

GENESIS 42:29-38 **(NOT THINKING CLEARLY IN THE LAND OF CANAAN)**

Introduction: Many of the verses we'll look at today are a recapitulation of what we've already seen. But we'll also see Jacob's response to them. This is a man who has seen the Lord at least three times and has heard from him even more than that.

If any person could claim, "Hey, I know the Lord is on my side..." it should be Jacob. Quite possibly the most intimate encounter with the Lord in all of the Old Testament was with Jacob as they wrestled in the night by the Jabbok River. He beheld the face of God in the form of the Man and he prevailed as they fought.

And yet, in today's verses, it's as if he had lived his life entirely apart from God. The Lord has never been mentioned in this chapter and the word "God" has been used only twice. Once it was by Joseph. The second time was by Jacob's son's questioning why God allowed something bad to happen to them.

Not only did Jacob fail to see God's hand in these events of his life, but he also failed to teach his children that the events of their lives were being directed by God for their good. This is a portion of Scripture which demonstrates abject failure and a complete lack of faith in the providence of God by God's people. What can we learn from it about our own lives?

Text Verse: ⁶You have laid me in the lowest pit,
In darkness, in the depths.

⁷Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
And You have afflicted *me* with all Your waves. Selah Psalm 88:6, 7

This psalmist, like Jacob, was laid in a low pit and felt the heavy wrath of the Lord upon him. But there is a difference between the two. Instead of whining about it, he talked to the Lord about it. Despite the horrors which engulfed him, he still found it possible to talk to the Lord through the trouble.

Jacob, despite being God's chosen man, still has a way to go in the development of his faith and of his walk. It is from the Bible that we learn how to do these things. His Superior Word is what guides us on this path and so let's turn to it again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Recounting the Journey (29-34)

29 Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying:

In the curious way the Bible does these things, the name "Jacob" is used five times in this chapter. The only time the name "Israel" is used is when speaking of the sons of Israel. In the next chapter though, the name Israel will be used three times and the name Jacob won't be used at all.

There is Jacob, the deceiver who is also deceived. And then there is Israel who struggles with God. Jacob is still deceived concerning his son Joseph and he has no hope of seeing him again. And as we'll see through the end of this chapter, he is unwilling to let Benjamin go back to Egypt to rescue the family.

It is Jacob, the man of flesh and blood, who is lost in the life of this world. And it is to him that the sons now return. Although it's not always easy to tell the difference, observing why the names Jacob or Israel, or both, are used is always a help in seeing what is going on in the life of the man and the pictures they point to concerning the people Israel.

To their father Jacob, they now take time to explain the details of their long trek south to the land of Egypt...

30 "The man *who is* lord of the land spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.

The way the Hebrew is constructed in their sentence to Jacob emphasizes their feelings concerning the harsh treatment they received. "Spoke the

man, lord of the land, with us hard things." Included in those "hard things" was the accusation that they were spies, something they refuted.

³¹ **But we said to him, 'We *are honest men; we are not spies.***

This is exactly what happened. Just as things occurred in Egypt, so they are telling their father now.

³² **We *are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is with our father this day in the land of Canaan.***'

And again, this is exactly how it happened with the exception of mentioning the missing brother first and then the youngest being with their dad in Canaan next. They have exactly repeated their conversation with Joseph.

I would suggest that the significance of the ten brothers not being able to satisfy the lord of Egypt, who happens to be Joseph, is that it pictures the current way that Jewish believers *think* they are able to sanctify God in their rituals. What does that mean?

They have a requirement that 10 people are needed in order to make what is known as a *minyan*, or an assembly. This comes from a precept known as the *gezerah shavah*. According to this rule the *gezerah shavah* teaches ... that an "assembly" must be present when G-d is being sanctified." (chabad.org)

What they mean by *God being sanctified* includes, for example, the public reading of the Torah - their Bible. The public reading of the Bible to us would be forbidden under this precept without at least 10 people present. Continuing on in their explanation they say this shows -

"... a great truth: the power of each individual Jew. There can be a group of nine of the greatest Jews, men who complete all of the commandments and understand the depths of the Torah's secrets, yet they do not have the ability to complete a minyan on their own. However, add to the group the simplest Jew, someone who perhaps cannot properly read his prayer nor does he really understand what he is saying, yet when he walks into the

room he has now transformed the entire group and made them complete—a minyan. It is because of him that they are now able to recite those parts of the prayer that can be read only with a minyan. Never underestimate the potential of the individual Jew."

