

God in the Background

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[0 : 0 0] Great, well thank you very much for reading that Gary and I'll just add my welcome to everyone this morning. It's a privilege to be here and to be able to open up God's Word to us this morning. Let me just pray as we begin. Father as we have sung this morning, speak O Lord and give us listening ears and open hearts to be receptive to your Word. Amen. So we're in Genesis. We've been going through from chapter 25 and we find ourselves this morning in chapter 29. So a bit of a catch-up. Maybe you've not been here or maybe you just, catch-up is always good, isn't it? Remind us of where we've been. So Genesis, we're in the first book of the Bible. We have creation. The world is made. We have the fall. Sin comes in and then sin develops and then we end up with the flood. The flood wipes God's judgment. Noah restarts the population and then we end up with the Tower of Babel and then God disperses the nations into the world. Then a wee while later, God chooses Abraham. Abraham is going to be the father of the nations.

I've got a little graphic. You might be able to see that if you've got good eyes. But if not, it basically just shows a little bit of a family tree. Might be helpful. We basically have Abraham. He has his son Isaac. And then we find ourselves this morning with Jacob. So Jacob is Abraham's grandson. Okay. And our series heading, as we had on our first slide, is when God's grace meets our mess. When God's grace meets our mess. And Jacob is in a mess. He is in a real mess. In chapter 27, he's too weak to challenge his mum's plan to steal the blessing from his older brother Esau. He goes along with the plan. And because of the deception, Esau wants revenge. Esau, he comes across as an angry man. And so because of this, Jacob is sent away, partly to escape his brother's wrath, but also to find a wife back in his mother's home country, rather than marrying someone from the people they are living with. And then last week, Kenny took us through chapter 28. And this is where we see God's grace. In chapter 28, Jacob, a real failing man, but got you as promised a future place to live. He's promised that he will have descendants and that God will watch over him and will be with him all of his days. And also that his people will bless the whole world. So we go into this morning's passage and Jacob goes into the events of these things with that ringing in his head.

God's promised that I will be with you no matter what. And Jacob, at the end of 28, just before this, he vows, I will serve you, Lord. But then he puts a few conditions on whether he will serve God or not. So now we hit chapter 29 this morning. Now this is an unusual passage. It doesn't mention God at all by name. It doesn't say God, it doesn't say the Lord. God isn't mentioned.

But what we will see is that God works in the background. His sovereignty shines out through this passage without even being mentioned. Don't know if anyone's a fan of classical music. A few nods. Fiona, that doesn't surprise me.

[3 : 3 6] Very musical. Well, basically there's a guy at the front and he's got two sticks. You know what I mean? The conductor. He stands right at the front, but he faces this way. Everyone in the orchestra looks at him. They're all facing him. Now you've got some talented people in this orchestra. You've got violinists that could amaze you. You've got trombonists. But everyone looks at this guy at the front with the two sticks. And you know why? It's because he controls every single one of them. They follow his timing. He makes sure that they all come together to sound amazing. And that's a wee bit like God in this passage. God isn't front and center, but he is controlling the events. So this morning we're going to look at three headings. We're going to see God's direction in verse 1 to 14. God's direction. We're going to see Jacob's devotion in 15 to 21.

And we're going to see Laban's deception in verse 22 and 23. So first of all, God's direction. Kenny talked about last week, Jacob goes on this journey from his family to find a wife back at his mom's home country. Now this, you can see the red line up there.

You don't really need to see the detail, but this was a huge journey. This was about 450 miles, something like that. And you know, there was no sat-nav. There was no cars. There was no planes, trains, automobiles. This was a big old journey. But we see in verse 1 that he came to the land of the Eastern peoples. He finds himself in exactly the right place. Verse 2, he saw a well in the open country. God's guidance here. He's done this massive journey. This would be a big land and he comes across the very well where he needs to be. And he finds that there's these flocks of sheep lying around.

