



Cities Church

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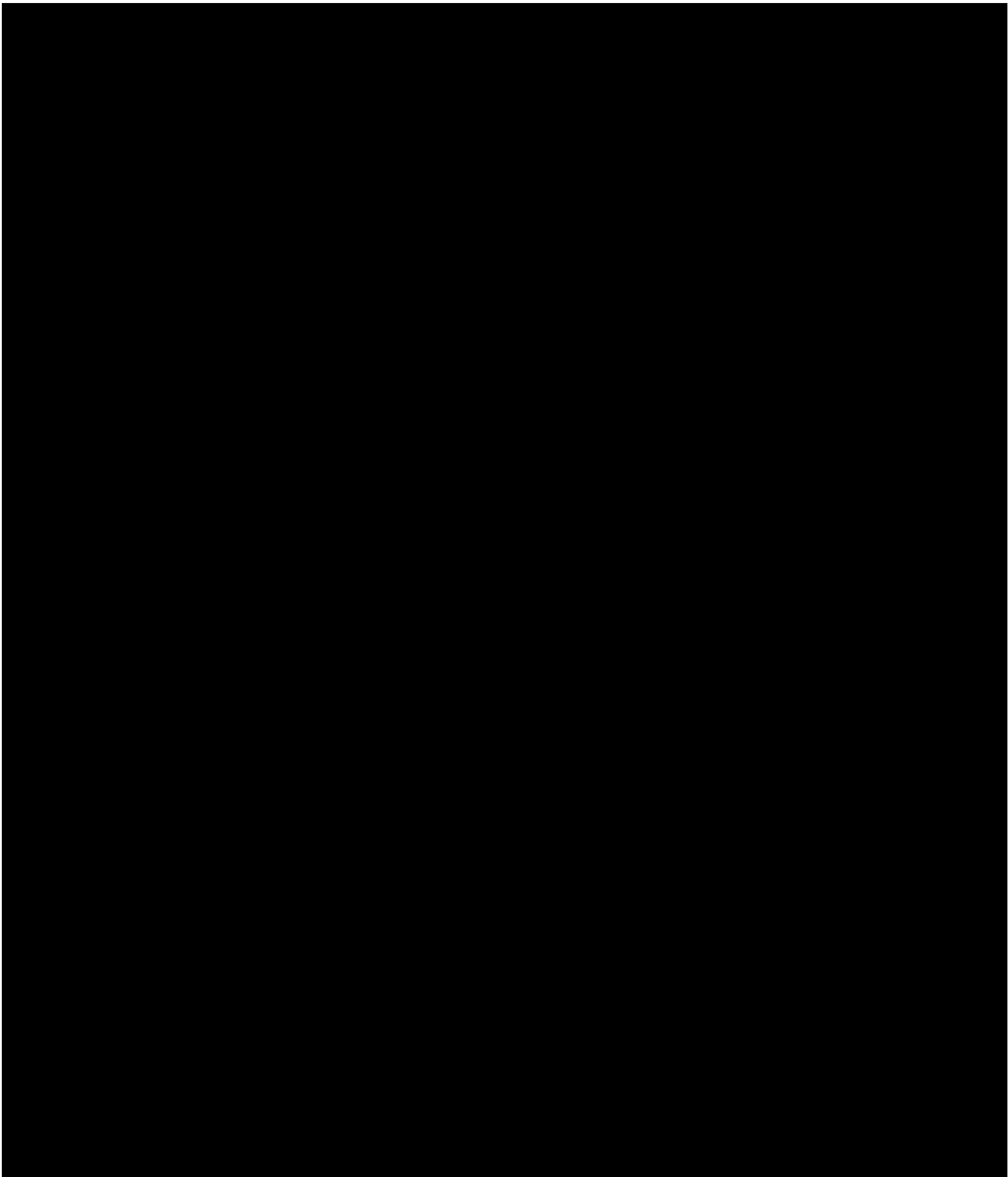
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# Week One

8



Blessing  
Through the  
Unexpected

Dan Nichols

# Blessing Through the Unexpected

Dan Nichols

Every story is intentionally designed to have an effect on its reader. Some tales spur on affection while others create a taste for the unknown; some provoke sorrow as others provide relief through comedy. I can remember how Tolkien's meanderings through the Shire in *The Fellowship of the Ring* lulled my teenage sensibilities, creating in me a discontentment that helped me realize we are created for a greater purpose in a grand adventure.

The history recorded in the latter half of Genesis is no exception to this rule. Particularly, Genesis 27 moves readers in ways that are repeated and reemphasized throughout the rest of the book. The prime example of this is the story of God transferring his blessing from Isaac to Jacob, which is intended to create in us thankfulness for God and his heart towards his people. We see he is a loving and compassionate God who looks out for those who belong to him. These chapters also sharpen our understanding of how God interacts with his people on earth. As we observe Isaac's children we learn that

– although God ferociously protects his covenant people – the manner in which he leads them into blessing is both unexpected and difficult.

The heart of Genesis 27 lies with Isaac giving the first-born blessing to Jacob (Gen 27:26–29). This passage includes language drawn directly from God's original promises to Abraham. First, Isaac blesses his son with all the fruit of the field, hearkening back to the land of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. Then, Isaac states that the fate of all nations resides in their relationship to Jacob and his descendants. Here, Isaac effectively transfers the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant specifically to Jacob and his family.

In journeying through the three-scene story of Jacob's inheritance, we see three realities pertaining to God's blessing to the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

1. God has chosen for his blessing to advance through the younger and weaker son (Gen 27:1–29).

2. Those outside of the scope of Abraham's blessing are cursed (Gen 27:30–40).

3. God's purposes are often realized through great opposition (Gen 27:41–46).

The opening scene of Genesis 27 details Jacob and Rebekah's plans to obtain for Jacob the blessing that Isaac is determined to give to Esau. From Isaac's perspective, Esau was the older, more competent, worthy brother to receive his blessing. As the younger brother, Jacob is pictured as feeble when compared to Esau. Unlike Esau, Jacob does not hunt and is unable to prepare the food that Isaac desires. Surprisingly, it is Rebekah's – not Jacob's – first impulse to engineer a plan to trick Isaac into giving Jacob his blessing instead of Esau. Like David after him, there is nothing mentioned about Jacob that makes him preferable to carry out God's plans. Jacob is neither warrior nor leader, yet with great sovereignty and wisdom, God decided to advance his plans to

bless the peoples of the earth through the weaker, less desirable child.

What follows is Esau's not-so-subtle reaction to losing the blessing he had already decided belonged to him (Gen 27:30-40). Out of bitterness he seeks another blessing from Isaac but, after pressing his father on the issue, instead of a blessing he receives a curse. Instead of embracing God's purposes, Esau's immediate response to Jacob receiving Isaac's blessing is resentment, hatred, and opposition.

The curse Isaac places on Esau

and his family would bow down before him in service and gratitude. The journey that God takes Joseph on is treacherous and filled with tests of his faith, but it ends with Joseph becoming one of the most powerful men in the world.

Fruitful land and success accompany Joseph's indirect ascent in Egypt, while his family is unable to survive the drought in the land of promise. Though his brothers acted in the same manner as Esau towards Jacob, as the recipient of promise, Joseph becomes the source of provision and sanctuary

generation, which is exactly what God decreed for his blessing to progress.

So, what does all of this mean? God's blessing often operates opposite to how we would expect. It is given to the most unlikely recipients and it advances though human opposition is strong. On the contrary, we see that the man who attempts to take the promised blessing by force, and is unwilling to submit to the younger, is the one who loses it. This pattern in Genesis is magnified in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not the authoritative warrior Israel was looking for, who would forcefully rescue the nation. Instead, he came to earth in humility. Instead of seizing what was rightfully his through an act of might, he received it through opposition — and ultimately death. In fact, it was his own destruction that sealed his inheritance. Through his perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, Jesus revealed himself as God's promised blessing to Abraham. Jesus reigns over his children peacefully, while executing judgment on all who oppose him; he leads his people into perfect rest in a greater land.

God's blessing often operates opposite to how we would expect. It is given to the most unlikely recipients and it advances though human opposition is strong.

is the inverse of the blessing Jacob receives. Jacob would receive the "fateness of the earth," and Esau would be driven away from it. While the younger would preside in peaceful lordship over all nations, the elder would be attended by restlessness and dread. The point is, there is no middle ground when it comes to how one responds to who God is and how he works. Either one recognizes his lordship and submits to it, or they rebel against it and receive the due consequence.

This concept of blessing and anti-blessing reverberates throughout the rest of the book. Later in Genesis, we see this pattern repeated with Jacob and his son Joseph. Though Joseph was the youngest and weakest of the brothers, it was revealed to him that his en-

tire family would bow down before him in service and gratitude. The journey that God takes Joseph on is treacherous and filled with tests of his faith, but it ends with Joseph becoming one of the most powerful men in the world.

for them. Instead of remaining in the land, God's blessing follows Joseph into a pagan nation. The last scene in our text reveals how God causes his blessed people to advance and grow through opposition. Joseph experienced a great deal of hostility. His brothers ridiculed, maligned, and attacked him before selling him into slavery. Through this outrageous scheme, God used it to bring Joseph to Egypt. There he was falsely accused and thrown into prison. Even in this grim situation, God was still at work. While in prison, Joseph met the man who would ultimately provide the opportunity for him to take a position of utmost authority in Egypt, second to Pharaoh. Difficulty is brought upon Abraham's family from generation to

## Day 1 – Genesis 27:1–13

- ① As we open part three of Genesis, it may be a good refresher to watch The Bible Project's videos on Genesis. Jot down key points or events from Genesis 1–26. Describe the individuals in our passage, their relational connections, and how they are related to Abraham. In Genesis 25:19–24 what does Esau do that helps us see his character as we enter Genesis 27?
- ② Describe any relational tensions between Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, Judith, Basemath, and Jacob (see Gen 26:34 & 27:46). How does this play into the deception in Genesis 27:1–13?
- ③ Reflect: How do you feel about Rebekah and Jacob's actions to get the infamous blessing from Isaac before he dies? What does it mean to be 'shrewd'? Could you make a case that Rebekah and Isaac are being 'shrewd' instead of being 'cheats'? See Genesis 25:23.

## Day 2 – Genesis 27:14–29

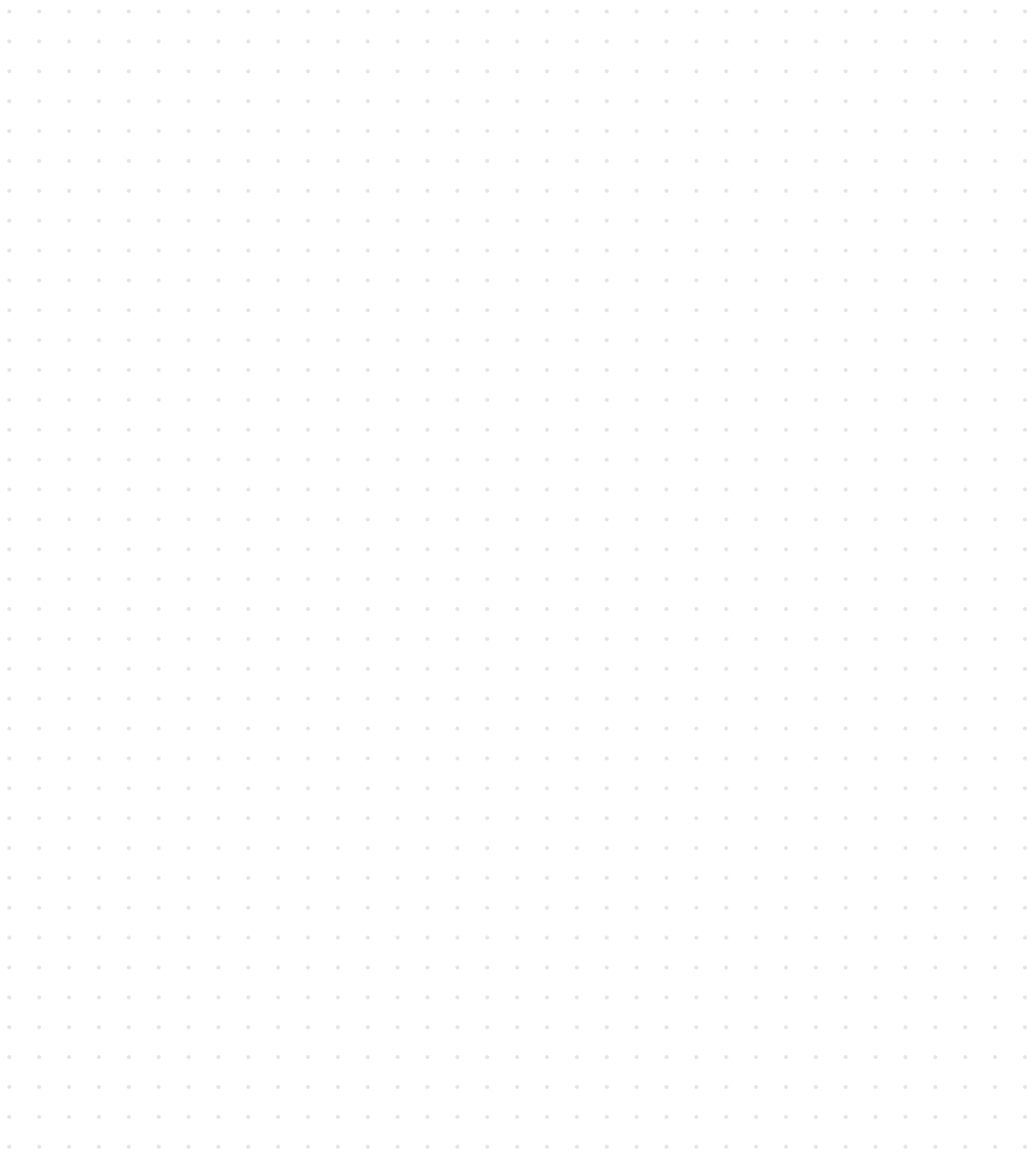
- ① Does Isaac fall for the trickery? How does Jacob get the blessing? Why is this blessing so important? Given that Jacob is younger than Esau, what is an unusual outcome of this blessing (Genesis 27:29 & 25:23)?
- ② Read Malachi 1:1–3, and Romans 9:9–16. How did the blessing Jacob received fulfill God's purpose? What did it show?
- ③ Reflect: It was unthinkable in that time that the older brother would serve the younger brother. What are the implications of God choosing to bless the younger brother? What can learn from this regarding God's mercy on people?

## Day 3 – Genesis 27:30–46

- 1 What type of blessing did Jacob receive and why was Esau furious he didn't receive it? What does Jacob's name mean (Gen 26:21–26), and how does Jacob play into this in Genesis 27? What are some results of the manipulation game that Rebekah and Jacob played?
- 2 Why does Isaac not revoke the blessing and give it to Esau (see Gen 28:1 as to how Isaac is handling this whole ordeal)? Jacob's descendants (Israel) and Esau's descendants (Edom) will be in conflict with each other for the rest of the Old Testament. Note these conflicts in Numbers 20:14–21, 2 Samuel 8:14, 1 Kings 22:47, and 2 Kings 8:20.
- 3 Reflect: Define 'manipulate.' Rebekah and Jacob's manipulation of Isaac result in God's plan being fulfilled. Does the end result justify the means? What does manipulation (outward action) show us on the heart level? In what ways do you "manipulate" and what does that show you about your heart? How can the gospel change your heart to fix the deeper need?

# Sermon Notes

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# Week Two

18

The  
Overlapping  
of Heaven  
and Earth

Zach Krych

# The Overlapping of Heaven and Earth

Zach Krych

Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 quickly grabs our imagination, as it reveals heaven itself to us. This is something every Christian rightly thinks about.

Have you ever considered what's happening in this passage, and what it says about the nature of heaven and earth? "And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it" (Gen 28:12-13).

Heaven is a complicated term in Scripture because it refers to multiple things. "The heavens" can refer to the sky, where the birds live. This phrase may also refer to 'the expanse,' where the stars are. This is often the case, yet heaven is also used to refer to where God resides. God is high and lifted up — like the sky and stars — with both authority and holiness. God's presence is said to be in heaven because God is high above us.

This third definition of heaven is often surrounded with misconcep-

tions. One is the idea that the afterlife looks like spending eternity with God in a purely spiritual, cloudy state, far removed from anything physical or earthy. That is not God's plan for humanity. For this reason, it can be helpful to think of heaven as God's presence or 'God's space,' and earth as 'our space.' Though don't be confused, as these spaces are not mutually exclusive. They overlap.

Jesus is now the place where God's space and human space overlap, and this will one day culminate in heaven coming down to earth, a New Earth, better than Eden.

The Biblical story begins with God's space ours overlapping in the Garden of Eden. Though after we arrogantly rejected God's will for us on earth, God expelled humanity from his presence and banned us from the Garden. No more mingling of heaven and earth, no more union between God's space and our space, at least not in the

same way as before. Since man's fall, heaven and earth experience fundamental separation.

The rest of the Bible is the story of God reuniting heaven and earth, and Jacob's dream offers one the first tastes of how this reunification will occur.

