

Weaving life 1 of 4, Careful who you offend – 21jan2023

Hi all,

The longer I live the more I see the Father God weaving together all the elements of life to reveal His involvement in every detail.

It is as if He 'winks' at us in subtle ways which if noticed, is like He is saying 'I am here'. These 'God winks' give us assurance and confidence in His ability to weave together the fabric of our lives.

Meant it for evil?

This series examines the lives of 4 situations the Lord used to get His will done, sometimes in spite of themselves. Sometimes it isn't until after the event(s) that we are able to look back in review and see His hand at work.

An example is Joseph who we first see as an arrogant 17 year old. In Genesis 37 he has the nerve to share prophetic dreams with his family, including his jealous older brothers. Though much younger, he was their boss and clearly their father's favorite. They sold him into slavery, lied to their father telling him he had been killed, and then went about their business for the next 13 years.

You know the story: Sold to Potiphar, promoted to run his household, falsely accused, imprisoned, promoted to run the prison, interpreted dreams, brought before Pharaoh, put in charge of securing Egypt for the famine foretold to arrive 7 years later.

When his brothers came to Egypt to buy food in year 2 of the famine*, Joseph revealed who he was. In Genesis 50:20 Joseph comments as he looks back over these events: "You thought it for evil, but God meant it for good." *45:6

The Hebrew is more clear and can be translated this way: "You thought evil but God overruled your plans with His own thoughts, turning it for good." Another translation puts it this way: "You meant it for evil, but God wove it together to make it good."

This series is about how God weaves things together

My hope is that it will cause us to pause and look back, then look at the present, to see His hand at work weaving together the elements of our lives.

Situation 1: David and Bathsheba

In II Samuel 11:1 we are told 'in the spring when kings go out to war' David sent his army out, but he stayed in the city. This is the first clue something is about to go wrong - he was not where he should have been, not doing what he should have been doing.

The result was that he had some leisure time on his hands, and as happens with many men when they are bored, his thoughts turned to women. He saw Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, bathing on her roof top.

You know the story I'm sure: He took Bathsheba, after their tryst that got her pregnant, had her husband put in the front of the army so he would be killed. This freed him to marry the widowed wife. Nathan confronted him, and his sin was forgiven - we have Psalm 51 that he wrote in his repentance. Verse 10 in particular stands out: "Create in me a clean heart in my O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Who is watching?

At this time King David had several royal advisors, chief among them was Ahithophel. Ahithophel's wisdom was legendary and he was deeply trusted by King David.

David's son Absalom rebelled as II Samuel chapters 15-17 tell us. Ahithophel became involved in the plot against David, purposely giving him bad counsel that played right into the hands of the rebels. Eventually however, the rebels did not follow his advice and knowing the cause was lost, committed suicide by hanging himself.

He had helped start the whole thing by encouraging Absalom to rebel, counseled him on how to do it, planned the killing of the king, and ruined any possibility at reconciliation. Why?

The devil is in the details

There is an American phrase that other nations have also have, or something similar: *The devil is in the details*. That expression is used to explain that a plan looks great, but the real work and real troubles come in the implementation of the plan. In this case the saying is quite literal: The devil really was in the details of the plot against David.

We are told in II Samuel 11:3 that Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam. That's interesting enough, but when we read II Samuel 23:34 we read Eliam's father was none other than David's favorite counselor, Ahithophel. That means Bathsheba was Ahithophel's granddaughter.

Why did Ahithophel rebel against King David?

Because he was right there to see the whole ugly truth. His boss the king taking his granddaughter for his own, destroying any respect he held for him. His granddaughter's husband murdered so that the king could hide his affair and her pregnancy. He carried that offense in his heart where it became hatred, eventually plotting the death of his boss the king.

The point of each of the 4 situations we will examine is how God weaves things together to get His larger will done, sometimes in spite of ourselves. It isn't about Ahithophel and Absalom and their plot.

No, it is about God the Father's ability to give us Solomon, the wisest of all men of the Old Testament. It's about how in spite of David's sin, in spite of his deceit, the Father God still gave us Solomon from a marriage begun in the worst of circumstance.

That Solomon had a close and loving relationship with his father (David) and mother (Bathsheba) is evident in the first 9 chapters of Proverbs.

In those first 9 chapters Solomon is quoting what his father told him. Proverbs 1:1-8 make it clear:

"My son, hear the instruction of your father, don't forsake the law (torah) of your mother." (He repeated the command not to forget the words of his mother in 6:20)

Throughout the first 3 chapters he says 'My son' repeatedly, as he quotes his father King David. And in chapter 4:3-5 Solomon wrote: "I was my father's son, tender and beloved in the sight of my mother (Bathsheba)...He taught me saying...my son...get wisdom and with wisdom get understanding..."

