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S E R I E S

FRETHEIM  
EXPLORES  
**Genesis**



Study Guide

 LUTHER PRODUCTIONS

# Fretheim Explores Genesis

## S E S S I O N S

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### **Fall Up, Fall Down or Fall Apart?**

Genesis 3–6, the story of the fall into sin and its disastrous effects.

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### **Children of Abraham: Christians, Jews, Muslims.**

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### **Wrestling in Faith.**

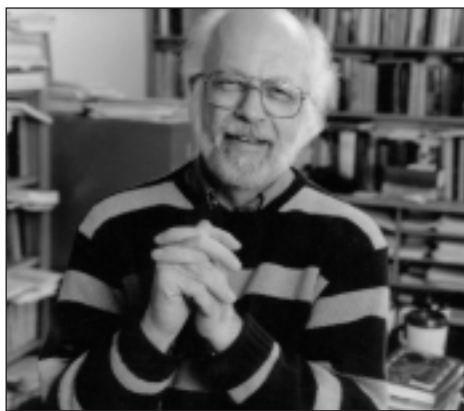
Genesis 25–33, the story of Jacob and his family with a look at the various ways in which the theme of wrestling plays its role in their conflicted life.

### **Women With Stories.**

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### **A Family Reconciled.**

Genesis 37–50, the story of the sons of Jacob and how God works behind the scenes, especially through Joseph, to bring reconciliation to his family.



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Bible, Abingdon, 1994); *The Pentateuch* (Abingdon, 1996); *First and Second Kings* (Westminster Bible Companion, 1999); and *About the Bible: Short Answers to Big Questions* (Augsburg, 1999).

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# Leaders' Guide

## The Book of Genesis

Terence E. Fretheim

This video cassette series consists of nine studies on the book of Genesis. These studies have been prompted by a series I prepared for *Lutheran Woman Today*, entitled "In God's Image: A Study of Genesis." My commentary on the book of Genesis in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (vol. 1; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) provides much of the detail that undergirds these studies.

### Genesis as the Opening Chapter of the Bible.

Genesis stands at the beginning of the Bible. That placement is important not only for interpreting the book of Genesis, but also for understanding the Bible as a whole. Just as the first chapter in any book is important for the reader's grasp of the rest of the book, so also is this the case for Genesis as the first "chapter" of the Bible.

### The book of Genesis provides six basic perspectives for reading the rest of the Bible.

1. The Bible begins, not with the chosen people, but with the entire creation. The people of Israel are not in view until the end of Genesis 11. In other words, this beginning provides the reader with a universal frame of reference through which to interpret everything that follows. What happens in the rest of the Bible is in a basic sense related to the entire creation. God's purposes at work among the people of Israel and in the person of Jesus Christ have to do with all of God's good creation. In the words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son."
2. The Bible also begins with a sad story that has tragic effects on this good creation. God created a good world, with no sin and evil at work in its life. But this situation didn't last long. Genesis 3 tells us that human beings did not trust God and this sin deeply disrupted the harmonious life of God's good world. Most basically, relationships at every level fell apart: between human beings and God, among human beings themselves, between human beings and the rest of the creation, including the land and the animals. The rest of the Bible is to be read in view of this deep disruption in the creation. Sin and evil are now powerful forces at work in the life of the world. Because of this, the world is in need of redemption, and the rest of the Bible witnesses to God's work toward this end. At the same time, God continues to shower blessings on all at every turn.
3. The Bible also begins with a divine strategy to save a world that has been broken by this pervasive sin and evil. God is not resigned to this world situation, but moves to redeem it and to heal all broken relationships. To this end, God chooses a single family in and through whom to work, namely, the family of Abraham and Sarah. Their task is put succinctly in Genesis 12:3: "in [or, through] you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." These "families" are all the nations of the world listed in Genesis 10. God chooses one family as a means in and through which to save all families. To put the matter in a nutshell: God makes an initially exclusive move for the sake of a maximally inclusive end, the salvation of the entire creation, both human and nonhuman.

## Optional additional reading or reference tools

- *Lutheran Woman Today*, "In God's Image: A Study of Genesis"
- Commentary on the book of Genesis in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (vol. 1; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994)

# Leaders' Guide

## Photocopying

Feel free to photocopy the contents of this Study Guide to use as handouts.

