

99-08-29a

Continue our worship this morning now by turning for our scripture reading to Proverbs chapter 19. The context of our study in Genesis is the blessing dispensed by Isaac when he believes himself to be on his deathbed. It is intended by Isaac for Esau.

It is intended by God for Jacob. Jacob does in fact receive the blessing, but the means whereby he obtains that blessing is deceit. So the question in our minds is, well, is God happy with this plot? So it will be helpful to us to review these.

As you know, when you go to Proverbs, if you read a chapter in Proverbs, you come away thinking that you've been scattered all over the map. Because from one verse to the next, the subject can change. But oftentimes if you look closely, you find that there is a larger theme or thread that sort of holds many of these disparate statements together.

And we find this in Proverbs chapter 19. There is a refrain that runs through this chapter, and it deals with the idea of falsehood or deceit. Proverbs chapter 19.

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips and is a fool. Also, it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge, and he sins who hastens with his feet. The foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the Lord.

Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend. Now, I just want to point out to you, if you look at these first four verses, it already kind of throws you off balance, doesn't it? Because most of these proverbial type statements have statement A and statement B, and most of the time it's in contrast. And so you would expect verse one, better is the poor who walks in his integrity, if I just gave you a blank on a test and said, now fill in what the rest of this proverb should say, you would say, then the rich who has no integrity, or something to that effect.

But this sort of plays on our expectations, because we've had 18 chapters of Proverbs by now, so when you get to 19, it says, well, you think you've got this figured out, so I'm going to use your expectations to tell you something new. And so where we would expect the rich without integrity, it says, the perverse one in his lips who is a fool. And so you actually get sort of three statements for the price of two.

Because you can fill in the second blank, and then he says, well, that person who is rich without integrity is perverse in his lips and is a fool. The same thing when you get to verse four. Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is going to have real friends, or something like that.

And then it says, instead, the poor is separated from his friend. And you think, well, what's the point there? And that's a good question, and I'm not going to address it now, or we'll never get through the chapter. But just be aware, when you come to these

verses, that there's more going on than meets the eye.

And it's real difficult in English to do these justice, because many times the people who translated them did not fully understand them. Verse five, a false witness will not go unpunished. He who speaks lies will not escape.

Many entreat the favor of the nobility, and every man is a friend to one who gives gifts. You can see now we're starting to run through the cycle again that was established. I'm not just trying to purposely leave you hanging with verse four, but if you observe the cycle in this chapter, it will answer itself.

Many entreat the favor of the nobility, every man is a friend to one who gives gifts. All the brothers of the poor hate him. How much more do his friends go far from him? He may pursue them with words, yet they abandon him.

He who gets wisdom loves his own soul. He who keeps understanding will find good. So we're moving away from the issue of possessions and those who are attracted thereby.

The shallow friend who doesn't stick with the poor, even when he pursues them with words, they abandon him. This is the recommended path. He who gets wisdom loves his own soul.

He who keeps understanding will find good. Now we have another echo of verse five and verse nine. A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish.

Luxury is not fitting for a fool, much less for a servant to rule over princes. What kind of servant might this be? Remember what Jesus said about Mammon? Verse eleven, the discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression. The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass.

A foolish son is the ruin of his father, and the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping. Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. If you ever wanted a verse for right man, right woman, that's a good one to put on your list.

Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger, or should. He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is careless of his ways will die. He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and he will pay back what he has given.

This is the kind of friend that is worthwhile for the poor. Not the one who runs away when there are no possessions, not the family who departs, but the one who has pity on him because he sees it as lending to the Lord. This is a wonderful principle in terms of how to express charity.

He will pay back what he has given. Chasten your son while there is hope. Do not set your heart on his destruction, literally, to put him to death.

A man of great wrath will suffer punishment. For if you rescue him, you will have to do it again. Here is a man who instead of being enslaved to possessions is enslaved to passions.

You can rescue him, but you'll just have to rescue him again. Many of us have had that experience. Listen to counsel and receive instruction that you may be wise in your latter days.

There are many plans in a man's heart. Nevertheless, the Lord's counsel, that will stand. What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.

The fear of the Lord leads to life. He who has it will abide in satisfaction. He will not be visited with evil.

A lazy man buries his hand in the bowl and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again. Strike a scoffer, and the simple will become wary. Rebuke one who has understanding, and he will discern knowledge.