Is it any wonder growing up in this loving family with such devoted parents telling him to get wisdom, that when the Lord appeared to the young king asking him what he wanted, Solomon said he wanted wisdom and understanding? (I Kings 3:1-10)

Let us be encouraged that no matter how badly we mess things up, no matter how bad the circumstances were that we caused and what came of those circumstances, the Lord is still capable of accomplishing His will.

More than that, to bring blessing out of our mess!

Look for the Father weaving the threads of your life together, and remember that David died before he saw his son ascend to the throne of Israel. The Lord was faithful in spite of David's carnality, in spite of his sins, to accomplish His will. It took longer than David's life to bring it to pass, but He did in fact bring His will to fulfillment.

Get our eyes off ourselves, praying 'bless this mess', and tackle life trusting in the Father's ability to weave things together to be a blessing.

New example next week, until then, blessings,
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Weaving life 2 of 4. Promises and a long memory– 28jan2023

Hi all,

This is the story of God's long memory; His ability to keep His promises. If you feel the Lord has given you promises about a loved one, but you don't see it coming to pass yet, this will encourage you. If you are wondering if something promised to you will ever happen, this will encourage you.

The time is roughly 1,400 BC

Exodus 17 tells us Israel had just emerged from the parting of the Sea as a brand new nation, only to arrive at Rephidim which means in Hebrew: 'Resting place'. One problem: They had no water.

The Lord told Moses that He would stand on a rock, and instructed Moses to hit the rock one time with his staff, and it would give water. The symbolism is beautiful. The rock and the Lord standing on it is a type of Christ Jesus. The striking of the Rock 1 time with the staff (Word of God/prophecy) was a type of the cross, resulting in water (the Holy Spirit) being poured out from the Rock. The water quenched the thirst of the people.

Later, in Numbers 20:8, Moses would come upon another situation like this, and the Lord told him this time to merely speak to the rock and it would bring forth water. The first example required the Rock to be struck as a type of Jesus on the cross, but salvation is believing in the heart, then confessing with our mouth that Jesus is Lord.

That's why this 2nd time he was just supposed to speak to the rock to bring water. Because he got caught in the strife of the congregation he hit the rock as he did at the first, in a severe violation of what he knew of the Lord, His plan of salvation, and was in fact rather an insult in the face of the Lord. That sin caused the Lord to judge him, forbidding him from entering the Promised Land. The more you know, the more slim the grace in some things.

Immediately after Moses hit the rock and water came out

Israel was attacked by their cousins the Amalekites, in Exodus 17:8. Genesis 36:12 tells us Amalek was the illegitimate son of Esau's son, and it was his descendants that attacked their cousins the newly formed Israel. It was an ambush we are told.

It is here in Exodus 17:10-15 the battle between the cousins was so long and hard that it raged all day. We are also told as long as Moses kept his hands raised Israel prevailed, but when he got tired and let his hands down, Amalek started to win.

The solution was for Aaron and Hur to have Moses sit on a rock, and they held his hands up. Again we have foreshadowing of salvation: Moses means 'drawn out' as he was drawn out of the river to answer a higher call, seating himself in rest on the Rock.

Furthermore, Aaron means 'strength' or 'exalted' or 'strong' and the root of Hur (harar) means a source of heat or to burn. The derivative means 'hole or cavern', as where one would build a fire to warm the place, the source of fire.

So we have the one drawn out seated upon the rock of his salvation, exalted on the one hand as he burns with zeal for the Lord with the other, winning the battle! It is here we see a redemptive name given the Lord, Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord my victory banner.

As a result of Amalek's ambush verses 14-16 tells us the Lord promises Moses He would be at war with Amalek through all generations until they are completely wiped out.

Flash forward 400 years to about 1,000 BC

King Saul reigns, and once he becomes established the Lord tells him to go to war with Amalek in I Samuel 15:1-3 telling him: "I remember what Amalek did to Israel, lying in wait along the way when he (Israel) came out of Egypt...therefore go to war and destroy the sinners the Amalekites (v18) all of them and all they have..."

But Saul spared the life of king Agag of the Amalekites and his family, and the best of the animals. Though Agag was later executed that day, it is clear some of his family survived. How do we know this?