4. The Bible also begins with a focus on God's promises. Before Genesis gets to the chosen family, it bears witness to a God who makes and keeps promises. After the flood God promises, sealed by the rainbow, that God will never judge the world in flood-like ways again (Genesis 8:21–22; 9:8–17). This promise undergirds God's later promises to the chosen family: promises of blessing, many descendants, a great name and nation, and a land to call their own (Genesis 12:1–7). These promises are reiterated throughout the book of Genesis and begin to be fulfilled in the growth of this family. At the same time, these promises do not mean that there will be no more acts of judgment (witness Genesis 18–19). God's judgments will continue so that sin and evil do not go unchecked in the life of the world. But such judgments are never an end in themselves, but always in the service of the promises (the language of "tough love" can be helpful).
5. The Bible also begins with a focus on families. Genesis is unusual in that most of its stories focus on the experiences of families. This interest in family life begins with the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) but centers on the family life of Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Leah/Rachel, and their sons and daughter. While there is some interest in larger communities of people, such as nations (especially in the Joseph story), Genesis keeps our attention centered on matters pertaining to the family. These stories do not present families in ideal terms, however. Sin and evil have had a deeply disruptive effect on family life. One such effect is ongoing conflict among family members. The chosen family is a dysfunctional family! Yet, miracle of miracles, God chooses to work in and through this family, with all their flaws and foibles, on behalf of God's purposes for the world. This family is portrayed in such a way that readers from every generation can recognize themselves in them.
6. The Bible also begins with an interest in the outsider. Genesis is not simply concerned about the chosen family; it is also interested in those families that are not chosen. We have seen this concern both in the universal frame of reference and in the commission to Abraham to be a blessing to all families. To this end, Genesis often portrays the chosen family in various relationships with outsiders (Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, Aramaeans). How the chosen family relates to these other families becomes a theme in the book, especially in view of its call to be a blessing in Genesis 12:3. Sometimes the chosen fulfill their responsibilities to the outsider in exemplary ways; at other times, they alienate the outsider and frustrate God's purposes to be a blessing to all families. These stories help those of us who are chosen (the "insiders") think carefully about how we are relating to the outsiders in our communities.

# Leaders' Guide

## An Outline of the Book of Genesis.

The book of Genesis has a relatively simple outline, shaped in ways that lift up the focal points we have noted above.

1. The Story of all Creation (Genesis 1:1–11:26). These opening chapters of Genesis center on the entire universe, on creatures both human and nonhuman. They move from God's creation of a beautiful and amazingly diverse creation to various stories that tell of the disruption caused by human sin. As noted, this disruption includes adverse effects upon various relationships, not least upon the entire ecosystem.
2. The Story of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 11:27–25:18). These chapters begin with God's call of Abraham to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God's promises to this family are lifted up in a special way, and the stories focus particularly on the promises of land and a son. An important element in the story pertains to the identity of the son that will carry on the line of promise. Will it be Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar? Finally, it becomes clear that the promised son would be Isaac, the son of Abraham by Sarah. But the story of Hagar and Ishmael is also filled with God's promises.
3. The Story of Jacob (Genesis 25:19–36:43). These chapters focus on the sons of Isaac and Rebekah—Jacob and Esau. The conflict between these sons, generated in significant part by God's choice of Jacob, shapes all of these stories. At the same time, amid all the conflicted relationships and Jacob's often questionable behaviors, God's promises to him are sounded again and again. At the center of this story is the report of the birth of twelve of Jacob's children by four different women (Genesis 29:31–30:24). These children (and Benjamin, born later) are the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob is not only an individual; by being given the name Israel, who he is and what he does mirrors the life of this entire people on their journey.
4. The Story of Joseph and his Brothers (Genesis 37:1–50:26). These chapters are centered on Jacob's son Joseph and his conflict with his brothers. This is a family in deep conflict and the reader may rightfully wonder how God's purposes and promises can be worked out in and through them. Yet, God does not leave this family and go looking elsewhere; God works behind the scenes through the efforts of persons like Joseph to bring about a reconciliation of the family. The ending of Genesis in some sense returns to the "good" state of affairs set out at the beginning of the book. At the end of the story, this family is in Egypt, the setting for the events of the book of Exodus.

## What you need:

- TV
- VCR
- Bible
- Photocopies of the appropriate session for the participants

# Session 1

## Closing Prayer

Creator God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation. Give us wisdom and reverence to use the resources of nature so that none may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty. Amen.

