

The Story of Two Families

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Good morning. Please keep your Bibles open at Genesis, the last few chapters. We're going to be looking at chapters 48 to 50 this morning. Well, it can be said that the story of the Bible is really the story of two families, the family of Adam and the family of Abraham.

In the book of Genesis, really, if you wanted to summarize it or sum it up, you could say is the origin stories of these two families, how these two families came about and what is the difference between them.

Now, we're all by default in the family of Adam. And we all by default go the same way as our first ancestor Adam went in the Garden of Eden by failing to believe in God's desire and his ability to bless us and then rather trying to find blessing by our own hand, through our own means, which we see in Genesis is the root cause of all the sin in our hearts and in this world when we don't believe God's desire, ability and plan to bless us.

And we try to find our own. And the sad story of the first few chapters of Genesis shows us what happens when humanity fails to believe and look to God to bless them and when they therefore try to take God's place, which is a fall away from his environment of blessing and frustration of our lives on this earth and a limitation of our lives, making us temporary beings, and as well as an ever-increasing cycle of sin and depravity.

And that was the first few chapters of Genesis that we saw. And that, of course, culminated in Genesis chapter 11 with the Tower of Babel, humanity's great united effort to become God, to reach heaven by our own skill and by our own means.

[2 : 01] And God's response of that we saw in Genesis 11 for our own good was to scatter the family of Adam all across the earth into different races and languages as we see today.

And that was Genesis 1 to 11 in summary. But then, from chapter 12 onwards, we learn another origin story about another family, the family of Abraham.

And that is a family that is chosen out of this world by no merit of their own and who are called to leave their own prospect of blessing, leave their ability or prospect of trying to get blessing for themselves as Abraham was called to leave his land, and rather to trust God to bless them.

And that's why the origin story of Abraham's family started with promises from God. And the rest of the story is whether or not they trust in those promises that we see in the first few verses of Genesis chapter 12.

And we saw also that through, if we look at those promises, which we spend a lot of time on, we saw that through this family of faith, God has a plan to actually save this whole world and to reverse the curse that we saw in Genesis chapter 3 and to bring people, humans, again to a place of life and blessing once more.

[3 : 25] Now, Genesis showed us the origin of those two separate families, but it doesn't only show us where they come from, it also gives us glimpses of where those two families are headed, where they're going to.

So, we saw some disastrous stories in Genesis, the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah, the stories of the flood. That's what happens when God's judgment comes down on people in Adam's family, the children of Adam, who continue to ignore God in the world that he's made.

And what happens, essentially, is he cuts them off from himself and from life and blessings that flow from him forever. And that, we've seen in Genesis, is the destiny of the children of Adam.

But it's here, in these closing chapters of Genesis, right at the end, that we also get a glimpse into the destiny of the children of Abraham, his family, which is an alternate future for humanity.

We think, you know, by default, as children of Adam, it's ingrained into our minds that we have this life and then we die, and that's the end. But actually, there's an alternate path.

[4 : 42] There's an alternate future for humanity that Genesis shows us, which is bound up in the family of Abraham, and which we need to know, is real. And so, we're going to look at these few chapters and what they tell us about that alternate future, the future of Abraham's family.

And as we look at it, we're going to ask four questions. How can we be sure this future will actually come about? Who will be included in this future? What does this future actually consist of? What does it look like? And how will that future finally be achieved? And so, let's look at this passage by asking those four questions together. Firstly, how can we know it'll actually happen? In these closing chapters, we see Jacob passing on God's covenant promises to his children, to the next generation of Abraham's family. But the question we've got to be asking is, well, how can he be so confident that they'll actually happen?

What is he pinning his hopes on? Is it not just wishful thinking? Of course, the same question goes for any religious hope that a person might have, that God is going to bless or save a particular group of people.

[5 : 51] You know, why pay attention to what Jacob says and Abraham and his family rather than Islam or Hinduism with their similar claims of future blessing?

You know, what's so special about Abraham's family? Why is this the one to trace through history and follow if we want to know what God is saying to us? Well, the answer, quite simply, of why to focus on Abraham and his families out of all the other families and religions of the earth is because of God's track record with this particular family that no other family or group of people in this world shares.

We see Jacob reflecting on this track record before he hands over the blessings to his sons. There in chapter 48 from verse 15, he says, May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm, may he bless these boys, may they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac and may they increase greatly on the earth.

Okay, so Jacob was really confident about the future of this family but we see here it's all because of what God had already done in the past with this family. The history of how he had shown his promises true in the lives of these men, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs, which of course is all the history we've been looking at in Genesis for the past 38 chapters.

