

Understanding God in the Old Testament

A God Who Looks Out For Us

Genesis 25-35

Turn with me this morning to the book of Genesis, we will be continuing our study of understanding God in the Old Testament. We have up to this point seen the character of God and it shouldn't surprise us that he did send his Son, Jesus Christ, to come and help us, because as we have seen so far, God has always been for his people not against them.

He has always been a pursuing God who hopes for our return to him, he has always been a God of promise instilling hope for our future, and he has always been, and will always be with us no matter what trauma or pain, or sin we may commit, or what opposition or trial we may face. He is a faithful God in the Old Testament, he is a faithful God seen through his son, he is a faithful God who stand behind his church, and he is a faithful God to our everyday lives, and he will always be faithful.

We have seen that even though men have sinned against him, even when they do their own thing, God's desire is to redirect them back to himself, into a relationship. In the life of Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham, and Isaac we read of how God is faithful, and we now come to the life of Jacob where we will still see the same theme throughout his life.

We find that the beginning of Jacobs life was one of struggle. In **Genesis 25:21-23**:

The Lord answered Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant with twins. 22 But the two children struggled with each other in her womb. So she went to ask the Lord about it. "Why is this happening to me?" she asked. 23 And the Lord told her, "The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son."

Rebekah gives birth to two sons, Esau and Jacob. God in his foreknowledge was telling of the future, when the decedents of Esau would be idols worshipers and the descendents of Jacob would become the nation of Israel and eventually, the lineage of Christ which now applies to all of us as followers of Jesus Christ. And yet instead of allowing God to work this conflict out we find that Rebekah tries to take things into her own hands.

We read that the babies are born and on the way we read that Jacob grabs the heel of his brother Esau which is where he gets his name Jacob, meaning "he grasps the heel" which also has a figurative meaning as well which is "he deceives." Deception is a key theme throughout the life of Jacob. Not only is he a participant in deception but he also become the victim as well. In an effort to manipulate the fulfillment of God's words in Genesis 25:21-23 Rebekah and Jacob participate in a plan steal the blessing of the firstborn away

from Esau and they succeed. However, it leads to Jacob fleeing away from God's promised land in an effort to save his life from his brother.

At times we try to take things into our own hands, and we end up making a mess. Sometimes it may look like God's plan, but it's not, and with it will come suffering, hurt relationships, and the school of hard knocks. We can make such a mess, and yet **we serve a God who can take our plan B and turn it into plan A.** God doesn't leave us because of our stubbornness but waits till we give up on ourselves and turn back to him.

Jacob flees for his life, and yet we read that God meets him in his time of fear. It tells us in **Genesis 28:10-17:**

10 Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. 11 At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep. 12 As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway. 13 At the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. 14 Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. 15 What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you." 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!" 17 But he was also afraid and said, "What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God, the very gateway to heaven!"

God give Jacob a vision of a stairway to heaven where he continues to have access to God and where God promises protection, and a promise. **Even in the midst of our messes, we serve a God who is always available and will to work through and make his promises come to pass despite our humanness, insecurities and mess ups.** And when he begins to take our failures and turns them into his faithful demonstrations, then we will say, "surely the Lord is in this place and in my life." Jacob then makes a vow in **Genesis 28:22:**

20 Then Jacob made this vow: "If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing, 21 and if I return safely to my father's home, then the Lord will certainly be my God. 22 And this memorial pillar I have set up will become a place for worshiping God, and I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me."

How many of us know that when we make promises like this we better watch out, because God is going to put it to the test? Many times it doesn't come easy, it doesn't

come early, it comes just on time, and in a way that we have been stretched and matured. Jacobs makes this promise and God blesses him, yet not without a test. I am reminded of the words of Jesus in **Luke 6:31**:

31 Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

And as sinful human beings who are the focal point of our universe, that means we have to treat each other like, if not better, than we treat ourselves. But it almost seems in the life of Jacob, that the very thing he ends up doing to his brother, becomes the very test again him. Jacob goes to live with his Uncle Laban, falls in love with his cousin Rachel and vows to work for Laban for 7 years in order to marry her. It is clear here that Jacob wasn't afraid to work, and that he was deeply in love. In fact in **Genesis 29:20** it tells us:

20 So Jacob worked seven years to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days.

On the night of the wedding feast, Laban takes his first daughter and when it is dark tricks Jacob into sleeping with her. Jacob wakes up the next morning and realizes that he was deceived and confronts Laban and comes to an agreement that not only will he marry the first daughter but he will work another 7 years in order to pay for Rachel. Laban gives him Rachel right away and yet Jacob remains a man of his word and stays the second seven years.

I can't imagine how awkward it must have been for Leah, Laban's first daughter, having to marry a man because of your father's deception. Leah knows that she will never measure up to Jacobs love for Rachel, and yet she tries to gain his approval by having children hoping that that will change his heart. In fact it tells us in **Genesis 29:31-35**:

31 When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he enabled her to have children, but Rachel could not conceive. 32 So Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "The Lord has noticed my misery, and now my husband will love me." 33 She soon became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. She named him Simeon,* for she said, "The Lord heard that I was unloved and has given me another son." 34 Then she became pregnant a third time and gave birth to another son. She named him Levi,* for she said, "Surely this time my husband will feel affection for me, since I have given him three sons!" 35 Once again Leah became pregnant and gave birth to another son. She named him Judah,* for she said, "Now I will praise the Lord!" And then she stopped having children.*

God responded to her position and brought her to a place of being favored by society and her husband. **There are times when we feel like we are accident and worth nothing, and yet I can tell you time and time again that God can take nothing and turn it into something that will bring glory and praise to Him.** We find that it is from here that part of the tribes of Israel are derived, all out of a demonstration of compassion and grace

of God. Even to Rachel who had gone for a long time without children, cried out to God and it tells us in **Genesis 30:23-24**:

23 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. “God has removed my disgrace,” she said. 24 And she named him Joseph (may he add), for she said, “May the Lord add yet another son to my family.”*

We serve a God who responds to our cries out of compassion and grace. He doesn't have to solve our misery, especially many times when we have created it ourselves, but he chooses to answer our cries of anguish and discomfort because he loves us and cares for us.