## The Morning of the World (Genesis 1–2)

Terence E. Fretheim

### The first video session focuses on the creation of the world as presented in Genesis 1–2.

The Bible begins, not with the chosen people, but with the entire creation. The people of Israel are not in view until the end of Genesis 11. In other words, this beginning provides the reader with a universal frame of reference through which to interpret everything that follows. What happens in the rest of the Bible is in a basic sense related to the entire creation. God's purposes at work among the people of Israel and in the person of Jesus Christ have to do with all of God's good creation. In the words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son."

### The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these two chapters.

- Before viewing the video, read these two chapters, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

### Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:

- What does it mean to speak about Genesis as a book about beginnings?
- In view of 1:28, what does it mean to call God's creation "good"?
- Is God's creation a finished product, or is it created to be developed further?
- Identify several methods that God uses to bring the world into being, especially in light of the following verses: 1:3; 1:11–12; 2:7; 2:21–22.
- What does it mean for male and female to be created in the image of God (1:26–28)?
- What would you say about the relationship between male and female that God intended before sin entered the world?
- How might these chapters help us think about the relationship between God's good creation and ongoing scientific reflection?
- What might these chapters teach us about the relationship between human beings and their environment?

# Session 2

## Fall Up, Fall Down, or Fall Apart? (Genesis 3:1–6:5)

Terence E. Fretheim

### The second video session focuses on the fall into sin and its ill effects upon the world as it is presented in Genesis 3:1–6:5

The Bible also begins with a sad story that has tragic effects on this good creation. God created a good world, with no sin and evil at work in its life. But this situation didn't last long. Genesis 3 tells us that human beings did not trust God and this sin deeply disrupted the harmonious life of God's good world. Most basically, relationships at every level fell apart: between human beings and God, among human beings themselves, between human beings and the rest of the creation, including the land and the animals. The rest of the Bible is to be read in view of this deep disruption in the creation. Sin and evil are now powerful forces at work in the life of the world. Hence, the world is in need of redemption, and the rest of the Bible witnesses to God's work toward this end. At the same time, God continues to shower blessings on all at every turn.

### The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these chapters.

- Before viewing the video, read 3:1–24 and 6:5, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

### Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:

- Genesis 3 is often referred to as the story of the Fall. Discuss the image of “The Fall” and how it is or is not helpful in thinking about this chapter.
- How does the text identify the serpent? It has at times been identified with the devil, but what other ways might one think about the serpent that would be true to the text?
- The word “sin” does not appear in Genesis 3. What is the first sin? What in the text prompts you to answer in the way you have? What has sin become by 6:5?
- What are the effects of sin upon the various relationships indicated in the chapter?
- Describe the effects of sin in 3:14–19. Do these verses describe what the effects of sin are or do they prescribe the way things should be from this point on?
- How do the stories in 4:1–6:5 describe the effects of sin on human life?

## Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may obtain from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness. Amen.

*(Lutheran Book of Worship, Ash Wednesday prayer, p. 17)*

# Session 3

## Closing Prayer

Merciful God, we confess that we have violated the covenant with Noah and all flesh, for we are laying waste this lovely place, this gracious, green and provident place, whereon you have been pleased to plant us. The confessional formula is apt: Forgive us, Lord, for we have sinned. Amen.

## God Will Never Do That Again (Genesis 6:5–11:26)

Terence E. Fretheim

### The third video session focuses on the flood story and its aftermath as presented in Genesis 6:5–11:26.

These chapters focus on the most devastating effect of sin in the life of the world: the story of the flood. In modern terms, the flood is an ecological catastrophe. This story in Genesis also sets an unconditional divine promise in place for the rest of the Bible, namely, God's promise never to visit the earth in flood-like ways again. In this promise, sealed by the rainbow, God places an eternal self-limitation on how God will respond to the sin and evil of the world. This story is especially revealing of a God who enters into judgment, but does so with a grieving heart. This God decides not to blot out the entire creation, but chooses to save some, both human beings and animals, in order to begin again. The story of the world following the flood is filled with promise (see 8:22), blessing (the birth of children) and the continuing effects of sin.

