revelation is complete in the

coming of his Son. Through the Holy Spirit God led the Apostles into all truth (John 16:13-14.) This means that we are in a very different situation to Joseph. Joseph did not have the Bible as we have it today. Indeed, Joseph didn't have any of the Bible because none of it had been written in his day. We should therefore not be surprised to find God communicating differently to Joseph and to us. This is not to say that God cannot or does not communicate through dreams today. There are plenty of stories of God using dreams to unsettle people and to cause them to search for Jesus. These stories often emerge from places where there is little access to the Bible. Yet we must also be clear that God does not give new or fresh revelation through dreams today. This means that if someone has a dream that they believe is from God then it should be weighed against scripture. A dream that in any way contradicts what God has said through the scriptures cannot be from God.

Big Themes and Applications

- **God controls and reveals the future** – The sovereignty of God is a familiar theme as we move through these chapters and we have already seen God revealing the future to Joseph (chapter 37.) Nevertheless there is always much benefit and comfort to be had from dwelling afresh on God's sovereignty, especially in chapters like these where we see him using years of injustice and suffering for the good of many.
- **Joseph humbly uses his gift to serve others and glorify God despite experiencing such unjust suffering.** There is much that we can learn from Joseph in these chapters. We want to help the group see how as Joseph interprets he is constantly giving the glory to God rather than taking it for himself. We also want to see how he does not allow these years of suffering to turn him into a bitter selfish person. He keeps humbly looking for opportunities to serve and bless others and God uses this. Here again we keep coming back to our big theme verse (50:20). God can and will use us and our suffering for the good of others. This doesn't lessen the pain and injustice that we may experience but it is here to help us hold firm and continue to trust God even when we go through years of hurt.

Questions

There is a lot of material in these two chapters so there is no way we can cover everything. The following questions try to focus on what I think are the key themes. You may feel that you need to supplement these questions with other observation questions if the group are not familiar with the details of the chapters.

Starter Question - What has happened to Joseph so far in his young life? As he sits in prison at the end of chapter 39, how do you think he might have been feeling?

This question is designed to refresh people's memories and invite people to think about how Joseph might have been feeling. We are not told in the text how Joseph was feeling but we can imagine that the events of chapters 37 and 39 have left him with a sense of injustice (see 40:15.)

1. In 39:20-21 we read, 'while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him...' Are there any signs in chapter 40 that the LORD was with Joseph?

The aim of this question is to get us closely reading the text looking for clues. Surely we can see the LORD's hand in the way Potiphar assigns Joseph to the cupbearer and the baker. Similarly we see the LORD's hand in giving them dreams at the same time. We also see the LORD is with Joseph by giving him the ability to interpret the dreams. Perhaps we also see that the LORD was with Joseph when Joseph courageously tells the Baker the true interpretation instead of something more palatable.

At the same time someone might point out that it probably didn't feel like the LORD was with him, especially when the cupbearer forgot Joseph and left him in prison for another two years. Scripture says that the LORD was with Joseph, but that doesn't mean that Joseph always felt like the LORD was with him. In the same way, the LORD is always with us, and has promised never to leave us nor to forsake us. That doesn't mean we will always feel like God is with us.

2. How did Joseph respond when he saw that the two men were both dejected?

Again we want to encourage people to look closely at the text and not just answer from memory. The simple answer is that Joseph interprets their dreams for them but look carefully at v6-7. Joseph sees they are dejected and instead of thinking, "Well I've got enough problems of my own to worry about" he moves towards them, asks what is wrong, and then uses his God-given ability to help them. Joseph is therefore a wonderful example to us of someone who seeks to love and serve others even when he himself was suffering.

3. What request did Joseph make of the cupbearer? How do you think Joseph would have felt when the cupbearer forgot him?

v23 really is a tragic verse and it must have felt like a real blow to Joseph. But again, how we feel about things is not always a reliable indication of what God is doing...

A. How did the LORD use the cupbearer's memory for good?

Think about what would have happened if the cupbearer had remembered Joseph's request and gone straight to Pharaoh? Joseph may have been acquitted and released or he may have been left in jail, we don't know. What we do know is that because the cupbearer forgot about Joseph, he knew exactly where Joseph was when Pharaoh

needed his dream interpreting. The LORD used the cupbearer's forgetfulness to elevate Joseph and bring about the saving of many lives that would have otherwise been lost in the famine.

4. Look at 40:8, 41:11-16, 41:25, 41:28, 41:32. What does Joseph keep saying about dreams and interpretations?

The big thing is to see that it is God who gives the dreams and the interpretation because it is God who controls the future. Joseph is nothing special, he is just God's servant.

A. What does this tell us about the LORD?

Here is where the conversation could get side-tracked onto a debate about dreams. Try and keep the group on track by helping them to see that the LORD alone can reveal the future because he alone is in control of the future.

B. What does this tell us about Joseph?

We cannot help but notice the humility of Joseph. Whereas before there was perhaps a hint of ego in the way he shared his dreams with his family, now there is a striking note of humility. He is merely doing what God has enabled him to do.

5. In 40:52 Joseph says God made him fruitful in the land of his suffering. How have we seen this in these chapters?

God has not only enabled him to interpret dreams, he has also given him the wisdom and skill to organise the incredible agricultural efforts so that the people will be able to endure the famine.

A. Who benefitted from Joseph's fruitfulness?

Certainly Joseph did as the LORD rescued him from prison, yet we must also say that it was the people of Egypt and the other nations (see 41:56-57) who were blessed by Joseph. Again we are seeing God keep his promise to Abraham that through his descendants the LORD would bless all the nations.

B. What does this teach us about God and his ways?

There are many things that we could bring out at this point. We see that God can bring great good and blessing through times of unjust suffering. We see too that he can use those who are suffering to bless other people, it is not always about us.

C. Can we see glimpses of the Lord Jesus in these chapters?

Again there are a number of ways we can see glimpses of Jesus through Joseph. Jesus brings revelation from God. He speaks the truth even when it will not be popular. He graciously feeds the multitudes. Perhaps most of all, the LORD makes him fruitful in the land of his suffering as eternal life comes to us through Jesus' suffering.

D. How is Joseph an example to us when we are in the land of suffering?

Joseph has suffered terrible injustices. He has been badly treated by his brothers and Potiphar and yet there is no hint that he becomes bitter, instead he generously uses the gifts that God has given him to serve others. When we suffer it is easy for us to become self-absorbed and only think about ourselves. Joseph is a wonderful example of someone who remains focused on serving and blessing others even in times of suffering.

Genesis 42-43

Context

- **Joseph's dreams come true** - 20 or more years have passed since Joseph dreamt that his brothers would come and bow down to him (37:5-7). All these years later those dreams come true and the significance is not lost on Joseph (42:6-9.) God could reveal the future to Joseph because God is the one who controls the future.
- **Joseph's accusation** - Joseph repeatedly accuses his brothers of being spies (42:9, 12, 14, 16.) This takes us right back to the very start of the story when Joseph brought his Father a bad report about his brothers (37:2.) They didn't like Joseph because he was Jacob's spy. Now Joseph accuses them of being spies.
- **The famine** - at the end of chapter 41 we were told that the whole world came to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe everywhere. This sets the stage for Jacob to send his sons to Egypt to buy grain (42:1-2.)
- **God's Purposes** - We keep remembering that God is working all things to accomplish the saving of many lives (50:20.) He has already used Joseph to save many lives in Egypt (41:56) and other nations (41:57), now he will use Joseph to save the lives of his brothers who sold him as a slave.
- **God's Promise** - God has promised to make Jacob and his family into a great nation and through them to bless the world (Genesis 12.) How can he do this if they die in the famine? (42:2). This then is a crucial point in the story of salvation.