This is standard Jewish thought concerning approaching God. But I believe this pictures why the brothers were not accepted by Joseph. It is to show us that this belief is not acceptable. As a Christian and a believer in the finished work of Jesus, we can stand alone with Him and be acceptable before God.

We don't need numbers of ten, a thousand, or a million. When we stand with Christ, we are in right standing with God. The reason I brought this up now is because these brothers, standing before Joseph, picture the Jewish people, and specifically the leaders of the tribes, still not recognizing their Lord.

As a group, the brothers were unable to satisfy Joseph. And the same is true with the *minyan* in synagogues to this day. Until they stand with, and acknowledge Christ, they cannot be pleasing to God. Thus, there is the need for Benjamin among them. There is the need for the Son of the Right Hand, Jesus, among the Jews.

We need to keep looking at these verses in the context of the church age. Joseph's brothers picture the tribes of Israel. Joseph pictures the Lord. During the church age, the brothers are separated from Joseph just as Israel is still separated from Him. That will end in the chapters ahead in Genesis and that will end in the days ahead. After the rapture, Jesus and Israel will meet and be reunited.

*Some wonderful day Israel will receive their King
They will call on Him and to them he will be seen
The glorious moment will cause Israel to sing
And all the world will marvel at the glorious scene*

³³ Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, 'By this I will know that you *are* honest *men*: Leave one of your brothers *here* with me, take *food* for the famine of your households, and be gone.

In this, they don't tell the whole story. They left out what originally happened. At first all of them were to be imprisoned and one would go to Canaan. After three days in prison, only one was left and the rest were allowed to go. And they only said that the brother was left in Egypt, not that he was bound in prison.

You can almost hear their conversation before getting home, "Dad will be so upset. We'd better not tell him what happened or he'll flip his lid." So instead of giving all of the bad details, they tell him the truth without giving all of the information.

Whether it was out of fear or whether it was out of respect for dad, they have been honest and yet circumspect in what they've shared. Most probably, they anticipated what Jacob's reaction would be concerning the youngest son, Benjamin.

If he knew everything that happened to them, he would be even less likely to send them back to Egypt. And this is exactly the bad news they will now share with him...

³⁴ And bring your youngest brother to me; so I shall know that you *are* not spies, but *that you are* honest *men*. I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'"

This returns to what Joseph said to them when he told them what they were to do -

"By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether *there is* any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you *are* spies!" Genesis 42:15, 16

With an oath, he vowed that without producing Benjamin, they will be counted as spies, not honest men. With Benjamin, they will have free access to trade. Benjamin, is the key to their survival.

And the same is true with Israel. Someday, Israel is going to be completely isolated in the world. There will be a peace agreement and this will eventually be broken by the antichrist. They will have no defender but the Lord and it will be when they call on Him that He will return and fight for them.

The relationship between Israel and Jesus didn't end in AD70. It was put on hold during their time of exile. God has and He will remain faithful to them. Reconciliation is coming between Joseph and the brothers and it is coming between Jesus and Israel. Benjamin, meaning Son of the Right Hand, is key to both.

II. Ye of Little Faith (35, 36)

³⁵ Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man's bundle of money *was* in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.

The brothers already knew the money had been returned. One of them found the money in his sack and later, when they go back to Egypt, they'll admit that they all found it in their own sacks while at the camp. You kind of have to put yourself in their place.

They traveled at least a day before finding the money. They were already overdue, having traveled probably a week, been in prison for a few days, and then on their way back home. Do they return to repay the money or do they go on home? And if they told their dad, no matter what they did, he'd be upset.

So, instead of making the situation worse in either way, they continued on home and didn't say anything about the money until they were there.

³⁶ And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me: Joseph is no *more*, Simeon is no *more*, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me.”

Jacob seems to imply that he knows that what happened with Joseph is the brother's fault, but it could simply be his old age and weakening emotions. Whatever his state, he now demonstrates a continued lack of faith. The mortal flesh and blood man has forgotten about God's sovereignty.

And so he cries out *alai hayu kulanah* - "all these things are against me." The Latin Vulgate says, "all these evils fall back upon me." It is to him as if the weight of each bad thing has been heaped right back onto his shoulders until the strain has become an unbearable load which will destroy him.

Jacob, not his brother Esau, is the covenant son. Regardless of what happens, God is in control of his past, present, and future. The Lord has appeared to him personally several times and has made unconditional assurances to him.