Fast forward again, 600 years to about 480 BC

We are now roughly 1,000 years after Moses, 600 years after king Saul, and we find a certain man named Haman who hates Jewish people. You know the story; Haman plots against the Jewish people, laying a trap, not realizing the queen is Jewish. Through her boldness, risking her own life, the plot is revealed and Haman is executed on the gallows he had prepared for Esther's uncle Mordecai.

We may wonder why the book of Esther is in our Bible. It is the only book of the Bible not to mention God, and it doesn't feature the birth of any notable people in the lineage of Jesus. I submit one of the reasons the Lord made sure to have it in our Bible is to show the Lord's long memory and faithfulness.

Haman is identified 5 times in Esther as 'Haman the Agagite'. (3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24) Agag you will recall, was the king that Saul had spared some 600 years earlier. His surviving family kept the name alive, all the way to the book of Esther, still bound by that hatred for cousin Israel.

Haman the Agagite was of the same hatred held by Amalek against Israel so long ago in the original ambush. It was the Lord's poetic justice that Haman had also laid a trap, an ambush for the Jewish people, and once again the Lord prevailed. The feast of Purim celebrates this, the Lord's final victory over the Amalekites.

Our lesson?

Many of us have received promises of the Lord concerning everything from our own lives, to the eternal destinies of loved ones. We sometimes get anxious or worried when we see circumstances contrary to the promise.

The circumstances are not an indicator about the progress of the Lord's word to you. Hebrews 11:13 lists several people of great faith, concluding: "These all died in faith not having received the promises..."

Whether you live or die has no bearing on the promises of God coming to pass. You're already in eternity, so if you have a promise or call on your life and it isn't going to happen in this age, give it 200 or 500 years. His Word will come to pass.

He will do what He promised you, so rest in that. Just stop trying to figure it out, and rest. Come to the end of yourself, and rest. Quit. Stay in His peace. Go back to the original promise and find that peace again. Let Him handle it.

He will do it! He has a long memory and is not a man that He would lie.

Another situation next week, until then, blessings,
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Weaving Life 3 of 4, helping a prostitute get settled – 4feb2023

Hi all,

Have you lived long enough to understand how a tiny, everyday decision can have a life changing effect? Sometimes for good and sometimes for bad. When it is bad we talk of of the 'law of unintended consequences'. When it is good we look back and say 'That was God'.

The singer Jewel has a song called 'I Do' and one line observes: "Life can take a long time if you make the wrong choice." We can repent, but we still have to walk it out. Forgiveness is about the vertical, how God loves us and forgives us. But the other component is the horizontal, the consequence, the impact of our decisions. We can be forgiven of the sin in the vertical, but the injury in the horizontal must be lived to its conclusion - redemption or destruction.

And sometimes we look at a situation and assess it properly, understanding the time and season, and are waiting for our chance.

The Moabite woman named Rahab was just such a person, in such a time

The whole of the newly formed Israeli nation was a short distance from her home on the inner wall of Jericho. Joshua sent 2 spies to gain intelligence for the upcoming battle. They stayed at Rahab's.

The Hebrew word translated here as 'harlot' or 'prostitute' is 'zonah', which can be translated 'innkeeper', and there is little doubt that was one element of why the 2 spies spent the night there. But both Hebrews and James* call her a 'harlot' or 'prostitute' and the Greek has no variability in its meaning: She was a prostitute. In her inn keeping duties it seems she picked up a cash on the side. *Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25

When a lie is honored

But the New Testament tells us she had great faith in the God of Israel, and it was counted to her for righteousness. And she was very brave. She lied to the authorities when she hid the 2 spies, and made them promise that she and her household would be spared.

Let me take a side-trip here to talk of her lie. The king of Jericho asked in Joshua 2:3-4 for her to turn over the spies, but she told him they were no longer there and she didn't know where they went, when in fact she had hidden them inside.

In Exodus 1:15-21 we see 2 Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, being told by Pharaoh to kill all the male newborns by throwing them in the river. They feared God more than Pharaoh so they disobeyed. When called before Pharaoh they lied, saying the Jewish women gave birth faster than the Egyptian women. Verses 20-21 tells us God blessed them for their actions and gave them each families, or 'gave them houses' (families).

In both cases the people involved obeyed God rather than man, for the 'royal law' of God outweighs man's law. Similar behavior can be seen in the hiding and rescue of Jews from the Nazi's of World War 2. I've visited both the home of Anne Frank in Amsterdam and the home of Corrie ten Boom in nearby Haarlem many times, and am amazed at God's grace in those difficult times.