Structure

- The 1st Journey from Canaan to Egypt (42:1-38)
 - The Journey to Egypt and their first meeting with Joseph (v1-24)
 - The Return to Canaan (v25-38)
- The 2nd Journey from Canaan to Egypt (43:1-34)
 - The Family Debate (v1-14)
 - The Brothers Return (v15-34)

Notes and Tricky Bits

• **The 1st Journey from Canaan to Egypt (ch 42)**

- ***Jacob did not send Benjamin (v4)*** - Jacob is still showing favouritism. Benjamin has replaced Joseph as his favourite son. No doubt this was because Benjamin, like Joseph, was a son of Rachel, his favourite wife. As the story unfolds we see that he is willing to sacrifice Simeon to keep Benjamin safe (42:36-38.)
- ***Joseph recognised his brothers but they did not recognise him (v6-8)*** - This might seem strange to us. Why wouldn't they recognise their own brother? Firstly Joseph speaks to them in Egyptian using a translator (v23.) Secondly at least 20 years has passed (see 37:2, 41:46-47 and 41:53-54) since they last saw Joseph. Think how much your appearance changed from when you were 17 to your mid-30s or early 40s. A third reason they wouldn't have recognised him is that they simply would not have expected to meet Joseph where they did. They sold Joseph as a slave, so if they were going to bump into him anywhere it would be in the slave market. They would never have expected Joseph to have become the governor of Egypt (42:6.)
- ***Joseph pretended to be a stranger to them (v7)*** - Why doesn't Joseph immediately reveal his identity to his brothers? At first it looks like he is getting revenge on them but we also see great tenderness (v22-24), kindness (v25) and acceptance (43:16-34 - eating a meal with someone was always a sign of acceptance and welcome) from Joseph towards his brothers. Joseph is therefore not seeking revenge but testing his brothers' motives (v15-16.) He has changed a lot during these years, but have they changed? Joseph is willing to forgive, but ultimately there can only be true reconciliation if the the brothers are repentant of their sin. Joseph's actions in chapter 42 test the brothers and allow us to see the work that God is doing in their hearts.
- ***"... and one is no more." (v13)*** - Imagine what it must have been like for Joseph to hear his brothers to talk about him in this way. They don't know that the governor in front of them is their brother who is no more. How do they feel about the fact that Joseph "is no more" the rest of the chapter will show us.
- ***"Surely we are being punished because of our brother..." (v21-22)*** - Having locked them up for three days, Joseph now tells them that one of them must stay in prison while the others go back for Benjamin (v18-20 - notice his reference to God.) For the first time in the story we hear the brothers admitting their guilt. They recognise that they deserve to be punished for how they treated Joseph, ignoring him as he pleaded for his life. It seems his cries had lain heavy on their guilty consciences all this time. God is using Joseph to confront them with their unconfessed sin. This is painful but ultimately for their good. For twenty years they had been living a lie, watching their Father grieve and being eaten inside by the guilt of their sin. They have been living in the darkness for fear of being exposed by the light. Here is their first step towards the light. At this point they are not necessarily repentant, but they do at least acknowledge their guilt and this is a vital first step towards forgiveness and reconciliation.
- ***"Joseph turned away from them and began to weep..." (v23-28)*** - Joseph hears the way they are talking (v23). He knows that they feel guilty about what they did to him

and when he hears them acknowledge their guilt it brings him to tears. What is more, as well as filling their bags with grain, he gives them provisions for their journey (surely he didn't give everyone a packed lunch for the journey home) and put their silver back in their sacks. Instead of punishing them as they deserve, he blesses them with undeserved kindness. He could let them starve, instead he gives them life! When the brothers discover their silver has been returned they are scared (v28) and ask each other "What is this that God has done to us?" They fear that this is all part of God's judgment that they deserve. The truth is that it is part of his undeserved mercy to them!

- **Reuben's sacrificial offer and Jacob's stubborn refusal (v37-38)** - Did Reuben have a more sensitive conscience than the others? It was he who argued against killing Joseph so that he could rescue him and take him back to his father (37:21-22), he was clearly upset and perhaps even angry with his brothers when they'd sold Joseph (42:22.) Yet instead of continuing to blame the others, he now offers to sacrifice one of his own sons if he doesn't bring Simeon back to Jacob (v37.) Yet Reuben's drastic vow is rejected by his Father who is terrified at the prospect of losing his new favourite son.

- **The 2nd Journey from Canaan to Egypt (ch43)**
 - The famine was still severe... (v1-7) Eventually the food they had brought back from Egypt runs out. Jacob wants them to go back but the brothers rightly point out that they can't go without Benjamin. Something will have to give.
 - Judah steps up (v8-9) The change in Judah is really quite pronounced. It was he who proposed selling Joseph (37:26-27), then there was his sin and hypocrisy with Tamar (ch38). At the end of chapter 38 there was a chink of light as he admitted that Tamar had acted more righteously than him (38:26.) Now here we find Judah putting himself forward guaranteeing Benjamin's safety (v9.) From selling a brother (Joseph) he is now willing sacrifice himself for a brother (Benjamin) God is changing Judah.
 - **"When Joseph saw Benjamin with them..." (v16)** - The sight of Benjamin is proof Joseph needs of the goodwill of his brothers. Instead of accusing them of being spies and throwing them in prison, he now welcomes them into his home to dine with him as honoured guests.
 - **The brothers are terrified of Joseph but he responds with kindness (v17-30)** - They fear they will be accused of stealing (v18), but the steward calms their fears and attributes the good that is happening to them to God (v23). Their needs are met (v24) and having bowed down to Joseph (in fulfilment of the dream), Joseph then kindly enquires after them and their father. You can understand Joseph's desire to know that his elderly Father is well. When he sees Benjamin ("his own mother's son") it is all too much for Joseph. Surely he never imagined the day when he would be reunited with his family like this.
 - **For now there is only partial reconciliation (v31-34.)** Joseph does not yet reveal his identity to them and is served separately from them. He also gives Benjamin (the youngest) five times more than anyone else. Is this another test to see how whether the older brothers will respond with resentment just like they resented Joseph (ch37). The chapter finishes with us wondering how complete reconciliation can be brought about?

Big Focus and Applications

There's much that we could focus on in these chapter. We therefore need to be selective as we study these passages. We could concentrate on the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams or Jacob's reluctance to allow Benjamin to travel to Egypt. I think it will be most fruitful to focus on the brothers and the way that God confronts them with their sin in these chapters.

Their pressing need is food, and God will provide food for them, but their bigger need is for forgiveness and reconciliation with Joseph. This will require true repentance which will not be easy but then discipline is never pleasant at the time.

Two key New Testament passages are Hebrews 12:10-11 and 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. In Hebrews 12 we are told that God disciplines his beloved children for our good so that we may share in his holiness. In a similar way 2 Corinthians 7 tells us that there are two kinds of sorrow. There is godly sorrow which brings repentance which leads to life. Alternatively there is worldly sorrow which brings death.

As we watch God confronting and discipling his people in these chapters we see something of how he will loving discipline us when we sin. He doesn't punish us for our sins but he will lovingly confront us with our sin so that we respond with godly sorrow that leads to repentance, salvation and holiness. The following questions are designed to try and bring this truth to light for our groups.

Questions

Starter Question - In chapter 42-43 we meet Joseph's brothers for the first time in 20 years. From what we have seen so far, what kind of men are they?

For the last few studies the focus has been entirely on Joseph so it is good as we begin to remind ourselves of just what the brothers were like. If you need to refresh your memory then a quick look at chapter 37-38 should help.