The last time God spoke to him directly was when he had returned to Bethel after many long years. At that time, God said to him these trustworthy words -

“*I am* God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. ¹² The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.” Genesis 35:11-12

After that, Joseph had his two dreams which showed that God was with *him* like he was with *Jacob*, but Jacob has forgotten that too. Since then, as far as the Bible records, the Lord has remained silent. Jacob has taken this silence as abandonment.

But this is the last thing that has happened or could happen. The very things that he feels are against him - every one of them he has mentioned, are actually being worked out for him. Joseph's removal from his life seems to him to be an evil which God allowed to weigh him down.

Instead, God has used that to bring Joseph into the only land that could save them during the time of famine. He then brought him to the only place where he would be secure *from* the executioner because the one he worked for *was* the executioner.

In that house he was falsely accused and placed in a special prison where the king's prisoners would be kept. God, not man, gave the king's prisoners dreams. God, not man, gave Joseph the wisdom to interpret the dreams.

God, not man, gave Pharaoh his own dreams and again, it was God who directed that it would occur in the presence of the once-imprisoned cup-bearer who then told Pharaoh about Joseph.

Again, it was God who gave Joseph the ability to interpret the dreams, and gave him the wisdom which brought him to the second position in all of Egypt. God directed the famine which made it necessary for the sons of Israel to journey to Egypt.

And of all of the city storehouses in Egypt, God led the sons of Israel to the one where Joseph was at on a day that he would be working. And the brother's time in prison allowed them time to reflect on their consciences to the extent that they would feel remorse over their treatment of Joseph.

The continued duration of the famine which came about by God will eventually necessitate a second trip to Egypt with Benjamin, and the events which will lead to reconciliation and the safety of all of Israel.

All eleven brothers will come back and bow before Joseph. Amends will be made, and the family will be saved. Every single detail is being worked out for good, but Jacob only sees the evil because he only sees it *from his perspective*.

Since his dream at Bethel when he fled from his brother Esau, the Lord has always been with him. But all of that is forgotten in the misery since Rachel's death. And isn't that exactly, I mean exactly, what we see in Israel since the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Rachel, if you remember, means "lamb." It's the same word for her name which is used to speak of the work of Jesus in Isaiah 53:7 -

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a **sheep** before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

For the past 2000 years, since the death of the Lamb, Israel has gone from one calamity to another, as if everything were against them. But for every calamity, God has been there, and He has been working to bring them to reunion with the King. He gave them safety in one land after another, leading right up to America. And then He brought them home to their promised land.

Here is a list of the things that are recorded about Jacob since Rachel's death -

- 1) Reuben slept with his concubine Bilhah
- 2) His father Isaac died
- 3) Joseph had strange dreams, one showing that his father would bow down to him
- 4) Joseph was supposedly killed
- 5) A famine comes upon the land
- 6) Simeon is taken from him during the trip to Egypt, and
- 7) Benjamin is now expected to be taken from him to Egypt

These seven things are almost a snapshot of Israel since the death of Jesus. First, Reuben sleeps with Bilhah. Her name means "troubled" and it is carried over into the New Testament as Belial - "wicked." If you remember, she pictures the second exile of the Jewish people. Israel unites not with Christ, but with Belial.

If that sounds harsh, listen to the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:9 which are written about Israel's time during the church age -

"Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."

Next Isaac dies. Isaac means laughter. The laughter is gone and the laughter has been gone from Israel for these 2000 years.

Next Joseph has his dreams about the brothers bowing down to him. As he pictures Christ, someday Jesus' brothers will bow to Him. After that Joseph is supposedly killed and lost to Jacob, but he is actually sold off by his brothers. Jesus was killed and supposedly lost, but instead he was sold off to the gentiles.

Following that a famine comes upon the land. We saw that the famine pictured the famine of the word of God for the world of the end times. Next, Simeon was bound up. His name means "He who hears." In Israel, any who would otherwise hear are bound up from their brothers.

Even today, Jewish people are often told "You can't be a Jew if you're a Christian." You can be a Buddhist, a non-believer, a Hindu, or whatever else you want and you get to remain a Jew, but should you convert to the truth of God in Christ, you are shunned from the collective whole.

Now Benjamin is set to be taken to Egypt. Jacob doesn't understand that everything so far has happened for God's good end. And Israel just like them, can't see the truth of what is going on around them. All they can see is the trouble, not the plan.

