THE BIRTH OF A NATION

Course 3, *The People of Destiny*, Lesson 5

The Problem: The story of the birth of the nation of Israel is a powerful testament to God's intervention in history. It reveals His unyielding efforts to protect His faithful people, preserve true worship, and counteract Satan's purposes. History, as presented in Scripture, is far more than a chronological record of past events—it is the unfolding of the great conflict between the forces of good and evil.

This cosmic struggle began in heaven when Lucifer rebelled against God, coveting His position and leading a third of the angels into defiance (Revelation 12:4, 7-9). Satan's ambition was to rule the universe, with Earth as the focal point of his rebellion. Tragically, humanity fell prey to his deception in Eden (Genesis 3), introducing into the world a multi-dimensional conflict. This battle manifests as:

- Spiritual forces in opposition—a cosmic clash between God's righteousness and Satan's rebellion
- Competing ideas and beliefs—the collision of God's truth with Satan's lies and deceit
- Human struggles and choices—a personal and relational battle as individuals wrestle with sin and determine whom they will serve.

This enmity, first declared in Genesis 3:15, has persisted throughout history, shaping societies, ideologies, and the destinies of nations. It will culminate with the ultimate destruction of evil and its originator at the end of time (Revelation 20:10, 14-15; Malachi 4:1-3).

The biblical record shows that God has not predetermined all human events, but instead has granted humanity the freedom to choose between good and evil (Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; Hebrews 11:6). Through His Spirit, He continually brings conviction and light, urging people to accept His salvation. Yet, God never uses force—His decisions are rooted in foreknowledge of what individuals will choose (Romans 8:29). This freedom of choice necessitates that God intervene in history to counteract the destructive plans of Satan and the poor decisions of humanity. His providence ensures that, while human error and evil may abound, all things work together for the good of His people and His ultimate purpose (Romans 8:28).

God's guiding, overruling providence is evident in the lives of the patriarchs. Through His intervention, purity of faith was preserved, and the nation of Israel emerged as a beacon of God's love and truth. The conflict Abraham's descendants faced—both externally and internally—illustrates this multifaceted struggle and God's redemptive power. In this lesson, we will explore the lives of Jacob and Joseph, discovering how God's providence worked to establish Israel as His chosen people, even in the midst of this great controversy.

Objectives:

I. We begin by studying Jacob's early life and noting the foresight and promises of God.
II. We consider Jacob's experiences from the time of his exile from home to the time the name Israel was conferred upon him.
III. We observe the overruling providence of God in the dramatic life story of Joseph.
IV. We briefly consider how God delivered His people from Egyptian bondage.
V. We observe that God fulfilled His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by establishing His people in the promised land.

I. JACOB'S EARLY LIFE

Isaac, Abraham's son, had two sons of his own—Jacob and Esau. Just as Adam and Eve experienced conflict within their family due to the opposing paths chosen by their sons, Cain and Abel, so too was there strife in the home of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau chose a life that disregarded God's ways, pursuing sin and self-interest, while Jacob committed himself to serving the Lord. This division in their choices created tension within the family, reflecting the broader spiritual conflict between those who align themselves with God and those who turn away from Him.

The Word:

1. When Rebekah was expecting twins, what prediction did the Lord make concerning them? Genesis 25:21-23

2. What division arose in Isaac's family? Genesis 25:27-34

3. Briefly describe how Rebekah and Jacob schemed to take the birthright from Esau. Genesis 27:1-40

Explanation: Isaac and Rebekah were both aware of the Lord's prophecy, "*the elder shall serve the younger*" Genesis 25:23. Despite this, Isaac favored Esau and sought to bestow the birthright blessing upon him, contrary to God's revealed will. Under Mosaic law, which reflected earlier practices, the privileges of the firstborn included:

- The authority to lead the family, assuming the role of the father.
- A double portion of the father's inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17).
- The responsibility and honor of serving as the family priest (Exodus 22:29; Numbers 8:14-17).

For Abraham's descendants, the birthright also carried unique covenant blessings—the inheritance of the land of Canaan and the honor of being the forefather of the promised Messiah.