1) At the start of ch42 the brothers are starving in Canaan and there is food in Egypt. Why might they have been so reluctant to go to Egypt?

Notice their Father's question in v1 - "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" We know more than Jacob. We know that for 20 years they have lived with their guilty secret of how they sold Joseph as a slave in Egypt. Is their inactivity in v1 a hint that they are still troubled by their guilty conscience?

2) How do the brothers respond when they meet Joseph? (v6-9)

Firstly they bow down before him but secondly they don't recognise him.

a) Why is this significant?

As they bow down to Joseph they are fulfilling the dream that they hated so much. Joseph clearly sees the significance of this (v9.)

b) Why might they not have recognised Joseph?

See the notes above.

3) Why does Joseph accuse them of spying? (v9-20)

Our instinctive reaction is that he wants to get revenge - they didn't like it when he gave a bad report to their father so now he turns the tables and accuses them of spying. When we read the passage carefully we see that Joseph is testing them (v15) to see whether they have changed. We also need to see that whilst he spoke harshly to them (v7) he also wept when he heard them acknowledge their guilt (v23-24.) Help the group to see both aspects, this is not a simple case of sibling revenge!

4) What do the brothers think is happening to them? (v21-22 and v28)

a) What does this tell us about them?

b) How does Joseph respond when he hears them talking? (v24-26)

These verses are a window into their hearts. Here we see that they have been carrying around their guilt for all these years. They believe that God is punishing them for their sins. This is exactly what they deserve and yet Joseph shows them undeserved kindness by not only giving them grain, but food for the journey and returning their money to them.

5) The brothers report back to their father Jacob but he refuses to let Benjamin go with them. What do Reuben and Judah do to try and change their father's mind?

Reuben offers to kill one of his sons if he doesn't bring Benjamin back safely and Judah offers to bear the blame himself. At this point the group may be struck by the change that has come about in these men, especially when you consider their actions in chapter 37-38. At the end of the study we will return to think about the change that God is bringing about in the brothers.

6) When they return to Egypt Joseph invites them to a feast. What do the brothers think is going to happen?

They again are terrified that Joseph is going to attack them. Last time they came to Egypt he threw them in prison so you can understand their wariness.

7) How does Joseph show kindness to his brothers? What does this tell us about his attitude to them?

The big thing is that he invites them to feast with him. To eat with people was a mark of acceptance and welcome. See the notes above for more on the details of the feast and the significance of not being served with them. The process of reconciliation has begun but it is not yet complete.

8) Read 2 Corinthians 7:10. Do you think the brothers' sorrow was godly or worldly?

Are they repentant? That's the big question. There is certainly sorrow but is there any sign of repentance? I think that we can see the beginnings of repentance and change (look at the offers of Simeon and Judah.)

9) Read Hebrews 12:4-11. How did God lovingly discipline the brothers? In what ways was it painful? In what ways was it good for them?

This question is here to help us review what we have read and to begin to turn to application. God disciplines the brothers by confronting them with their unconfessed sin. He is using Joseph's testing to bring them to a place of repentance so that they can receive forgiveness and be reconciled to their brother. It is clearly a terrifying and painful experience for them. You can help the group here by getting them to look for all the emotive language that is used in these chapters (there's a lot!) Yet by the end of the chapter we can begin to see signs of how God is using this painful experience for their good. They have confessed their guilt, they have acknowledged that they deserve God's judgment. These are vital steps if they are to be forgiven and truly reconciled to Joseph.

10) What can we learn from these chapters about God and his dealings with us?

Firstly it teaches us that God doesn't ignore our sin. It is a sign of his love that he confronts us and disciplines us. If he didn't discipline us then it would show that he didn't love us and we didn't belong to him. God disciplines the brothers because they are his chosen people and the recipients of his undeserved grace and promises. God's discipline is never pleasant, when God truly confronts us with our sin it will bring much sorrow and godly sorrow will lead to repentance. This is God's aim, he wants us not only to acknowledge or guilt, but to confess our sin and turn to him in repentance, looking to him for forgiveness and the grace to change. God's purpose was to make the brothers his holy people, and that is his same purpose for us.

Genesis 44-45

Context

• **God's Plan of Salvation**

- I know we keep coming back to Genesis 12 but it really is vital to understanding the rest of Genesis (and indeed the rest of the Bible.) God had promised that he would bless Abraham and his descendants. This promise was not conditional on their obedience but flowed from God's grace. We have seen that neither Jacob nor his sons deserve God's blessing and yet God graciously blesses them abundantly, not only by saving them from famine but then providing for them so richly in Egypt (45:16-28.)
- Here in 45:4-7 Joseph articulates one of the great themes of this section of Genesis. Though the brothers intended things for evil, God has worked so that Joseph is in place to be used by God to bring about a great deliverance. These verses along with 50:20-21 provide us with the key to understand what has been going on.

• **The change in Judah**

- It is worth taking the time to re-read chapters 37-38 to remind yourself of just what Judah was like. Then compare that old Judah with the new Judah who we met last week in 43:9-10 and again here in 44:17-34. From one who will selfishly sell his own flesh and blood and who will hypocritically condemn his daughter-in-law, now we find a man who will selflessly offer himself as a sacrifice for innocent Benjamin to set him free. Such change can only be from God.
- Judah's self-sacrifice points us forward to Jesus (Judah's descendant) who will offer himself as a sacrifice to set the guilty prisoner free.

• **Full Reconciliation**

- At the end of ch43 we had seen a partial restoration between Joseph and his brothers as they feasted and drank freely with him. Yet the restoration was only partial as Joseph withheld his identity from them and was served separately from them. In ch44 Joseph lays one final test for his brothers to see whether they really have changed. Once he sees that they truly have changed he reveals himself to them and the relationship is truly restored (look at the grace he shows to them in 45:5-11.

Structure

With another big passage it can be helpful to look for some natural divides in the text.

How about the following division;

- 44:1-13 - The 'guilty' is uncovered
- 44:14-34 - The substitute is offered
- 45:1-15 - The brothers are reconciled
- 45:16-28 - The LORD graciously blesses

Notes and Tricky Bits

- **Joseph plants the cup in Benjamin's sack (44:1-10)** - Why does Joseph do this? Is he out to punish the brothers further? If so why does he frame Benjamin, his mother's own son? Joseph is testing his other brothers. In the past they have shown little concern for their father or for Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph wants to see whether their hearts have really changed. He targets Benjamin because he knows how precious he is

to their father Jacob. Will one of the brothers step forward and sacrifice themselves for Benjamin to save their father heartache, or will they selfishly sacrifice Benjamin?