None of this is stretching the picture which is presented in Genesis. So far, this book has consistently shown us of things which *have* happened but which are also things which *will* happen. Every story is selected by the wisdom of God to show us this exceptional tapestry of human history.

Every name, every location, every number, every detail showed us more about the heavenly drama being worked out in our earthly existence. It is the epitome of beauty and the greatest exhibition of love we could imagine - love for Jew and love for Gentile.

*For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has become His counselor?
It is only through His wondrous, marvelous word
That we can understand what for us He has in store*

III. Not Thinking Clearly in the Land of Canaan (37, 38)

³⁷ Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him *back* to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.”

Reuben is the same son who tried to save Joseph from being killed by his brothers, hoping to eventually get him back to Jacob. Now, he's actually probably more concerned with getting Simeon released from prison in Egypt than he is about anything else.

Reuben is the oldest and Simeon is second by birth. He is also the full brother of Simeon. In his desire to get him back, he knew that he had to take Benjamin to Egypt. And in order to do that, he makes an incredulous offer. "If I don't bring him back, you can kill two of my sons."

First, he knows that Jacob wouldn't kill his own grandsons if he failed. Secondly, if he did fail, he wouldn't be coming back either because they were already threatened under oath to be proven faithful or they would be counted as spies.

And so, thirdly, he makes this offer, not with the intent of it being carried out, but with the surety that he will perform what he has spoken. It is his promise that Benjamin would be brought back safely. The offer is one of guarantee, but not one of reality.

³⁸ But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.”

Jacob is not ready to let him go. The famine hasn't taken its toll. The missing son is not as great a concern as the one he has. The time hasn't reached its fullness. He believes Joseph is dead and so to him he is dead even though he is alive. And so only Benjamin is there to remind him of his beloved Rachel.

The fear of Jacob is tied up in his lack of faith in the promises of God. He is not thinking clearly in the land of Canaan and he is worried about his life, not what the future is promised to hold. And so here, in the troubled Jacob, is a picture of you and me at any given moment of weakness - when we forget God's promises to us.

When we as Christians see God's hand at work in an evident way, when blessings and good things come to us, and when those around us that we love are happy and healthy, we are quick to praise Him and to admit His presence and favor is there with us.

But when things fall apart, we start to question His goodness. What we need to do is to continue to trust Him through these times. That's a lot easier said than done, but it is possible. It's good to just keep reminding ourselves that what we might see as God's severity toward us may actually be His kindness.

If we know with certainty that it is impossible for God to be the cause of evil, then just because something appears evil which is from God, then it cannot be evil. Joseph was taken from Jacob, and Jacob certainly thought that was evil, but from whose perspective?

If a brother, a sister, or a child dies, we might call that evil. "Why did God allow this terrible thing to happen?" But again, is it evil, or are we not seeing the whole picture? God's goodness cannot be on trial and so our *understanding* of the situation, and resentment towards Him, must be wrong. Listen to these words from Job -

¹⁰ "Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding:
Far be it from God *to do* wickedness,
And *from* the Almighty to *commit* iniquity.

¹¹ For He repays man *according to his work*,
And makes man to find a reward according to *his way*.

¹² Surely God will never do wickedly,
Nor will the Almighty pervert justice. Job 34:10-12

This doesn't mean there isn't wickedness, but that the wickedness has no power to triumph over the good. Proof of that is evident anytime we look at the cross. There was a little baby in a manger who was born without the faults that the rest of us are born with.

There was the law which *pointed out our faults* even more, and which only *increased* His radiant perfection. There were the hungry that He fed and the sick that He healed. He taught people, and freed others from every possible thing that bound them.

And yet He - this marvelous Person was rejected, abandoned, and tortured. And then He was crucified. Was that wicked? The biblical answer is "Yes" and the biblical answer is "No." The Bible says in one verse that the answer is yes and no. Here is Peter in Acts 2:23, speaking of Jesus -

"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;"

Lawless hands crucified Christ - that was wicked. But it was done by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God - that was good. From Mary's perspective, as she stood looking at her Son bleeding and dying, this was indeed wickedness. But from Mary's perspective when she later realized that His death is what washed away her lifetime of sins, she saw something entirely different, didn't she? She saw wickedness and she saw majesty in one act!

