

How to use Explore

In this issue

The 92 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but they will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives. We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

1

Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2

Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3

Ask God to help you understand

4

Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5

Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

6

Pray about what you have read


the good book
COMPANY

BIBLICAL | RELEVANT | ACCESSIBLE

Welcome to Explore

Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, like carpentry or flower arranging. Nor is it a lifestyle choice, like the kind of clothes you wear, or the people you choose to hang out with. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because many Christians view the practice of daily Bible-reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy modern lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

The Bible is not a manual. It's a love letter. And as with any love letter, we'll want to treasure it, and make time to read and re-read it, so we know we are loved, and discover how we can please the One who loves us. Here are a few suggestions for making your daily time with God more of a joy than a burden:

☛ *Time:* Find a time when you will not be disturbed, and when the cobwebs are cleared from your mind. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. If you're not a "morning person", then last thing

at night or a mid-morning break might suit you. Whatever works for you is right for you.

☛ *Place:* Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (*see Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.

☛ *Prayer:* Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

☛ *Share:* As the saying goes: *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And remember, *it's quality, not quantity, that counts*: better to think briefly about a single verse than to skim through pages without absorbing anything, because it's about developing your relationship with the living God. The sign that your daily time with God is real is when you start to love him more and serve him more wholeheartedly.

Tim Thornborough and Carl Laferton
Editors



GENESIS: Previously...

Jacob the deceiver has tasted his own medicine as he has endured 20 years of deception and exploitation by his scheming uncle Laban. At last he's escaped...

Now he's headed for the promised land. But his two wives, 11 children and huge herds are not all he has with him...

Hedging your bets

Read Genesis 31:22-35

❓ *What does Rachel steal from her father?*

She is hedging her bets. She has not yet learned to trust wholeheartedly in the God of the Bible, and so she takes these "gods" to gain their blessing. (What is it with this family and stealing blessings?!)

❓ *How much blessing does she get from these gods?*

False gods never deliver. The other things we cling to in the hope they will give meaning and blessing to our lives always end up bringing difficulty and disappointment.

Showdown

Read Genesis 31:36-42

- ❓ *How has Jacob been treated by Laban?*
- ❓ *Why do you think he keeps stressing the number of years?*
- ❓ *So how was it that he was able to prosper in spite of Laban's scheming and mistreatment?*
- ❓ *How else do we see the true God protect Jacob and his family in this passage (see v 24, 29 and 35)?*

Why seek the blessing of pathetic carved

"godlets" when the true God is with you?

In a few hundred years the children of Israel will be mistreated and exploited by a tyrannical ruler in Egypt. But again, God will see their hardship and rescue them.

Read Exodus 1:6-14, 3:1-10

The Bible is full of patterns and shadows to help us see how consistent and reliable God's character is!

Moans and stones

Read Genesis 31:43-55

Laban is petty and pathetic. He happily gave his daughters to Jacob, and he set Jacob's wages (and then repeatedly changed them). But we all have a tendency to justify ourselves and fail to see our own wrongdoing.

Jacob and his family faced serious danger at the beginning of the passage.

- ❓ *By the end, what guarantee of safety do they have from Laban?*
- ❓ *What title does Jacob give to God as he takes his oath in verse 53?*

In a world of scheming cheats and enslaving abusers, it is a great comfort to be able to cry out to a God who is worth fearing!

Pray

Pray that you would not be tempted to trust in other things for security and blessing but would look to God alone.



Out of the frying pan...

... and into the fire! Jacob has escaped from deceitful uncle Laban. But he is walking straight into the path of vengeful brother Esau. The life of faith is not one of ease.

God with us

Read Genesis 32:1-9

God promised to be with Jacob when he left the promised land in 28:15. Now he reminds him that he is still with him. David may have had this episode in mind when he wrote Psalm 34:7: “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them”.

- ❓ *How is this confidence in God’s protection immediately put to the test in Genesis 32:3-6?*
- ❓ *How does Jacob feel, and what does he do in response to this (v 7-9)?*

Just as important as what he does do is what he does not do. He may feel afraid and take precautions, but he does not disobey God by turning back.

Note too how he addresses Esau. Many years earlier he had deceived his brother so that he could take the blessing that was rightfully Esau’s as firstborn.