- ***The sacks are searched and the brothers tear their clothes (44:11-13)*** - Don't miss the detail about their clothes. Ripping your clothes like this is a sign of real grief and seems to indicate a change of heart. Contrast this with what they did to Joseph's robe in chapter 37.
- ***"God has uncovered your servant's guilt" (44:14-16)*** - Joseph is waiting for them when they return and they throw themselves on the floor before him in desperation (notice the echoes of the dreams). They are desperate for mercy and their words are telling. Whilst they attempt to plead their innocence of the theft, they do seem to acknowledge their wider guilt before God. Previously they had acted as if God hadn't seen their sin. Now they acknowledge that God has seen and exposed their guilt. They are taking ownership of their guilt and crying out for mercy. They have come a long way.
- ***Judah offers himself as a substitute (44:17-34)*** - Joseph sets the final part of his test (v17). He won't punish them all, only one will become his slave, the rest are free to go. This prompts Judah to step forward and offer himself instead of Benjamin. As you read these verses, listen to Judah's humility (v18), listen to his concern for Benjamin where previously he was happy to make his father suffer. Notice too Judah's selfless sacrifice of himself (v33-34.) What a transformation God has brought about! It has not been instant, it has taken decades, but God can bring about real transformation as he confronts us with our sin and leads us in humble repentance.
- ***Joseph's emotional revelation (45:1-3)*** - Notice that Joseph's outbreak of emotion comes after he has just heard Judah's selfless offer. It is this that causes Joseph to break down in tears and to reveal his identity to them. We can easily understand why the brothers are scared to learn that the Joseph who they sold into slavery is now the one who holds their lives in his hands.
- ***God's gracious saving purposes (45:4-11)*** - Notice the themes of God's sovereignty, grace, and Joseph's gentleness with them. Notice how he calms their fears (v5) and emphasises God's overriding purposes "God sent" (v5, v7, v8.)
- ***The reconciliation is complete (45:12-15)*** - There is a lot of emotion in this chapter (don't be British and ignore it!) See the way that Joseph not only embraces Benjamin but also kisses and wept over all the brothers. "Afterwards his brothers talked with him." serves to underline that he truly has forgiven them and they have been reconciled to one another.
- ***God uses Pharaoh to bless Jacob and his family (45:16-28)*** - Pharaoh does more than roll out the red carpet for Joseph's family. They came asking for emergency rations to keep them alive through the famine. They end up receiving the very best of all Egypt! Such is the grace and generosity of God!

Big Theme

As with the previous studies there is a lot of material in these chapters and we cannot focus on everything. If I had to sum up the main theme of these chapters I'd go with...

God graciously and sovereignly brings heart-change, reconciliation and blessing to his undeserving people.

Areas of Application

- In God's grace to Jacob and his family we see something of his wondrous grace to us. We, like them, are completely undeserving of his kindness and grace and yet in Christ he has blessed us in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3.) In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade." (1 Peter 1:3-4.) Try to steer the group away from looking for material blessings to see that the New Testament promises us spiritual blessings instead of the material blessings that they received in Genesis.
- It is also worth reflecting on the change that God brought about in Judah. If God can change Judah then he can change any of us. As with Judah, that work of change can take years, even decades, but God will bring to completion what he has started in us.

Questions

Starter - Broken families are a sad and painful part of life. Why is reconciliation often so hard? What is required for people to be reconciled?

You could spend ages talking about this question and sharing thoughts and examples but don't take too long. The aim is to help us tune in the theme of reconciliation in this chapter. Hopefully people will talk about things like the need for repentance, forgiveness, and change.

1) Joseph plants a silver cup in Benjamin's sack. Why do you think he targets Benjamin? In what way is this a test of the brothers?

Help the group see this isn't revenge. This is testing the brothers to see whether their hearts have truly changed. Will they sacrifice Benjamin to look after themselves? Will they break their father's heart again? Are they still so selfish or have they changed?

2) How do the brothers respond when the cup is found? (44:6-13)

v13 they tore their clothes and returned.

A. What do you think this shows us about their hearts?

Tearing your clothes is a sign of grief, mourning and repentance. It is another hint that God is at work to change these men.

3) Why does Judah offer to take Benjamin's place? (44:16-34)

It is not just that Judah had promised Jacob that he would do this. Judah has broken his word before if it suited him (see chapter 38.) He is now concerned more about his father than about himself.

A. How has Judah changed since chapters 37-38?

You may need to help the group out by giving them a quick recap of Jacob in those chapters. In ch37 he thought nothing of selling Joseph to make him and his brothers some money. Similarly in chapter 38 he will break his word to Tamar because it benefitted him. Over the years God has turned this man inside out, from selfish to selfless.

B. Does this surprise you?

It really is quite a dramatic change that God has brought about. Remember the time frame is over years not days or weeks. God's transforming work in us is often slow and a long-term project, but he will complete the work he has begun in us.

4) When does Joseph breakdown in tears when he does? What has he realised about his brothers?

Why does Joseph cry now? Because Judah's speech shows that he and his brothers really have changed. They really do now love their father and Benjamin because Judah was prepared to sacrifice himself.

5) What does Joseph stress about God? (45:4-11)

He stresses God's sovereignty, his goodness, his salvation and his provision. God has brought great good out of terrible evil for his incredible saving purposes.

6) How does Joseph show grace to his brothers?

He speaks gently to them, comforting and reassuring them. He also offers to provide for all of them despite what they had done to him. As God has been kind to Joseph, so he then overflows with that same kindness to them.

7) Look at what Pharaoh offers to Jacob and his family (45:16-20). How is God keeping his promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)?

God had promised to bless Abraham's descendants and that is exactly what he is doing here through Pharaoh's generosity.

8) How do we see something of Jesus and the gospel in this passage?

A. In Judah?

Jesus is the greater son of Judah who selflessly sacrifices himself to set the guilty free.

B. In the reconciliation of the brothers? (Ephesians 2:11-18)

The reconciled family provides a picture for us of the church. God in his grace reconciles those who were enemies to make us one in Christ.

C. In God's generous blessing? (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Here we want to steer away from thinking about the material blessing that they enjoyed to think about the spiritual blessing we enjoy now, and the eternal blessing of the new creation that we look forward to.

9. What has this passage shown us about God and his ways?

Use this question to draw things together and help us focus on God as we finish. People might talk about the way he transformed Judah and the hope that gives us that he is slowly but surely changing us. Others might want to praise him that he is the one who can bring about reconciliation. Others may highlight the way in which Jesus is like Judah and yet a far far greater substitute.

Spend time praising God for what you have learnt about him from this passage

Genesis 46-47

Context

- **Immediate context** - Jacob has just received the most unbelievable news! The son he has been mourning for twenty years is alive. At first he didn't believe it (45:26) but when he saw the carts Joseph had sent with the brothers, his spirit was revived and he was convinced (v28.) Believing that Joseph is alive gives this old man a new lease of life. "So Israel set out..." (46:1.) We now follow Jacob on his journey to Egypt to meet his long-lost son.
- **Beersheba** - Jacob stops to offer sacrifices at Beersheba. You would think he would be desperate to race to Egypt to see Joseph, so why the delay?
 - Beersheba had been a significant place for Abraham (21:31-33) and particularly Isaac (26:23-25. The LORD had appeared to Isaac at Beersheba and had reassured Isaac that the promises God had made to his Father Abraham still stand. Jacob now receives a similar reassurance that the LORD's promises still stand.
 - The LORD's words to Jacob are also important because in 26:2 the LORD had told Isaac not to go to Egypt but to stay in Canaan. Jacob therefore comes to Beersheba to worship the LORD as his father and grandfather had done. This man who was been so wayward is at least following in the faith of his ancestors. There at Beersheba Jacob receives God's permission to go to Egypt, and even though he is leaving Canaan, God will bring them back. The LORD's promises still stand.
- **The LORD's covenant promises** - The LORD has promises to bless Israel, to make them a great nation and to give them the land of Canaan. In this chapter we continue to see God keeping his promises.
 - Whilst Egypt experiences the hardship of famine (47:13-26), Israel experience God's generous blessing (47:5-6, 47:27.)
 - He also begins to multiply them. There are 70 when they arrive (46:27), but they soon become fruitful and increased greatly in number (47:27).
 - The LORD has also not given up on his promise to give them the land of Canaan (see 15:13 and then 46:4, 47:4, 47:9, 47:30.)
 - The other aspect of God's promise was that through Israel God would bless the world and we see this happening again in this chapter. Firstly as Jacob blesses Pharaoh (47:7,10.) Secondly as God uses Joseph to save the Egyptian people from starvation (47:25.)
- **Jacob worshipped the LORD as a pilgrim** - The beginning and end of our passage are marked by Jacob worshipping the LORD (46:1 and 47:31.) 47:31 is picked up in Hebrews 11:21. Jacob saw himself as a pilgrim passing through (47:9.) As good as Goshen was he knew it was not his home. Ultimately even Canaan was not Jacob's true home. As Hebrews 11:13-16 tell us Jacob and the rest of the Patriarchs were looking forward to a better country, a heavenly country. Jacob is therefore held up to us as a worshipping Pilgrim looking forward to the fulfilment of God's promises to him and to us.