There's these shepherds. And God's guidance, these shepherds, they know Laban. They know Laban. Not only is he in the right place, but he's at exactly the right time as well.

Verse 6 says, is he well? Yes, he is. And here we see God's timing. Oh, and here comes his daughter, Rachel, with the sheep. Just to the exact right moment, Rachel appears on cue from stage left.

[6 : 20] In she comes with the sheep. Now, Rachel was a shepherdess, a female shepherd. Quite unusual for that day. We don't really hear many other female shepherds. Now, we've got to remember that a shepherd in that day, that was a tough gig. I think we maybe see the cartoon figure of the person standing there with the staff and it's a nice day and just watching the sheep eat some grass. But we know from David that he had to fight wolves. He fought off bears to protect the sheep. They'd have been out all day long in the blistering heat, making sure that the sheep were fed. This was a tough gig. And you know, Rachel's name actually means you, as in E-W-E, sheep. So Rachel comes along with God's timing, just as Jacob gets there.

Next, in 7 to 10, we have a... In this passage, it's slightly odd to us because it's just so out with our context. I'm pretty sure no one here is a shepherd. And even if they were, it wouldn't look like what it looked like in this day. But in 7 to 10, we have this kind of strange discussion about being able to water the sheep and when they can do it. You know, Jacob, in verse 7, he says to the shepherds, he says, look, the sun is still high. It is not time for the flocks to be gathered. That would be at night, you know, to keep them safe. He says, water the sheep and take them back to pasture to keep feeding. You know, Jacob's not speaking here out of turn. He was a man of the land. He knew sheep. That was what he did as well. He was experienced. So he knew what he was talking about. They say, we can't. We have to wait till everyone comes. Then we roll the stone off the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep. You know, this mouth of the well, this would have been the well for miles around. This was a desert place. It would have been dry. It wasn't the soggy hills of Scotland.

This was a desert land. But this well, this gave life to the sheep. They came, they gathered. Once everyone got there, they rolled the stone off the mouth of the well. The stone would have been to protect the well, protect it from getting dust in it, from animals dying in it. It was a protecting stone. And this would have been a big old stone as well. And part of me reckons, and I don't know this for sure, but part of me reckons that the reason they had to wait for everyone to get there was that it probably would have taken all of them to push it to the side. This would have been a big, heavy stone to protect the well. But what do we see? Well, Jacob gets given exactly the right strength. God's help comes. While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd. And verse 10, when Jacob saw Rachel, daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban's sheep, he went over, rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well, and watered his uncle's sheep. Jacob was given strength and help here to be able to do it on his own, to roll this stone away to water, to do this serving thing towards his uncle's sheep.

You know, we read passages like this, and we sometimes think, you know, what's going on here? You know, I was reading this this week, and I thought, roll the stone away. You can't help but think of the tomb, can we? We've not long had Easter. The tomb, the stone was rolled away.

[9 : 57] And you know, here, the stone was rolled away from the mouth of the well. This was a one, this happened every day, and it gave life to the sheep. Water means life. They were fed on the pastures, but they had to come once a day so that they could drink the water, and it kept the sheep alive. And you know, this tomb, when the stone was rolled away from the tomb, there was nothing special in that of itself, but it showed that Christ was risen. You know, the Lord Jesus, he came, he died.

He suffered the punishment that we deserved. But that wasn't the end of the story. The stone was rolled away, signifying that Christ was risen. We have a living Savior, and at his resurrection, that rolling of that stone away from the tomb, that gave life. Christ had defeated death, and if we accept

him as our Savior, then we have that life-giving water that Christ talks about. So that was God's help. And then in 11 to 14, exactly the right response is given. And here we really see God's goodness towards Jacob.

Jacob kissed Rachel in verse 11, and he began to weep. It would have been relief. What a journey. I've made it. I've met who I was meant to meet. This, just a side note, this kissing here was just a greeting.

We see Laban do it a few verses later. This was just a greeting to what would have been his cousin. And you know, Rachel tells, so Jacob tells Rachel who he is. Rachel runs and tells Laban who he's met.