- ❓ *But how does he address his brother here?*

Prayer...

Read Genesis 32:9-12

We have seen Jacob say and do many things over the last seven chapters—but this is the first time we have seen him pray.

- ❓ *What gives Jacob confidence as he prays to God for his protection?*

We can likewise pray with confidence when we are obeying God, when we recognise how much God has already blessed us in spite of our unworthiness, and when we trust in his promises.

... and planning

Reliance on God in prayer does not mean inaction. On the contrary, it makes action worthwhile.

Read Genesis 32:13-21

- ❓ *What does Jacob hope his gifts will achieve?*

Pray

Read Philippians 4:6-7

- ❓ *What things are causing you anxiety or stress as you face this day?*
- ❓ *Will you obey Paul’s words here, following the example of Jacob as he prepared to meet his brother?*

Pray now!



Limping to victory

Jacob is full of fear and anxiety. So what does God do? Speak words of comfort? Send an army of angels? No—he attacks him in the dark and cripples him!

And it's the best thing that could have happened to Jacob...

Grappling with the grasper

Read Genesis 32:22-26

Jacob's family cross the river at night.

- ❓ *What happens when he is left alone in the darkness?*
- ❓ *Who is this mysterious man, according to verses 28-30?*
- ❓ *How does the wrestling match go to start with?*

Ever since he was a baby, Jacob has been a wrestler. His name means “grasper” or “deceiver”. He has wrestled with his brother, with his father and with Laban (see Hosea 12:3-4). Each time he has come out on top. It looks as if this is going the same way—until God uses his supernatural power.

- ❓ *What does Jacob then do?*
- ❓ *Why do you think God does this to Jacob?*

God has humbled Jacob until all he can do is cling to God. His only hope is in God's blessing, and he clings to him for all he is worth.

Who are you?

Read Genesis 32:27-32

Why would the God who knows everything ask Jacob his name? Because Jacob's answer is also a confession. He is saying, “I am Grasper; I am Deceiver”. God has brought him to the end of himself. His strength is broken, and he recognises his sinfulness. But God doesn't break him to destroy him. He has done it to prepare Jacob for blessing. He is now ready to cross into the promised land and to lead God's people. “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

Apply

We can only ever limp to glory. We will never be spiritually useful until we have been humbled by God. We never seem to be able to rely wholly on Jesus until we have come to the end of our own strength. Sometimes that's physical as with Jacob. But it might be financial, moral or emotional. As God says to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, in our greatest weakness you and I discover that “[God's] grace is sufficient for you, for [God's] power is made perfect in weakness.”

- ❓ *Where are you tempted to trust your own strength?*
- ❓ *How has God caused you to limp, but also to know his blessing?*

Brothers not-quite-united

Jacob and Esau enjoy a beautiful reunion. The bitter rivalry that tore their family apart is laid to rest. But it is clear that their lives are heading in different directions.

No small change

Read Genesis 33:1-11

The question we're left with at the end of chapter 32 is whether Jacob has really changed. He spent the first part of his life grasping and deceiving to get all he could. This included the blessing of the firstborn, which meant he would be "lord over [his] brothers" and that they would "bow down to [him]" (27:29).

- ❓ *What indications are there in 33:1-11 of a genuine repentance?*

It can be easy to say, "I'm sorry". True repentance involves real change, and this means making things right where possible.

- ❓ *How do we see this with Jacob?*

Jacob humbly bows to Esau, greets him as lord and generously gives him costly gifts—the very things he deceived Esau to get, he now gives back.

- ❓ *How does Esau respond?*

No small difference

The brothers have come back together, but there is a difference between them that means they will never really walk together. The narrator shows this subtly in v 4-11.

- ❓ *What does Jacob mention repeatedly as he explains how he's become so wealthy? What word does Esau never use?*

In the same way, God has been absent from Esau's life throughout these chapters. Esau has never cared about God or his own role as part of the covenant family. That's a big deal—it's not like ignoring his family's quirky Christmas traditions. He's ignoring their role in bringing salvation to a world condemned in sin.