You could build a whole sermon on that verse. He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother is a son who causes shame and brings reproach. Cease listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.

This is a reminder that no matter how much instruction we have, no matter how many victories we've had in the past, you can't rest on your laurels. You can't say, well, you know, I put in my time in Bible study, and so now I've got enough to coast my way to glory. If you cease listening, you will stray even from the words of knowledge you already have.

A disreputable witness scorns justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity. Judgments are prepared for scoffers and beatings for the backs of fools. As I say, there's quite a lot.

There are things in any section of Proverbs that point in many different directions, and we certainly can't address them all, but you see the constant refrain here of what God thinks about deceit or about gaining riches and being enslaved to them. What is curious, as we return to our study in Genesis chapter 27, is this issue of deceit, because there is no getting around it. There is deception on a grand scale involved here.

It is a collusion. It is a plot. It is a conspiracy perpetrated by Rebekah and Jacob to fool Esau into doing something he manifestly does not want to do.

It is easy in the Word of God to find references to what God thinks about deceit, what

God thinks about deception, and it is helpful to look at those passages. If you look, for example, let me get my list of deceit passages up in front of me here. Throughout the Word of God, of course you have even in the Ten Commandments, thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Why would someone bear false witness? What would be the purpose? Usually it is personal gain, isn't it? Usually there is someone after something. They want to accomplish a goal. They want to achieve a purpose, and it is usually selfish.

Even in Proverbs chapter 19, we have the case where riches are gained by deceit. That is the principle. Well, what if your goal is not so selfish? What if you have a good goal? What is the classic case of deception in the Bible that seems to have a good goal? Rahab the harlot, the local police in Jericho, comes to her house looking for the spies, and she lies through her teeth.

She tells them that the men have departed, and they are no longer in the area when in fact they are right there in her house. So, is there a difference? We saw last time that there is some justification. It is not God's will for Esau to receive the blessing, but Isaac is about to give it to him.

There is a statement by God before the twins are ever born, that the elder shall serve the younger. Rebekah knows this, Isaac knows this, and apparently Jacob knows it as well. Rebekah in particular is the instigator of this plot.

She is the one who calls Jacob and says, we are going to fool your father. When Jacob raises objections, she squelches those objections. She says, don't worry about it.

If there is any curse involved, let the curse fall on me. You do as I say. And she is very emphatic.

In the Hebrew, these imperatives that she gives to Jacob are as strong as they can be. She doesn't put the little n-a-h ending. We have seen that request thing when God asks Abraham to take his son to Mount Moriah.

He puts that na, I pray you, on the end. Rebekah doesn't use this language at all. It is a direct command.

She says, you go and bring me two kids. You go and do these things. She will brook no opposition.

So, are we to find in this a principle then that sometimes it is okay to deceive, and if we do draw that conclusion, then in this case, was it okay for Rebekah and Jacob to deceive Esau and to beat Esau out of the blessing, to deceive Isaac and beat Esau out of the blessing? And out of all of that, is there a principle of application? Are there times when we need to be misrepresenting the truth? Well, first of all, let's look at some of the things

that God has to say about falsehood. And you can go to any topical Bible. I didn't do an exhaustive study.

The Bible is replete with examples of what God thinks about deceit. For example, the two verses that we read in Proverbs chapter 19, verse 5 and verse 9. Proverbs 24, 28, Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause. Why would you deceive with your lips? And this is presenting false witness, which is one of the Ten Commandments.

Do not bear false witness against your neighbor. But you notice that this is against your neighbor. This is gaining riches by falsehood.

This is bearing false witness to turn justice against someone. You can look at Leviticus 19, 11. You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.

There isn't any getting around it. When Jacob walks in and says, I am Esau, your firstborn. Well, he's not.

Psalms 5, 6. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. Psalm 7, 14.

Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity. Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. It is a characteristic of the wicked.

It is a characteristic of the bloodthirsty man. And when falsehood is found in those connections, it is always wrong. Psalm 31, 18.

Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. This is not really the category that we have in Genesis 27, is it? We don't have someone speaking proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. We have someone speaking up, at least in their minds, to try to preserve the righteous and to get the righteous what's coming to him and to not let a backslidden father give the blessing of Abraham to the son that cares nothing for it.