### The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these chapters.

- Before viewing the video, read 6:5–22; 8:1; 8:20–22; 9:8–17, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

### Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:

- How would you describe the character of the God revealed in the flood story? See especially 6:5–8; 8:1; 8:22.
- Of what importance is the saving of the animals in the ark, God's remembering them at the height of the flood (8:1) and God's giving promises to them (9:9–10)?
- What purpose do you think the flood served? Compare the description of human beings in 6:5 (before the flood) and 8:21 (after the flood).
- Reflect on the flood story as an ecological event and how human sin affects the environment, both then and now.
- If you have time, read 11:1–9 and reflect on this statement: God will promote diversity at the expense of any kind of unity that seeks to preserve itself in isolation from the rest of the world.



# Session 4

## God's Unconditional Promises (Genesis 12–15)

Terence E. Fretheim

**This fourth video session focuses on Genesis 12–15 and its depiction of God's call of Abraham and God's promises that go with him on his life's journey.**

The Bible also begins with a divine strategy to save a world that has been broken by a pervasive sin and evil. God is not resigned to this world situation, but moves to redeem it and to heal all broken relationships. To this end, God chooses a single family in and through whom to work, namely, the family and Abraham and Sarah. Their task is put succinctly in Genesis 12:3: "in [or, through] you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." These "families" are all the nations of the world listed in Genesis 10. God chooses one family as a means in and through which to save all families. To put the matter in a nutshell: God makes an initially exclusive move for the sake of a maximally inclusive end, the salvation of the entire creation, both human and nonhuman.

**The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these chapters.**

- Before viewing the video, read 12:1–7; 13:14–18; 15:1–21, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

**Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:**

- God's call to Abraham in 12:1–3 includes a responsibility to others (see the last clause in v. 2 and v. 3). Put that responsibility in your own words.
- In God's call to Abraham, God chooses (elects) him out of all the people in the world. Why do you suppose God decided to do things this way?
- God's call of Abraham is surrounded by God's promises throughout these chapters. Look at the following texts and make a list of the promises (12:2–3; 12:7; 13:14–18; 15:5; 15:18–21). How would you describe those promises? Are they simply spiritual in character?
- Are all of these promises unconditional, that is, that God will keep them regardless of what Abraham and his family might do, think, or say? What do you think of such promises in the light of what promises have often become in today's world?
- Genesis 15:6 is an important verse in the way it speaks of faith and righteousness. Reflect on what Abraham's faith means for you (see Galatian 3:6-9)?

## Opening Prayer

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us.

Amen.

*(Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 153, adapted)*

# Session 5

## Opening Prayer

Holy and righteous God, you created us in your image. Grant that we may contend fearlessly against evil and make no peace with oppression. Help us to use our freedom to bring justice among people and nations, to the glory of your name. Amen.

*(Lutheran Book of Worship, prayer p. 37 adapted)*

## Sodom and Gomorrah: Intercession and Judgment (Genesis 18:16–19:38)

Terence E. Fretheim

### The fifth video session focuses on the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:16–19:38.

These chapters describe a devastating judgment on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham's intercessions with God on their behalf. This story begins with God's decision to share with Abraham a preliminary decision regarding judgment on these cities. Abraham intercedes on behalf of the cities (which includes his nephew Lot and his family), asking that the cities be saved for the sake of the righteous. Abraham's argument is based on the issue of critical mass, whether there are sufficient numbers of righteous in the cities to offset the evil effects of their sins. Though God moves with Abraham, finally there are an insufficient number (no more than ten) to do so, and the judgment falls. The righteous few are saved, and an ecological catastrophe befalls the cities. Moral order affects cosmic order, that is, human sinfulness can adversely affect all aspects of the created order (including the ecosystem). But Abraham's intercession on behalf of the wicked cities sets a standard with respect to the prayers of the righteous on behalf of others, even their enemies.

### The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these chapters.

- Before viewing the video, read Genesis 18:16–19:30, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

### Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:

- Get a sense of where these cities are located in a general way (we don't know for sure where they were) and the kind of terrain in that part of the world.
- What does it mean that God does not want to hide from Abraham (18:17)? What are the implications for our knowledge of God's actions in the world (see John 16:12–15)?
- How would you describe the effect of Abraham's intercession on God? What are the implications for our understanding of intercessory prayer?
- What were the sins of Sodom that resulted in this catastrophe (see Genesis 19:4; Matthew 10:14–15; Ezekiel 16:48–55)?
- Discuss the relationship between human sin and the environment.
- Discuss Lot's treatment of his daughters (19:8) and its effects on their relationship (see 19:30–38). What good did God bring out of even this disastrous situation?