Structure

- As with all these studies there is a lot of material. One way to break down the material is by focusing on the different encounters that take place and the consequences of these encounters;
 - The LORD and Jacob - 46:1-4
 - > Jacob and all his family went to Egypt - 46:5-27
 - Joseph and Jacob - 46:28-30
 - > Jacob is ready to die
 - Joseph and his Brothers - 46:31-34
 - The Brothers and Pharaoh - 47:1-6
 - Jacob and Pharaoh - 47:7-10
 - > Joseph provided for his family and settled them in the best land - 47:11-12
 - Joseph and the Egyptians - 47:13-26
 - > Joseph saves the Egyptians and established new laws
 - Joseph and Jacob again - 47:28-31
 - > Jacob worshipped the LORD - 47:31

Notes and Tricky Bits

- For the significance of Beersheba and the LORD's words to Jacob see 'Context'.
- Why does Moses spend so much time telling us who went to Egypt and how many they were? (46:5-27) Look how many times the word 'all' is used in 46:5-7. Look how detailed the family genealogy is, giving us all the names not only of the sons but of their sons. Notice too the way that the genealogy is divided up according to Jacob's different wives and concubines and how they are all carefully counted (46:15, 18, 22 and 25.) Then finally we are given a grand total of 70 including Joseph and his family (46:26-27.) What's the significance of all this counting? 70 often signifies a complete and perfect number and so Moses is making the point that God has saved his complete people. God has saved his complete remnant (45:7) he has saved all those he intended to save (notice how Er and Onan are mentioned in 46:12.) This remnant of 70 may not have looked much as they rolled into Egypt, but they are complete and sufficient for God's plan to bless the world through this family. The genealogy therefore is here to show us God's sovereignty and faithfulness to keep his promises to his people.
- Notice how Joseph sets things up so his family will receive the best land of Goshen (46:28-47:12.) When they arrive in Egypt he takes them straight to Goshen before taking them to Pharaoh (46:28-29.) Then he tells them exactly what to say when they meet Pharaoh (46:33-34.) Then he takes only 5 of the brothers in to see Pharaoh (47:2). Were these 5 chosen because they would make a better impression than the others? In all this Jacob is at work to make sure his father and brothers are well looked after. Is this favouritism? Yes, but he is being incredibly gracious to his brothers! Instead of getting what they deserve, he gives them all a fair share of the best (notice how he provides for them in 46:12.) Joseph is also an example of a godly child honouring and

providing for his father in his old age. I think we should therefore view Joseph's provision for his family as a positive thing rather than a negative.

- If Joseph's care for his family is a good thing, what are we to make of his dealings with the Egyptians? (47:13-26.) First he sells them food for money (v13-14.) Then when the money ran out he sold them food for their livestock (v15-17.) Then when they have no more livestock he buys their land off them and reduces them to servitude (v18-22.) In return he gives them seed and tells them that they can keep 4/5th but that 1/5th must be given to Pharaoh (v23-24.) At first this might not seem like a good thing, yet they get to keep 4/5th and they are thankful to Joseph for saving them (v25.) I think therefore that we are to view this as a good thing rather than a bad thing. God has given Joseph wisdom to organise things so that not just his family but all the people of Egypt are saved. Having said this we also see a stark contrast between the experience of Egypt and Israel. See how the blessing of Israel is described before and after the servitude of Egypt (47:11-12 → 47:13-26 → 47:27.) The LORD's hand of undeserved blessing is clearly upon Jacob and his family in a special way.

Big Idea

Here's my summary of this passage...

Despite the blessing and comfort of living in Goshen, Jacob lives and worships the LORD as a pilgrim heading to a better home.

Applications

- Focus on the gracious character of God who richly blesses Jacob and his family despite how sinful and undeserving they are. Help us rejoice not only in God's grace but his sovereignty which means that we can trust him to keep his promises to us.
- Whilst Jacob has often previously not been a good role model, here he is a good example of what it means to be a pilgrim living for and worshipping the LORD while he waits for the LORD to bring him home. It would have been very easy to live as if Goshen was their permanent home, and they were there for 400 years. Yet despite the comfort of Goshen, Jacob kept looking forward. He kept remembering that as good as Goshen was, the LORD had promised him something even better. In the same way we enjoy much comfort and blessing in our lives today. Yet we too needed to remember that ultimately this world is not our home. We are aliens and strangers (1 Peter 1:1-5) passing through. The LORD has a far greater home prepared for us (John 14:1-4.) Let us therefore follow in the footsteps of Jacob and live as worshipping pilgrims waiting for the LORD to bring us home.

Questions

Starter Question - The Bible describes Christians as God's elect exiles and foreigners. This world is not our home, God has prepared something better for us, and so we are like pilgrims on a journey. Do you find it easy to live as a foreigner/pilgrim in this world? What are some of the things that can make it hard?

There are many different reasons why we might find it hard - e.g. increasing hostility of society, we have to live by faith, this world can be so comfortable and enjoyable at times. In this chapter we will see Jacob settling in the comfortable land of Goshen and enjoying God's blessing. Yet he continues to see himself as a pilgrim (47:9) and Hebrews 11 tells us he was looking forward to something better. Jacob will therefore be an example to us of how to keep living as a pilgrim whether life now is comfortable or hard.

§1 Jacob has just learnt that Joseph is alive in Egypt. You would think he would be in a hurry to get to Egypt, so why does he stop at Beersheba?

Turning up Genesis 26v2,23-25 may be helpful to see the similarities with Isaac and to see the command God had given Isaac not to go to Egypt. Jacob is following in the footsteps of faith of his father Isaac.

§2 What was the LORD's message to Jacob? How would this have been a reassurance to Jacob?

God gives him permission to go. He also reassures him that all his promises still stand. God is with Jacob, he will bless Jacob, make him a great nation and give him the land of Canaan as promised.

§3 In 46:5-27 we are told who went to Egypt. Why do you think we get such a detailed list? What is emphasised at the beginning and end? (v5-7 and v26-27.)

Big thing to bring out is the number 70 and the sense of completeness. You may need to explain the significance of 70. Help the group to see that God is faithfully keeping his promises and rescuing all his people as planned.

§4 What do you imagine it was like when Jacob and Joseph finally met?

Think of how long it has been. Think of the years of grief Jacob had experienced because he thought his son was dead. Remember this is narrative so encourage and help the group to get into the emotion of this moment. Look to at what Jacob says, what does this tell us about him?

§5 What different things does Joseph do to ensure that his family receive the best land of Goshen?

See the notes section above. Notice how he carefully manages things.

§6 How does the plight of the Egyptians contrast with the blessing of Israel? How do we see God keeping his promises in these chapters?

Try not to get too bogged down into the issue of slavery. Help the group see that the people of Egypt consider this to be salvation. The big thing is to see the contrast between Egypt (slaves) and Israel as described in v27.

§7 Life in Goshen sounds great so why does Jacob want to be buried back in Canaan?

The simple answer is he is a pilgrim. He believes God's promises that as nice as Goshen may be, it is not his real home.