When we read of Jacob's ladder (or stairway) reaching to heaven, we naturally think of ourselves climbing it. That is not quite what we should

be envisioning. Part of the purpose of this dream is to compare and contrast God's redemptive plan with humanity's plan, as it is seen in the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). Earlier in Genesis, we saw humanity trying to ascend up to God through creating a tower "with its top in the heavens" (11:4). Most commentators believe that the tower of

Babel was an ancient Ziggurat, which looked like a gigantic square wedding cake, meant to be a stairway or ramp to an ancient temple, where God's space and man's space were supposed to meet. The word sometimes translated as 'ladder' here in Genesis 28 is not a ladder with rungs, but it appears to be referencing something like a Ziggurat. God put an end to Babel's arrogant effort to ascend up to himself. Yes, God would eventually dwell again with man — as Jacob's stairway represents — but it would be on his terms, not ours.

What are God's terms? Think ahead to the beginning of the Gospel of John in Chapter 1:47–51. Jesus is gathering his twelve disciples, and afterwards he prophetically speaks to Nathaniel. Nathaniel responds in faith by proclaiming, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (1:49), and Jesus responds by referencing this very passage in Genesis 28, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these!" And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:51).

Jesus has just revealed the terms by which God is going to reunite heaven and earth. He will be the way. Jesus is the stairway of Jacob's dream, and the dream has always been about Jesus. He essentially tells Nathaniel, "I am the link between God's space and human space, and everything I do on earth will show this."

Through Jesus, God's heavenly kingdom is becoming an earthly real-

ity. Jesus is now the place where God's space and human space overlap, and this will one day culminate in heaven coming down to earth, a New Earth, better than Eden. Revelation 21 shows what we should be envisioning: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God'" (Rev 21:2–3).

Christ is the Stairway, the Temple, the Gate, the Door, and the Way (the analogies are many to make sure we do not miss the point!). Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), and Jesus makes it clear that he wants the truth to permeate our lives. He is the Stairway making God's presence available to us on earth. He wants us to experience and participate in the reunification of heaven and earth today.

Jesus tells us that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17), and he commands us to pray that God's kingdom would come and his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. As Tim Mackie of TheBibleProject.com explains, "Everywhere on earth that Christ visited, he brought little pieces of heaven with him, and though mankind ultimately killed him, his death created a permanent access point between heaven and earth."

Jesus wants us to live with Jacob's vision in mind, seeing himself as the way heaven and earth are being reunite-

ed. We are to long for Christ's return, for when he will fully reunite heaven and earth, by constantly praying for more of God's space and human space to overlap today.

Jesus told us: "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'" (Matt 6:9).

## Day 1 – Genesis 28:1–9

- 1 Describe Isaac's attitude towards Jacob. See Genesis 12:1–3 and connect Abraham's blessing to Jacob's.
- 2 Esau responds. He sees his mom and dad's disappointment over his choices. Esau can't go to Paddan-Aram since that is where Jacob is heading. Instead, he goes to the family of Ishmael to find a wife. If you could enter into the story right now and give Esau some advice, what would you tell him?
- 3 Reflect: What do you think is the root of the issues in this family between these two sons and their parents? In what ways do you not want to repeat these mistakes in your own family, and how do you go about changing that?

## Day 2 – Genesis 28:10–15

- ① Where is Jacob heading, why, and what happens? In what ways does God affirm that Jacob is the rightful one to whom the blessing has been passed down to from Abraham, then to Isaac, and then to Jacob?
  
- ② Describe this ladder in Jacob’s dream. What is it, and how did it work? Who does God say that he is? What message does God send to Jacob?
  
- ③ Reflect: Study John 1:47–51 and compare it with Genesis 28:12 and Hosea 12:4. Note the subtlety here that Nathaniel is a man “in whom there is no deceit,” whereas Jacob’s name means deceit. How does Jacob’s ladder point to Jesus? See Hebrews 10:19–22.

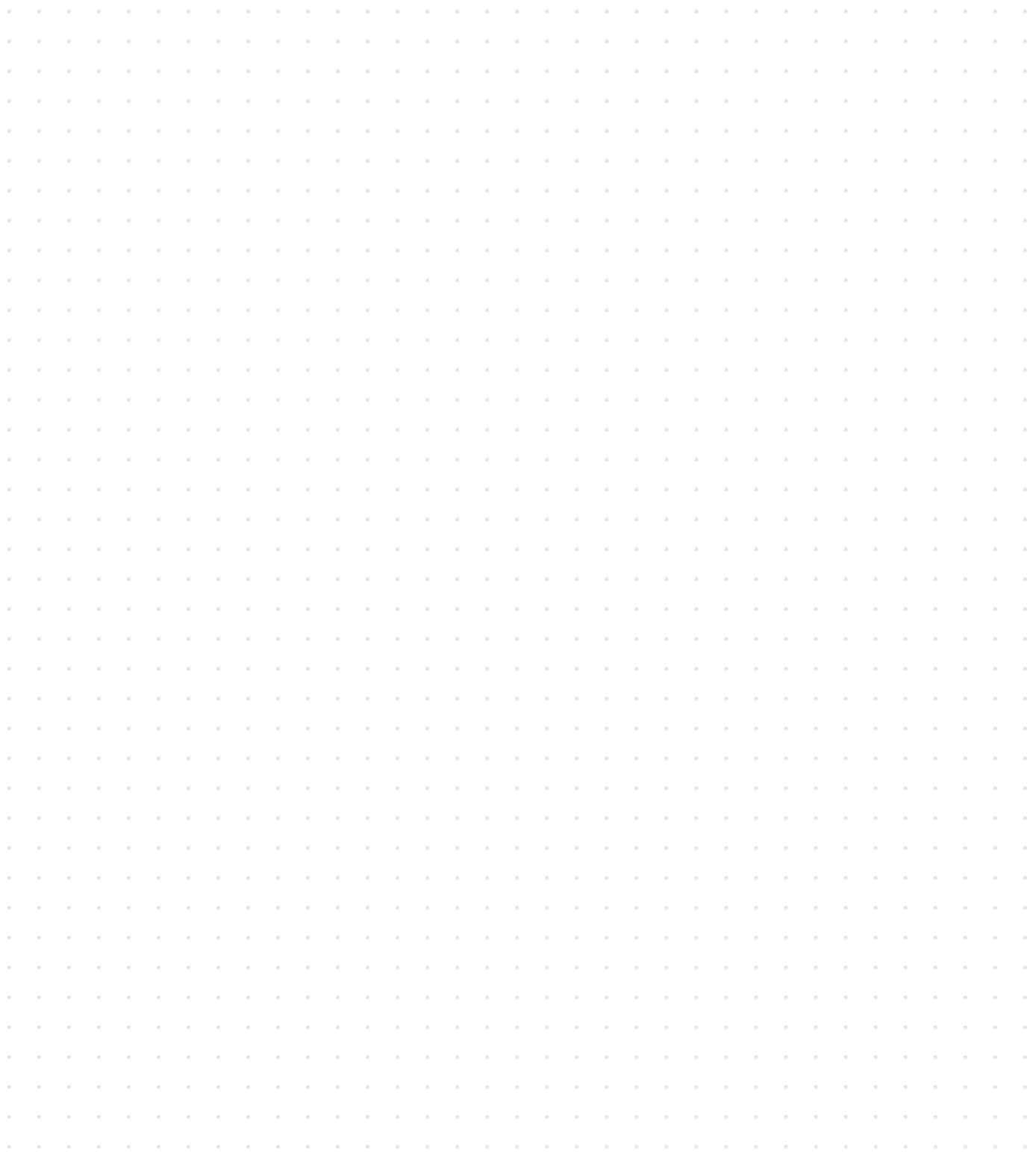
## Day 3 – Genesis 28:16–22

- ① Why do you think Jacob was afraid? Describe Jacob's emotions, and describe his vow that he gives in response.
- ② Today the town of Bethel is known as Beiten, which is about ten miles north of Jerusalem. Why did Jacob name the place Bethel? What happens to Bethel as the Old Testament progresses (see 1 Kings 12:26–33)? Bethel became a perpetual place of false worship that led to the judgment on the northern kingdom — note Jeremiah 48:13, Hosea 10:15, Amos 5:5–6.
- ③ Reflect: The lesson of Bethel serves as a warning to churches, organizations, and individuals. Though you may glorify God at one point in your life, you may turn to idolatry and your life degrades in sin. Study 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 and describe this 'turning.' What needs to happen in our lives? Study Hebrews 3:12.



# Sermon Notes

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# Week Three

28

All the  
Promises  
of God

Laura Fuehrer

# All the Promises of God

## Laura Fuehrer

“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”

2 CORINTHIANS 1:20

While recently studying Genesis 29:30, I have been repeatedly reminded of Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians, “all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory” (2 Cor 1:20). This statement may be

before, and I’ve typically focused on Jacob and Rachel’s story of beauty, love, deception, and infertility. Recently, my attention has been drawn to Leah.

Leah has some type of physical deformity simply described by her “weak eyes.” She is directly compared to her sister Rachel, who is younger and more beautiful in form and appearance (Gen 29:17). Poor Leah. She’s the oldest daughter and should be married off first, but her father doesn’t think any man would ever want to marry her. In

woman. Maybe he could have made the honorable decision to accept this circumstance and remain committed to his new wife, but he doesn’t. Instead, Jacob completes his wedding week with Leah then moves on to Rachel, the one he really wants. And there’s Leah, kicked to the side, trapped in a life of always coming in second to her beautiful younger sister.

Genesis 29:31 describes Leah as hated. She experiences lifelong suffering. She spends her years of marriage trying to gain the love and acceptance of her husband, yet it is all in vain. My understanding of the culture at this time is that there are two main ways a woman is valued: her outward beauty and her ability to produce a male heir for her husband. Each time the Lord gives Leah a son, her response seems to reveal some faith in God that he has heard her plea and blessed her with a son. She “praised the Lord” after having a child, and each time she seemed to think that surely now it would be enough for her husband to finally love her and choose her. Repeatedly, Leah

Leah was not able to see in her lifetime how her story played a special role in God’s ultimate plan of redemption, but God certainly did not fail to deliver.

easy for present day believers to accept, since we are able to see the entirety of Scripture and the fulfillment of God’s plan through Jesus, his Son. However, this statement also holds true for God’s people in the past. I’ve read the story in Genesis of Jacob and his wives

result, Leah’s father plays a trick on an unsuspecting man in which the poor man marries her, finally getting this undesirable daughter off her father’s hands. Jacob neither loves nor desires to marry Leah, and he is understandably upset that he was given the wrong

produces a son for her husband and is waiting for love and acceptance from Jacob, but it never comes.

What if suffering and pain is all that seemed to mark Leah's life? What if she reached the end of her life and felt as though God was not faithful to her? What if our lives end and we feel that we have experienced suffering and pain without seeing God deliver on his promises? Is God a liar? Of course not. We know that our God is faithful even though we cannot see all the details of his plan for us. He is unfathomably kind and generous to sometimes allow us to see a way that he has directly worked a trial or hardship in our life for our good, but this does not always happen.

Just because we cannot see God's plan in our lives doesn't mean he isn't at work. One of the most beautiful ways I've seen how all the promises of God find their 'yes' in Christ is in Leah's descendants. Leah has six sons with Jacob, and one of these sons is Judah. From Judah's line came Obed, Jesse, David, and eventually Joseph, the husband of Mary, mother of Jesus. The Deliverer of Israel came through the line of Leah! The long-awaited Messiah, Savior of the World, not only came and fulfilled all of God's promises to his children— including Leah — but he entered the world directly through the line of this woman who had been shamed, unloved, and cast aside her entire life.

The only love and ultimate acceptance we all need is that of Christ our Savior. What an incredibly beautiful detail in Leah's story. Leah was not able to see in her lifetime how her story played a special role in God's ultimate plan of redemption, but God certainly did not fail to deliver. All the promises of God find their 'yes' in Christ. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. Even in the midst of deep and painful suffering, we can see through all of Scripture that our God is faithful and that his promises always find their 'yes' in Christ.

## Day 1 – Genesis 29:1–14a

- ① Jacob continues on his journey, and now with a bounce in his step after his encounter with God. What happens at the well? Describe how you know it is love at first sight with Jacob towards Rachel.
- ② See Genesis 24 for a previous story about a well and match-making. Why was Laban enthusiastic about the marriage with Rebekah in Genesis 24? Why do you think Laban is so enthusiastic about Jacob and Rachel?
- ③ Reflect: Rachel is the only female shepherd mentioned in the Bible. Study Proverbs 31:10–33. Note that the Bible doesn't support stereotyped roles for men and women. In fact, Jacob and Rachel have quite the role reversal from culture's standpoint – Rachel was a shepherd whereas Jacob loved the indoors and cooking with his mom.



## Day 2 – Genesis 29:14b–35

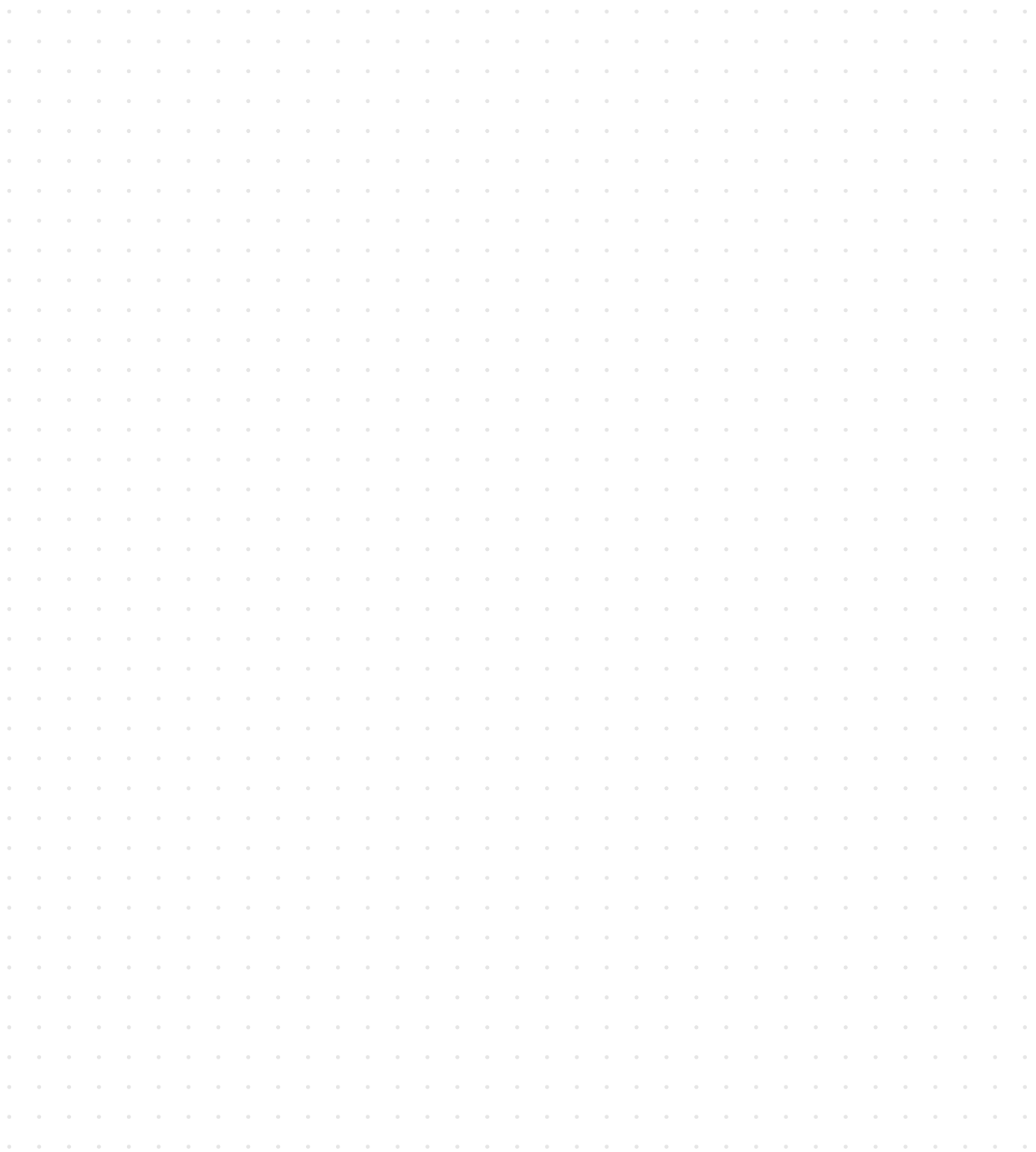
- ① Laban probably wanted Jacob to work for him for free. What deal do they work out? How does Laban feel about the deal? What does Laban do that throws a wrinkle in the plan?
- ② The trickster, Jacob, was deceived by another trickster. Jacob sleeps with Leah and not Rachel, the bride. How in the world does this happen? Remember that we asked a similar question of Isaac, in that how could he not know that it was Jacob and not Esau. So, what factors could be in play where Jacob couldn't put it together that it was Leah? Why did Laban do this?
- ③ Reflect: At the end of our passage, we get God's take on the situation. What does the Lord focus in on with this saga? And yet, what is Leah's motivation for wanting children? What is she chasing after? Who in this story is the one who loves Leah? How is this a picture of our own issues with wanting others to love us?