# Session 6

## Children of Abraham: Christians, Jews, Muslims (Genesis 16–17, 21)

Terence E. Fretheim

### The sixth video session focuses on the story of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16:1–16; 17:15–20; 21:8–21.

The story of Hagar and Ishmael has often been neglected by the church. Inasmuch as Sarah was barren, she asks that Hagar, her slave-girl, become a surrogate mother to bear a child for Abraham. This was a custom in those days (see Genesis 30:3–4) and Sarah had not yet been designated the mother of the child of promise (that comes in 17:15). Conflict breaks out between Sarah and Hagar (16:4–6) and Hagar runs away, going toward her home in Egypt. But the angel of the Lord (equals God in human form) encounters her and, while telling her to return, makes promises to her and her child (see 16:10–12; see also 17:20). For reasons known only to God, Sarah's son rather than Ishmael becomes the one through whom God will establish a covenant (see 17:19). Conflict again breaks out between Sarah and Hagar, and Hagar and Ishmael are forced to leave (21:8–14). But God delivers them in the wilderness and, once again, makes promises to Ishmael (21:15–19) and God “was with the boy” (21:20).

### The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these chapters.

- Before viewing the video, read Genesis 16:1–16; 17:15–20; 21:8–21, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

### Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:

- Why do you think this story has been neglected by the church?
- Put yourself in the shoes of Sarah and Hagar and get some sense of what is stake for each of them. How might you find your story mirrored in one or the other or both?
- God makes promises not only to Isaac but also to Ishmael. What does it mean for God to give promises to one who is not a member of the chosen family? How might God be keeping promises to both Isaac and Ishmael?
- The members of three great religions of the world trace their ancestry back to Abraham: Jews (through Isaac); Christians (mostly spiritual descendants of Isaac); and Muslims (through Ishmael, both physical and spiritual descendants). What might that mean for the way in which Christians relate to Jews and Muslims?
- What does it mean that God delivers non-chosen peoples and is present with them?

## Opening Prayer

Almighty God, all thoughts of truth and peace come from you. Kindle in the hearts of all your children the love of peace and guide with your wisdom the leaders of the nations, so that your kingdom will go forward in peace and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of your love.

*(Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 40)*

# Session 7

## Closing Prayer

Thank you, God, for being with us through all of our life's journeys. We ask that you be with us in the days to come. Bless our struggles with you so that we may grow and become ever more the one you created. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Wrestling in Faith (Genesis 25–36)

Terence E. Fretheim

### The seventh video session focuses on the story of Jacob and his family in Genesis 25:19–36:43.

The story of Jacob is also the story of Israel, the name given by God to Jacob. The people of Israel see their own life story mirrored in this story of an individual who has both positive and negative features in his character. There are four “pillars” in the telling of this story, instances where God appears to a member of this family. The first is God's appearance to Rebekah (25:23); the other three are to Jacob. In the second of these God appears to him in a dream at Bethel as he is leaving Canaan when Esau threatens him (28:10–22); there God showers him with promises (28:13–15). Jacob then spends years with the family of Laban, whose two daughters (Leah and Rachel) become his wives and bears him thirteen children. In the third, God appears to him when he returns to Canaan land (32:22–32), engaging him in a wrestling match. In the fourth, God appears to him again at Bethel, reiterating his name change and reaffirming the promises (35:9–12).

### The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these chapters.

- Before viewing the video, read Genesis 25:19–34; 28:10–22; 32:22–32, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

### Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:

- What is the point of God's speaking to Rebekah (25:23) and why do you think God speaks to her rather than Isaac? How does she respond to God's word?
- What does God promise Jacob in his dream at Bethel (28:13–15)? Note the mixture of family and personal promises.
- What is your sense of God's using dreams as a means of revealing himself to people?
- Who wrestles with Jacob in the night (32:22–33)? If it is God, does God really wrestle with Jacob or is God just playing games with him (see especially vv. 25, 28)?
- We are not told directly, but for what purpose does God take Jacob to the mat (see 33:10 and Jacob's response upon meeting Esau)?