§8 Hebrews 11:21 commends Jacob for his faith and worship of God. Read Hebrews 11:13-16. How do these verses help us understand Jacob?

This should serve to reinforce the idea of Jacob as a pilgrim, as good as it was in Goshen he knows that God has something even better waiting for him.

§9 Jacob described himself as a pilgrim 47:9. In what ways did he live as a pilgrim in these chapters?

As nice as Goshen is, he holds lightly to it. See too how the beginning and end of our passage are bookended with Jacob worshipping the LORD. He follows the LORD obediently and seeks to bless others as he is passing through.

§10 In these chapters we have been reminded of God's faithfulness and we have seen Jacob's example as a pilgrim. How will these help and encourage us when we find it hard to live as pilgrims in this world?

Here we come back to the beginning. As Christians in Britain we don't face much hostility, life is pretty comfortable for many of us. In that way there are similarities between us and Jacob living in Goshen. Yet God has prepared something better for us, and so we are to live as trusting, worshipping pilgrims, waiting for the day when finally we will be home.

Genesis 48-49:28

Context

- Jacob is coming to the end of his life (47:28-48:2.) His life has dominated a large chunk of Genesis and now it is time for the promises to pass to the next generation. Chapters 48-49 are all about Jacob looking to the future.
- God's promises continue to be key to understanding what is happening (48:3-4.) Look up 28:3-4 and 36:9-13 to see how the promises have been passed on.
- Twice in these chapters we find the younger son taking precedent over the older son (48:13-20 and 49:3-12.) Firstly Ephraim (the younger) is exalted over Manasseh (the elder.) Then Judah is exalted as leader instead of Reuben, even though Reuben was the firstborn. This is not new in Genesis (see 4:1-8; 27:1-41 and 38:27-30.) These incidences bring us to the key biblical theme of God's sovereign election. God makes choices as is his right as the sovereign creator and ruler of the universe (see Romans 9:10-21 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.)
- In chapter 49:1-28 Jacob prophesies about his sons and their descendants in the future. The blessings he announces not only look to the future (e.g. 49:10), they are also a consequence of how each brother has behaved in the past (see (49:4, 5-6, 23, 28.)

Structure

- **Chapter 48 - Jacob blesses Joseph and his sons**
 - 48:1-7 - Jacob adopts Manasseh and Ephraim
 - 48:8-20 - Jacob blesses Ephraim ahead of Manasseh
 - 48:15-16 & 21-22 - Jacob blesses Joseph
- **Chapter 49:1-28 - Jacob 'blesses' his sons**
 - v1-2 - Jacob assembles his sons to prophecy about them
 - v3-4 - Reuben
 - v5-7 - Simeon and Levi (together)
 - v8-12 - Judah
 - v13 - Zebulun
 - v14-15 - Isaachar
 - v16-17 - Dan
 - v18 - Jacob looks to God for deliverance
 - v19 - Gad
 - v20 - Asher
 - v21 - Naphtali
 - v22-26 - Joseph
 - v27 - Benjamin
 - v28 - Jacob gave each the appropriate blessing.

Notes and Tricky Bits

- 48:1 - When Joseph hears that his father is about to die he takes his sons with him when he goes. These children were born to Joseph when he was in Egypt and far from his father, perhaps he wants to make sure that they will share in the blessing God has promised through Jacob?
- 48:2-4 - Jacob rallies at the prospect of seeing Joseph. He then restates the blessing that God had promised him. These have dominated his life! Even though he is about to die, the promises will not die. See how the theme of promise and blessing runs through chapter 48-49.
- 48:5-7 - Jacob adopts Ephraim and Manasseh so that they will be his sons and therefore heads of their own tribes receiving their own portions of the promised land. Jacob seems to link this adoption to the death of his beloved Rachel (their Grandmother.) There will not be a tribe of Joseph but instead all Joseph's descendants will be incorporated into the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim (v6.) We may find this strange, we may wonder why God does this but again we must remember that God is sovereign and he can do what he wants.
- 48:8-10 - Jacob's eyesight is failing so he is careful to check the identity of the sons before he blesses them. He knows from personal experience how easily blessings can get swapped around (see ch27.)
- 48:12-14 & v19-20 - Jacob deliberately swaps his hands over to give the younger (Ephraim) the blessing that would ordinarily go to the elder (Manasseh.) Joseph thinks his dad is making a mistake but Jacob is clear in what he is doing and what it will mean for the sons and their descendants. Ephraim will be exalted above Manasseh and this is exactly what we see later in the Old Testament. When the Kingdom of Israel divides, it is Ephraim that becomes the dominant tribe in the Northern Kingdom.
- 48:15-16 & v21-22 - Jacob doesn't just bless Joseph's children, he also blesses Joseph, assuring Joseph of God's continued presence with him and his provision for him in the land. In v15-16 Jacob twice invokes God but then also invokes 'the Angel' to bless these boys. Mention of Angels is often the trigger for all sorts of wild speculation. The simplest way to understand this is to see it as referring to the 'Angel of the LORD' who repeatedly occurs in Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament (see 16:7, 21:17, 22:11-15.) The Angel of the LORD is a manifestation of God in human form at crucial points in the Old Testament. It is not a key part of these chapters so I would avoid getting side tracked into a discussion about this.
- 49:1-2 - Jacob gathers his sons to prophecy to them about the future. As he does this he is looking beyond their lifetime. Whilst some of the brothers receive great blessing, others receive very little and in some cases they are cursed because of their past sins.
- 49:3-4 - As the firstborn Reuben would expect to receive the greatest blessing, but he doesn't. This is because of what he did when he slept with his Father's concubine (v4 see 35:22.) He therefore receives the 'blessing' appropriate to him (49:28.)
- 49:5-7 - Simeon and Levi are the only brothers to be grouped together. Again this is because of what they had done previously (see v5 and ch34.) They are cursed (not

blessed) and scattered. We see this in the way that the tribe of Levi would not receive territory like the other tribes.

- 49:8-12 - Judah, along with Joseph receives the largest blessing. Whilst we might expect Joseph to be greatly blessed, we may be surprised to find Judah (remember chapters 37-38) being blessed so generously. Here again we are confronted with the election, sovereignty and grace of God. He is free to bless whoever he chooses in whatever way he chooses. Ordinarily you would expect leaders to come from the firstborn, Reuben, but instead they will come from Judah. Yet it is not just that Judah will provide kings for Israel. From Judah will come a king, a lion, to rule the world. The New Testament shows us that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 5:5.) Further hints to the Lord Jesus can be seen in the description of him in v11-12. The references to donkeys, colts, vines and branches and washing garments in wine/blood of the vine are all picked up in different ways in the New Testament in connection with Jesus and his ministry.
- 49:18- Half way through his prophecy, Jacob momentarily breaks off to seek the LORD's deliverance. It breaks the rhythm of the passage and so it is clearly important. As he reflects on what he has just prophesied (v3-17) Jacob recognises that his descendants will need the LORD's gracious deliverance. The past shows that left to their own sinful desires they will bring destruction and misery. If the people of Israel are to prosper it will require the LORD to graciously deliver them from themselves and their sin.
- 49:22-26 - Alongside Judah, Joseph receives the biggest blessing. Again his blessing reflects what has happened in the past (v23-25.) Joseph's life testifies to the faithful, delivering hand of the LORD who has helped and blessed him. The life of Joseph therefore stands as an encouragement to all the people to follow Jacob in looking to the LORD for deliverance and grace.
- 49:28 - This verse is the key to understanding what we have just seen. Jacob has given each the blessing appropriate to them.