Jacob's attempt to purchase the birthright from Esau in exchange for a bowl of stew exposed his lack of trust in God's timing. His cunning scheme reflected a misguided effort to achieve God's promises through human means. However, Jacob later repented and was forgiven. Esau's sin, on the other hand, was far more grievous; he "*despised his birthright*" (Genesis 25:34), treating it with contempt. God, foreseeing Esau's irreverent attitude, had declared beforehand that Jacob would receive the birthright. Esau ultimately forfeited the privileges of the firstborn, and despite his later remorse, there was no way to regain them (Hebrews 12:17).

The deception orchestrated by Rebekah and Jacob—where Jacob impersonated Esau to obtain the blessing (Genesis 27)—was a serious sin. Their actions betrayed a lack of faith, as they wrongly assumed that God needed their intervention to fulfill His promise. Nevertheless, Isaac was also at fault for disregarding God's prophecy and persisting in his plan to bless Esau, despite Esau's evident unfitness to lead the family. The Lord, in His sovereignty, allowed Isaac to be deceived, ensuring that His purposes were accomplished. Esau's sinful lifestyle and previous disregard for the sacred responsibilities of the birthright culminated in his loss of the blessing.

This narrative reveals a family striving to follow their own plans rather than submitting to God's counsel, leading to discord and sorrow. Yet, the most remarkable aspect of the story is God's mercy and providence, which overruled their failures and brought ultimate good from their mistakes.

Relevance: When we distrust God and insist on pursuing our own way, contrary to His revealed will, we inevitably encounter failure and heartache. However, God's mercy remains steadfast. Only His grace can deliver us from the consequences of our missteps and realign us with His divine purposes.

II. FROM SUPPLANTER TO ISRAEL

The name Jacob means "he supplants," a reflection of the pivotal moment when he deceitfully secured the birthright blessing intended for Esau. After this event, Esau bitterly remarked that Jacob was well named, highlighting the nature of his actions (Genesis 27:36). This marked the beginning of a long period of exile for Jacob, as Esau's anger and plan to kill him forced Jacob to leave his home. At the urging of Rebecca and with the blessing of Isaac, Jacob fled to Haran in

northern Mesopotamia, where he would stay with his relatives. This move not only ensured his safety but also provided an opportunity for Jacob to find a wife among those who revered the one true God, unlike the idolatrous Canaanites (Genesis 27:41; 28:5).

The Word:

4. What dream did Jacob have on the way to Haran? What did the dream mean? Genesis 28:10-17; John 1:51

5. What covenant did Jacob make with the Lord as a result of his dream? Genesis 28:18-22

6. How was Jacob (the supplanter) deceived by his uncle Laban? Genesis 29:15-30

7. On his way home after 20 years serving Laban, what special experience did Jacob pass through? Genesis 32:22-30

Explanation: Jacob served Laban for a total of 20 years (Genesis 31:38), during which time pivotal events shaped his family and spiritual journey. After seven years of labor, Jacob was given Leah and Rachel in marriage. Over the next 13 years, 11 sons and one daughter were born to his two wives and their maids (Genesis 29:31; 30:24). Later, his 12th son, Benjamin, was born in Canaan (Genesis 35:16-20). These 12 sons were destined to become the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel, fulfilling God's covenant promises.

The discord within Jacob's household underscores the consequences of polygamy, highlighting why it is neither wise nor aligned with God's design. Abraham's experience had already demonstrated that monogamy was God's ideal. Nevertheless, Jacob, immersed in a polygamous culture, succumbed to the prevailing practices of the age, leading to strife and heartache in his family (Genesis 30:14-16).

After 20 years of service to Laban, Jacob decided to return to his homeland in Canaan. Fearing that Laban would prevent his departure, Jacob left secretly while Laban was temporarily absent. As he neared Canaan, Jacob learned that Esau, accompanied by a band of men, was coming to meet him. Haunted by the memory of Esau's anger and intent to kill him, Jacob feared for his life and the safety of his family. At the river Jabbok, he sent his family across to the other side and remained alone, seeking divine protection through prayer.