# Session 8

## Women with Stories (Genesis 34, 38)

Terence E. Fretheim

### The eighth video session focuses on the stories of Dinah and Tamar in Genesis 34 and 38.

Women play a prominent role in the book of Genesis. From Genesis 1 we learn that male and female are created in the image of God. A fundamental equality between men and women is seen as basic to God's intentions for the creation. When sin entered the world, one of its effects was the breakdown of this equality, and patriarchal structures became characteristic of their life together. That the stories of Genesis are predominantly concerned with families also makes it natural for women to play a key role. Eve plays a prominent role in Genesis 2–4 and is not the culprit she is often claimed to be. Sarah and Hagar and the dynamics of their relationship are key to the development of the story of Abraham and his family. Rebecca is key to God's plans for the choice of Jacob, and his wives Leah and Rachel (with their slave-girls) bear twelve sons that are the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob also has one daughter, Dinah; she and Tamar (Judah's daughter-in-law) are the characters that provide the focus for this session.

### The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these chapters.

- Before viewing the video, read Genesis 34:1–31; 38:1–30, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

### Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:

- Focus first on Genesis 34 and the character of Dinah. Have participants express their “feelings” about what happens in this story.
- What do you think of Shechem's actions toward her in 34:3, 11–12? Note the law in Deuteronomy 22:28–29, which was designed to preserve the woman's honor.
- Dinah does not speak in the story. Can you become the voice of Dinah? How do you let Dinah speak in your world. Do you speak for her, if she is too fearful to speak?
- Focus next on Genesis 38. What are your “feelings” about this story?
- How would you describe Tamar and what she does to provide an heir for her dead husband? The comment in 38:8 is explained in Deuteronomy 25:5–6.
- How does Judah evaluate what she has done? How might you relate to Tamar in our world? Might your voice make a difference for persons like her?
- Note that God does not speak or act in the story of Dinah nor in the story of Tamar (after v. 10). What might you say about God's presence in these women's lives?

## Opening Prayer

God of honor, we offer prayer for those who are victims of rape or prostitution. May they know you as a safe place, God, and may we, the church, be a safe place as well. Renew our energies to help those who have been so hurt. Thank you for those Rachels in our lives who have taught us about suffering. Keep our eyes on the empty tomb and your promises of new life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

# Session 9

## Opening Prayer

Almighty God, we commend to your care all families. Keep them free from bitterness, from the thirst for personal victory, and from pride in self. Let children and parents have full respect for one another; and light the fire of kindness among us all, that we may show affection for each other, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*(Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 51, adapted)*

## A Family Reconciled (Genesis 37–50)

Terence E. Fretheim

### The ninth and last video session focuses on the story of Jacob and his sons in Genesis 37–50.

This session is usually referred to as the story of Joseph, but his brothers and their father also play an important role. Central to the story is the conflicted character of their relationship and how it moves, often through the words and deeds of Joseph, to their reconciliation. Also important is what happens to God's promises. Will God follow the pattern up to this point in Genesis and pick just one son to carry on the promises to this family? The figure of Joseph is especially important for how this story develops. Though his actions are by no means always exemplary, he shows how a single individual can often be crucial in the movement toward reconciliation. That he plays a prominent role in the Egyptian government is also significant. Joseph not only proves to be a leader of this family, he also guides the social and economic functions of government so that the entire world benefits from his wise policies (see 41:57). God plays a more behind-the-scenes role in this story, present and active but unobtrusively so. But all along God is the one who works in and through all that happens to bring about a reconciled family.

### The following comments and questions are designed to prompt discussion regarding the content of these chapters.

- Before viewing the video, read Genesis 37:1–36; 50:15–21, preferably out loud.
- Having read the text, jot down one-two issues or questions you have regarding the text itself.
- Next, jot down one-two issues or questions regarding what you may have heard about this text from other individuals.
- If this viewing is a group project, invite as many participants as possible to identify the questions they have in as short a time as possible. This is not a time to discuss the questions, but to get people thinking about them before they see the video.
- View the video.
- In light of the video, discuss one or more of the issues that were initially identified.

### Some questions that might be discussed, if not already identified:

- Though the focus is only on two chapters, refresh your memory about the development of the story of Joseph as a whole.
- How would you characterize the character of Joseph?
- What does he do that proves to be in the best interests of this family, especially in the key text, Genesis 50:15–21?
- Does Joseph actually forgive his brothers or refuse to forgive him, claiming that he is not God? Why or why not?
- In view of 50:20, how would you understand the role that God plays in bringing the brothers to this place in their family life?