Deception and lying were required to protect the people from the Nazis. Stories all over Europe of heroes helping the Jews are told of falsified documents, and even fake health reports, all with the more honorable intent of saving lives against unjust and ungodly laws that would have all the Jewish people murdered.

This isn't intended to be a full study of the topic, just food for thought. Back to our story...

The taking of Jericho, the saving of Rahab

You know the story, how Joshua circled the city, the walls fell, and Rahab and family were saved because she hung a red 'cord of redemption' out her window to identify her home for the conquering army.

Matthew 1:5 tells us a man named Salmon married Rahab in a wonderful story of redemption. Some speculate he was one of the 2 spies that stayed with her, seeing her heart, her potential, her bravery. We don't know, but we do know Salmon and Rahab married and she had a son named Boaz.

It was this Boaz who met a beggar woman, a widow named Ruth who was from Moab, the same area where his mother was from. Ruth was under the tutelage of Naomi, herself widowed, and Naomi encouraged Ruth to do something quite remarkable for her day: She told her to propose to Boaz rather than waiting for him to get around to it.

In Ruth 3:1-11 we find Naomi tells Ruth to wait until Boaz is asleep, then lay down at his feet and put his clothing over her. Today in Judaism there are variations of this. One is for the groom to cover his bride with a cloth, and another is to have both bride and groom wrapped around their shoulders binding them together with a prayer shawl, a tallit. In ancient days the groom would throw his robe over his wife, symbolizing their unity and that he is now her 'covering'.

By instructing Ruth to lay at the feet of Boaz and cover herself with his clothing, she was proposing to him. This is confirmed when Boaz reacts in v11: "Fear not, I will do all you ask..." This means Rahab became Ruth's mother in law - how wonderful of the Lord to give this godly widow a new husband, and more than that, a mother in law from her homeland!

Boaz and Ruth went on to have a son named Obed, who had a son named Jesse, who had a son named David. David's great grandmother was Ruth, his great-great grandmother was Rahab.

Who would have known when the prostitute name Rahab sized up the situation, believed in the God of Israel, protected the spies, and married into the family of Israel, that she would be the great great grandmother to David, and therefore in the lineage of Jesus? Who would have known? The law of unintended consequences - for the good.

What we see in the lives of Rahab, Naomi and Ruth, is that in spite of the difficult circumstances each did the right thing. The moral thing. The results of doing things the right way in the midst of difficult and even life-threatening circumstances, was life. God was able to weave together all the happenings into something beautiful.

What we see in this story is God's ability to change a prostitute's life and to honor her by being in the lineage of the savior. We see the Lord being gracious to a grieving widow in a strange land, giving her a husband, and mother in law from her home country. We see the Lord weaving the events of multiple lives over decades to bring His will to pass on the earth. He is doing the same in our lives, among our loved ones. Trust Him. Trust amazing grace!

Our last example next week, until then, blessings,
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Weaving life, Be careful what you pray for, 4 of 4 – 11feb2023

Hi all,

In our study of the Lord weaving our lives together to accomplish His will, we now come to our last example.

It is about not feeling compelled to press Him to get every single detail of our heart fulfilled, of knowing when to say 'enough'. There are times we pray and press and grunt and groan because we want God to get everything exactly perfect, with the results often being less than what he had expected.

King Hezekiah is just such a case

He was a good and very remarkable king of Judah, so brilliant and yet so flawed. He seems to be a person trying to do what is right, believing the best in people, which got him into trouble a few times - just like you and me! Not satisfied with the Lord's work in his life, he pressed for more, and many suffered as a result. If only he had been able to rest in the Lord and let things be. But no, he had to press forward, press God for more.

A little background information

Hezekiah is king of Judah and the prophets Hosea, Micah and Isaiah are active in the land. He was born in roughly 741 BC, became king at 25 and lived at total of 54 years, dying in about 687 BC. His reign is well documented in the archaeological record, for he made the pool of Siloam (John 9) which in our day is being made open to public tours.

It was against Judah and Hezekiah the Assyrian king, Sennacherib assembled his thousands. The Lord sent a single angel we are told in Isaiah 37:36, who killed 185,000 of the enemy army. Humiliated and defeated, Sennacherib returned home.

You just can't make this stuff up

After the defeat of the Assyrians, Isaiah 38 records Hezekiah became sick to the point of death. The Talmud, which is a collection of oral law (Mishnah) and history/commentary (Gemara), gives the back story.

