

Blended Week 3

January 11: Genesis 27-28 and Matthew 9:18-38

Isaac has grown older and it is time for him to bless Esau. He sends Esau away to bring him back some game. We see just how calculating Jacob and Rebekah are. Rebekah warns Jacob that Isaac is about to give the blessing to Esau. She hatches a scheme. Isaac's eyesight is failing in his old age. She puts some goat skins on Jacob's arms and dresses him in Esau's clothes. Jacob goes to his father with some lambs that his mother prepared. Isaac questions whether it is really Esau or not, stating that the voice is Jacob's but the hands are Esau's. Jacob keeps up with the lie and Isaac gives him the blessing. As soon as Jacob leaves, Esau shows up and Isaac trembles as he realizes what he has just done. Esau is enraged!

This is one event where I question how anyone can think that the Bible is a boring book! This has all the makings of a modern day drama with deceit and treachery amongst family members!

Jacob leaves having been instructed to not take a wife from the Canaanites (just as Abraham had commanded for Isaac). Esau learns this. Thinking that it is his father that despises the Canaanite women, he goes to Ishmael and married several women of Canaanite descent. A relationship is forged between Isaac's descendants and Ishmael's descendants all based on spite for his father and the lost blessing.

In the New Testament, we read about more healings. Jesus heals a young girl that is dying. He also heals a woman that has been suffering with bleeding for 12 years and restores the sight of two blind men. In chapter 9:36 we see the compassion that Jesus has for the people. He sees that there are so many that do not have a shepherd. He doesn't have anger toward them. He doesn't look down upon them for being lost. Instead, Jesus has compassion for them.

January 12: Genesis 29-30 and Matthew 10:1-23

Jacob continues on his journey when he meets Rachel. He is thrilled to have found her. Rachel reports to Laban who Jacob is and that he is present. When Laban hears this, he is thrilled and runs to greet Jacob. Jacob stays with Laban for about a month. We can infer that he had been working, earning his keep around the house since Laban feels it is not right for him to work for nothing. They strike a deal. After seven years of work, Jacob can take Rachel as his wife. The seven years pass quickly because he loves her so much. At the end of his work, Jacob demands Rachel. Laban then sets up the wedding feast inviting all the men of the place. However, he does not give him Rachel. Instead, he gives Leah. The deceiver has become the deceived.

Laban dismisses his actions saying that it is customary to marry the older daughter first. Jacob still wants Rachel so he agrees to work for another seven years. He loved Rachel more than Leah. Unfortunately for Rachel, she was barren, but Leah provides six sons to Jacob. In desperation, Rachel cries out to The LORD. He opens her womb and she conceives a son and names him Joseph.

In Matthew, Jesus appoints the 12 disciples. He sends them out to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and drive out demons. They are not to charge anyone for the works they will perform since they have received freely. Jesus tells them not to take any provisions for travel. God will provide what they need. He also tells them to not waste their time in a town. If the town is refusing the message of Christ, they are to shake the dust off of their sandals and move on. Jesus warns them of the trouble ahead for them. Walking with Him is not for the faint of heart!

January 13: Genesis 31-32 and Matthew 10:24-42

Laban begins to look at Jacob with contempt. Even Laban's sons are complaining about Jacob taking wealth from their father. Jacob's wages were the spotted and striped sheep. Even though he had set the poplar branches out when the stronger of the flock were breeding, Genesis 31 makes it abundantly clear that it was God that made Jacob's flocks stronger than Laban's. Jacob leaves with his wives and sons. Laban pursues them. After Jacob airs his grievances about Laban's treatment, they establish a covenant and build a stone mound to commemorate the agreement. Laban calls the mound Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob calls it Galeed. Both mean "Mount of Witness". Jacob named it in Hebrew and Laban named it in Aramaic.

Jacob continues on his way. He has just dealt with his father in law and now he is about to meet up with his scorned brother Esau. Jacob is terrified after he receives the report of how many men Esau has with him. So, he sends many gifts to his brother with some servants ahead of the traveling party. Keep in mind that money was not a thing back then. Instead, wealthy as measured by livestock and land. Jacob is parting with a hefty amount of his wealth in his attempt to appease Esau. Jacob actively works to set several barriers between himself and his brother.

During the night, Jacob sends his family to Jabbok. After the family had crossed the stream, Jacob was left alone, or so he thought. He spends the night wrestling a man. The Hebrew language changes to show that this was no ordinary man. Jacob is wrestling with God. He puts up a good fight and he demands that God bless him. Jacob will now be named Israel.