Parting of the ways

Read Genesis 33:12-17

It's hard to know what to make of these verses. What is undeniable is that Jacob is right to head back to the promised land, in obedience to God's command (32:9), rather than head off with Esau. It's unclear though whether he's right to deceive his brother, or whether this is a culturally appropriate way to part ways.

Apply

Real repentance—true change—often involves giving up what is precious to us.

- ❓ *Where have you seen this in your life?*
- ❓ *Where might you need to act on this right now?*

Pray

Pray that the cost of true repentance would not keep you from truly turning to Jesus in trusting obedience.



Surprising reversals

Jacob has had a decisive, life-changing encounter with God. But habits, character and relationships don't change overnight. What happens next is truly upsetting.

Read Genesis 33:18 – 34:31

- 🔍 *Read the whole passage. Who is never mentioned?*

None of the characters involved consider how to obey their God in the way that they act. The result is a terrible mess.

The absent father

- 🔍 *Where does Jacob settle, and what does he do (33:18-20)?*

It all seems admirable, until we remember that he was meant to return to Bethel, as he had promised (28:18-22). Compromised, partial obedience always eventually leads to misery.

- 🔍 *What does Jacob say and do in 34:1-12?*

Here is a father who is physically present but is as good as useless. He is passive and takes no responsibility or action whatsoever.

- 🔍 *What fact about Dinah is repeated four times in verses 1-7?*

Pointedly we are told that Jacob's sons are outraged about this, but he expresses no emotion. That he even entertains Hamor and Shechem's proposal is shocking.

Chips off the old block

In verses 13-29, still Jacob says nothing. His sons take over—and reveal that they have learned from Jacob's deceiving ways.

- 🔍 *What do they require from Shechem and his men in verses 13-17?*

How shameful to abuse the holy ritual of circumcision.

- 🔍 *Before we feel too sorry for Shechem, what do we learn about his motives in verse 18-24?*

Having seized their sister, he now wants to seize all their possessions too (verse 23).

What happens next is shocking. Without godly leadership to restrain it, sin spreads and grows, bringing misery and death.

A glimpse of grace

Re-read Genesis 34:30-31

Again Jacob shows no concern for his poor daughter, but only his own skin. What will the family have to do now? God uses this mess to bring the family back to Bethel, where they should always have settled.

Apply

- 🔍 *Do these events resonate with your own experiences in some way? Please find a trusted, wise Christian to talk to if you need to.*

Read Romans 12:17-19. Pray for yourself or others you know who are struggling not to give in to bitterness and hatred. Pray that God's love and promise of justice will sustain them.



Web wisdom

We are blessed—and cursed—to live in a time when we can respond and reply immediately to people and situations around the globe.

Some people dismiss Scripture as out of date and of no value. How wrong could they be...

Net rules

Read Proverbs 15:1-2, 4

- ❓ *What is the basic point being made in these verses?*
- ❓ *What powerful word pictures are evoked by the adjectives and verbs here?*

It is not hard to find polarising opinions on the internet. In fact, we are told that the algorithms that choose what to include in our Facebook, Twitter or Instagram feeds will naturally prefer posts with “strong opinions”. The nature of the medium seems to encourage us to kick back with knee-jerk reactions—on politics, people and religion. But like the best page moderator, these verses give us a set of “best practice” rules for engaging with others.

- ❓ *How would you summarise them?*

It’s basic stuff really. Be kind. Stay rooted in the facts, not opinion. And even if someone is harsh and hostile, treat them with gentleness and respect.

TIME OUT

Read 1 Peter 3:16-17

- ❓ *How does this verse encourage us to speak, write and respond to those who attack us for our beliefs?*

Net effect

Re-read Proverbs 15:1-2, 4

- ❓ *What effect will kind, wise words have on the nature of a conversation?*
- ❓ *What will happen if our words are not godly and wise?*

If you want to practise your debating skills, there are plenty of forums where you can have a knockabout slanging match with atheists. But what good does it actually achieve? It is far better to try to establish a proper relationship with someone, where you share about your life, listen to them, ask good questions about what they believe and why they believe, and offer trusted evidence and facts, rather than getting angry or opinionated. We must be Christ-like in our engagement with others, in both everyday conversation and online, if our aim is to bring life, peace and grace.

