

Read the Whole Bible with Pastor

Monday (January 23) – Genesis 32

Last week our readings directed us through the first part of Jacob's story. You may want to reread Genesis 25:19-28, as it sets up some important themes in this week's readings. Note especially the circumstances of Jacob's birth, which lead to his naming. "Jacob" means "heel grabber", which is a Hebrew colloquialism, meaning "cheater." Take a moment to recall the ways in which Jacob's life has been characterized by cheating thus far.

In today's reading Jacob will begin learning to leave behind his former identity as a "cheater" as he is forced to wrestle with trusting in God. But leaving behind this identity will not be easy. After hearing of his brother Esau's seemingly hostile approach, Jacob turns to the Lord for deliverance (Genesis 32:9-12). Then comes one of the key moments in Jacob's life—he wrestles with God. This physical wrestling is reflective of the spiritual wrestling which had begun to define Jacob's life. As he leaves behind his former life in Haran, Jacob wrestles with his sinful tendency of self-preservation by cheating. Therefore, fittingly, the Lord gives Jacob a new name: Israel, which means, "he wrestles with God" (Genesis 32:28). This identity of wrestling with God (learning how to truly trust Him) would come to characterize not only the remainder of Israel's (Jacob's) life, but also the lives of his sons, the nation of Israel.

Tuesday (January 24) – Genesis 33, 34

In chapter 33, as Jacob reunites with his brother Esau, we notice more favoritism, which continues to be central to the Genesis story. Just as Isaac and Rebekah each favored a son, so, too, does Jacob favor his son, Joseph, by placing him last, most protected from Esau's approach. After the pleasantries Jacob demonstrates his continued "wrestling" with trust in God, as he again deceives his brother and settles far from Esau.

In chapter 34 Jacob's daughter Dinah is defiled by one of the Canaanites, Shechem, son of Hamor, on whose land Jacob's family dwelt. Jacob's sons take matters into their own hands, deceiving ("cheating") Shechem and Hamor by promising the hand of their sister in marriage on the condition that Hamor, Shechem, and their people be circumcised. Then seizing the opportunity of the men's weakened state, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, wickedly obtain vengeance for their sister by putting to death the men of Hamor and Shechem's city.

Wednesday (January 25) – Genesis 35

As Jacob leaves behind the place of his daughter's defiling, he returns to the place where the Lord had appeared to him many years before (Genesis 28:10-22). The Lord reiterates Jacob's new identity and name, and He gives to him the promise of Abraham and Isaac. It is through Jacob that God's promise to bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3) will be fulfilled. As Jacob's youngest son, Benjamin, is born, his mother, Rachel, dies in childbirth. Her premature death is an ironic fulfillment of Jacob's words to Laban in Genesis 31:32, as the one who stole Laban's household idols dies. The twelve sons of Jacob (Israel) are now complete. After the death of Isaac, these patriarchs become the focus of the Genesis story.

Thursday (January 26) – Genesis 36

Genealogies are a common narrative feature throughout Genesis, often used to signal a shift in focus, as one character or set of characters move off the scene to make way for another. Genealogies are also a helpful way to tie up loose ends of a story. Such is the case in Genesis 36. While he has not been the central character in the previous section of Genesis, Esau has been integral to the story. This chapter enumerates Esau's descendants before the story moves on to focus on Jacob's sons. However, there is also one vital piece of information which this chapter provides that ought to be noted before moving on: Esau is also known as Edom (Genesis 36:8). The Edomites will appear at several key future junctures of the biblical story.

Friday (January 27) – Genesis 37, 38

Genesis 37 begins the final major section of the book of Genesis, with a focus on Jacob's sons, especially Joseph. The story of Joseph's dreams and his being sold into slavery in Egypt is well-known. Notice, though, that it is Jacob's favoring of Joseph as much as Joseph's own actions which cause the brothers to act in anger towards him. When the brothers throw Joseph into the pit and agree to sell him to the Ishmaelites, it is Reuben (the oldest) who stands up for Joseph. However, the brothers listen to Judah (the ancestor of David and Jesus).

In chapter 38 we read the story of Judah and Tamar. Read in isolation, this chapter seems oddly out of place. However, with the larger biblical story kept in mind, this story's contrast with the story of Joseph is beautifully fitting. Judah fails to resist sexual temptation, yet from Perez, the descendent of his sinful union with Tamar, Jesus would one day be born (see Matthew 1:1-16, especially v. 3). In contrast, Joseph does resist sexual temptation (see chapter 39), but from his descendants come the Ephraimites, who would lead the apostasy of Israel's northern kingdom (see Hosea 5:3). The Lord's great reversal and His repeated use of sinners to accomplish His purposes is truly humbling! (See Luke 1:46-55).

Saturday (January 28) – Genesis 39

The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife reveals the cruelty of the world. As the saying goes, "no good deed goes unpunished." Joseph had been thrown into the pit by his brothers. Through his integrity and dedication, he had worked up to a high-level position in the household of an Egyptian officer, Potiphar. However, in an instant, all of that was gone, and Joseph found himself back where he started—in the pit of the king's prison. But the Lord was not done with Joseph. He continued to bless him, as He had even greater purposes in mind.

Sunday (January 29) – Genesis 40

This chapter sets the stage for the "greater purposes" the Lord had in mind for Joseph. He was faithful in the little things, as he trusted in the Lord and provided interpretations to the dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. Joseph's interpretations proved correct, but the chief cupbearer failed to remember Joseph, as he had promised. Again, "no good deed goes unpunished." However, the Lord had not forgotten Joseph, as we will soon see.