## Day 3 – Genesis 30:1–24

- 1 Read Genesis 30:1–13. How is Rachel handling the family situation? What does she demand Jacob to do and why? And after some children are born to Bilhah, how does Leah respond?
- 2 Read Genesis 30:14–21. What does it mean to be jealous? What are these sisters struggling with? In what ways have you experienced tension like this in your relationships? In what ways is the gospel the answer?
- 3 Reflect: Read Genesis 30:22–24. In the midst of this family junk, God is there. In fact, Joseph is a critical character in the remaining chapters of Genesis. How does this help you have hope in your family dynamics? Specifically, how does the gospel bring you hope in your struggles in relationships?

# Sermon Notes

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# Week Four

38

# Shrewdness & Sovereignty

Mike  
Schumann

# Shrewdness and Sovereignty

## Mike Schumann

Jacob wanted to go home. Twenty-years had gone by since he left his beloved Canaan. At that time, he had nothing but a walking stick to his name (Gen 32:10). Now he was a man of great possessions, multiple wives, and many children. He was rich, but he wanted to go home.

Laban, Jacob's father-in-law, had lied to him. He had promised his daughter Rachel in exchange for seven-years of hard labor but, after Jacob completed the work, gave him Leah instead (Gen 29:23). Laban had vowed to give Jacob the speckled animals of his flock, but sent them away before he could retrieve them (Gen 30:35). Jacob had worked tirelessly for Laban, but Laban cheated him and frequently modified his wages (31:7). Jacob — the one who deceived his father (Genesis 27:19) and cheated his brother (Genesis 27:36) — now stood on the receiving end of deception.

It was not all bitter for Jacob. He too had dealt shrewdly with his father-in-law. Jacob manipulated the breeding process, ensuring that his animals would increase in strength and num-

ber, while Laban's flock diminished in size and strength. In so doing, Jacob amassed a greater wealth than Laban's, including a large family, servants, flocks, camels, and donkeys.

Though what are we to make of this story? How do we understand Laban's use of divination, Rachel and Leah's competition, or Jacob's peeled sticks (Gen 30:39)? Can we boil this section down nothing more than a battle of wits between Jacob and Laban or Rachel and Leah? Is there something more, or perhaps there is someone more?

### I Will Be With You

Genesis 31 begins with Saul-to-David type tension, replete with spreading rumors and swollen pride (cf. 1 Samuel 18). Laban no longer favored Jacob, and something would need to be done. Who would make the first move? Which fox would outwit the other? The answer: neither. The next voice to be heard was not the clever Jacob's, or wily Laban's, but God's.

“Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you” (Gen 31:3).

Jacob's attempt to flee could fail, and if it did, he could lose his wives, his possessions, and even his very life. What was Jacob's peace in the midst of such a daring decision? Was it that he was wiser than Laban, had more possessions, or simply knew the quickest route back home? No. Jacob's boldness to flee came from God, and specifically the five words upon which any action, no matter how full of risk, can be carried out in confidence: “I will be with you.”

This was not the first time he had heard this promise. If we were to turn back the pages to twenty years earlier, we would see Jacob with his head laid on a stone, fast asleep in Bethel, with an angelic ladder above him. God spoke to him that night, saying “The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth... Behold, *I am with you*” (Gen 28:13–15). This was the promise that kept him all



those years under Laban in Paddan-aram, and this would be the promise that would allow him take flight.

could have harmed Jacob, perhaps killed him, but he didn't. Why? God commanded him not to (Gen 31:29).

sured the outcome. God had brought Jacob to the land of Laban, and God had brought him home.

His will determined the process, and his hand ensured the outcome. God had brought Jacob to the land of Laban, and God had brought him home.

### The Journey Home

Jacob and his household fled on the day Laban went to shear his sheep. The three-day head start was helpful, but insufficient, and Laban would soon catch up. The situation is strikingly similar to that of Jacob's descendants' years later, after fleeing Egypt with enemy goods in their hands. In both scenes, the people of God have amassed wealth, cast off their shackles, and watched as their pursuers approached. What would Jacob do now? Were there any tricks left up his sleeve?

Fortunately for Jacob, Laban would not attack him that day. He

Jacob's family, possessions and life were preserved that day because God had spoken. The situation is best described by Jacob himself: "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed" (Gen 31:42).

What are *we* to make of this story? Is there something more, or someone more? Yes, there is indeed Someone more. Jacob, Laban, Rachel and Leah had made decisions, taken action, and expended energy, but God was the one in the driver's seat. His will determined the process, and his hand en-

God's promise to protect Jacob echoed his initial promise to Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, namely, to make his people plentiful and to bless them so that they would be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2). God birthed that promise in a couple beyond the years of childbearing (Gen 21:2), upheld it as a father's knife nearly came down upon a son (Gen 22:10-11), and maintained it despite Jacob's exile in another country (Genesis 30-31). God would continue to uphold his promise through an Egyptian exile, a Babylonian exile, 400 years of silence, and the unlikely birth of a Jewish boy to a virgin woman. This child was an offspring of David, a descendant of Abraham, the one who would be a blessing to his people for all of eternity. His name is Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, the promise to be a blessing, the promise God kept by his sovereign hand.

## Day 1 – Genesis 30:25–43

- 1 Describe the difficulty that Jacob faces in trying to get away from Laban and back to the Promised Land. Why is the birth of Joseph a turning point for Jacob? Has Rebekah alerted Jacob somehow that it is safe to return? Jacob and Laban are at it again. Describe the selfishness of both men in this story. What did Laban do in Genesis 30:27 and what did he learn from the Lord?
- 2 What strategy did Jacob use to increase his flock, and is there any scientific proof for why this should have worked? If there is no scientific reason for this, then what is an explanation for why Jacob's flock grew (see Gen 31:8–9)? Study Job 1:21.
- 3 Reflect: Laban acknowledges that Jacob has been a blessing to his household because God was with him. Would non-Christians say this about you? In what ways in your vocation and in your neighborhood are you a blessing to others? In what ways could you be a fresh blessing to those around you? Study John 17:20–23.

## Day 2 – Genesis 31:1–21

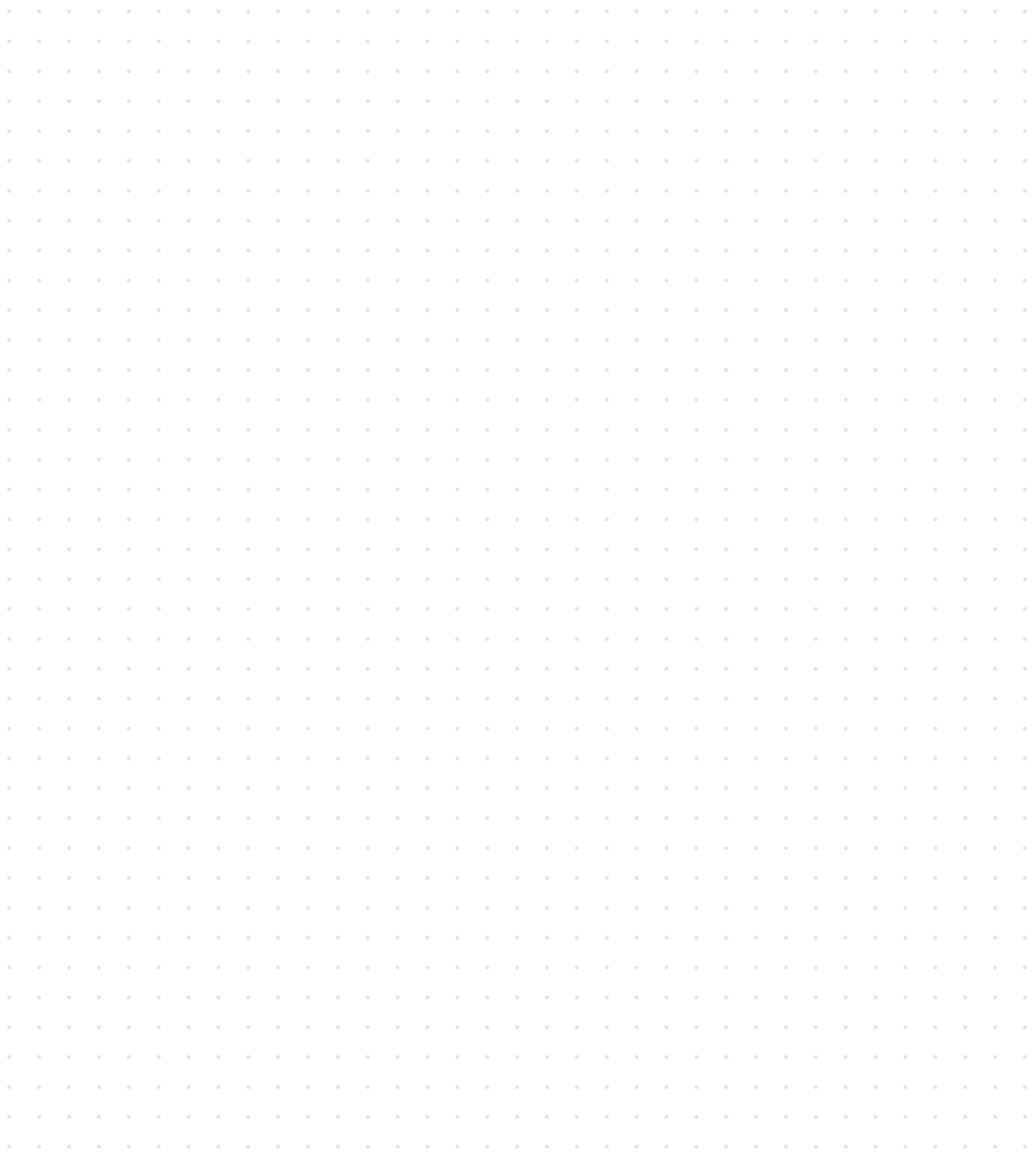
- ① In what ways does wealth and wages and money come up in this passage? How does God come up in this passage in relation to wealth?
- ② What does Jacob plan on doing? What did God promise Jacob at Bethel (Gen 28:15) and how does that come into play here (Gen 31:13)?
- ③ Reflect: How does Laban get what he deserves in this passage? Study Galatians 6:6–10. Describe the sowing/reaping metaphor. In what ways are you sowing to your own flesh, and in what ways are you sowing to the Spirit?

## Day 3 – Genesis 31:22–55

- 1 What is the tension between Jacob and Laban and why is it there? What does God make clear to Laban? Why did Jacob try to flee? What would you have done if you were Jacob? Would you have trusted Laban? What hint is given that Laban does not worship the God of Abraham?
- 2 Why do you think Rachel stole her father's gods? What does she do to get away with it? Why do you think Laban ends up asking Jacob to enter into a covenant with him?
- 3 Reflect: Lying and deception have occurred many times in Genesis so far. Here, Jacob leaves town in a deceptive manner. What clues from the passage help us see whether or not God approves of this flight? What deception has been condemned and which have been positively affirmed? Is there a principle in your opinion where deception is permissible? Explain. See Exodus 1:15–22, 20:16.

# Sermon Notes

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# Week Five

48



God's  
Faithfulness  
in Our  
Unfaithfulness

Todd Mathison

# God's Faithfulness in Our Unfaithfulness

Todd Mathison

## What's Going On?

In Genesis 32, we pick up the story of conflict between Jacob and his brother Esau that was left off twenty-years earlier in Genesis 27. After Jacob negotiated an exchange of Esau's birthright for a mere bowl of stew in Genesis 25, he then deceived his father Isaac into giving him Esau's blessing. How big of a deal was that blessing? Isaac's words to Esau describe it pretty well, "Behold, I have made him (Jacob) lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?" (Gen 27:37). It's not a huge surprise then when we read a few verses later, "Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Gen 27:41). Those words eventually make their way back to Jacob, and they are the last thing he hears from his brother before fleeing for his life.

Twenty years later, in Genesis 32, Jacob is on a journey back to his home country where he knows his brother, Esau, will be waiting. Why would Jacob go back then? He had received the promise from God, "Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good" (Gen 32:9).

## Jacob's Response

After Jacob received a report that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men, Jacob was "greatly afraid and distressed" (Gen 32:7). Can we blame him? The last thing he heard his brother say was that he wanted to kill him, and now he's approaching him with 400 men. Sure, God made a promise that he'd be ok, but that's a big promise! Jacob figures it might not be a bad idea to get some extra insurance on the side just in case God isn't able to deliver. First, he decides to divide everyone into two camps, thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape" (Gen 32:8). Next, he figures it couldn't hurt to butter up Esau with several droves of gifts before

he finally meets him face to face. Let's be honest, given the circumstances, those don't seem like the worst strategies. However, at their root is a lack of trust in the faithfulness of God.

## We're All Like Jacob

We can look back at several stories throughout Israel's history and see the same pattern emerge, but I can look back on my own life to see it clearly, as well. I'm fully aware of the promises God has made to me when it comes to the sharing of my faith. I know from Matthew 28:20 that Jesus promises to be with me until the end of the age. I know from Romans 1:16 that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. And I know from 1 Corinthians 2:5 that the faith of others should not rest on the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Yet, where do I tend to place my faith when it comes to evangelism? On the little insurance policy of flawless apologetics and perfect gospel analogies.

## God's Most Unbelievable Promise

God's promise to Jacob, that returning to the brother he robbed so much would in some way work out for his good, was no small promise. Scripture is full of promises even more unbelievable than that! However, there is *nothing* more unbelievable than the promise that eternal righteousness can be obtained for wretched sinners through nothing more than faith alone in the sacrificial death of a sinless, perfect Savior. There is no promise of God more scandalous than that. Just like Jacob in Genesis 32–33, how do we respond? Sure, we know that God promises that salvation comes

through grace and faith alone, but a little insurance can't hurt, right? Just in case God doesn't quite follow through with that promise, shouldn't we have a few good deeds lined up on the positive side of our ledgers to tip the scale in our favor? Just like Jacob, so often at the root of our good deeds is a lack of trust in the beautiful promise God has for us.

### The Good News

When the time finally comes for Jacob to confront Esau, "...Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (Gen 33:4). How gracious is God that his faithfulness to fulfill his promises is not dependent on the degree to which

we trust him? How glorious is it that the promises of God are not something we can earn, but were already earned for us in the perfect obedience of Jesus? We often crumble at the threat of societal rejection or momentary suffering, yet, when faced with the wrath of God poured out for the sins of all mankind, Jesus never wavered. Rejoice in the fact that God's promises for you cannot be lost, the trusting work has already been accomplished on your behalf. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:4–5).

## Day 1 – Genesis 32:1–21

- 1 Describe Jacob and Esau's relationship up until now. See Genesis 25:22–23; 25:27–34; 26:34–36; 27:42–45. Jacob is returning home before receiving word from his mother that it is all clear. Jacob encounters angels signaling he is back in the Promised Land. In Genesis 32:3, what does Jacob proactively do? What is Jacob's disposition towards Esau at this point (Gen 32:4–5)?
- 2 If you are Jacob in Genesis 32:6, what would you be thinking of your situation regarding Esau? What is Jacob's fear? How does Jacob handle his fear? What does he do?
- 3 Reflect: After devising a plan (Gen 32:7–8), Jacob turns to God in prayer (Gen 32:9–12), and then acts (Gen 32:13–21). How does this show Jacob's faith in God? Study Proverbs 16:1–3, 9. What plans do you have right now that you also need to give room in your heart for God to establish the way?