Web watcher

Read Proverbs 15:3

- ❓ *Why is it important to remember this when you are online in particular?*

Pray

Ask the Lord to help you as you relate well to others, both online and in the flesh. Pray that your web words would be wise.



All change

To move from rejecting God and worshipping idols to worshipping God and working to obey him is as significant as changing your name.

Read Genesis 35:1-8

Now that he is in danger of a revenge attack from the Canaanites, Jacob heads to Bethel at last.

- ❓ *What does Jacob require of his family in the next verses?*

Even the family of God's promises has accumulated foreign gods (idols). The same can be true of Christians. While we say we worship Jesus, we can, in practice, have lots of other "godlets" too—things that we look to and rely on and pursue because deep down we think they will provide what in fact only God can give: whether it's career success to provide us with the respect we long for, or money to give us security, or a relationship that we think will fulfil our deepest longings. Like Jacob's family, we must get rid of these.

- ❓ *How do verses 5-7 encourage us to see that it is worth ridding ourselves of the other things we worship?*

Jacob's family quickly learn that God is able to protect them and provide for them.

Read Genesis 35:9-15

- ❓ *What does "Jacob" mean (see footnote)?*
- ❓ *What does "Israel" mean?*

It's as if God is saying in verses 9-10, *It's time to live out who you are. Stop being Jacob; be Israel. Be who I call you to be. Live out your new identity and destiny.*

This will not be easy. It is a struggle to live with God, and for God. At times it feels like struggling *with* God. That is the life of faith.

God first made promises to fallen humanity in 3:15, and to Abraham's family in 12:1-3.

- ❓ *What is promised in 35:11-13, that wasn't promised to Adam and Eve, or in the initial promises to Abram?*

It's hard to think of a less promising source for God's kings! We should not be surprised, then, when his ultimate, eternal King, descended from Jacob, is born in a shed to an unmarried girl.

Apply

The Bible uses the image of new clothing as a picture of the complete change in identity given to every Christian, and the complete change in behaviour required of every Christian:

Read Ephesians 4:20-24

- ❓ *What attitudes and behaviours do you need to take off?*

Of course, taking off the old clothes is only half of what the Bible requires.

- ❓ *What Spirit-filled attitudes and actions are you particularly aware that you need to put on?*

Pray for God's help in getting rid of the idols and "old clothes", and in putting on the new.



Happily ever after?

Some movies have deliberately unsatisfactory endings, where the loose plot threads are not tied up. Usually it's because they are teeing things up for a lucrative sequel...

This passage tells us about the end of Jacob's pilgrimage, but there is a sense of unfulfilment to it. There is more to come!

The circle of life

Read Genesis 35:16-20

The great joy of God's glorious promises to Jacob in verses 11-12 is followed by great sorrow.

? *Why would this death have been particularly bitter for Jacob?*

The love of his life is dead, but she has given him another son, Benjamin. Now he has twelve sons.

Unhappy families

Read Genesis 35:21-26

God promised in verse 11 that his descendants would be kings. But who among Jacob's sons is worthy to rule? Already Simeon and Levi have disqualified themselves with their murderous vengeance in chapter 34. Now his eldest, Reuben, shows his unworthiness.

? *What does he do?*

He's trying to show that he now rules the family (see 2 Samuel 16:20-22). Reuben is unworthy to lead the family, but once again, Jacob proves unwilling to lead it, as he does nothing.

We get another reminder of the mess in this family in Genesis 35:23-26.

? *How are Jacob's sons listed?*

The family has been divided from the start. Soon enough that split will threaten to tear the family apart for ever.

The best is yet to come

Read Genesis 35:27-29

There is a painful irony in the burying of Isaac at Mamre. In Genesis 18:1 and 10, Mamre was where God promised Abraham that Isaac would be born.

This passage is marked by a nagging sense of unfulfilment. Jacob's family remains dysfunctional, and Isaac dies. Hebrews 11:39-40 reminds us that God's great promises are not focused on everything working out in this life but in the life to come.

Like Jacob, we await the day when we will enjoy the full measure of God's promised blessings: not the hope of a happy ending so much as a happy movie that never ends!