After the birth of Joseph we find that Jacob wants to take his family and return to the promised land given to his father Isaac. But Laban pleads with Jacob in **Genesis 30:27**:

27 “Please don't leave me,” Laban replied. “I have become wealthy, for I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.

That's the way the world is at times, they want the blessings of God and yet take no responsibility to get it. The world will use people to be blessed, when we allow God to bless us divinely. But Jacob strikes a deal with Laban to stay only if Laban will give the spotted, striped, and dark colored sheep to him. Laban agrees and immediately sends his sons out to hide all the spotted, striped and dark colored sheep from Jacob. Yet, God miraculously provides. Laban sees that Jacob continues to thrive and begins to turn against Jacob.

I think there many of us who have a Laban in our lives, one who continues to deceive us, and trick us, making promises and never pulling through, and yet we continue in patience and in disappointment to trust that something will break loose. Let me say this, that **despite the deception and manipulation of people, God's true blessing will always come through for those who trust on God.** In fact, look at God's words to Jacob in **Genesis 31:12-13**:

The angel said, “For I have seen how Laban has treated you. 13 I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel, the place where you anointed the pillar of stone and made your vow to me. Now get ready and leave this country and return to the land of your birth.”*

God reminds Jacob of his promise made at Bethel to protect, and provide. Jacob then gathers up all of his family, flocks, and belongings and begins to travel back to see his brother Esau. Laban gathers up a group of his relatives to attack Jacob and God appears to Laban in a dream warning him to leave Jacob alone. Jacob is very much aware of God's sovereignty and intervention and we read his words in **Genesis 31:41-42**:

40 “I worked for you through the scorching heat of the day and through cold and sleepless nights. 41 Yes, for twenty years I slaved in your house! I worked for

fourteen years earning your two daughters, and then six more years for your flock. And you changed my wages ten times! 42 In fact, if the God of my father had not been on my side—the God of Abraham and the fearsome God of Isaac—you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen your abuse and my hard work. That is why he appeared to you last night and rebuked you!”*

God will always look out for you. Don't think that the abuse of others is going unseen. Don't think that your hard work and sleepless nights will go unrewarded. Don't think that he will allow people to get away with things without his intervention. Why do you think David kept crying out to God to protect him, guard him, and deliver him from his enemies time and time again? Because we serve a God who will not let those things slide by.

Jacob comes full circle – he deceives his brother, then experiences the result of deception in the person of Laban, yet God still provides abundantly and protects his life, and instead of a manipulative man you finally see a surrendered man. It is amazing how God lines up events in our lives in order to bring us to a point of surrender. We read Jacobs prayer in **Genesis 32:9**:

9 Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac—O Lord, you told me, ‘Return to your own land and to your relatives.’ And you promised me, ‘I will treat you kindly.’ 10 I am not worthy of all the unfailing love and faithfulness you have shown to me, your servant. When I left home and crossed the Jordan River, I owned nothing except a walking stick. Now my household fills two large camps! 11 O Lord, please rescue me from the hand of my brother, Esau. I am afraid that he is coming to attack me, along with my wives and children. 12 But you promised me, ‘I will surely treat you kindly, and I will multiply your descendants until they become as numerous as the sands along the seashore—too many to count.’”

Jacob knows he must reunite with his brother whom he deceived and stole the birth right from. He become dependent upon God for his intervention. After he sends on ahead all of his family, his belongings to the other side of the river, and is left there by himself we read that God appears to him in the form of a man and they wrestled until dawn. Jacob refuses to let go, even after God dislocates his hip. And we read in **Genesis 32:28** that God gives him a new name:

28 “Your name will no longer be Jacob,” the man told him. “From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won.”*

The name Israel means, “One who struggles and overcomes.” **I believe that God comes to us as well and calls us Israel (one who overcomes)** not because we are all that, but because of him and his blessing. It was as if God was telling Jacob that despite what he owned, despite how he manipulated people, God was still big enough to allow Jacob to

succeed in his restoration with Esau. We find exactly that - that Esau welcomes his brother back with open arms and in **Genesis 33:4** it tells us:

4 Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept.

And just as it happened in the life of Isaac, we find that God's kindness and grace, his intervention and faithfulness leads Jacob to a life of worship. Genesis 35:1-3 tells us:

1 Then God said to Jacob, "Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau." 2 So Jacob told everyone in his household, "Get rid of all your pagan idols, purify yourselves, and put on clean clothing. 3 We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone."

Maybe you have done things in the past that have been manipulative and God comes today and tells us that despite what you have done, there is more than enough grace to cover it. Maybe you have been hurt by others and have felt like you have been mistreated and God comes to us today and tells you to let him take care of you. He will provide and protect, and he is your source. Maybe you have felt overlooked like Jacob's wife Leah yet God comes to you today and says that he hears your cries and is moved by your pleas.

No matter where you are in life today, our God is one who looks out for us, even when we feel like no one else is. Turn your eyes to him, cry out to him, commit yourself to him and just as he was El Shaddai (the God Almighty) for Jacob, he is El Shaddai for you so that you can be called Israel (the one who overcomes) through the grace of his great strength. Let's Pray!