We get assurance from Jesus in our New Testament reading. We have no need to fear because God is going to take care of us. He takes care of all the wildlife. They are fed and have what they need to survive. God will do the same for us. Jesus also promises that if we acknowledge Him in front of others, He will acknowledge us before the Father in heaven. He also warns that if we do not acknowledge Him, He will not acknowledge us.

January 14: Genesis 33-35 and Matthew 11

Jacob, now Israel, continues moving toward Esau. He looks up and sees that Esau is before him with 400 men. Jacob divides up his family behind him according to their status. He goes ahead of them and bows seven times before Esau, a sign of unparalleled respect at the time. Esau rushes to greet Israel. This encounter is completely different than we would expect it to have been. Esau is no longer bitter. He explains that he has enough. The men go their separate ways.

Shechem is infatuated with Leah's daughter, Dina. He rapes the woman and Jacob finds out about it. Hamor, Shechem's father, approaches Jacob about giving Dinah to his son as a wife. When Jacob's sons return, Hamor explains to them how much Shechem loves their sister. He encourages them all to intermarry. The men explain to him that it would be a disgrace since his son is uncircumcised. They tell Shechem that if he has all of the men in his camp circumcised, then they will allow the marriage. This seems like a great idea to Shechem, so he goes and does just that. On the second day after the circumcision, when the men were still in pain, Jacob's sons Levi and Simeon, went in and slaughtered every Hivite man.

From there Jacob is told to go to Bethel. He packs up his things, buries the foreign gods by a tree, and terror falls on the surrounding people so that they will not pursue him. God blesses Jacob once again, repeating the blessing that his name will now be Israel. Rachel gives birth to one more son, but the birth is difficult and she passes away shortly after delivering Benjamin.

We learn more about an interaction between Jesus and John the Baptist's disciples. John is in prison, so he sends some of his men to ask if Jesus is the Messiah. He sends them back with a message that affirms He is the One. Jesus also tells the people that John was the one identified in Isaiah as the messenger that would herald the Messiah. Of course, many did not believe John because he came in a hairy garment with wild hair, eating wild honey and locusts. They claimed he had a demon because he did not come eating or drinking like the other Israelites. At the same time, they denied Jesus's Messiahship because He came eating and drinking, saying that He is a drunkard and glutton.

Some people will do what they can to find fault no matter what. Some people just refuse to accept something for what it is. They will change up the standard of measurement, not because it is right, but because it protects what they want to believe.

January 15: Genesis 36-37 and Matthew 12:1-21

Genesis 36 details the descendants of Esau. While some of us might be tempted to gloss over this reading, it is important to showing God fulfilling His promise to Abraham. The Edomites, a nation founded by Esau, will later have squabbles with the Israelites. However, they also grow, fulfilling God's promise that Abraham would have many descendants. The text here also shows that the Edomites had established their kings well before Israel installed king Saul.

Israel, aka Jacob, remained in Canaan. He has his favorite son Joseph that begins having a series of dreams. All of these dreams point to the future where all of his brothers will bow down before him. As you can imagine, this does not set well with them. They already have a certain amount of disdain for him since he is Israel's favorite. The brothers decide that they will kill him, but Reuben reasons with them. Instead of killing him, they are just going to make it look like he was killed and throw him into a pit instead. Reuben's plan was to go back and rescue Joseph later. However, Joseph never makes it into the pit. Instead, he is sold into slavery and taken to Egypt. The brothers think this is the last they have seen of Joseph. They are incredibly wrong!

In our New Testament reading, we see that Jesus is showing the true meaning of the Sabbath. The Pharisees and Sadducees were too wrapped up in the Law itself. They were making the

Sabbath something they served rather than it being something for them. So, Jesus heals a whole lot of people on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was meant to be a day of rest. It was meant to be a blessing to the people, not something that forbid them from doing good.

January 16: Genesis 38-40 and Matthew 12: 22-50.

Judah breaks away while Jacob is still grieving Joseph's supposed death. This was most likely because of the guilt he bore in the plot. He finds a wife for his firstborn son, but he is deemed evil, so The LORD strikes down the son. Judah goes to his second son, Onan, telling him to impregnate his brother's widow, Tamar. This might seem odd to us, but this was a common practice in the Ancient Near East. Onan is deceitful and ensures that he will not get her pregnant.