? *In what way do you need to hear this, and feel hope in this, today?*

Pray

Pray for faith to serve and obey God while you look forward to the fulfilment of all his wonderful promises when Christ returns. Take your disappointments and disillusionments with this life and give them up to God, praying that he would help you look forward to the glorious life to come.



The other family

Genealogies tend not to be our favourite bits of the Bible at the best of times. But this one is not even about the covenant family of Jacob. So, why include it?

Why waste a whole chapter detailing the offspring of a man who rejected God and turned away from the family of promise?

Seeds of conflict

Read Genesis 36:1-12

We see here how far Esau has fallen. It begins in v 1 with his other name. Throughout the Old Testament, the Edomites were always at war with God's people (2 Samuel 8:13-14; 1 Kings 11:15-16; 2 Kings 14:7; etc.). Obadiah prophesied judgment for their treatment of Israel (read Obadiah v 8-10).

🔍 *What are we told about Esau's wives in Genesis 36:2?*

In 26:34-35 we learn that Esau's first two wives were a "source of grief" to his parents. They were Canaanites, likely to draw Esau away from serving the LORD. And while Esau did not know they disapproved (v 8-9) and perhaps they should have told him, he clearly had not asked them for their guidance and wisdom, either over who to marry or how many wives to marry.

Finally, tucked in the middle of 36:12, is another ominous name.

🔍 *Can you spot what it is?*

This boy's descendants tried to destroy the Israelites as they journeyed to the promised land (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).

The point being made is this: Esau's lack of

wisdom in marriage set his family and his descendants on a trajectory away from God and towards conflict with God's people.

Seeds of hope

Read Genesis 36:9-30

🔍 *How many sons does Esau have? Who else has recently enjoyed the same blessing?*

God does not reject Esau completely. He cares for him and provides a family. Centuries later, in Deuteronomy 23:7, God would tell the Israelites to care for the Edomites, "because they are related to you".

Read Genesis 36:31-43

But still... why such a long genealogy listing all the descendants in detail? It is a hint they have not been written off by God. It gives hope that one day their descendants will come back to God and his people.

It was a hope that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Now peoples of all tribes and nations can join God's people. **Read Ephesians 2:13-14, 19-22.** In the gospel those who were once enemies are reconciled at the cross.

Apply

Don't give up hope for those who don't yet trust in Christ. Whether it is members of your own family or people groups far away, don't give up hope. Pray for them. Seek ways of sharing Christ with them.



Swimming lessons

You need swimming lessons before you fall into deep water. The same is true of faith. You need to learn to trust God before you face confusing, difficult circumstances.

The story of Joseph helps us to do that.

The focus of Genesis 37 – 50 is providence: the truth that God is sovereignly at work through people and circumstances to bring about his good purposes. Each chapter will build upon, embed and consolidate this truth. As we see how God works through the story of Joseph, we will learn to trust that God is at work behind the scenes in our lives too, and that nothing can stop his good plans. When your life, or the lives of those you love, is messy, painful or dark, you need a firm grip on this truth, or you will be crippled with doubt and bitterness.

Unhappy families

Read Genesis 37:1-11

-  *What do we learn about Jacob?*
-  *What do we learn about the behaviour and attitudes of Joseph's brothers?*

We don't know whether Joseph's report in verse 2 is fair, but given how his brothers behave in this chapter, it seems likely!

-  *What impression do we get of Joseph?*

He sounds like a spoilt brat! I can't imagine he was popular with anyone other than his doting father, whose indulgent love had ruined him.

Here is a family ruined by favouritism, pride, hatred and jealousy. Here is a warning that sin brings misery. Jacob has failed to root out sin in his own heart and has

failed to raise his children in the instruction of the Lord. Now he is beginning to reap the whirlwind.

A divine promise

Re-read Genesis 37:5-11

-  *What is the meaning of Joseph's dreams?*
-  *How does his family respond to them?*

It's not hard to imagine the smug voice and self-satisfied grin as Joseph interrupts family breakfast to tell them all about his dreams.

God's plan for this family comes through a surprising source, but Joseph's dreams reveal what God is going to do in these chapters.

Apply

God promises in Romans 8:28 that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him”.

