

"G.I. Joe"
aka
God's Interpreter, Joseph
Episode 1

At some point each of us will undoubtedly raise questions like:

- If God really loves us, why do bad things happen?
- Why do so many evil people prosper while many good people suffer?
- Why should I forgive and not avenge those who've wronged me?
- How can I stay positive when it seems I have no hope?
- Is there anyone who will never break their promises to me?
- Why is something as squishy and intangible as faith be the only ticket to heaven?

Joseph, Abraham's great-grandson, is a study in 4,000-year-old principles which will transform our lives as we learn from this ordinary man who does extraordinary things because he trusts and obeys God.

"And they called it 'The Birth of the Jews'"

Let's read Genesis 12:1-7 (p. 11 NIV), 13:14-17; Exodus 23:31-33 (p. 80); Romans 4:18-25 (p. 1130).

The ancient city of Ur, 700 miles east of Jerusalem, existing as early as 5,500 B.C., is near the Euphrates River in today's Iraq. About 2091 B.C God tells a 75-year-old there named **Abram** ("exalted ancestor") and his wife **Sarai** to relocate to a place God would reveal later. God pledges that Abe will sire a "great nation" (the Jews) and live in Canaan (today's Israel). **Let's read Genesis 15:1-7 (p. 13).**

God's promises to Abraham were not conditional -- no *quid pro quo*, no "I will if you will." And He makes it crystal clear that He'll bless those who bless the Jews, and He'll curse those who curse the Jews.

The Jews are "God's chosen" because He wanted a people:

- (1) to whom He could entrust the Holy Scriptures
- (2) to tell His story and be a reflection of Him to all the world
- (3) through whom He would send the promised Messiah.

DISCUSS: Only to the Jews has God deeded land with specific, permanent borders. What does this say about Israel?

Barren Sarah (nee Sarai) yearns to give her husband a son. If heirless, how could Abe sire a great nation? So she has him sleep with her Egyptian maid, **Hagar**. Quicker than you can spell *concubine* in Sanskrit, out pops **Ishmael**, the father of all Arabs.

At age 99 Abraham (new name: "*ancestor of multitudes*") believes God that Sarah will give him a son. God honors his faith, declaring Abe to be in right standing with Him. And c. 2066 B.C. Sarah, at 90, delivers **Isaac**, the granddaddy of all Jews. His and Ishmael's rivalry will trigger the centuries-long dust-ups between Arabs and Jews. Until this very day, when they sneeze, the entire planet gets a cold.

DISCUSS: Describe a time when you acted ahead of God's plan.

Let's read Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-22 (p. 1212).

About 1859 B.C. Isaac and **Rebekah** welcome twins, **Jacob** and **Esau**. Jacob deceives his dad into giving him -- not the older, entitled Esau -- his blessing (estate). The conniving Jacob raises a dozen sons who will head ten of the twelve Jewish tribes. **Israel** ("*one who has power with God*") is the name God gives Jacob. This "reality show" throbs with love, envy, favoritism, anger, restoration, deceit and integrity.

DISCUSS: How have you dealt with jealousy and betrayal?

The Real Housewives of Canaan

Let's read Genesis 28:1-5, 10-15, 29:1-30:32 (p. 28).

Like Sarah, **Rachel**, Jacob's ravishingly beautiful and favorite wife, is sad that she can't give Jacob a child. But c. 1800 B.C., she delivers Jacob's 11th and favorite boy, **Joseph** ("*remover*" and "*increaser*"), saying, "God has removed my disgrace."

Joseph's saga sprawls over nearly one-third of Genesis as he matures into a leader who saves entire civilizations. It's a vivid portrayal of how God interrupts human lives to deliver, save and bless.

Jacob has six kids by Rachel's sister, **Leah**, whom her dad, **Laban**, tricks him into marrying. How like God to choose the unattractive, unloved Leah to birth Judah, the forefather of Jesus who's called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah!" Judah strays, *takes* a Caananite girl and beds his daughter-in-law, Tamar, who had posed as a prostitute. Even in His own genealogy Jesus embraces *all* sinners who come to Him by faith.

DISCUSS: What's your experience with dysfunctional families?

We may perceive God as unfair in dispensing health, wealth, fame, etc. We can blame our plight on family or environment. But God says ***all* have sinned**. How can we bridge that Grand Canyon between (1) spending eternity with God and (2) unending separation from Him in what the Bible calls hell? **Let's read Genesis 22:1-19 (p. 20).**

God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his only son. En route to the altar, the killing place, Isaac asks his dad, "Where's the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham replies, "God will provide a lamb."

Because God loves you, He provided His only Son as the sinless Lamb to die in your place, taking ***all*** your past, present and future sins to the cross. His Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice and **totally, permanently** forgave you! To take possession of God's pardon, the Bible says to simply by ***faith*** -- not by religion or good efforts -- *accept* His gift of forgiveness and place your *trust* fully in Him (Ephesians 2:8,9). While we pause a moment, you can do that right now. If Jesus is already your Savior, is there something else you need to release to Him? We're not here today by accident. This is your time.

... Amen.

His Deal

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