And so Jacob's confidence in the future, you see, is not wishful thinking but it's based on what God has already done in history. Because you see, God never expects people to have blind faith.

[7 : 36] That's a misunderstanding of what faith is, at least biblical faith. Biblical faith is always based on history. It's always based on facts. And therefore, it's not unreasonable.

Now, just imagine I was standing on the side of the road waiting for my wife to come fetch me, come pick me up in the car. Now, you wouldn't come to me and say, well, where is she?

You can't see her. Oh, that's just blind faith. That's so unreasonable to have faith in her. Well, no, I don't believe because I see her in front of me that she's going to come pick me up. Even when she's around the corner and I don't see her, I still believe because of her past history of doing what she's promised.

And that is faith in what I can't yet see, but it is not unreasonable faith, you see. Well, in the same way, it's not unreasonable to trust in God to fulfill his promise to Abraham's family.

If he's proven himself reliable to do that to them in the past, if he has a history with that family, then we can know and we can trace that family through history and follow them knowing that God's promises will come to pass for them.

[8 : 51] What is unreasonable is to believe that God's just going to bless you because you want him to and for no other reason. But it's not unreasonable to believe God is going to bless you if you tie yourself to the group of people in this world that he's already promised to bless.

But then, of course, if that's true and if we know that God will bless this particular group of people because he's got a track record with them and he's promised and God doesn't lie, the question is who will actually then end up being part of that blessing that God has promised to Abraham's family?

Who is included in these blessings? And the answer is not who you expect. One of the interesting things that also happens in this story in chapter 48, you can read about it, is when Jacob, before he blesses the rest of the children, he blesses Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

And what he does is he basically reverses the blessings that are supposed to go to these sons by tradition. And instead of giving the eldest the main blessing, he gives the younger one, much to Joseph's objection.

But Jacob insists on doing it that way. So he crosses his hands over. Joseph says, no, you can't do that. And he says, I'm going to do that. And I think Jacob is insisting on that because he wants to make a point to Joseph and his children and us that God's blessing doesn't always go to who you think it does.

[10:20] much like in Jacob's own life. He knows from personal experience he was the least likely candidate to receive God's covenant blessings and yet God chose him. And so he knew that God's blessings don't go to those who have done something to deserve them.

He knew he didn't deserve God's covenant blessings. And he was also out of order. He wasn't the oldest son as well. But that was also Jesus' point, wasn't it?

in much of his teaching like the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. You remember that? It's a shocking story. Two men come to the temple. One is a uber-religious Pharisee and he's ticked all the boxes religiously.

The other one is a very unethical sinful tax collector. And the Pharisee comes to the temple and he lists to God all of his religious works, the things that he's done.

The tax collector he can't. He doesn't even have a list of good things that he's done. So all he does is he bows down and he cries out and he appeals to God's mercy. Now, we expect the religious guy is going to be the one who receives God's blessing, but that's the twist in the story.

[11:35] Jesus ends the story by saying this in Luke 18. I tell you that this man, the tax collector, rather than the Pharisee, went home justified before God.

And the point which Jesus makes here and over and over again in his teaching is that religious works will never save someone or secure God's blessing. Because no matter how religious a person is, we can never do enough to undo our sin and rebellion against a holy God that is in our heart.

We can't cover up what's in our heart by religious good works. God sees through that and God's not impressed with religious tokenism. But what God is actually looking for is people who trust him and embrace his means of salvation and blessing rather than their own.

That's the lesson Abraham had to learn. Remember, we looked at the story with Abraham and Sarah and God had given them a promise of a child but Sarah was barren and so they tried to engineer God's promise through their own means and that failed and that was all part of the process of Abraham and Sarah learning how to trust God and what true faith in God really looks like.

To trust him for blessing and promise and fulfillment rather than to trust ourselves. And that, that kind of faith is also what marks out a child of Abraham's as someone who is in Abraham's true family today.

[13:06] People who, like Abraham, look in faith to God's means of blessing rather than their own. It's why Galatians 3 verse 7 says, Understand then that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

That is faith in God's means of blessing and salvation which of course the Bible shows us is the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins which the prophets foretold and the apostles declared. That is and has always been God's plan to save and bless the family of Abraham. And so all who look to that plan and God's means of salvation, all who look to Jesus in faith are the children of Abraham today, the Bible teaches.

And all who don't look to that means of salvation are not in that family. Which means, of course, that many Gentiles are children of Abraham while many Jews are not.