That night, the Lord appeared to Jacob in the form of a man and wrestled with him until dawn. This extraordinary encounter was transformative, marking a shift in Jacob's identity and spiritual journey. The Lord gave him the name Israel, meaning "he who strives with God" or "God contends." Jacob, once known as a supplanter, had become one who successfully wrestled with God in faith. In turn, God contended for Jacob, softening Esau's heart and ensuring reconciliation and safety for Jacob's family.

Relevance: When we sin, the Lord forgives us, but He also rebukes and disciplines us, allowing us to experience trials that teach us to rely on Him and trust His plan for our lives (Hebrews 12:6-11). Through these experiences, He shapes our character, giving us victory over sin and blessing our service for Him. Just as Jacob learned to trust in God's promises, we too can find strength and hope in His transformative grace.

III. THE LIFE STORY OF JOSEPH

As the eldest son of Rachel—Jacob's beloved wife—Joseph was cherished more than his brothers (Genesis 37:1–4). This favoritism bred resentment, and his brothers came to hate him. When Joseph shared two prophetic dreams that symbolized his family bowing before him (Genesis 37:5–11), their jealousy deepened. Later, when Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers tending the flock, they seized him and cast him into a pit (Genesis 37:12–24), setting in motion one of Scripture's most heartbreaking betrayals. Yet this story, though marked by sorrow, unveils a profound truth: God's love is steadfast, and His deliverance is sure for those who trust in Him. Through rejection, injustice, and suffering, Joseph's journey becomes a testimony to divine faithfulness and redemptive purpose.

The Word:

8. What did Joseph's brothers do with him? Genesis 37:25-28

9. Briefly describe what happened to Joseph in Egypt. Genesis 39

10. How did God change Joseph's fortunes in Egypt? Genesis 41:14-15, 25-45

11. When Joseph's brothers came down to Egypt to buy grain, what gracious words of forgiveness did he speak to them? Genesis 44:14; 45:1-8; compare 50:20-21.

Explanation: God had no part in the sinful actions of Joseph's brothers, who cruelly sold him into slavery. Yet, in His sovereignty, God overruled their wicked deed and brought Joseph into a position of prominence as the prime minister of Egypt. Through this miraculous turn of events, Joseph was able to provide for his father and brothers during a severe famine in Canaan, saving their lives and preserving the family. This story powerfully illustrates the truth of Romans 8:28: "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*." Even the evil intentions of humanity and the injustices they bring are used by God to accomplish His greater purposes for those who trust Him.

Joseph's time of hardship—his ordeals in Potiphar's household and his unjust imprisonment—were transformed by God into preparation for his future responsibilities as the second ruler of Egypt. These trials refined his character, equipped him for leadership, and ultimately positioned him to bring blessings not only to his family but to countless others during the famine. Despite the brothers' initial sins, they repented and turned back to the God of their father, receiving forgiveness and the blessings that Joseph's rise to power made possible.

This narrative highlights the extraordinary grace of God, who not only delivers His faithful people from the injustices inflicted by Satan and wicked men but also uses those very circumstances to bless and redeem them. Even though Joseph's brothers deserved punishment for their crimes, God's mercy provided reconciliation, healing, and restoration for the family.

Relevance: God's providence is unwavering. He overrules the evil that Satan and his followers bring against believers, using it to fulfill His divine purpose. When we place our trust in Him, we can rest in the assurance that nothing will frustrate His will for our lives. His faithfulness transforms trials into blessings and works all things together for good.

IV. DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL FROM EGYPTIAN BONDAGE

The Lord had told Abraham, "*Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions*" Genesis 15:13-14. The 400 years obviously referred to Israel's stay in Egypt in round numbers. Exodus 12:40-41 indicates that they were there 430 years. During a good share of that time they had peace and acceptance. Then trouble arose.