## Day 2 – Genesis 32:22–32

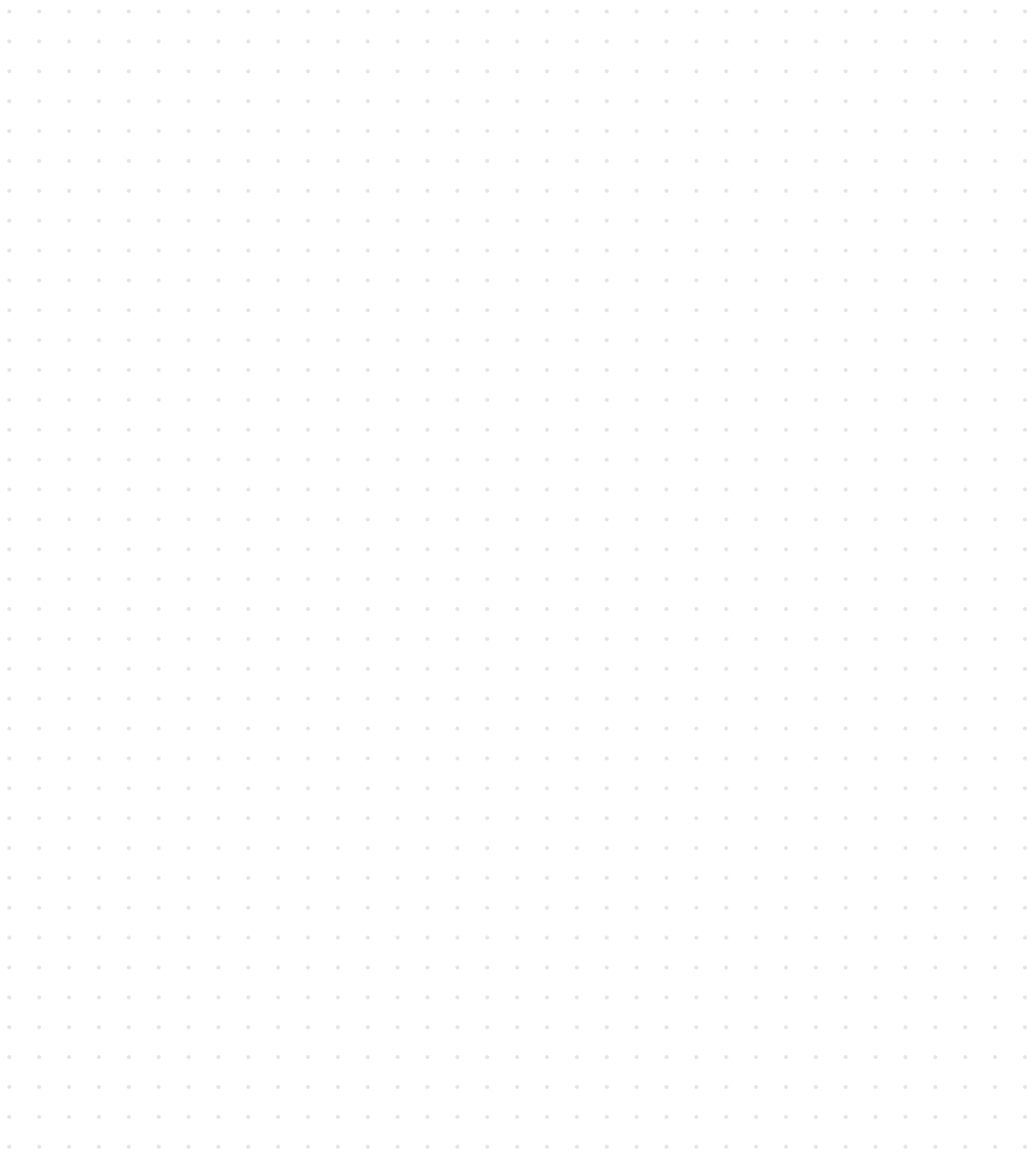
- ① What does Jacob do to prepare for his meeting with Esau (Gen 32:13–21)? Then what does Jacob do in Genesis 32:22–23? What do you know about the river Jabbok? There seems to be a word play going on here in the Hebrew as ‘Jabbok,’ ‘wrestle,’ and ‘Jacob’ are all very similar. How do we find Jacob in verse 24a?
- ② Describe this “man” that Jacob wrestles with. What does he do to and with Jacob? If he has the power to cripple Jacob with a touch, why do you think he doesn’t defeat Jacob in the night? Why do you think he has to leave before daybreak? What does Jacob want from the man, and what does this tell us about Jacob’s viewpoint of him?
- ③ Reflect: Describe the name shift. What does ‘Jacob’ mean and what does ‘Israel’ mean? Even though Jacob is far from being perfect, how does this name change point to the personal growth that has taken place with Jacob? Who is this ‘man’ in the story? Study 2 Corinthians 4:4–6. How has Jesus helped you have personal growth such as Jacob?

## Day 3 – Genesis 33:1–20

- ① Jacob is a husband and father. What faces him and his family in Genesis 33:1. How does he protect his family Genesis 33:1–3. What clues do we have as to who Jacob loves most? What issues do think this may bring in the family dynamics?
- ② What surprising things take place in Genesis 33:4–11, and why are they surprising? How do things end between Jacob and Esau in 33:12–20? Where do Jacob and his family settle down and what is significant about this?
- ③ Reflect: Even if momentary, and even if we don't know Esau's intentions, we see two brothers reconciling and the emotion the reader probably feels while reading this narrative is that of gladness and warmth. This is a good thing. Study Psalm 133 and Ephesians 2:14–18. Reflect on the importance of unity. What dis-harmony exists in one of your relationships right now, what fault is on you for this, and what can you do to help the relationship? How is the gospel necessary for this growth?

# Sermon Notes

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# Week Six

58

Eternity  
Changes  
Everything

Rebecca  
Mathison

# Eternity Changes Everything

## Rebecca Mathison

The events that unfold in Genesis 34 may be some of the most appalling examples of deceit, rape, and murder detailed in Scripture. From beginning to end, we wait and hope for some satisfactory resolution or answer to one of the most basic questions, “Why?”

### Stepping Back

We pick up after Genesis 33, where Jacob meets Esau and they reconcile their relationship. As we have followed Jacob and his family through Genesis, it is not hard to see that this family, like many others throughout the Bible, is dysfunctional. Through Leah, Rachel, and two female servants, Jacob had eleven children total (Gen 29–30) and a clear preference for Rachel over Leah. Through Genesis, we sympathize with Leah who was never cherished by her husband, despite bearing him six sons and his only daughter, Dinah (Gen 30:21).

### What Happened?

Jacob and his family have arrived in the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan,

where they pitched a tent on a piece of land they recently purchased. Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, leaves the tent to visit “the women of the land.” We don’t necessarily know who these women are, but based on Rebekah’s reference to “the women of the land” in Genesis 27:46, the phrase carries a negative connotation.

While Dinah is out, Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, rapes her. We know that this is rape by the sequence of events. She was “seized,” laid with, and finally, “humiliated” (Gen 34:2). Upon raping her, Shechem’s “soul was drawn to her,” and he loved and spoke to her tenderly. Jacob eventually heard that Dinah had been raped, but he waited to do anything until his sons returned from the field. We do not hear from Jacob until the end of this chapter.

Dinah’s rapist approached Jacob and his sons, for he had fallen in love with her and was willing to pay any price for her as his bride. He offered to give Jacob and his sons anything they desired, including land and a policy of social and political intercourse with

their daughters. Her brothers deceitfully stated that there was only one condition to be met: that every male in Shechem be circumcised, so that there would be no difference between people groups. To our astonishment, Hamor and Shechem were pleased with this request, and immediately required every male to be circumcised. Days later as the men of Shechem were recovering from their circumcision, Dinah’s two brothers, Simeon and Levi, went out into the city and murdered every man by sword. The brothers retrieved Dinah from Shechem’s house and plundered the city, taking all its wealth, children, and wives.

It is not until after the city has been plundered that we hear Jacob’s first words in this chapter, “‘You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.’ But they [his sons] said, ‘Should he treat

our sister like a prostitute?” (Gen 34:31). This is where the chapter abruptly ends.

### Making Sense of Senselessness

What?! Let’s take a minute. If you’re like me, you finish Genesis 34 and think to yourself, “Did that actually just happen? Did Dinah *really* get raped and then *sold* to her rapist? Was her father, Jacob, *really* silent through it all? Did her brothers *really* murder every male in the city for the horrible act of one man? What was to come of the widows and children who witnessed the murder of their husbands and fathers? How is it that Jacob only ever expressed concern for his own well-being despite all of the horrible things that had been done to his daughter?” How do we make sense of the seemingly senseless acts that occur in this passage?

Senseless events aren’t reserved for Biblical times. We are constantly reminded of the horrific events that have occurred in our recent history. The Holocaust, school shootings, 9/11, slavery, and human trafficking serve as only a few of the countless examples. Today, 1-in-4 girls and 1-in-6 boys will be sexually assaulted before they turn 18. One-in-5 women and 1-in-71 men will be raped in their lifetime. Since 1966, 154 different mass shootings have occurred in the United States, killing over 1,000 innocent people. The list of senseless events occurring this very minute could take up all the pages in this publication. Many of us likely find ourselves victims of senseless acts, experiencing the initial and lasting damage that follows.

We never find out what happened to Dinah. Was she ever able to recover from what was done to her? Did she ever find a husband who truly cared for her? What happened to the women and children of Shechem who lost their husbands and fathers? Inwardly, we long and hope that those who were caused suffering were given justice in their lifetime. We wait for a hero to sweep in and restore their broken relationships and give back life. That is why we must look to the cross.

### The Ultimate Injustice

As we think of the injustice that was done to Dinah and the innocent men, women, and children of Shechem, or as we consider the injustice we’ve experienced in our lives, we must look to the cross where the ultimate injustice occurred. It is at the cross where the perfect, holy, blameless Son of God, Jesus Christ, laid down his life for those who deserved death most.

Jesus is not absent in your past, current, or future suffering. He is able to relate to the pain of the injustices done to you. When children, women, and men are exploited for their bodies every day across the world, or when innocent people are murdered in masses, God is not silent. When your family betrays you, God is not silent. When your body has been humiliated and damaged, God is not silent. When you have been deceived by those you trust, God is not silent. When the world attempts to suppress your suffering, God is not silent.

God speaks clearly amid your pain through his Son, who suffered the

greatest injustice known to humankind. He did this so that one day, justice can return to the righteous:

He who planted the ear, does he not hear?

He who formed the eye, does he not see?

He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke?

He who teaches man knowledge—the Lord—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath.

Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law, to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.

For the Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage;

for justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it.

PSALM 94:9-15

Without Jesus’ death, Genesis 34 and our lives on earth together don’t make sense. Eternity changes that, because we know that the battle has already been won. Our Savior has already rescued us.

## Day 1 – Genesis 34:1–7

- ① In Genesis 28:20–22, Jacob makes a vow that when he comes back to the Promised Land he will go to his father’s house, referring to Bethel. Jacob is vowing to go to Bethel. Then in Genesis 33, he deceives Esau into thinking he will go to Seir, but instead goes to Shechem. What happens in 33:18–20? Now in Genesis 34, what trouble takes place for Jacob’s family in Shechem?
  
- ② How does Jacob respond to the rape of Dinah? What about her brothers?
  
- ③ Reflect: What does the New Testament teach about sexual sins? Study Romans 13:13–14. What does sexual immorality mean? Study Matthew 5:27–28.

## Day 2 – Genesis 34:8–17

- ① What does Hamor want to see happen with Jacob's family? What is Hamor offering? What does Prince Shechem want?
  
- ② How do Jacob's sons respond in the negotiation? The narrator says they are being deceitful – how so? What do you think about this?
  
- ③ Reflect: At this point in redemptive history, Abraham's descendants should not marry Canaanites. What is your thought for today on whether or not it is wise to marry someone not of the same gospel faith as you? Study Genesis 2:24 and 2 Corinthians 6:14–15. In such a marriage, what impacts most likely would take place on the Christian spouse?

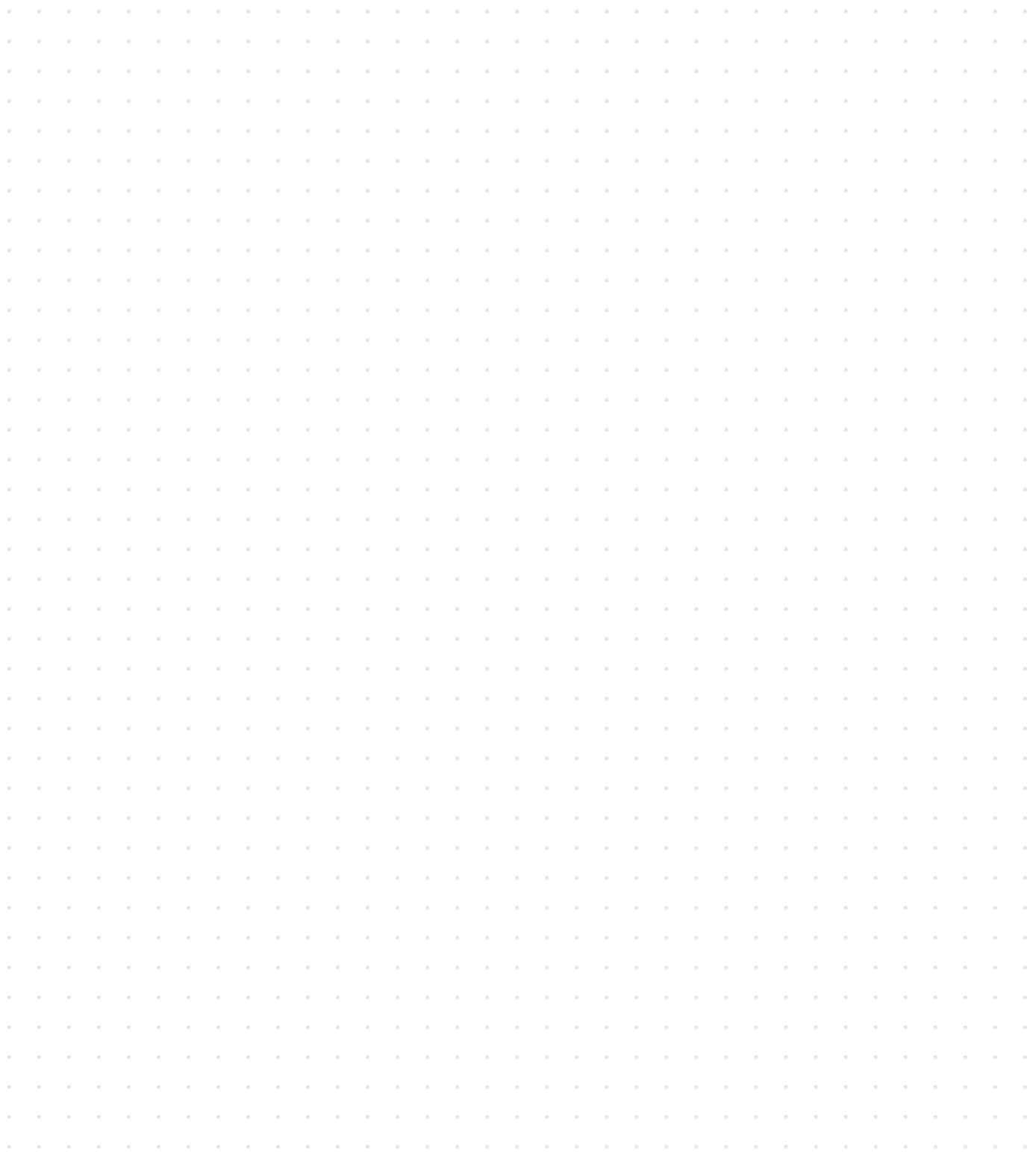
## Day 3 – Genesis 34:18–31

- ① How do Hamor and Shechem respond to Jacob's sons' offer? Why were they so eager to make the agreement happen?
- ② Which two sons are now specifically mentioned in this narrative, and why do you think these two sons are the ones most involved? What did these two brothers do? How do you feel about their actions? How did Jacob respond? Who gets the last word in the narrative, and what is it?
- ③ Reflect: What do you think is the narrator's opinion of the story? Would God have wanted the marriage to take place or not (see Deut 7:3–6)? What is Levi's role and lineage's role in the Old Testament regarding God's holiness and covenant? How does Jesus act as the great High Priest? Read Hebrews 6–7 to learn more about Jesus being priest. Instead of Jesus coming and waging war, what does Jesus do instead?



# Sermon Notes

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# Week Seven

68

# God of All Our Generations

Jon Fuehrer

# God of All Our Generations

Jon Fuehrer

What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you see that the next chapter in your Bible starts with the words, “These are the generations...” or when it leads with a subtitle containing the word “genealogy”?

Perhaps you see God establishing a baseline for the Bible, as to ground it firmly in a place or time in history. You see the foreshadowing of future stories to be told and the cast of characters that might star in those tales. You see the beginning of an overarching narrative to the Bible that spans these generations or genealogies. You think, “Oh, great! Another long list of hard to pronounce names that I likely won’t remember or encounter again.”

Most often for me, my heart goes to that last option when I come across a chapter like Genesis 36, recounting the descendants of Esau. The previous three reasons given for God chronicling family lineage are all true and valid at different points in the Bible. Sometimes the reason really is to provide a historical reference or begin to connect the strands of a Bible-spanning story.

Therefore, if there are good, glorious reasons for us to read those names, why do I so often struggle to stay engaged as I read them? I think the answer lays not so much in us forgetting or fumbling through those individual names, as it does lie in forgetting who called those names — those very real people — into existence in that specific order in that particular time in the first place.

Long before your birth God saw all your days. He saw the pain and brokenness that would inevitably fill them, and still, long before your birth, God redeemed all your days through his son, Jesus Christ.

Esau, Eliphaz, and Teman’s lives and lineage were neither an accident nor mere happenstance. God ordained “a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die” (Ecc 3:1–2). That means God intentionally appointed each person mentioned in this genealogy to be born at a particular time. Isaiah tells us that the Lord called

him from the womb, and from the body of his mother God named his name (Isa 49:1). The Psalmist declares, “for you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb” (Psa 139:13). Esau and his descendants are not there by accident and neither are you. In God’s book the days formed for you are written, when as yet there was none of them (Psalm 139:16) — ev-

ery single one! Do not let God’s divine intentionality of those descendants and genealogies be lost on you. Those real people really lived in that time and in that order. God established all those beginnings.

If the beginning was no accident, then the end won’t be either. Long before your birth God saw all your days.