Which is exactly the point that Jacob was trying to make here in this story that it's not those you expect who end up receiving the blessings of the family of Abraham. The next question, question number three that we need to cover is, well, if that's the case, what do these blessings actually consist of?

[14:25] What do they look like? What do we mean when we talk about blessing? And that we see in Jacob's prophecy about the future of his family which was read earlier.

But as you go through those promises, there's a lot of striking things but one of the most striking things is how earthly those blessings actually are. Did you notice that? We saw this last week too, if

you were with us, that the future of Abraham's family isn't going to be some ethereal existence on the clouds when you die, but real physical enjoyments of the fruits of the earth in a life to come. I mean, if you look at these promises, they include rule, land, food, mineral wealth, real earthy stuff, earthy blessings. For example, in the prophecy about Judah, look how it's put from verse 11. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch, he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. Now, I know it's some weird descriptions there, which is the nature of prophecy most of the time, but it's still clear that this is talking about material abundance. I mean, if you lived in those days and you had a donkey, not many people have donkeys today or vines to tie them to, but if you did in that day and you were a vineyard owner, one thing you wouldn't do is tie your donkey to the choice vine because donkeys eat grapes and he would eat up all your best grapes.

[15:58] But you would only do that if you've got so many grapes that it doesn't matter. And there's so much wine that the grape presses would be up to their waist, their clothes washed with the blood of grapes.

You see, this is a picture of a world without scarcity. Just like in Joseph's blessing, too, have a look, this family will one day enjoy the bounty of the everlasting hills.

It's a picture of a world without curse. When humanity, you see, sinned against God, God cursed the ground. It's why we have unemployment and scarcity and inflation, not to mention viruses, pandemics, sickness, and death.

It's because the world is broken. It's not meant to be this way. But here, we see this glimpse of a world that is fixed again. The world that God actually created us for, where we can enjoy all of the world's bounty again without limit.

That is underpinning this future hope of Abraham's family. Also, you'll notice if you read on in the story, both Jacob and Joseph, when they're about to die, leave some very strict instructions for what should happen to their remains after they die, their physical bones.

[17:14] And it's also something that the book of Hebrews in the New Testament from our reading earlier picks up as an example of their faith. Now, why is it so important? What happens to their bones? Well, it's because their future hope was real and physical and attached to this world and attached to their body and their bones.

They were looking forward to a physical resurrection in a restored, physical world one day where these promises would come true and they knew it because of God's track record of keeping His promises so far.

And, which is exactly what Jesus rising from the dead showed us will certainly happen to all those who trust in Him. It's why His resurrection is so important. It's not a footnote.

It's essential in the hope of Christians and the hope of Abraham's family. That day, looking forward to when Abraham's true children will be able to enjoy all the gifts God has always wanted to give us after we have a real physical resurrection from the dead, which has happened already in history. so we know it's true. But, of course, these are gifts that we must wait for that we can't get right now and even fight for while we wait.

[18:26] You'll also notice in Jacob's blessings, there's, it's not just blessing languages, there's a lot of conflict language as well. There's a lot of talk about fighting. There's battles to come.

There's fighting that needs to happen before these blessings can be enjoyed. but there's also victories that will be assured. And we, of course, see that in the history of Israel, how they had to go into the land and fight as they followed the path that God led them on.

He doesn't just hand things on a plate, especially in this broken world. There's, there is a journey we need to go through and that journey involves hardship and fighting. Paul tells Timothy to fight the good fight of faith.

So we see this conflict language in the New Testament as well. because, well, faith will always be a fight until we receive what is promised. Until we can see those promises in front of us, we have to fight all the ways that the evil one is trying to make us not believe God's promises and rather trying to make us find blessings here and now by our own hand.

That is what he's always been doing right from the Garden of Eden. And that's why we must be certain of our future and why it should be concrete in our minds. so that we don't fall for his tricks to pin our hopes here and now.

[19:47] But then the final question we must ask is how? How is God exactly planning to bring that future about? And we learn that by reading Judah's blessing a bit more closely.

Have a look at it. Because in the midst of these descriptions of blessings to Abraham's family, there's a very strange little line in verse 10 that they wouldn't have really understood then. Because it was a prophecy of something specific that would need to happen in the future before the blessings of a restored creation could be enjoyed. Have a look what it says. The scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

These are very important lines nestled in these blessings from Jacob because this here is a messianic prophecy.