Judah's wife passes away and he goes into mourning. After he is done mourning, Tamar removes her mourning clothes and covers her face. Judah believes she is a prostitute, sleeps with her, and impregnates her. Later, when Tamar is dressed normally, she is confronted about her pregnancy. Tamar proves that the father is in fact Judah.

Meanwhile, Joseph is alive and well. He was working hard for Potiphar and there was nothing that was withheld from him. Potiphar's wife takes an interest in him because he was well built. She continually harasses him, asking him to sleep with her. This was a constant thing and in her final temptation, she managed to get ahold of his garment and keep it with her. She then cries foul, telling everyone that Joseph attempted to rape her. This results in Joseph going to prison where he tends to the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. He interprets dreams for the two. The cupbearer receives good news. The chief baker does not.

In Matthew, Jesus is accused of driving out demons by Beelzebul. Jesus refutes the accusations, stating that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus also warns them that a good tree will bear good fruit and a bad tree bears bad. One thing that we must ask ourselves regularly as believers is if we are in fact bearing the fruit of the Spirit or the fruit of the world.

January 17: Genesis 41 and Matthew 13:1-32.

Pharaoh is having some disturbing dreams. No one is able to interpret the dream. The chief cupbearer overhears the problem and confides in Pharaoh that the Jewish man he was in prison with is able to interpret dreams. Pharaoh has Joseph brought to him and explains that no one can interpret the dreams. Joseph explains that he cannot explain the dream. Instead, God Almighty is the one that will interpret it. Egypt is in store for seven great years of abundance, but seven years of severe famine will follow them, making people forget about the great abundance from before. Joseph is given a place of honor and put in charge of the effort to prepare for the coming famine. Joseph, whether in a good or bad situation, constantly did well and sought The LORD. Due to his diligence and hard work ethic, he finds himself in a place of prominence!

In our Matthew reading, Jesus teaches in parables. He teaches about the seed Sower that spreads his seed. Some of the seed falls among the weeds and is choked out. Some seed gets into shallow soil and sprouts quickly, but it is quickly withered by the sun. Other seed falls on the hard ground and never grows any root. Still some of the seed lands in good soil and develops a

great crop. Jesus also tells the parable of the wheat and the weeds. The farmer plants the wheat, but an enemy comes in and plants weeds among the wheat. The men that tend to the land ask if they should pull the weeds up. The farmer tells them to leave them both. If they pull the weeds, they may pull the wheat as well. They will both grow. At harvest the wheat will be gathered and put in the barn. The weeds will be gathered first, bundled, and thrown into the fire.

January 18: Genesis 42-43 and Matthew 13:33-58.

The famine hits not just Egypt, but all of the surrounding areas. Jacob finds out that there is grain in Egypt, so he sends his sons there. It is interesting to note that when famine hit earlier in Genesis, Abraham went to Egypt for a safe haven. The sons go with the exception of Benjamin. He was the last of Rachel's children and Israel did not want to part with him. The men arrive in Egypt, where they find themselves bowing down to their brother Joseph, just as his dreams had indicated. They do not recognize their brother, nor do they think that he can understand them. Since Joseph held such a high place within the Egyptian government, he was adorned with the common Egyptian dress. Joseph has also spent many years in Egypt, so he would be very familiar with the language and use it often. There was no google translate back then, so he would have had to adjust to the language, dress, and culture. He sends his brothers back with grain and all of their money, but holds Simeon back as collateral. They return and explain what has happened. Israel in a moment of self pity cries, "Everything happens to me!"

The brothers do not return to Egypt until their grain runs out. They know that they are coming under judgment because of what they had done to Joseph so many years ago. The crime they committed still haunts them and their fear is intense.

In our New Testament reading, we have more parables. Jesus gives them the parable that shows how precious the kingdom of God is. It is like a priceless pearl that a merchant sells everything he has just to purchase it. When we come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, the things of this world aren't as shiny and nice anymore. We don't have residence on earth. Instead, we belong in God's kingdom. As believers, we know that our salvation through Christ is more precious than anything this world has to offer.

There is an interesting problem Jesus runs into in Nazareth. The people from His hometown reject Him. They merely see Him as Joseph's kid, the son of a carpenter. They do not see Him as Messiah. We can run into similar problems with people that know us from our past. I was a completely different person before coming to faith. The folks that knew me prior to conversion would probably still look on my past to downplay my faith. Not to worry, God doesn't hold our past against us. We might, our friends might, and the enemy sure will, but God holds no record of wrong when we are washed with the blood of Jesus.