It reveals Isaiah told Hezekiah he was sick because he had failed to marry and have children according to the divine order of things biologically and as king to produce an heir. So God allowed a sickness that would result in his death.

But when Hezekiah prayed and repented fervently, the Lord changed His mind before Isaiah had even left the palace grounds. (An example of a prophetic word not coming to pass because God changed His mind in response to prayer) Isaiah 38:5 records the Lord telling Isaiah He had answered his prayer and given him 15 more years (to produce an heir).

These 15 additional years are what our story is about.

Hezekiah recovers, and according to the Talmud, married Isaiah's daughter, Hephzibah, which means 'the Lord delights in her' (II Kings 21:1). Do we have the picture? Isaiah prophesies the king will die of a sickness, allowed upon him because he had not fulfilled the royal and biological duty of having children. When he repents and is given 15 years to be able to fulfill that duty, he marries Isaiah's daughter, making Isaiah their son's grandfather.

What happened in those 15 extra years?

Isaiah 39 tells us one of the things that happened is Babylon sent 'princes' or ambassadors to Hezekiah to congratulate him on his restored health.

Believing the best in people, and rationalizing that Babylon was a far distance, Hezekiah showed the princes of Babylon the whole of the royal treasury. All the temple treasures, all the national storehouses of gold and silver, even to the royal storehouse of spices and food.

It gave Babylon an exact estimation of Judah's strength. Isaiah told him he was foolish to reveal that to a potential enemy, and the nation would later suffer for it. Isaiah 39:3-7

What else happened in those 15 years?

Manasseh and Hephzibah had a son: Manasseh, again, making Isaiah Manasseh's grandfather. II Chronicles 32:33 and 33:1 tells us Hezekiah died when his son was 12 years old, so he became king at age 12.

II Chronicles 33:1-10 tell us young Manasseh did evil, bringing back all the gods of the pagans, even setting up pagan altars in the temple of the Lord. Verse 10 says the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. I feel sorry for his mother Hephzibah, for she was wife to one of the most godly kings ever recorded, and mother to one of the worst kings in the history of the nation.

Verses 11-16 tell us Manasseh was captured and sent to Babylon, where he truly repented, coming to know the Lord. He was also returned to rule the land. In his repentance, he undid the evil he had earlier done, tearing down all the pagan altars and restoring the temple and altar of the Lord. He commanded all Judah to worship the God of Israel.

But...

In between the time he took the throne at age 12, and the time he came to know the Lord, he did a horrible thing. He hated Isaiah his grandfather. Why, we don't know. He would have certainly known he was the product of those 15 years where his father was expected to produce and heir - perhaps in his eyes he thought he really wasn't wanted, wasn't really loved, just used to keep the family line going.

If so, we can understand his anger at first his father and then his grandfather. It was after all Isaiah who told his dad he was going to die if he didn't that a son. Whatever the reason, his hatred came full force upon his grandfather.

This is what happened

Not only in the Talmud, but referenced in the New Testament: Isaiah fled from Manasseh into a hollow in a cedar tree, but was discovered. Manasseh ordered the tree cut down with trapped Isaiah inside, sawing Isaiah in half. Hebrews 11:37 makes a reference to this in the 'hall of faith', saying of various unnamed faithful who had suffered for their faith: "They were stoned, they were cut in two, they were killed by swords..."

This great man Isaiah, grandfather to the king, friend of his father, died a martyr. What heartache his mother must have felt to see her son murder her father! Manasseh did later repent and that is good, but the nation suffered horribly before Manasseh repented.

What if Hezekiah had just said 'okay' when he was told he was about to die?

Be careful what you pray for. The Lord was still able to weave His way in those 15 years, though with heart ache for all. We repent vertically and God forgives us, but the injury we cause or is inflicted upon us is on this earth, horizontally. Being of the earth, it must be walked out, experienced, dealt with. Yet in all these things the Lord is still at work, still moving forward in the lives of all who desire Him. Ever the One who weaves His will into the fabric of our lives.

Are there areas we have insisted on having our way with the Lord? Have we at times pressed and demanded until finally we see the Lord has answered, only to discover things didn't work out the way we thought? And then we often wonder why God allowed it to happen, forgetting we were the ones who insisted He give us what we want.

Consider the possibility that some of the things you are going through now are to prepare you for what you prayed for.

Take the big picture approach to life, we are already in eternity, which means there will be as the Bible says, ages to come. Look for Him weaving together everything, our victories and defeats, moments of wisdom and foolishness, and you will see grace. Lots and lots of grace.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,

John Fenn

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