Now by that I mean it speaks about a future Messiah. A king who has the right to rule Abraham's family and whose rule we see will one day extend over all the nations.

[21 : 08] But until that happens and until all who resist God's rule are wiped from this planet and sin is done away with for good until then there can be no peace and blessing for God's people and that's why the Messiah is so central to the message of scripture and the future of Abraham's family and the Messiah is so important in God's plans.

The Messiah is key to these promised blessings coming to pass and that is why Jesus is so important because when he came to earth he proved himself to be the Messiah that the entire Old Testament had been anticipating.

I mean that is the point of the Gospels. The Gospels all are written to make the point that Jesus is the Messiah. Not just that Jesus died for our sins but that Jesus is the one who will one day rule the nations and that is going to happen.

It's actually going to happen. Jesus will rule the nations unless God's lying which there's no reason to believe he is. Jesus will one day return and he will take up his authority over all nations over China over the USA over South Africa over the United Kingdom over Iran over Israel over Palestine. He will claim all those as his own and kings will bow the knee to him whether they like it or not and he will judge all who have opposed him. And the Israelis and the Palestinians who are currently and constantly fighting over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem will get a rude awakening when Jesus comes and claims that for himself as his seat of government over this whole world and when he sends for the billionaires living in their mansions and owning their private islands and he says get out those belong to my people now.

[22 : 55] It sounds crazy doesn't it? But it's what will happen. It's what Daniel the prophet said will happen. He says but the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever yes forever and ever.

That is real. That is going to happen. This is the way that God is going to bring about the future promises for the family of Abraham through the Messiah and he will certainly do it.

And so what's left to ask as we finish this great epic journey that we've taken in Genesis the origin stories of these two families on earth the question that's left to ask is which family do you belong to? Because your eternal fate is attached to one of those two families either the family of Adam where you will go the way of Adam and your ongoing seeking of your own blessing apart from God will end up cutting you off from God and his blessings forever or your fate is tied to the family of Abraham with the future hope of eternal life in the new creation and inheriting the kingdom to come.

Well you know what determines which family you are tied to? is your response to the Messiah whether you have submitted to the Messiah as your Lord and King and trusted in the means that God has made to save you which is his death on the cross for you.

[24 : 34] Now if you have not yet done that you must because it's foolishness not to tie yourself to Abraham's family if these things are true. If that is the family God has made these promises to and shown by a proven track record in history that he is definitely going to fulfill and given you every chance to enter into that family he's not going to take kindly to you ignoring everything he's done so clearly in history to bring you life and salvation that he made you for.

But then if you are a member of Abraham's family if you have submitted to and trusted in the Messiah and his death on the cross for you and you've entered into and tied your fate to that family then if all this is true what you need to do now is learn to view your life not according to where you are now and the situation you're in now but according to where you are going God has made it very clear where the children of Abraham are going according to the future that God has secured for the family of Abraham that is how we've got to see our lives and define our identities and our place in this world by our future not our present which means not investing in the present situation and focusing and being taken in and distracted by what is present but rather being focused on what is

coming and investing and spending our energy and time and money on that investing into what you know is certain spending money on planting churches more than planning cruises and investing in missions rather than mansions and putting aside career aspirations to serve

Christ and bring others into the family of Abraham because that that is not a waste of your time or your money or your efforts what is a waste is to pour your energy and money and time into things that only last for this life and so what I want to do is close as we close the book of Genesis together I want to close with a quote from Jim Elliot he's a missionary many of you might know about his story but a missionary who gave his life serving the Messiah in Ecuador to bring people into the family of Abraham he was a true child of Abraham a true child of faith and we can see that in his words he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose let's pray Lord we thank you for these origin stories of the two families of this planet the family of Adam and the family of Abraham we thank you that you have worked in history to set apart the family of Abraham to draw them out of this world and to teach them how to have faith in your promises for the future and we thank you that you have done everything through the Messiah to make those promises true and sure

Lord I do pray for anybody watching this who might not know their eternal destiny Lord help them to determine which family they are currently part of and if it is not the family of Abraham the family of promise Lord would you bring them to the point of bowing the knee to Jesus Christ your son and trusting in him and being baptized into his people and having that sure hope of the future and help us who have that hope Lord to now see our lives in light of that and to focus on what's coming and on the kingdom and on kingdom priorities rather than what is present and passing away and so we pray that as we we go into June and July and the rest of this year you will keep us fixed not on our present situation in this broken world but on the future and help us to determine our steps and to speak and to live in light of where we're going and we pray this all in Jesus name
Amen