Big Idea - Worship God for his faithfulness and gracious election

Applications

- Worship marked the final days of Jacob's life (47:31.) As he reflected on God's faithfulness to the promises it led him to worship and give thanks to God. As we look both at God's dealings in Genesis and his dealings with us it should cause us to worship. There is much that we might not understand about God's sovereignty and election but we should not let this hinder our worship. God's ways are not our ways and that is reason to praise him!
- As we see Jacob adopting Ephraim and Manasseh we see something of the way that God has graciously adopted us, giving us a share in his wonderful inheritance.
- As we read Jacob's prophecy and see the way that it was fulfilled, (especially regarding Judah and Jesus) it should give us assurance of God's sovereignty over history and our lives.
- It might be tempting to beat up on the brothers but we are just as much in need of God's deliverance as they were (49:18.) If God had not been gracious to them then there would have been no hope for them. In the same way, if it were not for God's gracious deliverance there would be no hope for us either! Let us praise God that he is

a God who does not treat us as our sins deserve but instead graciously delivers us by the Lion of Judah!

Questions

Starter Question - Jacob knows he is coming the end of his life but he is still looking to the future because of God's promises. When someone knows they are coming to the end of their life, what sort of things do they do?

When someone knows that they are coming to the end of their life they often look back and look forward. They look back over their life and what has happened to them but they also look forward and seek to provide for their family when they are gone. In some ways we see something similar with Jacob. He looks back (48:3-5, 49:4-5, 49:22-24) but also spends a lot of time looking to the future of his descendants.

Focus on Chapter 48

§1 What does Jacob do as he comes to the end of his life?

As well as looking back (v4-5) he also looks to the future by adopting Ephraim and Manasseh so that they will be treated as sons of Jacob rather than sons of Joseph.

a) What will this mean for Ephraim and Manasseh?

They will receive an inheritance of the land (v6) and the rest of Joseph's descendants will come under Ephraim and Manasseh (v6.)

§2 Normally the eldest son would receive the greater blessing/inheritance. What does Jacob do that is unusual?

Jacob deliberately swaps things around. Look how he checks who is who in v8-10. Then when Joseph tries to line up Manasseh (the eldest) to receive the right hand blessing, Jacob swaps his hands over so that it is the younger Ephraim who receives the blessing of the firstborn. This means that Ephraim and his descendants will be greater. This finds its fulfilment after the kingdom of Israel splits in two when Ephraim becomes the dominant tribe in the Northern Kingdom.

This is not the first time that the younger has been exalted over the older. See the context for the other examples.

a) How does Joseph react when he sees what his Father is doing?

He thinks his elderly Father is making a mistake in his old age and because of his faltering eyesight. Jacob knows exactly what he is doing, this is no mistake.

§3 As Christians we have been graciously chosen and adopted by God. Look up some of the following passages to help you answer the following questions.

(Romans 8:28-39, Romans 9:10-16, Ephesians 1:3-14, 1 Peter 1:1-5, 1 Peter 2:9-10.)

These are just some of the New Testament passages on the theme of election and adoption. There will not be time to look at all of them so be selective. I suggest looking at just one or two passages. One or both of the passages in bold would be my suggestion.

a) What do these passages teach us about God's adoption and election?

There is much we could say here. The big thing we want the group to get that this is God's gracious merciful choice. He chooses us not because of who we are, what we have done or what we might become. It is simply because of his grace!

b) What assurances and blessings do we receive because of God's election and adoption?

We often find the topics of election and adoption confusing and possibly even unfair. Instead of getting bogged down in this, let's focus on the positives. Because our salvation is all of God we can have great confidence and assurance that he will finish what he has begun in us. Romans 8:28-39 is full of rich assurance that flows from God's election and adoption.

c) How should we respond to God's election and adoption?

Worship should be our primary response! We may not understand why God acts as he does but as those who have been adopted and chosen we should want to respond to the praise of his glorious grace!

Focus on Chapter 49

§4 Jacob now gathers all his sons and prophecies about them and the tribes that will come from them. Who receives the greater blessings?

Judah and Joseph receive the biggest blessings. Most of the other brothers receive barely a verse or two but Joseph and Judah 5 verses of blessing. Some of the other brothers barely receive any blessing in comparison.

a) In what ways is the distribution of blessing surprising? Do you think the various blessings are deserved?

Again we would expect Reuben, the eldest son, to receive the greatest blessing but he doesn't. Help the group to see the reason why Reuben (along with Simeon and Levi) don't receive such great blessings (v4 and v6 → v28.)

We may not be surprised that Joseph receives such a wonderful blessing as, humanly speaking, he has been the hero. We may be more surprised that Judah receives the blessing of the firstborn. It is from Judah that kings will emerge and one king will not just be King of Israel but of the whole world.

§5 In what ways is Jesus the fulfilment of the prophecy about Judah?

Revelation 5 will describe Jesus as the Lion of Judah. He is the son of Judah who will reign over all nations. Notice too how the imagery of v11 and v12 get picked up in the life and ministry of Jesus (see the notes above for more details.)

§6 v18 breaks the flow of the chapter. Why do you think Jacob breaks off from his prophecy to pray for deliverance?

We could easily sweep over this and miss this but it breaks the flow of prophecy so clearly it is important. As Jacob looks at his sinful sons in front of him he is all too aware that they and their descendants will need God's gracious deliverance. Just as God has repeatedly delivered his sinful people time and again in Genesis, so he will need to continue to deliver his sinful people if his plans and purposes to bless the world are to be fulfilled.

§7 What does this chapter teach us about the LORD?

This question can be used to help draw together what you have seen. Help the group to think about God's sovereign control of the future and his gracious blessing of undeserved people.

Genesis 49:29-50:26

Context

- God's faithfulness to his promises have been a huge theme throughout our studies and continue to be important here. Both Jacob and Joseph want to be buried in the Promised Land of Canaan. This reflects their faith that God will keep the promises that he made to Abraham (15:7) and Jacob (46:3-4).
- This final section of Genesis looks forward to the fulfilment of God's promises in the Exodus which came 430 years later (see Exodus 1:1-8, 12:40 and 13:19.)
- The theme of faith in God's promises is picked up in Hebrews 11:21-22 where both Jacob and Joseph are held up as men of faith who trusted the promises of God and died looking forward to the day when he would fulfil them.
- Hebrews 11:39-40 tells us that they did not receive what had been promised because God has something better prepared for them and us. In this way we see that the Promised Land of Canaan operates as something of a picture of the New Creation. Just as God eventually brought the Exodus to rescue Israel out of Egypt and brought them into Canaan, so he will bring about a greater Exodus when he brings all his people home to his perfect new creation.

Structure

- The NIV headings give a simple yet helpful structure to the passage;
 - Jacob's Death (49:29-50:14)
 - Joseph Reassures his brothers (50:15-21)
 - Joseph's Death (50:22-26.)
- This simple structure helps us to see parallels between Jacob and Joseph and their faith in God in the face of death. It also helps to highlight the central section of the passage where Joseph reassures his brother by reminding them of the sovereign care of God for his people. This theme of God's sovereign care runs right through the whole passage.