We've got to remember as well, this is a long time since Rebecca had left the land to go and marry Isaac. This actually, this whole passage is a mirror of chapter 24. In chapter 24, Abraham wants a wife for his son, Isaac. He gets his most trusted servant and he makes him promise to go back to the land that he came from, which would be this land here, and find a wife for Isaac. The servant goes. He goes with prayer in his heart. He prays to God that he will find the right person. He prays for God for a sign that they will be able to, to find the exact person that God wants Isaac to marry. And once again, they end up at the well and Rebecca waters his sheep and she is given by Laban to go and marry Isaac.

[12:31] And it's a mirror of this event, except here we don't hear God at all. Abraham's servant trusted God, let God lead him where he wanted to go. It was a God-orientated event.

But here we don't see that. We don't hear from God, but God still guides these events for his own purposes, despite Jacob's lack of trust, lack of dependence on him. I think the lesson for us from this is, are we trusting in God in our daily life? Do we fully commit to him, let him lead us through life? Not just take things into our own hands, not just strive on, do what we think is best. Do we fully trust in God's sovereignty?

This takes us to our second heading, which is Jacob's devotion in 15 to 21. So Jacob stays with Laban for a month.

Laban will have seen that Jacob is a good shepherd. He was a good businessman, that he knew what he was doing with sheep and how to grow them, how to manage them. And Laban, being a clever man, he offers some wages. He says, look, just because you're a relative, should you work for nothing? What do you want?

We also don't hear of Laban having sons at this point, so potentially he thought, you know what, having a man about would be great. So he says, look, what do you want?

[14:16] Now we have a slight aside where we meet the family. We meet the family in verse 16 and 17. So we have the sisters who are compared. Laban had two daughters, verse 16. The name of the older was Leah. The name of the younger was Rachel. We hear that Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. We don't entirely know what weak eyes means. We don't know the exact, but she either had some sort of sight problem or she had something wrong with her eyes.

But long story short, the younger one was more attractive and Jacob loved Rachel. You know, once again, God has never consulted here. Jacob doesn't pray to God and say, look, God, you made all these promises. Who should I marry? What should I do? Jacob just goes with his heart.

So in 18 to 20, we see that Jacob makes an offer that Laban can't refuse. And here we have Jacob's service. So he's in love with Rachel. He says, I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel. Seven years. Whoa. That's a lot, isn't it? You know, once again, this is just foreign to us.

But back in the ancient Near East, there would have been massive dowries to marry someone. This was just part of the culture. We've got to remember here that Jacob turned up and he was essentially a fugitive. He fled his brother's wrath. He traveled all this way and he came with nothing. He had nothing to offer Laban apart from his time. So that's what he offers. He says, I'll work for you seven years.

I don't have money to give for your daughter, but I can work it off. So that's what he does. And it says, Laban says, it's better that I give her to you than to some other man.

[16:19] Stay here with me. Now, I think Laban's playing it cool because I think this was a prized asset. Seven years of work. Great. I think Laban was chuffed. So verse 20, Jacob served seven years to get Rachel. He did that. But they seem like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Now, I'll be married seven years in August and I can't say it's been like a few days. And I'm not just saying that because my wife's not here. I think she's probably had it worse with me than me with her. You know, seven years is a long time.

But such was Jacob's love for Rachel that it just seemed to go so quick. You know, just as the stone reminded us of the tomb in the first section, Jacob's devotion to his bride really reminds us of Christ's love for his bride.

The work that Jacob did here for his bride, seven years of work. What a lot of work. And yet Christ's work for his bride, which is the church, which is you and I, if we are followers of him, was so much more.

Christ made his bride ready for him, making us pure and righteous because of the work of the cross. Such a beautiful image that if you want to look at that further, look at John 3.

[17:49] Look at Ephesians 5. Look at Revelation 19 to 22. It's a really great thing to study. Let me just read Ephesians 5. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Christ did that massive work of the cross so that he could present his bride, the church, to himself. You know, I like to think that Rachel, she's living, she's watching Jacob work these seven years just to marry her.