He saw the pain and brokenness that would inevitably fill them, and still, long-before your birth, God redeemed all your days through his son, Jesus Christ. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-7). When we read about the descendants, tribes, or genealogies of these families in the Bible, we are being invited into worship of God’s sovereignty over all our days. Each name is a reminder of God’s faithful plan that began before the foundations of the world (Eph 1:4) and ends with Jesus taking us to himself, that where he is we may also be (John 14:2-3). The next time you come across a genealogy, let those names take you beyond just the names. Let them take you to the Author of this overarching, redemptive, merciful, glorious Bible-narrative that has spanned every generation from before Esau’s through yours and forevermore. Let them help you see the God of all our days.

## Day 1 – Genesis 35:1–15

- ① What do we know about Bethel? Why is God calling Jacob to Bethel? Where is Bethel? Review Genesis 12:1–3; 28:10–22, 34.
- ② How does Jacob respond to this calling? What’s the deal with the “foreign gods”? What is false worship (idolatry) and why is it bad? What does the change of clothes represent? What idols do you need to dump (see Ecc 12:13-14 and Mark 12:30)?
- ③ Reflect: Study Genesis 35:11. Compare with Genesis 1:28. Who is God? Describe the cultural mandate regarding what God commands in these verses. In what areas of your life do you need to acknowledge God as the Almighty? In what ways are you fulfilling the cultural mandate?



## Day 2 – Genesis 35:16–29

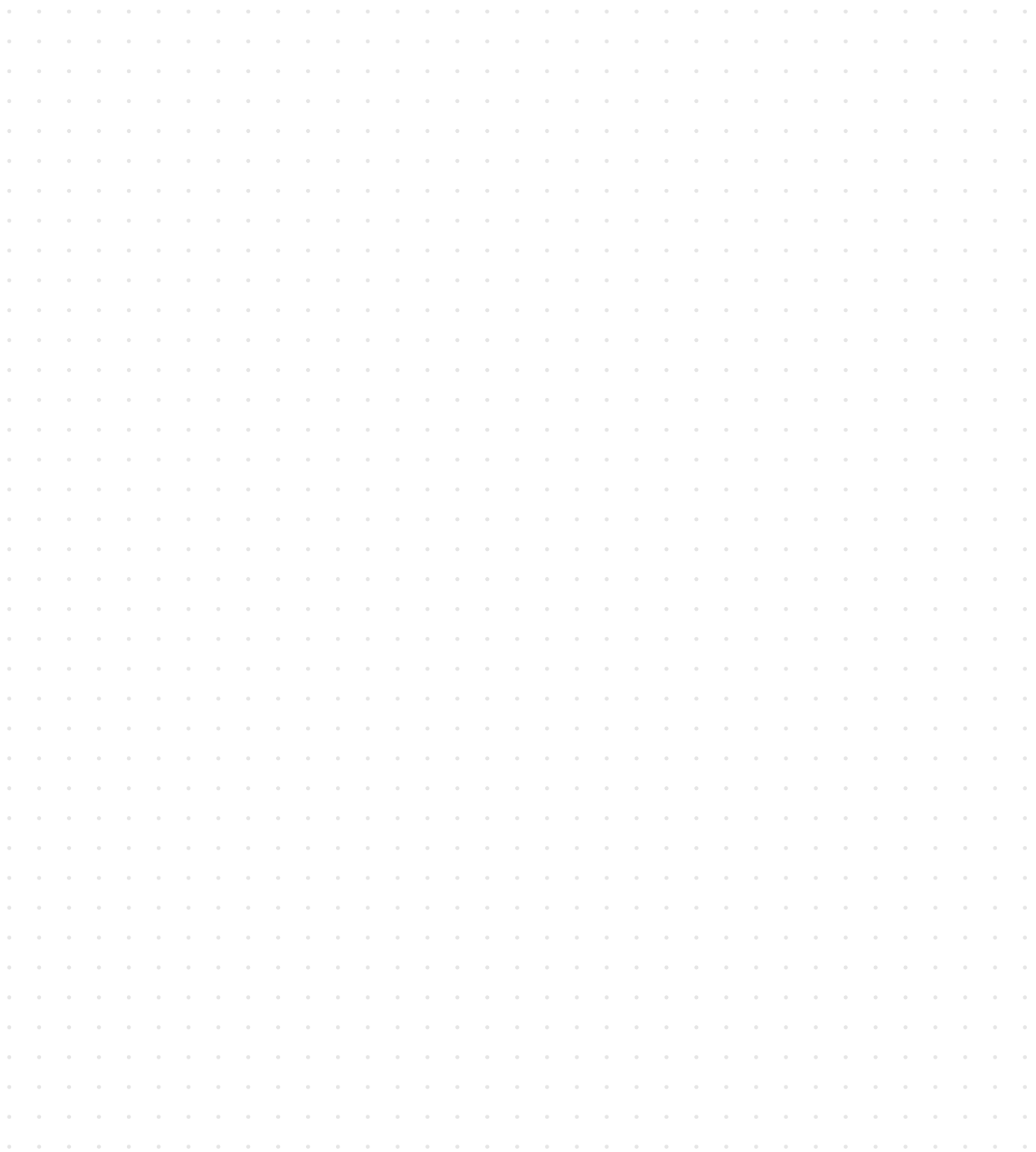
- 1 Describe the heart-wrenching event of Benjamin’s birth. How do you feel about Jacob’s decision to change the name? How does the baby war come to an end (how many sons and to whom)?
- 2 Where does the family travel from and to (Gen 35:16, 21, 29)? What do you know about Ephrath (see Micah 5:2)? What surprising fact do we learn in Genesis 35:22? The narrator tells us someone heard about it: who, what name? See Genesis 49:3-4. What were the consequences for Reuben’s sin?
- 3 Reflect: Isaac’s days were full and he died in his old age. What do you think it was like for Jacob and Esau at the funeral? Define forgiveness and reconciliation. Why are these powerful acts? Do you have a relationship that could use some forgiveness and reconciliation? How is this possible? Study Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 3:13.

## Day 3 – Genesis 36:1–37:1

- ① What do we learn about Esau in Genesis 36:1–8? Even if Esau is not ‘chosen’ does God care about him and his family? Explain. Does Esau stay in the promised land or does he give it up to Jacob? What does this reflect? Describe the similarities of this account (Gen 36:6–8) to that of Lot and Abraham (Genesis 13). Why does the narrator evoke the memory of Lot’s departure from Abraham?
  
- ② What do we learn about Esau’s grandchildren in Genesis 36:9–19? Specifically, what do we know about Israel’s relationship with the Amalekites? See Exodus 17:8–16. In 36:20–30 why are the sons of Seir listed and mentioned alongside Esau’s genealogy? See Deuteronomy 2:12 & 22. In what ways does this reflect God’s caring of the ‘non-chosen’? What funny detail is mentioned in Genesis 36:24? Read Genesis 36:31–37:1.
  
- ③ Reflect: Read Romans 9. Study Romans 9:14–16. How does Jacob and Esau fit into this story? What encouragements do you find in Romans 9? What are some challenging things you learn in Romans 9? In what ways do you need to re-orientate your heart and mind to be aligned with this text?

# Sermon Notes

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# Week Eight

78

# The Truest Happy Ending

Sara Krych

# The Truest Happy Ending

## Sara Krych

The story of Joseph is one of the most familiar in the Old Testament, and it is full of rich details that often seem to be left out of major characters' biographies. At the beginning of Genesis 37 we are told when Joseph was just a 17-year-old shepherd boy, watching his father's flocks with his brothers, he returned from the pasture to deliver a bad report about his brothers to his father. We are not told what this report included, but it doesn't get the sibling relationship off to a great start.

This conflict is exacerbated by the fact that Israel, Joseph's father, not so subtly favors him over his brothers and demonstrates his preference with an extravagant gift. The brothers' jealousy is described as hatred, which is fueled by Joseph's lack of prudence when he decides to tell his brothers about two dreams that predict them becoming subservient to him. He seems to be poking the bear.

When Joseph is sent to check on his brothers as they are out tending to the flocks, something rises up in us that wants to urge him not to go. Sure

enough, the brothers take advantage of the opportunity to get rid of Joseph, starting out with an attempted murder.

son has been killed by a wild animal, which causes him profound mourning and grief.

Maybe we'll get a glimpse of what God is doing, but even a glimpse is likely only a fraction of what God has in mind.

At first it is by means of violence, then by what would have resulted in a slow and agonizing death at the bottom of an empty cistern. Reuben's conscience is pricked and he devises a plan to rescue Joseph. It appears, however, that Reuben wanders off, and while he is gone Judah decides it would be better to make some money off of Joseph's demise and suggests selling him into slavery instead of letting him die. While he spins the idea as the right thing to do since Joseph is their *brother*, their *own flesh*, we are not told whether he is actually trying to preserve Joseph's life or simply make an extra buck. The scene concludes with the brothers letting Israel believe that his favorite

There are several questions that aren't answered in this narrative. What was Joseph's reaction to his brothers' plot? Did he put up a fight or try to bargain with them? Did he beg for mercy or yell empty threats of what he would do if he ever got out of that pit? Did he finally give up and resign himself to his fate, figuring that after his boasting he probably had it coming? Although I can't imagine he went quietly, we aren't told anything else from Joseph's perspective until two chapters later when we find him serving as a slave in the captain of the guard's house in Egypt. From that point on we see a repeated theme of the Lord being with Joseph and blessing him in all he does (Gen



39:2-3, 5, 21, 23). Even after a series of seemingly unfortunate events he ends up in prison for something he didn't do, Joseph demonstrates his fear of God, rather than man, and we are told God shows him his steadfast love.

Of course, as readers we know the end of the story, how God uses these trials of Joseph to save many lives (Gen 45:5), bring the Israelites to Egypt (Gen 45:7), and fulfill his promise to Abraham (Gen 15:13-16). It can be easy to think, "all's well that ends well," and be on our way. Sometimes we like to imagine that our lives will be like Joseph's and we'll get to see the happy ending — along with all the reasons for the trouble — before we die, like some neatly wrapped up Hollywood story. If we zoom out, it is clear that this story isn't primarily about Joseph. It's about God. God caused Joseph's success (Gen 39:3). God blessed Potiphar's house (Gen 39:5). God gave Joseph favor in the prison keeper's sight (Gen 39: 21). God made him succeed (Gen 39:23). God revealed the meaning of dreams (Gen 41:16, 39). God gave Joseph peace and made him fruitful (Gen 41:51, 52). God sent him to Egypt (Gen 45:5, 7). God made Joseph a father to pharaoh and lord of all Egypt (Gen 45:8, 9).

In all this, God's primary purpose wasn't to make-up to Joseph all the wrong his brothers had done to him — the story is much bigger than that. Ultimately, the story of Joseph points to Jesus. Through Joseph's trials, God preserved His people and fulfilled His promise to Abraham, providing ultimately for the coming of his Son and the salvation of all who believe in him.

It's easy to only look for how things might "work out" for our own lives, to be thankful when we a satisfactory explanation, or become frustrated and resentful when we can't make sense of it. It's helpful to remember that God's story and purposes are much bigger than our little snapshots. Maybe we'll get a glimpse of what God is doing, but even a glimpse is likely only a fraction of what God has in mind. Either way, we can be thankful for the pattern we see in Joseph's life, and we may know that whether we find ourselves in a pit of despair or on the throne of a kingdom, God's purposes are being fulfilled, and therefore, so will we.

## Day 1 – Genesis 37:1–11

- 1 The final section of Genesis begins with an account of Jacob's family. Describe Jacob's family dynamics. What do we know about Joseph so far in the story (see Gen 30:22–25; 33:1–3, 7; 35:24)? The major focus of this last section is on Joseph, and in second place is Judah.
- 2 How old is Joseph? Describe his character at this point in the story. Why do the brothers hate Joseph? Why does Jacob love Joseph so much? Compare Abraham and Sarah having Isaac with Jacob and Rachel having Joseph – what are some similarities that may explain Jacob's exceptional love of Joseph?
- 3 Reflect: What are the issues with Joseph's dreams? Study Proverbs 16:18. Jacob is not only a deceiver, he also displays illegitimate favoritism. Define favoritism and highlight where Jacob shows favoritism towards Joseph. What is wrong with favoritism? Describe the impacts on children if a parent displays favoritism for one over the other. Have you ever 'played favorites' before? What does it look like, and how do you correct this? Study 2 Peter 1:5–8.

## Day 2 – Genesis 37:12–28

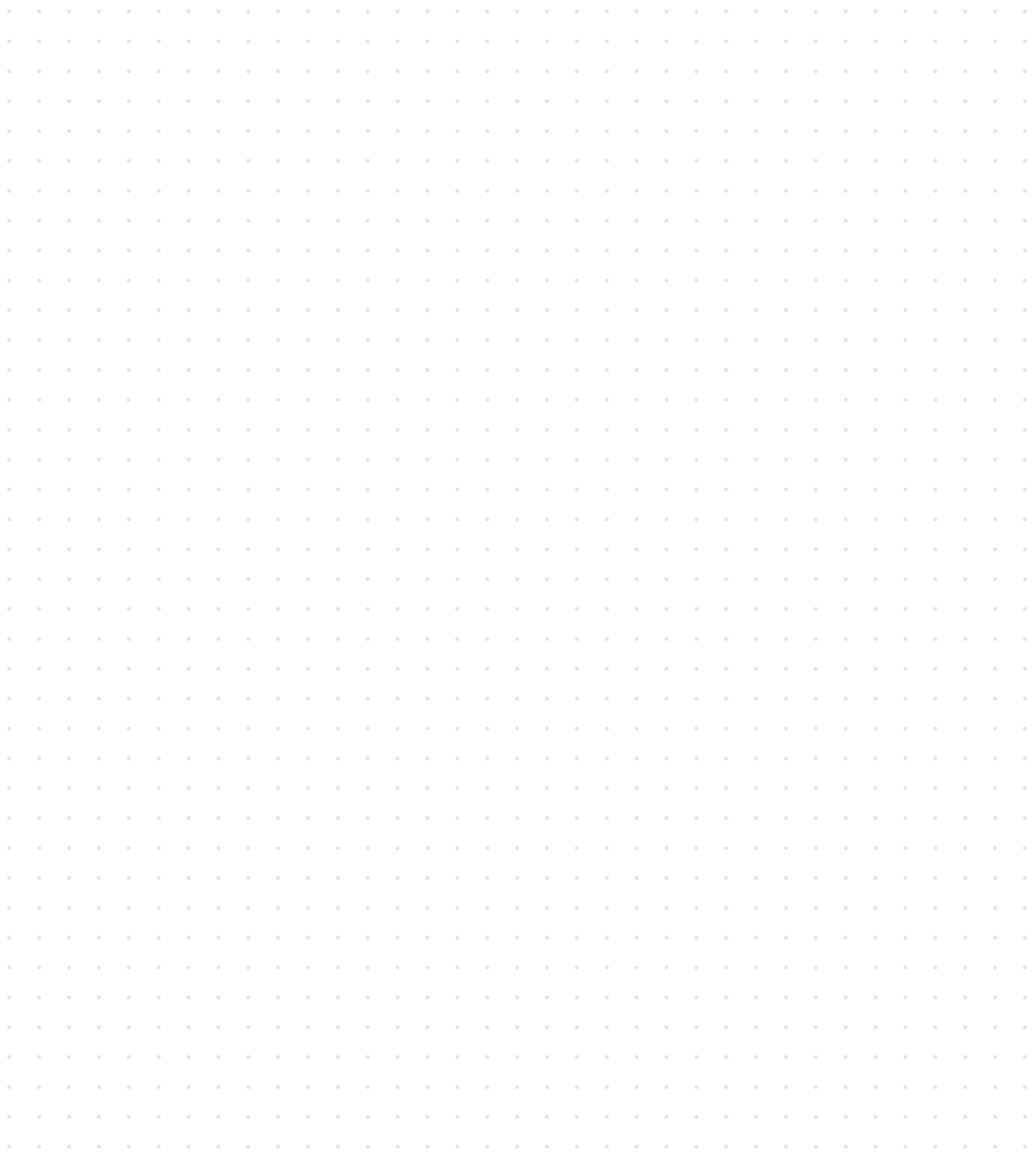
- ① Why had the family fled Shechem in the past (see Gen 34)? Where does Joseph go and why? What is the brothers' point of view and thoughts of Joseph as he approaches?
- ② What plan do the brothers come up with? What does Reuben want to do and why? What does Judah want to do and why? Who outshines who at this point in the Joseph narrative?
- ③ Reflect: How do you feel about Joseph so far — does he get what's coming to him, or are you shocked by the unjust suffering he is enduring? Where is God in all this? Did God send the dreams? Did he allow the selling into slavery? What challenges are you facing, and does it feel like God is absent? Study Genesis 50:20 and Acts 2:23.

## Day 3 – Genesis 37:29–36

- ① How does Reuben respond to the actions of the brothers, and why is he surprised? What was Reuben expecting?
- ② Describe the cover up. How does Jacob respond, and do you think he falls for the cover up?
- ③ Reflect: What happens to Joseph, and where does he end up? Define envy. What envy did the brothers have and what did it drive them to do? Study Mark 7:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 13:4. What envy do you have in your heart and how do you handle it?