-  *When do you find it hard to trust God's promise that he is at work in your life?*
-  *What difference will it make to remember that, often despite appearances, this verse is true?*

Pray

Pray that as we work through this Joseph narrative, God would deepen your trust in him no matter what you are facing in life.



With brothers like this...

Forget the feel-good family musical. The story of Joseph is about a brutal battle.

In one corner is the God of the Bible and his plan to work through Jacob's family to bring salvation to the world. In the other corner is sin—the sinful failings of Jacob's family, the sinful opposition of others, and behind it all, Satan himself, who will stop at nothing to destroy God's plan. Who will win...?

Satan 1, God 0?

Read Genesis 37:12-20

- ❓ *What name is repeated three times in these verses?*

This is not a good place for Jacob's family. Last time they were there, in chapter 34, Dinah was raped, and Simeon and Levi slaughtered the town in revenge. It is not surprising that Jacob wanted to check what his sons were up to!

In 3:15, God promised to work through the offspring of Eve to destroy the devil and redeem humanity. He warned that the devil would violently oppose this work—and in Genesis 4 we saw what this might mean as Cain gave in to hatred and killed his brother Abel.

- ❓ *So why should alarm bells ring as we read 37:4 and 8?*
- ❓ *What do they now plan to do?*

Satan is at work behind the scenes, seeking to destroy the family of promise—to destroy God's plan to rescue humanity.

Read Genesis 37:21-28

- ❓ *What do you make of Reuben's conduct here?*
- ❓ *What thwarts his plan?*

Light in the darkness

God is not mentioned anywhere in these verses, but if we read carefully, we can see his footprints.

Look back through verses 12-28, looking for the two big coincidences. When Joseph arrives in Shechem, a man just happens to find him (v 15) who knows the brothers are heading to Dothan. When the brothers plan to kill Joseph, a caravan of Ishmaelites just happens to pass by (v 25). It's not much at this stage, but it's a hint that God is providentially at work behind the scenes.

As followers of Jesus, we are on one side of a cosmic conflict. Satan is at war with God, so we should expect some opposition and difficulty in this life. But we must hold on to the truth that there is only one God, and he is in control.

Pray

Pray that your trust in God's good rule would not be shaken when evil seems to have the upper hand. Speak to him about specific ways that you are finding this hard at the moment.



It doesn't pay

Every now and then someone dies after climbing into the tiger enclosure at a zoo. "The tigers look so cute," they seem to have thought: "Surely they won't harm me?"

We can be just as blind and foolish when it comes to sin. "It doesn't seem that serious; it's only a little sin after all..." But as we'll see today, sin deceives, sin dehumanises and sin destroys.

Covering up the crime

The brothers have flogged their own brother, a descendant of Isaac, to descendants of Ishmael. But as the camel train and Joseph's wailing cries fade into the distance, they are left with a problem: how do they explain what's happened to their father, who loved Joseph more than all of them put together?

Read Genesis 37:29-33

 *What do the brothers do to cover their crime?*

Notice how they describe Joseph in verse 32: not as "our brother" but as "your son". And there is bitter irony here. Years earlier Jacob had wanted his brother out of the way and had deceived his father using... his brother's stolen clothes and a slaughtered goat.

Read Galatians 6:7-8. Heed the warning: when we sow sin, we reap misery.

Sin never pays

Read Genesis 37:34-36

 *How does Jacob respond to Joseph's "death"?*

The brothers were jealous of Joseph. They wanted him out of the way. But they do not get the affection their father lavished on Joseph. They just ruin Jacob. Sin never pays what it promises. As Paul teaches in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death". In spite of any short-term pleasure, that is always the long-term pay. How different things are with God: "... but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord".

Apply

 *In what ways are you in danger of buying the lie that sin will deliver you happiness? How have you seen in the past that this is not the case?*

The glimmer

It seems that Satan has won. Joseph is as good as dead, and the family is more miserable and divided than ever. But right at the end is a glimmer of light in verse 36—a hint that all is not lost. Joseph has not disappeared from view. The story will continue in Egypt.

Pray

Pray that God would "lead us not into temptation"—that you and those you love would see through the "sweet" lies of sin and that you would know the goodness and satisfaction of holiness.