Notes

- **Jacob breathed his last and was gathered to his people (49:29-33)**
 - Death is normally viewed as separating us from our people. It separates us from family and friends, but here for Jacob it means being united with his people/ancestors. This is one of the first points in the Bible to give hope of life after death. Abraham and Isaac have died, and now Jacob goes to be with them. The rest of the Bible paints a fuller picture of the life after death that God offers to his people.
 - The hope of life after death and the assurance of God's promises means that Jacob does not rail against death. Instead he can face it calmly, confident that God is faithful and will keep his promises to Jacob and his descendants.
 - Jacob wants to make sure that he is not buried in Egypt but buried in the Promised Land. He shows us that as comfortable as life in Egypt was, he knew that it was not his home. His home was the land that God had promised and so that was where he wanted to be buried.
- **Jacob's sons did as he commanded and buried him in Canaan. (50:1-14)**
 - There are two things to note in these verses.
 - Firstly the obedience of the sons in obeying their father (v12-14.)
 - Secondly we see the high regard that Joseph is held in by the Egyptians. Joseph asks Pharaoh's permission to go and bury his father (v5.) Not only does Pharaoh

grant his request (v6) but all the dignitaries of Egypt made the long journey too (v7-9). Indeed there are so many Egyptians in the funeral party the the Canaanites think it is an entirely Egyptian funeral (v11.)

- **Joseph's brothers fear Joseph will seek revenge (50:15-18)**

- With Jacob dead the brothers fear that Joseph will not want revenge. They assume that the only thing that has held Joseph back for the last 17 years was Jacob. They do not trust that Joseph really has forgiven them. They assume that he is like them, holding grudges and looking to pay them back.
- They lie and and forge a letter supposedly from their Father telling Joseph to forgive his brothers.
- Notice Joseph's response to their letter - v17 - he wept! Why would Joseph weep when he heard their message? Perhaps he weeps because they have slipped back into their old lying ways. Alternatively their message shows that for the last 17 years they never really believed him when he said he had forgiven them. Their message calls into question his character and to realise that they have thought of him like this for the last 17 years must have been a painful realisation for him.

- **Joseph reassures his brothers with God's Sovereign Care (50:19-21)**

- Notice how Joseph begins and ends by saying, "Don't be afraid."
- Instead of getting angry at them for lying and questioning his character, Joseph reassures them and speaks kindly to them. They assumed that he was holding a grudge like them. The truth is that Joseph shows grace and forgiveness like God.
- Joseph has shown them forgiveness and kindness because he sees the sovereign caring hand of God has been over all things. God has used their sin and brought about salvation! This is one of the biggest statements of God's sovereignty in the whole of the Bible. It is right up there with Romans 8:28. God has used the sinful actions of the brothers to bring about not only their salvation but the salvation of Egypt and many other nations! In God's hands, their sin becomes the source of their salvation! 50:20 was true of the brothers' actions but it was even truer of the cross. God used the very worst of human sin - murdering our maker, and intended it for good, the saving of many lives! People often struggle with the idea that God is completely sovereign but the cross demonstrates not only God's perfect sovereignty but also his perfect goodness and these two always go hand in hand!

- **Joseph dies and reassures his brothers with God's promise (50:22-26.)**

- Perhaps the first thing to note in these verses is the many years covered by v22-23. Joseph was 17 when we met him in Genesis 37, he was 30 when he entered service in Genesis 41 and he was 110 when he died here in Genesis 50. We are told almost nothing of his life in Egypt from the death of his Father to his own death. What is evident is that he maintained his faith in God and his promises as is seen in v24-25.
- Joseph spent most of his life in Egypt. He was powerful and enjoyed a comfortable life but he never forgot that it was not his real home. He didn't want to be buried in Egypt, instead he wanted his coffin to be kept unburied, ready to be taken to Canaan when God rescued them from Egypt.
- Genesis therefore finishes looking forward. God's people are safe in Egypt, but they are not home in Egypt. God will one day take them home.

Big Themes

The faithfulness, goodness and sovereignty of God working all things for the good of his people!

Applications

- This passage, and the whole story of Joseph, provides us with a wonderful assurance of God's sovereign goodness in all things. If God can use the brothers sinful actions for his good and saving purposes then he accomplish his good purposes no matter how bad things seem to us. This is not just an abstract truth to believe, this is a truth to believe personally in the details of our own lives.
- The focus of Jacob and Joseph on being buried 'at home' in Canaan services to remind us that as comfortable as this world is, it is not our true home. Joseph lived almost all his life in Egypt, and for most of that time he enjoyed great comfort, status and blessing, yet he was never lulled into thinking that Egypt was his home. He therefore serves as a powerful example to us. Our lives in this world may involve much blessing and comfort. If so we are to enjoy that giving thanks to God, but we are never to forget that this world is not our home. Together with Jacob and Joseph we are looking forward to a heavenly country and a new creation. We are not home yet, but one day we will be.

Questions

Starter Question - How is death viewed in our culture today?

I know this is quite a morbid way to start a Bible study but this passage is bookended by 2 deaths. Many people today see death as the end, the full stop on the sentence of their life. Jacob and Joseph had faith in God which encouraged them to look beyond death.

§1 The passage begins with Jacob's death and it ends with Joseph's death. What instructions do they leave?

Both of them what to be taken to Canaan.

a) What do their instructions tell us about their faith in God?

God had promised to give Abraham and his descendants the land. By wanting to be buried there they were demonstrating their faith in God to keep his promise.

b) What do their instructions tell us about their true home?

Jacob had lived in Egypt for 17 years and Joseph for most of his life. They had enjoyed the best of Egypt and yet they still saw the Promised Land as their home.

c) How might their longing for home be an example and encouragement to us?

This picks up on the theme of pilgrimage that we covered when we studied Genesis 46-47. Hebrews 11 encourages us to view them as examples of faith, of pilgrims looking for a better home. As comfortable as life may be for us, this world is not our home. As Christians we are aliens and strangers in this world. God has prepared something better for us that we will enjoy with Old Testament saints like Jacob and Joseph.

§2 How is Jacob's death described? (49:29&33)

The key phrase is gathered to his fathers/people.

a) What picture does this paint of death?

There is a sense of peace and calm. There is also the picture of a family reunion. Most obviously of all it shows that death is not the end of Jacob. He enjoys life beyond death with his ancestors.

b) How is this different to the normal way we view death?

Firstly and most obviously many people see death as the end with nothing beyond the grave. Secondly death is often felt to bring loss and separation, whilst this is painfully true, death also brings us together with God and his people.

§3 Why are Joseph's brothers suddenly scared of Joseph? (50:15-18)

They fear that now Jacob is not around Joseph will seek revenge. They don't believe that Joseph really has forgiven them. See notes for more on this.

a) What do they assume about Joseph?

They assume that he is dishonest and holds grudges like them. Again see the notes for more on this.

§4 Why do you think Joseph weeps when he receives their message?

As mentioned in the notes it could be because they are lying again. They are also questioning his character and showing that they never really believed his offer of forgiveness.

§5 What does Joseph tell them about God?

He emphasises God's sovereignty and loving care. God has used their sin to bring salvation not just for them but for many people.

a) How does this serve to reassure the brothers?

Joseph's forgiveness rests on God not him or the brothers. They intended harm but God has used it for good. Joseph therefore has forgiven them because of what God has done rather than because of what they did.

b) How is the truth of v20 seen ultimately in Jesus at the cross?

Arguable the cross was the greatest evil in the history of humanity and yet in God's sovereign goodness it is the means of salvation for all human beings, even those who condemned and crucified Christ. The cross is the ultimate example of God's sovereignty and goodness.

c) Think about the circumstances in your own life. How does the truth of v20 bring you comfort?

Instead of focusing on how the sovereignty of God can be confusing, we want to go with the flow of the passage which is reassurance and comfort. At this point in the study things will be getting more personal. Be prepared to share an example from your own life which will help the group see how the doctrine connects with your experience.

§6 As we come to the end of our studies in Genesis what have you learnt/been reminded about God? How will this help you in your faith?

Use this question to reflect back over the studies. Again, be prepared to share your own reflections if others in the group are quiet. Why not spend time at the end of the study giving thanks for what God has taught you and praying for situations that have been raised.