# Sermon Notes

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# Week Nine

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# Part of the Bigger Plan

Amelia  
Schumann

# Part of the Bigger Plan

## Amelia Schumann

The Apostle Paul compares the groanings of the cursed creation to the groanings of childbirth. Just as much as we groan with longing for the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23), I groan with longing on behalf of Judah and Tamar when I read Genesis 38. I feel their need for the Messiah as I read their broken story. Amazingly, God literally used the pangs and groanings of childbirth in Tamar to bring about the eventual birth of the Messiah, the one for whom creation has been groaning. The one whom Judah and Tamar — and you and I — so desperately need.

Read Genesis 38 just once and you will see what I mean — there is abundant evidence of sin and the curse from Genesis 3:

- Two wicked husbands (of the same woman).
- The death sentence for wickedness. Twice.
- A woman widowed. Twice.
- Childlessness.
- A husband withheld.
- A broken promise.

- Deceit.
- Prostitution.

Read the passage again and note its connections to the rest of the Bible, and you'll see evidence of God's promise (also from Genesis 3) to send a Deliverer who will end the curse and crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). You'll see that God uses brokenness and fallenness in our lives both to do great things and to show us how powerful and good he truly is (cf. Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28).

In Genesis 38, we see Tamar, a woman whose one goal and purpose is to produce an heir; and two consecutive husbands who spoil the opportunity through her because of their wickedness. When her father-in-law, Judah, withholds his third son from her, contrary to the ancient custom of levirate marriage (and also breaking his promise to her), she tricks him into producing an heir through her. Her quest is successful, and she becomes pregnant with not one, but two sons. They are twins named Perez and Zerah.

Search the Bible for the names *Judah*, *Tamar*, and *Perez*, and you will find a more complete story than the one we see in Genesis 38. For instance, later in Genesis, we see Judah's name again when Jacob, his father, blesses each of his sons. Jacob prophesies that the Messiah — the Savior, the Deliverer whom God promised in Genesis 3:15 — would come through Judah's offspring, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Gen 49:10).

Next, we see all *three* names in Ruth 4:12 where the people of Israel bless Boaz and Ruth, "and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman." Similar to Tamar, Ruth had been widowed and left childless. Boaz was her kinsman redeemer, her deceased husband's relative who satisfied the law of levirate marriage for her. And the people's blessing on them was fulfilled: Boaz and Ruth, like Judah and

Tamar, were given a son, Obed. Though the similarity doesn't stop there.

Later, in Matthew 1, we see all of these names (Judah, Tamar, Perez; Boaz, Ruth, Obed) in the genealogy of Jesus. Amazing! The disreputable string of events that transpired between Judah and Tamar led ultimately to the birth of the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus, their descendant, is the very Messiah Tamar and Judah so desperately needed — evidenced by the brokenness in their own story. God brought him into the world through their brokenness. Only a truly great God could use sinners to fulfill his promise to provide a Deliverer for them. What is more, God didn't just send a Deliverer to temporarily heal sicknesses and diseases; he sent Jesus to the cross — a place of betrayal, agony, and suffering beyond comprehension. A place where those who loved him had to watch him endure it. A place necessary for the forgiveness of sins. God made this horrid, ugly scene into something beautiful, namely Jesus' resurrection, ensuring the resurrection of those who believe in Jesus (1 Cor 15:20–28)!

Marvel at the fact that the very people from whom Jesus descended needed him to be their Savior! Be amazed that

God brought such a glorious, amazing turn of events out of a strongly undesirable situation. Stand in awe of the God who did this. In your life, remember:

- God can use the hardest and most painful, broken situations in your life to do glorious things. And if you're a Christian, he eventually will (Romans 8:28).
- If God does something great through you, it is to show his greatness because of your sinfulness, weakness, and brokenness (1 Cor 1:27) and to make you realize your need for him.

I'll admit, when I first read this chapter, I wondered how on earth I was going to come up with anything helpful to say about it. Though as I prayed and read it over and over, God began to show me how narrow my perspective was. He began to broaden my mind to see this passage in light of the whole Bible. When you look at it that way, this passage says so much more! That is very much like the circumstances in our lives. When we try to find meaning in them apart from the grand story God has revealed to us in the Bible, we simply cannot.

If we can see that everything in our lives isn't the whole story but a part of God's grand story — which ends with the redemption of our bodies, when we are finally face-to-face with Jesus — we can trust that God has a good purpose in even the hardest things.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the first biblical mention of the practice of levirate marriage, in which a widow's brother-in-law would marry her if her deceased husband had left her no heir (and their children were considered to belong to the deceased husband). Later, in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, God made it into a civil law for Israel.

## Day 1 – Genesis 38:1–11

- ① Genesis 37–50 is typically known as the Joseph narrative, but is he mentioned in this chapter (38)? Who does the author focus on in this chapter? In the order of Jacob's sons, which number Judah? Who are the sons older than Judah and what is Jacob's opinion of them at this point (see Gen 35:21-22 and Gen 34)? From Genesis 38:1–5 describe the background and the setting of the scene for the chapter.
- ② Who is Tamar and what happens to her? Who is Onan and what does he do that is evil in the sight of God? Note that God sees what Onan is doing in private.
- ③ Reflect: Study the following passages that show how God is all-knowing and can see your heart, when no one else can: 1 Samuel 16:7; Isaiah 47:10–11; Jeremiah 20:12. How does this reality change your perspective?

## Day 2 – Genesis 38:12–23

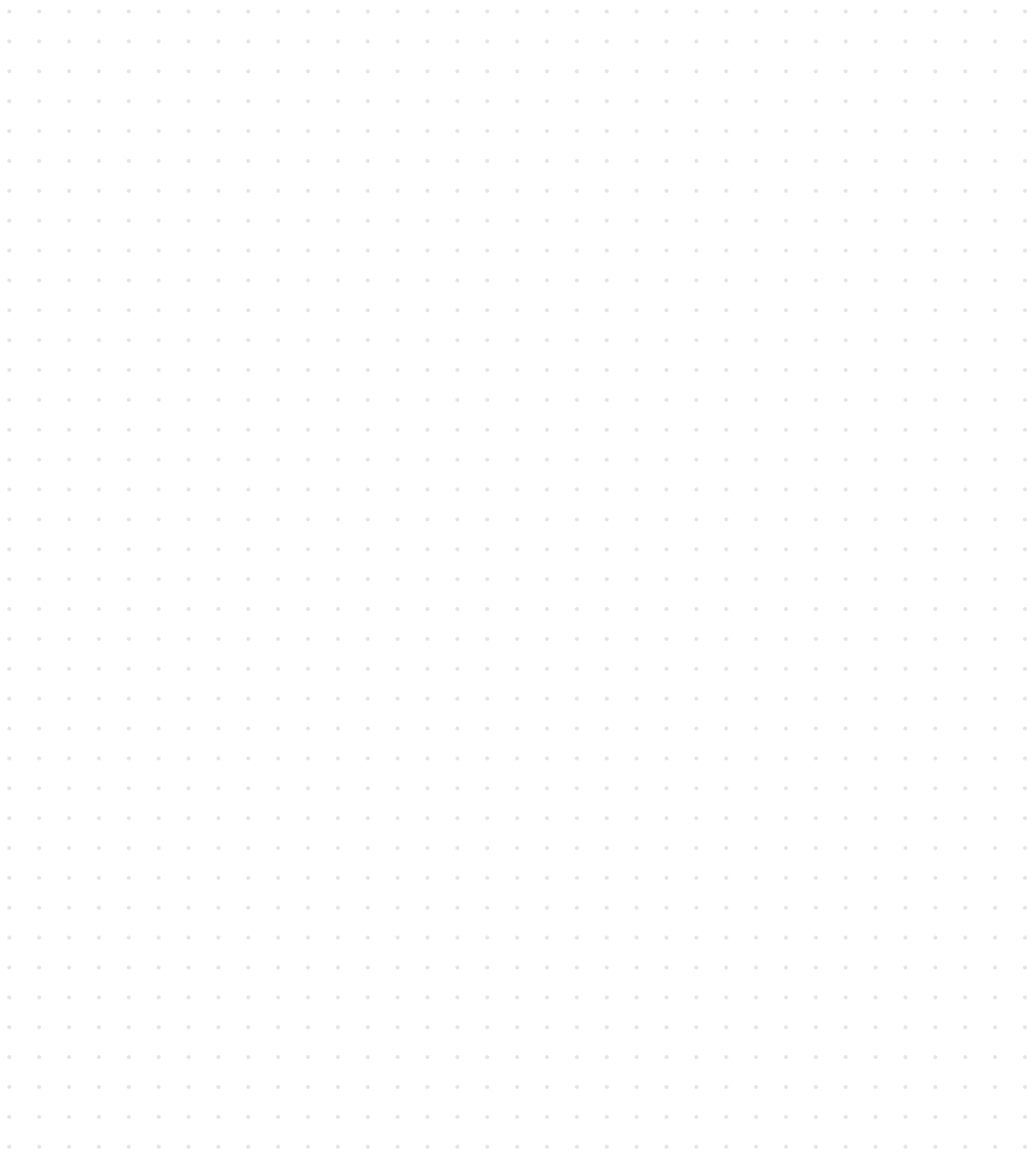
- ① A long time passes. What has happened and what hasn't happened yet that was supposed to happen as promised in Genesis 38:11? Because of this, what does Tamar do? Why does she do it?
- ② Describe the events that take place. How do things end in Genesis 38:23?
- ③ Reflect: What do you think of Judah at this point? What are some of the deeper heart issues with Judah? Read James 1. Study James 1:12–15.

## Day 3 – Genesis 38:24–30

- 1 What happens to Tamar and what is Judah's reaction? What do you make of his reaction? Why did Judah issue a harsh judgment?
- 2 What does Judah learn about the pregnancy? Describe Judah's reaction to this update in saga. What two main things did Judah feel guilt over? Describe some deeper heart changes that Judah may be going through in this challenging time in life.
- 3 Reflect: Describe the unusual birth of the twin boys. Read Matthew 1:1–6. What four women are either mentioned or implied in Jesus' lineage? Read Ruth 4:18–22. What do we learn about Jesus' lineage? How did Tamar impact redemptive history? Describe the relevance that these four women were 'foreigners' and had troubled pasts yet were key parts of Jesus' lineage? Study Ephesians 2:13–14.

# Sermon Notes

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# Week Ten

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God With  
Us – Always

Austin Felber

# God With Us – Always

## Austin Felber

Through great highs and lows in the Christian life, it may be tempting to believe God is unreachable. There are seasons we feel far from God, as if his presence were determined by our own circumstances or seasonal events. The Lord is not an unapproachable, fictitious, distant, impersonal character who puppets his creation as from behind a curtain. The good news of God's presence and faithfulness for Christians is not quantified through any circumstantial pain or wellness. When you are lost,

and gained favor in the officer's sight. The Lord was with Joseph in his success, and He sovereignly provided for Joseph's favor and gain in this position (Genesis 39:2-4). While Joseph gained popularity and favor with the Egyptians, it is clear that the Lord was consistently "bless[ing] the house for Joseph's sake" (39:5). The Lord was with Joseph.

Closely after the Lord caused Joseph's favor with Potiphar, we see that his circumstances are turned

to prison accordingly. By the kindled anger of the captain, Joseph is placed in prison.

"But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love" (39:21). When Joseph was otherwise alone and unjustly imprisoned, the Lord was with Joseph and caused all he did to succeed with the prison guard (39:22-23). The immortal, invisible God of Israel who created the universe was with Joseph in a dirty prison, sustaining Joseph's life and success in the midst of circumstantial chaos. We see God's faithfulness and gracious character in the story of the cupbearer and baker of the king of Egypt in the next chapter as well.

Through a series of events, the two workers of the king were sentenced to the same prison where Joseph was now in charge. Each had troubling dreams that caused them distress, and the Lord gave Joseph great ability of interpretation for the two (40:6-7). For the chief cupbearer, Joseph prophetically interpreted his position would be restored

The good news of God's presence and faithfulness for Christians is not quantified through any circumstantial pain or wellness.

bound in prison, darkened by depression, and burdened by life's gravity, the Lord is with you – always.

When Joseph was taken into Egypt and brought down with Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers, he had done well

upside-down with the captain of the guard. Through fleeing temptation and avoiding adultery with Potiphar's wife (39:9-10), the captain was deceived to believe Joseph had committed the great evil against God, and sentenced him

with the king, and his prison sentence would be no more. For the baker, however, death was impending according to the same prophetic interpretation God gave Joseph. He became a window to the plan of the sovereign God, and asked only one favor of the cupbearer with restoration in his future: “Only remember me, when it is well with you... and so get me out of this house” (40:14–15). The cupbearer’s position was indeed restored according to the interpretation of Joseph. However, the chapter ends with a somber, cliff-hanging verse, “Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him” (40:23).

But the Lord did not forget him, and was with Joseph always. In prison,

in favor, in Egypt, while being sold by his brothers earlier on (see Genesis 37), God was with him. The same gracious truth is reality for Christians today as God is magnified in and through the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ. The very name of the Messiah is Immanuel, *God with us*. Even when his presence is unfelt or unseen (Hebrews 13:5), when we are far off, cast down, and burdened, we can trust Jesus’s presence is even more profoundly with us through his Holy Spirit (see John 14:16–17).

For Christians today, we trust the greatest gift God ever gave us is himself. As a faithful husband holds fast to his wife, so does the Lord hold fast to

his Church, his people who believe in him by faith (Ephesians 5:31–32). Even when it seems all hope is lost, death is impending, depression and anxiety are suffocating, in both great loss and great success, God himself is with us and holds us fast in and through his own Spirit. Whatever season you’re in, however happy or sad, there is great joy and gladness for you in the warming presence of the sovereign God. This may be perhaps the most profound and comforting truth for you as a Christian. Today, right now, wherever you are and however you are feeling, Jesus Christ is real and he is with you – *always* (Matthew 28:20).

## Day 1 – Genesis 39:1–6a

- ① After the interlude of the story about Judah, we return to the story of Joseph. Summarize what has happened to Joseph so far. Describe how Genesis 39:1 connects to Genesis 37:36. What do we learn in Genesis 39:2 of God’s involvement?
- ② Describe Joseph’s situation in Egypt. How’s it going for him? How did he become so successful?
- ③ Reflect: What does the name for Jesus “Immanuel” mean? Look in verses Genesis 39:2, 3, & 5 at the phrase “with Joseph” or “with him.” Look at Matthew 1:22–25 and Isaiah 7:14. How is Jesus the embodiment of “God with us”? What does it look like for you that Jesus is with you and what fresh impacts could this have on your life?

## Day 2 – Genesis 39:6b–23

- 1 Read Genesis 39:6b–10. What is going on between Joseph and his boss' wife? Look at Genesis 39:9b – why does Joseph say that his sin is against God? Who would you think the sin would be against? What does this teach us about sin? Study Psalm 51:4
- 2 Read Genesis 39:11–23. What temptation does Joseph face and what does he do? Did Joseph do the right thing you think? And what happens to him because of it?
- 3 Reflect: Genesis 39 has a place in redemptive history, but it also has a clear moral lesson. The godly, wise person will flee from sex outside of marriage. Study Read Proverbs 5–7 and study Exodus 20:14. Describe how Joseph illustrates 1 Corinthians 6:18. In your life, in what ways do you need to focus on fleeing from sexual immorality?