The Word:

12. When a Pharaoh arose who had not known Joseph, what happened to the Israelites? Exodus 1:8-14

13. Who did God choose to lead the Israelites out of Egypt? Exodus 3:1-10

14. After Pharaoh had consistently refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt, and the Lord afflicted the country with plagues, what happened? Exodus 12:29-36

15. What was the retribution meted out upon Pharaoh and his army? Exodus 14:5-6, 26-31

Explanation: The deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage is one of the most remarkable accounts of divine intervention in Scripture. Through a series of extraordinary miracles, God demonstrated His sovereignty and power. Moses, chosen by the Lord, confronted Pharaoh and presented God's demands, but Pharaoh remained unmoved, his heart hardened despite repeated demonstrations of God's might. Only after experiencing devastating afflictions—the ten plagues—and the ultimate loss of his army in the Red Sea did Pharaoh's defiance come to an end. This dramatic event marked the beginning of Israel's long and challenging journey to the promised land, a journey filled with trials, lessons in faith, and evidence of God's guiding hand.

Relevance: When circumstances beyond our control threaten to overwhelm God's people or obscure divine truth, the Lord intervenes with power and mercy to defend and deliver. His promise remains steadfast: "*When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him*" Isaiah 59:19. The story of Israel's deliverance reminds us that God fights for His people, turning even seemingly insurmountable challenges into opportunities for His glory to be revealed.

V. ISRAEL ESTABLISHED IN THE PROMISED LAND

Because of their repeated apostasy, the children of Israel wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. They were fed by manna from heaven and supplied with water. God protected them and did everything that a loving Lord could do to engender their loyalty. The book of Exodus describes how God gave them His Ten Commandments, as well as the sanctuary services which they were to observe. Moses died just prior to the final invasion of Canaan, and Joshua succeeded him.

The Word:

16. What promise did God give to Joshua? Joshua 1:1-5

17. What special counsel was Joshua given? Joshua 1:6-9

Explanation: In obedience to God's command, Joshua led Israel in the victorious conquest of the promised land. The Canaanites, having reached the full measure of their iniquity, faced divine judgment as the Lord commanded their removal. This was necessary to establish Israel as His chosen people—a nation through which God could preserve true worship and the knowledge of His truth on Earth. However, in the years that followed, Israel frequently failed to carry out God's will, falling into cycles of disobedience and apostasy. Yet, in His patience and mercy, the Lord continued to guide them, sending prophets to call His people back into a heart relationship with Him.

Relevance: God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled when Israel inherited the promised land. This earthly inheritance was a foreshadowing of the heavenly Canaan that Christians, as spiritual Israel, now journey toward (Hebrews 11:10). The New Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21:1-4, is the eternal home for those who remain faithful to Jesus Christ, trusting Him to deliver them from their spiritual enemies and guide their lives according to His will. Jesus Himself promised, "*I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also*" John 14:3.

Do you long to be in the heavenly promised land with Christ and His people?

Will you commit yourself to walking with God, following the example of the faithful ones from ancient times?

Review Questions

1. True or False
    a. If Jacob had not deceived his father and brother, the Lord would still have fulfilled His promise of giving him the birthright.
    b. Jacob earned God's love by wrestling so well at the river Jabbok.
    c. Joseph's trials were used by God as a blessing to himself and to his family.
    d. It was impossible for Pharaoh to repent and turn to the Lord.

2. Reflect on how the history of Israel's rise as a nation showcases God’s active involvement in human affairs.
    - How does His guidance of His people and His use of them to share light and truth inspire and challenge us in our faith journey today?
    - What does it mean for us to carry forward Israel’s calling—to be a people through whom God’s love and truth are made visible in a broken world?

3. In what ways do the internal and external struggles faced by Jacob and Joseph mirror the spiritual, relational, and societal challenges we face today—and how does God’s redemptive power continue to work through these tensions to shape His people? Participants are invited to explore--
    - Internal conflict: identity, fear, favoritism, pride, guilt
    - External conflict: betrayal, injustice, family division, cultural pressure
    - God’s redemptive thread: how He transforms suffering into purpose, and brokenness into blessing
    - Space for personal testimony and communal encouragement—how is God still forming His people through hardship, just as He did with Israel?