Now, you have to think that that would impress her, that she thinks, wow, what devotion, what commitment Jacob has to me. You know, Christ has done so much more for us than Jacob did for Rachel.

The challenge for us then is, what is our loving response? Do we serve Christ willingly because of the work that he has done?

Not out of some sense of trying to pay it off. We can never pay it off. Not out of some sense of duty. Well, Christ did that for me, so I better, you know, come and clean the church on a Saturday morning just to make up for it.

[19:15] But it's a loving response. And our love for Christ, do we serve in the tea and coffee rota? Do we welcome people in? Do we just in our daily lives display Christ to those who don't know him?

That's the challenge. So then in 21, we have Jacob's demand. He says, my time has come. Give me my wife.

And you know what? He's done seven years. I think by this point, he's ready. So finally, this leads us to Laban's deception.

Our final heading. 21 to 24, the deceiver, the great deceiver Jacob is deceived. So we have Laban's deception.

Jacob is tricked. They have a big feast. They have a big wedding day. This would have been a massive event. Invite everyone around. Kill the fatted calves.

[20:15] Let's have a party. But we see when evening came, he took his daughter Leia, brought her to Jacob. And Jacob made love to her. And Laban gave his servant to be the attendant.

Laban deceives Jacob. He gives the other daughter. We can kind of read this and we go, how? Come on. Surely. Surely you'd know.

But it does say that it's evening time. This would have been in the desert. This would have been pitch black. Also, the bride in that day would have been heavily veiled. You wouldn't have seen. We don't see it, but, you know, perhaps there was drink involved.

We don't know. That's speculation. But what we do know is that Jacob reaped what he sowed.

Didn't he? Jacob, the ultimate deceiver, what he did to his brother Esau back with his family.

He really reaped what he sowed here. Don't know if you've been tricked before. Maybe just an office prank or maybe something more serious than that. But it doesn't feel great.

[21:18] It doesn't feel good. You know, my namesake JT, not John Terry, but Justin Timberlake. He sings a song and the chorus says, What goes around comes back around.

Now, I probably wouldn't read the rest of those lyrics for moral guidance. But it's true. It's true, isn't it? Not in a kind of karma sense that, you know, if I punch someday, I'll get punched tomorrow.

Not in that kind of karma sense of things. But we cannot believe that our consequences don't have repercussions. That our actions can't have repercussions, sorry.

We can't believe that God will not be fooled. We know that from the Bible. We know that from reading that what we do has consequences and that we can't just get away scot-free. And that is certainly true for Jacob. So then we see in verse 25, the big reveal. Morning comes. [22 : 22] And there's Leah, the wrong daughter. Jacob is incredulous, isn't he? What is this you've done to me?

I served you for Rachel, didn't I? And then he's got the hypocrisy to say, Why have you deceived me? You know, after all Jacob's done, the hypocrisy of those words. You can hear him saying, You called me flesh and blood. We're family. I'm your nephew. How could you do this to me? Your own flesh and blood. You know, he just doesn't get it, does he? He just doesn't get it. He doesn't see it. Because of this, Laban, and you know, I think Laban was a clever guy. Laban's guile here.

A deal is made. Laban says in verse 26, It's not our custom to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish the daughter's bride a week.

[23 : 22] Then we'll give you the younger one as well. You know, here, Jacob, he must have heard these words. Laban laying out to Jacob saying, You know what?

In this country, we actually honor the firstborn. The firstborn must come first. That must have stuck in Jacob's heart. Surely at that point, he thought he'd been in the wrong.

But we don't see any repentance. And once again, Laban adds on at the end, in return for another seven years of work. I think this was the plan all along.

This prized asset of Jacob, a man of the land that knew sheep. Laban got Leah married off. And he knew that Jacob would still work for Rachel.