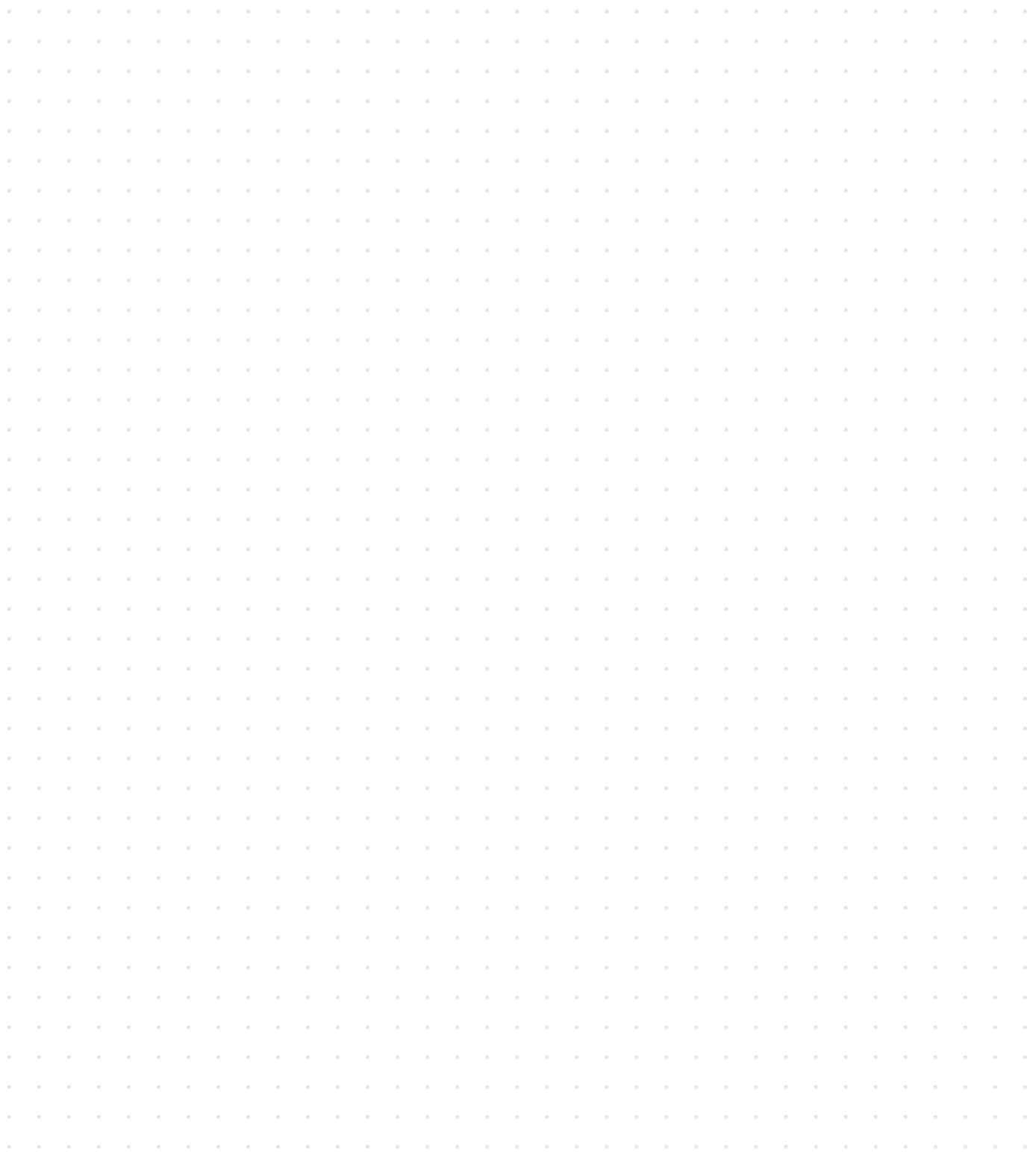
## Day 3 – Genesis 40:1–23

- ① Why was Joseph in prison? Who joins Joseph in prison? What takes place between Joseph and these guys? What happens to the cup bearer and the baker? Was Joseph right with his interpretations?
- ② Compare Genesis 40:14 with Genesis 40:23. How would you be feeling right now if you were Joseph? The major theme in the story about Joseph is summarized in Genesis 50:19–20. What does it say and how does Joseph live this out in the events of Genesis 39–40?
- ③ Reflect: In what ways do the trials of Joseph, the testing of his faith, anticipate those to come to Jesus Christ? See Mathew 4:1–11. And what about the trials that come to his disciples? See Acts 14:21–22. Study 1 Thessalonians 3:4. What trials have you experienced, or are experiencing, that by faith you can trust that God is meaning them for good? What is the role of faith in this and how are you doing?



# Sermon Notes

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# Week Eleven

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# In Search of God's Reason

Tyler & Steph  
Weers

# In Search of God's Reason

## Tyler & Steph Weers

Late for service one morning, I dropped off my family at the door and parked a few blocks away. Walking through the back alley on my way into the building, a man came into view and asked if I attended this church. He looked to be in his late fifties, maybe younger, but his worn appearance made it difficult to tell. Before I could even introduce myself, he asked me to pray for him. Within a couple minutes, I'd learned his name was Michael.

Michael described himself as a believer, someone who knew the God of the Bible and had previously been part of a church. For some time, however, he struggled with drug addiction and was weeks away from losing his house, job, and perhaps even his family. Certainly, Michael felt the need for prayer and he wanted to grieve. I found myself in a situation with a man sobbing in the parking lot, attempting to share the gospel of the good news of Jesus for his life with church music echoing in the background. Naturally, I asked for his information, hoping to better understand his

story with a follow-up conversation over coffee. However, at this question, he walked away. I was left wondering what more I could have said; I thought of how I might have helped give him hope, curb his addiction, and reassemble his life.

Turning to Genesis, by the time we get to chapter 41, Joseph has been sold into slavery (Gen 37:28), falsely accused (Gen 39:17), and forgotten in prison for two years (Gen 40:23). All the while,

ly established him as the second most powerful man in the region (Gen 41:40) after interpreting a dream for Pharaoh. He didn't interpret just any dream, but from that dream he delivered a warning of severe famine about to affect the entire earth (41:57).

Clearly, Joseph has experienced several ups-and-downs in his life, but through it all God was not absent. Joseph's family found themselves in the

Generations before the Founder and Perfecter of our faith would appear, God was setting the stage for the greatest redemption story the world has ever seen.

we read, God was with Joseph. The one who was betrayed and unjustly imprisoned was also given surprising success in whatever he did (Gen 39:3). The one who was forsaken by his brothers found unexpected favor in the sight of those he served (Gen 39:4). Despite his situation, God remembered Joseph, and ultimate-

same famine needing rescue. In the ultimate small-world experience, Joseph comes face-to-face with the very brothers who discarded him years earlier. Rather than retribution, Joseph extends mercy. He understands that he has been part of a larger narrative that God has set in motion:

So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

GENESIS 45:4-8

Now before we break out the cliché, “everything happens for a reason,” let’s slow down to understand what that reason may be. It doesn’t appear that God intends to preserve their family’s lineage for the sake of their earthly riches and success. After moving his whole family into Egypt, Joseph eventually dies and is forgotten about *again*. Spoiler alert, this doesn’t go well for his descendants (see Exodus).

For what reason, then, might God have in mind? I’ll offer one clue — fast forward to Matthew 1: The genealogy of Jesus Christ. Remember Joseph’s brother, Judah? It was he who suggested they sell Joseph into slavery, and it was he

through whom Jesus descended. Joseph again reaffirms God’s involvement at the end of Genesis, when his brothers were afraid he’d seek revenge, “But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen 50:19-20)

Generations before the Founder and Perfecter of our faith would appear, God was setting the stage for the greatest redemption story the world has ever seen. When Jesus was born, fully God and fully man, he lived a perfect life, was betrayed, tortured, and killed. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep, so that they may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10-11). This did not happen apart from God, but it also didn’t happen apart from pain and suffering.

We aren’t given a specific reasons for our daily trials, though we are reassured that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28). This does not mean we are guaranteed a life absent of suffering, but that this momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor 4:17).

Since that Sunday encounter with Michael, I’ve been replaying our conversation in my mind. I’ve thought of what

I didn’t say, and what I’d tell him if I had another opportunity. I’d tell him that he matters; that we all matter. That our value isn’t based on our socioeconomic status, political affiliation, years of sobriety, marital status, number of kids, job title, or number years serving at a church. Our value is based on the fact we are purchased by Jesus’ blood. There isn’t a person on this earth who doesn’t bear the image of God or who Jesus was unwilling to die for. To save us he faced betrayal, torture, and separation from God. He already did it. It is finished. We don’t need to clean ourselves up before coming to him. He is waiting with open arms.

Just like we learn in these chapters of Genesis, I’d want Michael to know there’s no circumstance that can separate us from our eternal rescuer.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”

ROMANS 8:35, 38-39

# Day 1 – Genesis 41

- ① Read Genesis 41. Describe the pain and suffering Joseph had endured in prison? What was it like? How long was he in there? When Joseph comes out of the pit (Gen 41:14), describe his faithful answers to Pharaoh (Gen 41:16).
  
- ② How does Joseph rise to power? Describe Joseph's new status. How old is Joseph at this point? Because of God working through Joseph, why is Egypt at this point a very critical place for the extended region?
  
- ③ Reflect: Joseph was in the pit, and then he rose to power all the way to the right hand of Pharaoh. People were to bow to Joseph. Describe how Joseph's humiliation to exaltation points to Jesus as a direct comparison. Study Philippians 2:6–11, 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. In what areas of your life are you not bowing to Jesus? What benefits would there be if you did?



## Day 2 – Genesis 42-43

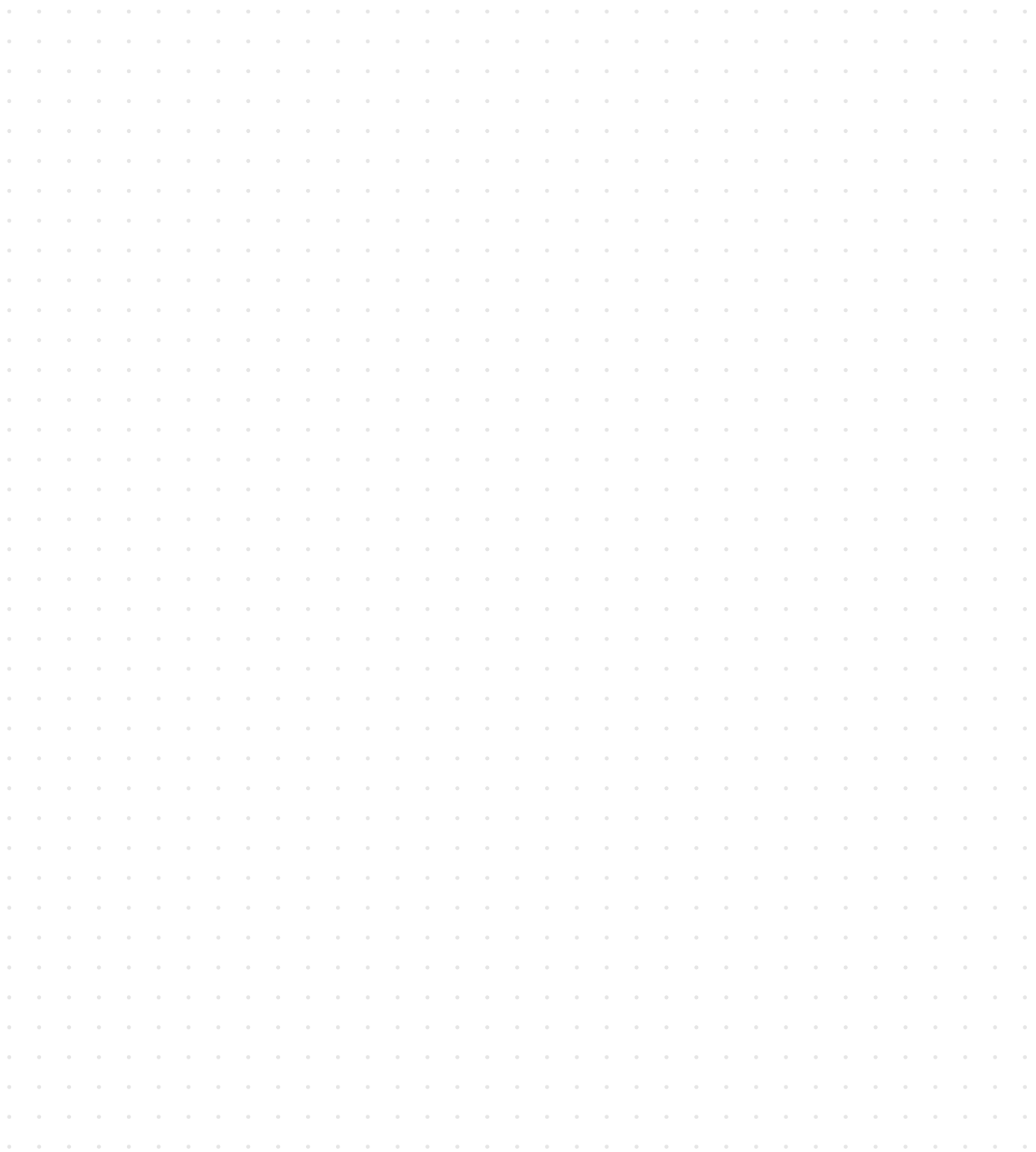
- 1 Read Genesis 42. How does Joseph's family again get involved in the story? In Genesis 42:9, what dream is Joseph remembering (Gen 37:1-11)? How does Joseph handle the brothers? How would you have reacted to them given the history of their relationship?
- 2 Read Genesis 43. How does Judah enter into the storyline, and is he different than the last time we heard about him? Why are the brothers going back to Egypt, and why are they taking double the money back with them? How does Joseph treat his brothers when they return a second time, and what is Joseph up to?
- 3 Reflect: As you look at Joseph's faith while living as a powerful person in Egypt, describe all the tangible ways that he is "Egyptian." Joseph is in Egypt, being an Egyptian, but it does not appear that he lost his faith in God. Study John 17:15-19. Describe the ways that you as a person have assimilated to your culture. Do you see yourself as being of the world or sent into it? What does it mean for you to be sent into the world (i.e. your culture, your geographical spot)?

## Day 3 – Genesis 44-45

- 1 Read Genesis 44. What does Joseph do to his brothers and why does he? What is Joseph looking for or after by this testing? How does Judah respond in the situation, and is this what you would have expected out of Judah?
- 2 Read Genesis 45. At this epic moment when Joseph reveals himself to the brothers, does Joseph stick it to his brothers for what they did to him? How is it possible for Joseph to act this way? What does it show us of his faith? Study Genesis 45:5–8. Why do you think Joseph says what he does in Genesis 45:24?
- 3 Reflect: Describe Judah's transformation. What was he like, and how does that differ from what we see in Genesis 44? Instead of harming others, Judah is now the first person in scripture to speak of sacrificing himself for others. In what ways does this point to Judah's descendent, Jesus Christ? Study Romans 5:6–11. What is your biggest fear today, your biggest pain point, and how does Jesus' sacrifice impact that?

# Sermon Notes

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# Week Twelve

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# When Trust Seems Illogical

Kenny Ortiz

# When Trust Seems Illogical

## Kenny Ortiz

Occasionally, as we journey through this life, we come to a fork in the road where the proper path doesn't seem to make sense. At that moment, obedience to the directives of Scripture can seem counterintuitive. In those moments, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and being faithful to whatever it is the Lord is calling us to do, may even seem illogical.

The Jewish patriarch Jacob faced a moment like this late in his life. The life of Jacob was jam-packed with deceit and manipulation. He was a deceiver, and he was also deceived several times by others. The life of Jacob is also a tale of God's incredible faithfulness, grace, and perfect providence.

Jacob had been through a wide variety of experiences, but the most seemingly counterintuitive moment would come when he was 130-years-old.

Many years earlier, Jacob had been deceived into believing his favorite son Joseph had been killed by a wild animal (Gen 37). The deceivers were his sons in this case. Though now, in his later

years, he discovered that Joseph was alive. Not only was Joseph still alive, but he was also thriving in Egypt.

Through a unique set of circumstances, Joseph had become the second-in-command of Egypt, the right-hand man to the king, the Pharaoh. Egypt was now in a very strong position because of God's grace on Joseph's life.

There had been famine in the entire region. None of the other nations had food, but God had alerted Joseph of the coming famine several years earlier during Joseph's unjust imprisonment. Through supernatural events, Joseph was able to warn the Pharaoh of the coming famine and Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of managing the crisis. Under Joseph's leadership, the Egyptians were able to stockpile an ample supply of food. People from across the region looked to negotiate with Egypt to acquire food.

Jacob and his sons found themselves in the same precarious position many other surrounding nations, lacking food and seemingly dependent

upon their ability to negotiate with the Egyptians for survival. It appeared to Jacob and his family that starvation could be in their future and that they, too, should go to Egypt. Little did they know, God had already been at work. God had already executed a plan that would ensure the safety of Jacob and his family. God had sovereignly brought Joseph to this position of power so that "many people should be kept alive" (Gen 50:20).

Jacob's sons had reunited with Joseph before Jacob even knew that Joseph was alive. Then, Joseph sent his brothers back to their homeland to retrieve their father and their families.

Those men traveled back to inform Jacob. This was remarkable news for Jacob. Joseph, his favorite son, was still alive. They now had the opportunity to save the lives of their family from impending starvation. What an amazing relief that must have been.

This seemed all good, right? Yes. Except there was one catch, as Jacob



would now have to leave the Promised Land.

The land where Jacob and his family lived was the land that had been promised to him and his descendants. God promised that he would create a great nation from Jacob's family and that they would dwell in this land. The promise had first been made to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham (Gen 15:18-21) and then confirmed to Jacob's father, Isaac (Gen 26:3). Later, this promise was confirmed to Jacob himself (Gen 28:13). The territory from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates belonged to Jacob and his descendants (Ex 23:31).

When God first promised the land to Abraham, the region was inhabited by pagan peoples, and this was still true in Jacob's lifetime. Jacob knew that by the grace and providence of God his descendants would eventually govern the entire region.

God had protected Abraham and Isaac through many trials, and God had done the same for Jacob throughout his many life experiences. It now made sense Jacob's family would continue to grow and eventually dominate the entire region. It would seem to be both counterintuitive and counterproductive for his family to ever leave this land. They had already set up shop. They were already living in the land. They had already gathered possessions, established alliances, and developed relationships. Why would God now have them pick up their roots and go to Egypt?