How is it that our faith, after being encouraged so many times through acts of God's love towards us can still be so immensely frail? How can our understanding of Him, even after having the entire plan laid out in the Bible, still be so unsure and wavering.

And how imperfect is our resolve to stand and say, I know that all things in fact do work together for good because I love God and am called according to His purpose? Why is my trust of Him only when I see Him. But when I'm in the darkened valley I suddenly think He's departed from me - like Jacob has in these verses?

When the apostles were out on a boat in Galilee, they got into a bit of a patch, didn't they? Here's what that says -

"Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, 'Let us cross over to the other side of the lake.'" And they launched out. 23 But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. 24 And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. 25 But He said to them, 'Where is your faith?'" Luke 8:22-25

These guys had already seen lepers cleansed, paralytics healed, and evil spirits cast out. They'd seen power radiating from Him as He healed multitudes. They'd even seen a widow's only son raised to life as he was being carried to his burial.

And yet, despite the calling, despite the wisdom in His teachings and the explanation of Kingdom matters which included them, despite the miracles, despite the power - they lost their faith as they were tossed about on the sea. Our sea of life is one of high waves and overflows of burdens, but He asks us to trust Him through it all... to have a little faith, even that of a mustard seed.

Let's endeavor to do this and not be like Jacob who had personally seen the Lord and yet allowed his own miseries to overcome the faith he should have possessed. Every week, I give a call for people to receive what they may never have had before, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. But today, maybe you need to receive what you once possessed and have now lost.

If you need Jesus, call out to Him to pardon you of your sins. Be reconciled to God and be free from what condemns. But if you need to renew your walk with Him, call out to Him and let Him know that. Redirect yourself to Him and He will bind up your wounds. Have faith in this wonderful Lord who walked on water and who died and rose again for you and me.

Closing Verse: My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:2-4

Next Week: Genesis 43:1-14 (A Difficult Decision for Israel) (107th Genesis Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you and He has a good plan and purpose for you. Call on Him and let Him do marvelous things for you and through you.

Where is God in All of This?

Then they went to Jacob their father
In the land of Canaan and him they told
All that had happened to them, all the bother
Saying: the circumstances of our journey were uncontrolled

"The man who is lord of the land
He surely spoke roughly to us
And took us for spies of the country
It was a bad situation, we now discuss
But we said to him, in an attempt to subdue
"We are honest men; we are not spies
We are speaking the truth to you
This is honesty from our lips, not lies

We are twelve brothers, sons of our father we say
One is no more, from us he is gone
And the youngest is with our father this day

In the land of Canaan, our words you can count on
Then the man, the lord of the country
Said to us, 'By this I will know
That you are honest men, thus I will see
If the words you have spoken are so

Leave one of your brothers here with me
Take for your households food for the famine
And be gone, off to Canaan except one detainee
Later, the truth of your words I will examine
And bring your youngest brother to me
So I shall know that you are not spies
But that you are honest men, speaking plainly
I will know you words are truth and not lies

I will grant your brother to you
And you may trade in the land
After I know that your words are true
And you have not dishonestly planned
Then it happened as their sacks they poured out
That surprisingly each man's bundle of money
Was in his sack which without a doubt
To them was something not very funny

And when they and their father
Saw the bundles of money
They were afraid, it was much bother
And life wasn't looking really very sunny
And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me
Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more
And you want to take Benjamin too I see

....

All of these things are against me
Then Reuben spoke to his father saying
"Kill my two sons if I do not
Bring him back to you as you are praying
Back to this place, yes this very spot

Put him in my hands
And I will bring him back to you
This is the thing father, I have committed to do
But he said, "My son shall not go down with you
For his brother is dead
And he is left alone, this idea eschew
Does this even really need to be said?

If any calamity should befall him there
Along the way in which you go
Then you would bring down my gray hair
With sorrow to the grave, I would perish in woe
Jacob's faith was lacking at this time
And it seems to us more than odd
That a man who had spoken to the Lord
Would waiver in his faith in God

But he is a flesh and blood man
He is another human like any of us
We drown in sorrows when we lose sight of the plan
Which God has revealed in the Lord Jesus
Help us O God to keep our eyes directed to You
Even in the deepest dark valley, that You are there
You are our faithful Protector, yes, we know its true
And in Your hand is our every woe and care

Thank You, thank You O God for Your sufficient grace
Thank You for Your guiding Light of love
You will surely carry us to Your glorious place
To the New Jerusalem in the heaven's above

Hallelujah and Amen...