He knew how much he was devoted to her. You know, I think Jacob got this thrown in his face here. About the respected firstborn.

[24 : 23] And just what he had done to his brother. So he does the seven years of work. He does it. He commits to it. He eventually has his prize, Rachel, which he was working for all along.

So then finally we have Jacob's compromise. So he has Rachel, his wife. He works another seven years to work that off.

But we read in verse 30, his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. Rachel was the favorite. He took Rachel to be his second wife.

Now just a wee aside here that the Bible, it doesn't comment on polygamy. It doesn't comment directly here about that. But we know from elsewhere in the Bible and it's explicit that this is wrong. It was not God's plan for Jacob to have two wives. But this is what happened. But just to be clear on that, it is not correct. But this is what happens.

[25 : 30] He has two, but we see that he has a favorite. And what we will see later on in Genesis is that it causes him all ends of bother. These two wives.

They fight. They clash. It causes him a real headache. But Jacob here, he has a favorite. Just like his parents did.

Isaac loved Esau, the hunter. But Rebecca loved Isaac. And that didn't end well, did it? And neither will this.

Neither will this Leah and Rachel situation end well for Jacob. Leah, she is forever the forgotten one. She's, in worldly terms, she's less attractive.

She is forgotten about most of the time by Jacob. And yet what we will see is that she'll carry the ancestral line to Jesus. She was the chosen one through whom Jesus will eventually come.

[26 : 27] You can read that in Matthew, the ancestral line. That comes through Judah. And also Leah has Levi, who is the priestly line as well. And we'll go on to see that Rachel, she'll toil all her life.

She can't have children. She eventually has Joseph, who is Jacob's favorite child. And then she has Benjamin, but she dies giving birth to Benjamin. So what can we see from this?

Well, God often uses the weak. Leah is the unnatural choice. If you are choosing a line to be descended from, well, go with Rachel. She's better looking.

She's, you know, she's great. She's beautiful. We'll go with her. But you know, God uses whoever he wishes. It doesn't matter about our worldly standing for God to use us.

Why? Because it is God that matters. It is not us. We can't do anything of ourselves. We just have to be willing to let God use us. That's our passage this morning.

[27 : 32] We've seen that Jacob, he didn't trust God's promises that he'd had. He went on his own. He took things into his own hands. And quite frankly, it goes pear-shaped. But God, who is sovereign over all, despite the mess, he guides and he keeps Jacob through these situations, despite his failings.

Jacob fails in his promises to serve God. And yet God does not fail in his promises. We saw God's direction and care over Jacob and getting there, the right place, the right time.

So are we letting God lead us? We saw Jacob's devotion to his bride. He loved Rachel so much. A reminder of Christ's love for us.

A challenge that have we put our trust in him. And we saw Laban's deception at the end, where Jacob really reaps what he sowed, didn't he?

Our actions, they have consequences. We can't pretend otherwise. And God, he'll go on to fulfill his promise through Jacob. He will have descendants that will fill the earth.

[28 : 41] But it will be through the unnatural choice of Leah. God uses who he wishes, because he is powerful. And it is up to him. We just have to be willing to be used by God.

Let me just pray for us as we close and let the band come up for our final couple of hymns. God and Father, I just thank you for your word.

We thank you that we can glean so much from it. We thank you that from each and every passage we can learn from it. You can speak to us. And we thank you that we can see Jesus, especially through these Old Testament passages that just point to him.

We pray that we will consider these things over the course of today and this week, and that you will just continue to speak to us. That we will trust our lives to you.

That we will let you lead us, no matter where that ends up. And that we will just have that faith to do that. We thank you for your promises, and that it came true that Jesus was born through the line of Jacob, and for his work of the cross.

[29 : 56] And that that wasn't the end, but that he was risen again, resurrected Savior, and that we have that great high priest on whom we can rely. So Father, we just thank you so much for that.

Help us. Give us strength, we pray. We just thank you for your goodness and for the Lord Jesus. And it's in his name we pray. Amen.