To me, this would seem counterproductive in the worst way. From my own vantage point (and in my own fol-

ly), I would be tempted to lash out at God. I would probably wonder whether we would ever make it back to the Promised Land? I might think, "Why wouldn't God just have Joseph send us a stockpile of food so that we could stay in the Promised Land?" I would ask, "Why would God promise us this land and graciously guide us for all these years only to then rip us from the land we love?"

Honestly, I might even be brash enough, and dumb enough, to say, "Doesn't God realize that if we leave this land, it will be trampled upon and taken over by pagans?"

For Jacob, leaving the land must have been counterintuitive. It must have felt odd, and maybe even seemed illogical to some extent.

This was not the first time that Jacob would've heard this. In fact, God had told Jacob's grandfather that these people would go down to Egypt, be oppressed, and eventually turned into slaves for 400 years (Gen 15:13; Acts 7:6).

If I were Jacob, I might be asking, "Lord, is this the moment? Is this the

Jacob did not know that God would graciously and gloriously give them the Law. Neither did he know that God would victoriously lead the Hebrew people back into the Promised Land.

moment where my people are led into slavery for four-centuries, and will I be the man to lead them directly into that horror?"

While Jacob must have been ecstatic to see his beloved son, Joseph, and

Jacob likely overwhelmingly relieved to be able to save the lives of his family, there must have been a part of him that was concerned for his descendants too. He knew this could be the journey towards four centuries of anguish.

Can you imagine the emotions going through Jacob? Can you imagine what it felt like to consider that maybe you are the person that God has elected to lead God's own people into suffering? I cannot imagine that it felt good.

Why would God approve of this? Why would God guide his own people from the land that he promised them, just to lead them to a place where they would be slaves?

Meanwhile, the Egyptians were saved by Joseph, and they benefited greatly from God's grace on Joseph's life. Their eventual response would be to oppress and enslave Joseph's descendants, and why would God orchestrate this?

As we examine the Scriptures we can put the pieces together. From where we sit today, nearly four-millennia later, we have a far better understanding as to

what God was doing. We know the end of the story, but Jacob did not.

Jacob didn't know that God would raise up Moses, and then later Joshua. Jacob did not know that God would graciously and gloriously give them the

Law. Neither did he know that God would victoriously lead the Hebrew people back into the Promised Land.

Jacob did not know how or when God would establish the nation; he could not foresee that God would give them judges, kings, and prophets. Neither did Jacob know that this nation would be used to eventually bring forth the Messiah, nor did Jacob have the benefit of hindsight.

So, what did Jacob do? He did the counterintuitive thing. Jacob packed up his family with all their belongings, and he went to Egypt.

On his journey he stopped at Beersheba to make sacrifices in worship to God (Gen 46:1). Beersheba was the southernmost outpost of Canaan. It could be viewed as the last city within the Promised Land on the way to Egypt.

Jacob had already packed up shop. He had already begun the long journey of migrating his family across the region into the land of Egypt, but it seems as if Jacob did not want to leave the Promised Land without having one last a heart-to-heart moment with the

Lord, just within the borders of the Promised Land.

The Lord graciously spoke to Jacob in this moment, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes” (Gen 46:3-4). This is interesting to note, that God spoke to Jacob after they were already on the move rather than before. God confirms that Jacob is doing the right thing, no matter how counterintuitive or counterproductive it may have seemed.

Jacob leads his family to Egypt and reunites with Joseph (Gen 46:28-34). What a wonderful and joyous moment that must have been for Jacob.

Jacob’s family settled in the region of Goshen (Gen 47) and they are given the best treatment by Pharaoh. Jacob meets Pharaoh and blesses him (Gen 47:10). He also meets his grandchildren, Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. On his deathbed he blesses Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48), granting

them an inheritance alongside Joseph’s brothers.

Jacob lived 17 years in Egypt. When he died, Joseph took Jacob’s body back to the Promised Land to be buried alongside Jacob’s grandparents, Jacob’s parents, and Jacob’s first wife, Leah.

By some standards, Jacob lived a tumultuous life. In his early years, he manipulated and deceived others as the means to control situations. As the years went on, Jacob seemed to come to understand and trust that God was in control.

Even in the moments that seem to be the most counterintuitive, and even in the moments where we do not understand why God is guiding us into potential dangers, we can trust that he is working on our behalf. God is in control. We can trust him. Nearly two thousand years after Jacob’s death, one of Jacob’s descendants boldly proclaimed this truth, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Praise be to God!



## Day 1 – Genesis 46

- 1 Read Genesis 46. Describe the journey and the timeframe that it took for all these events to come to fruition, as to get this family to Egypt. Describe God's involvement in this. What does God say to Israel, and what strikes you about it? What event is God alluding to when he says "I will also bring you up again"?
- 2 Study Hebrews 11:12–13. What did the descendants listed in Genesis 46 not receive in their lifetime? What does the author of Hebrews think of these descendants? Then, describe the reunion between Jacob and Joseph. What emotions were each of them feeling?
- 3 Reflect: Compare Genesis 46:4 with Jesus' words in John 10:17–18. Look at Genesis 46:3. Why should Jacob not be afraid? What are you afraid of? How does the truth of Jesus' dying on your behalf help eliminate your fear?

## Day 2 – Genesis 47

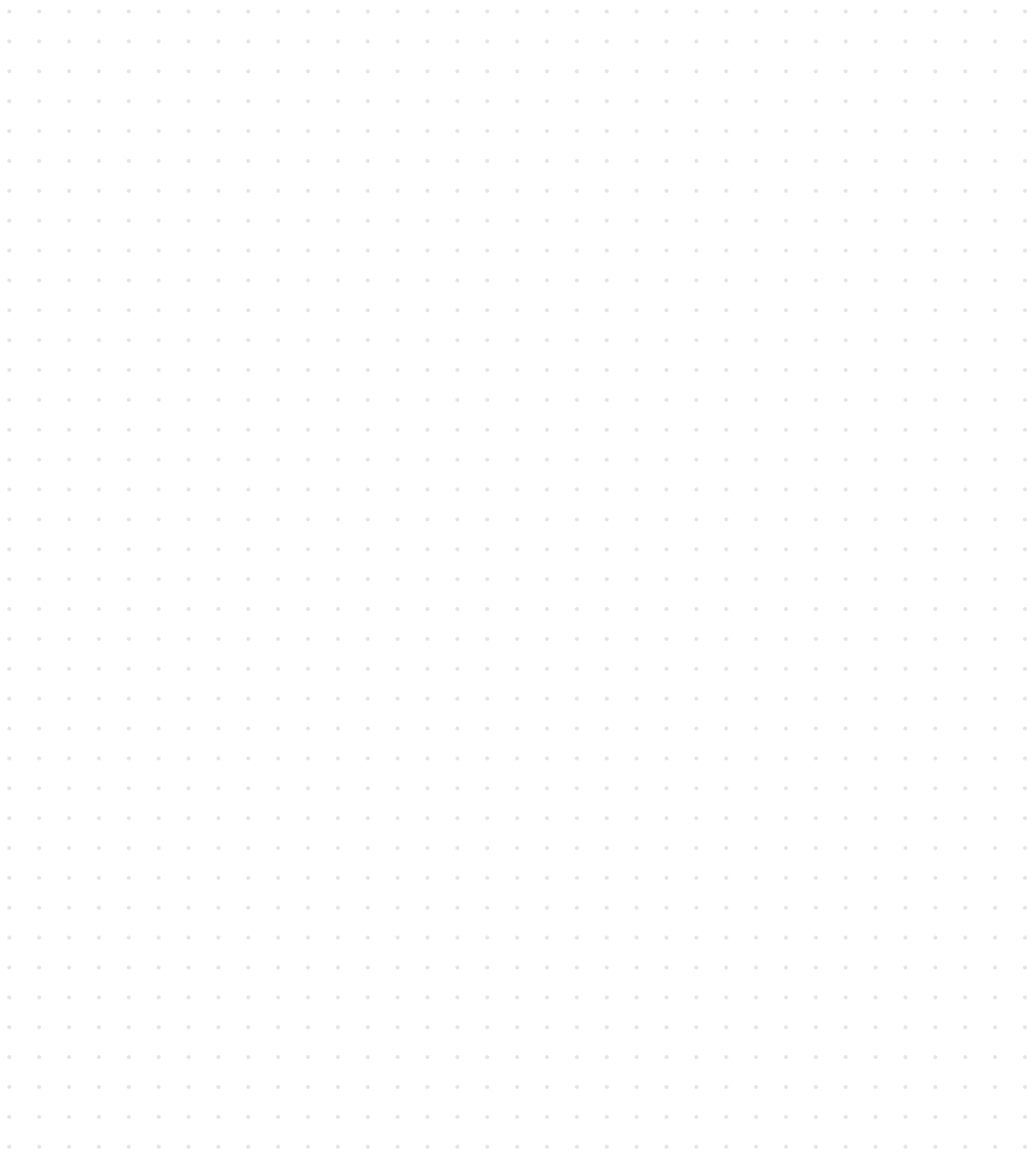
- 1 Read Genesis 47. What happens between Jacob and Pharaoh? Being in the presence of Pharaoh, describe Jacob's unbelievable journey that brings him to this point in his life.
- 2 Describe the depth of the impacts that this famine is having on Egypt, the people, and the nation. What is life like for the people right now?
- 3 Reflect: Look at Genesis 47:20–22. Describe how the concept of 'support' is already in place among the people for those who were priests. How does the gospel of Jesus redeem and fill out the concept of "giving" and "support"? What is Jesus after in our hearts in this area of life and money? Study 2 Corinthians 9:7. If you met up with Jesus for a one-on-one, what would he ask you about in this area of giving, and how would you respond?

## Day 3 – Genesis 48

- 1 Read Genesis 48. What story did Jacob share with Joseph, and why did he bring this up? How does this lead to Jacob 'adopting' Joseph's boys? Describe the final interaction between Jacob and Joseph. What takes place with Joseph's boys?
- 2 A weak-sighted Jacob blessing the next generation reminds us of a weak-sighted Isaac blessing Jacob. Is there any trickery going on in this story? Why do you think that Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim, the younger boy, and not Manasseh, the older boy? What is so significant about this?
- 3 Reflect: Study 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. Why does God insist on following the cultural customs, for example, that the older should be the one getting blessed? What does this tell you about God, and why is this good news? What is this teaching you about your pride, and what tangible things need to change in your life?

# Sermon Notes

A large grid of small dots arranged in approximately 30 rows and 40 columns, intended for writing sermon notes.





# Week Thirteen

130

The Sovereign  
Suffering  
of Joseph

Kyle McIver

# The Sovereign Suffering of Joseph

## Kyle McIver

### A Compelling Story

Joseph is one of my favorite characters in the Bible. Perhaps more than with any other narrative in the Old Testament, I find myself drawn into his story. It's captivating. There's a seemingly arrogant little brother with big dreams,

How terrible were the conditions in the Egyptian prison all those years, even with the guard's favor? Did he sleep a wink the night after he suddenly found himself second only to Pharaoh in all of Egypt? How often did he think about his family before his hungry, desperate

fearful of retaliation from Joseph now that their father is dead. When they understandably express concern over what will happen to them, Joseph's response is incredible: "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? *As for you, you meant it for evil against me, but God mean it for good...* So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones" (Gen 50:19-21). Would you respond with such faith-filled, gracious words to those responsible for such suffering in your life? I'm very skeptical I would, but here's Joseph standing in front of the people most responsible for his miseries, and he surprises us by interpreting the entire arc of his life in light of God's sovereignty.

Do you hear what Joseph is saying here? It's profound. He's plunging into a deep ocean where we often find ourselves fighting just to tread water. He goes straight for God's sovereignty in his suffering. Joseph not only admits it's truthfulness, as though he were shy about it, but worshipfully celebrates that God had the definitive hand in his many years of hardship. He sees the

I often find myself trying to get inside Joseph's head. What was he thinking down in that well his brothers threw him into? How did he feel when he was elevated as head over Potiphar's house?

and there is some palpable family tension. We see jealousy, betrayal, broken hearts, and unexpected reconciliation. Joseph suffers profoundly for doing the right thing. Have you ever seen someone fall so far only to rise even higher? Joseph's is a truly riveting story.

I often find myself trying to get inside Joseph's head. What was he thinking down in that well his brothers threw him into? How did he feel when he was elevated as head over Potiphar's house?

brothers came riding into town in the midst of a famine? Joseph's life was full of abrupt, life-altering moments. As I get to the end of his story, something surprising happens. I discover that for a moment, I actually am inside his head.

### The Mind of Joseph

Right at the end of Genesis, in chapter 50, we're given insider access to a deeply personal family moment. Joseph is speaking with his brothers who are

events of his life from God's perspective and understands that though his suffering is real, and he didn't enjoy dark prison cells, God was working for good – his good, Egypt's good, and his family's good. God had woven together a story unlike any other so far in human history, with the patient suffering of one man who trusted God's sovereign goodness at the center.

### **Real Suffering**

Have you suffered? If you're old enough to read this, I'm guessing you have. Suffering is a universal experience in a world broken by the destructive reach of sin. When you read Joseph's story and consider your own suffering, try something that might feel uncommon: slow down, engage your imagination, and put yourself in either Joseph's cell or at the bottom of that dark hole. He suffered for crimes he had not committed. Sure, he was put in charge of the prison to some degree, but he was still wasn't free. He was even forgotten for two years by the cupbearer whose dream he

had interpreted. Joseph had no shortage of opportunities for bitterness and grumbling. This prompts more questions about his inner-thoughts, "Did he wonder if God had forgotten about him, and if God even cared?" Maybe. If he was much like you and me, he probably did during some of those dark, cold nights where grim helplessness felt like his closest companion.

Are you suffering right now? Are circumstances so difficult that you wonder if God has forgotten you in the jail cell of your broken relationships? Do you think he has left alone you to find your way out of the desert of depression, or he has abandoned you to discouragement and loneliness for the rest of your days? How do you think Joseph would answer these questions? As it turns out, he did answer them. All of these realities – pain, suffering, doubt, forgottenness, hunger, broken relationships, loneliness, and on and on – were part of his past when he stood before his brothers and declared, "...God meant it for good."

### **The Sovereign Sufferer**

While Joseph's story is full of encouragement and good news for sufferers, there is an even better story we can look to. Remember when I asked if you'd ever seen someone fall as far as Joseph, only to rise even higher? There actually is a man who fell even further, only to rise to infinite heights. This man suffered more than anyone else ever has, or ever will, and he did it for you. Jesus knows what's it's like to suffer. He's also walked with his people through more suffering than we can imagine, and he does not grow weary in the pit with us. He does not grow tired of us in the desert. The Great News is that the hope we see in Joseph's suffering has come to us. He lived for us, died for us, and rose for us. In all of our suffering, we look to Jesus, and we know that he is near. He is doing us good. By faith we know that one day, like Joseph, we will see it – and even better yet – we will see him.

## Day 1 – Genesis 49:1–28

- ① Jacob's death is approaching. Before he dies, he blesses and curses his children. He starts with the oldest and moves to the youngest. List out each son (note their mother) and note Jacob's blessing or curse. First six: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. Second six: Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin.
- ② If you were in the tent with Jacob and the boys in Genesis 49, which lineage would you guess at this point would receive the blessing to be the dominant tribe in the future? Why?
- ③ Reflect: Study Genesis 49:10 and the prophecy of Judah's lineage. Who in Judah's lineage brings this to fruition (see Matt 1:1–17)? What character development took place with Judah to receive this blessing? In 1 Samuel 8–13, we see the first kings emerge. Who was the first king, of what tribe, and how did that go (1 Sam 8:1–5; 9:1; 13:14)? Compare that with the king of 2 Sam. 7:16 – who is the king, what is the tribe, and what is his heart or character like? What does this tell us about what God is after? Study Matthew 6:21.

## Day 2 – Genesis 49:29–50:14

- ① The story of Jacob’s life spans almost half of the book of Genesis! What final instructions are given at the end of Genesis 49? Why the cave of Machpelah (see Gen 12:1–3; 23:1–20)?
  
- ② In Genesis 50:1–4, describe the events right after Jacob dies. How would you describe this period of weeping? What does this show us of the natural pain of death starting in these olden days? Describe the funeral. Have you ever experienced a lamenting that was a “very great and grievous lamentation” or “grievous mourning”?
  
- ③ Reflect: We reflect on Jacob’s life in Genesis 49–50. Some questions to answer as you reflect on your life: a) Are you growing in loving others around you? b) Are you increasingly governed by God’s word? c) Do you still grieve over your sin?

## Day 3 – Genesis 50:15–26

- ① What do the brothers fear? What stunt do the brothers pull to save themselves? Why did Joseph weep when he heard what they had to say? What profound response did Joseph give his brothers? Would you have reacted the same way Joseph did? Describe how Joseph exemplifies Romans 12:14–21.
- ② Describe Joseph’s final days and the details of his burial. Describe Joseph’s faith in God as he dies. What promises do we get from John 14:1–4 to offer peace to Christians as they die?
- ③ Reflect: As your Bible study efforts through this quarterly end, what were the largest impacts it had on you? If you are stuck answering this, study Genesis 50:19–21.



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