Psalms 117. He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house. He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence.

Psalms 120, verse 2. Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue. Proverbs 21, 6 might pertain to this situation. Getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death.

Proverbs 21, 6. In the New Testament, of course, you have Colossians 3, 9. It's probably the most prominent passage. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds. Lying, misrepresenting the truth to one another, and this, of course, is a household of believers, is said to be the fruit of the old man, the unregenerate man.

It's a very interesting passage or two that we've looked at at the end of Revelation

where it says that those who are outside, those who do not inherit in the internal kingdom of the Father, Revelation 21, 8. The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part, their portion, their inheritance in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. That principle is reiterated in Revelation 22, 15. Outside, this is outside the gates of the eternal New Jerusalem, outside are dogs and sorcerers, sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

So, we're not, by any stretch of the imagination, finding here justification for deceit and falsehood. However, there are other passages. We've already noted Rahab.

Rahab is never condemned at any point in the Scripture. In fact, she is commended. She is in the line of David and therefore in the line of Christ and is mentioned in the genealogy of Christ and is honored in that way.

There's never a word spoken against the lie that she tells that protects the two spies. Let me give you a less well-known but equally interesting passage. If you'll turn with me to 2 Kings 5. 2 Kings 5 is an excellent passage to go to because there are two instances of deception in this context, in chapter 5 and chapter 6 of 2 Kings.

Chapter 5 records the rather well-known story of Naaman the Syrian who has leprosy and who is given to understand that there is a prophet in Israel, in Samaria specifically, who can heal him. And he is willing to come. And his king says, Go, if you can be healed, more power to you.

So he goes. He meets the prophet. Elisha tells him, Go dip yourself in the Jordan, the muddy old Jordan, seven times.

Your flesh will be restored to you. Naaman is furious. He doesn't want to go to this muddy little rivulet and dip himself seven times.

He says, We've got some real good rivers back in Syria, the Abana and the Farpar in 5.12 of 2 Kings. Are they not better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. His servants came there and spoke to him and said, My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then when he says to you, wash and be clean? One of the reasons this story is recorded in the scriptures addressed to Israel is the same reason we have the book of Jonah.

Here you have a Syrian. And when he recognizes the truth of what his servants say, these are pagans, these are Syrians, in some generations the enemies of Israel. And yet Naaman can see that it's such a small thing.

It takes nothing really but heeding the word of the Lord to be cleansed. He doesn't have to go slay 200 Philistines. He doesn't have to climb a mountain.

All he has to do is go be dipped. It's a symbolic, it's a ritual obedience. It doesn't require any great effort on his part.

And it's so simple that at first he's furious because he's not going to be able to claim any credit. He says, you mean just dip in the water? And it's a reminder to Israel that when God says wash and be clean, it's such a simple thing. And yet they're missing it.

But he goes, in verse 14, down and dipped seven times in the Jordan according to the saying of the man of God. And his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child. And he was clean.

That phrase, by the way, the flesh of a little child, is significant, highly significant. If you compare this to Leviticus chapter 14, if you compare this to John chapter 3 in the New Testament, this is your clue to the question we were talking about on Friday night, the conversation with Nicodemus, when Jesus says, are you a teacher of Israel and do not know about being born again? The concept of being born again is not a New Testament concept. It is an Old Testament concept.

Look at John 3.10, I believe it is, where Jesus says to Nicodemus, are you a teacher of Israel and do not know these things? A teacher of Israel, a scholar of the Old Testament law, should have known about the new birth, except a man be born of water and the Spirit. He cannot see the kingdom of God. Old Testament truth.

This is one of the passages that points to it. His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him.

And he said, indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. Now, therefore, please take a gift from your servant. He said, if the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing.

He urged him to take it, but he refused. So Naaman said, then if not, please let your servant be given two mule loads of earth, for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods but to the Lord. Yet in this thing may the Lord pardon your servant.

When my master goes into the temple of Ramon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Ramon, when I bow down in the temple of Ramon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing. He has official duties that are a part of his position with the king of Syria. The king of Syria comes and leans on his arm when he goes to perform his worship.

Now, I could say a lot about people who say, evangelize at any time, at any price. Naaman is not going to go back and try to evangelize the king of Syria. In fact, he is going to assist the king of Syria in the worship of his own false god.

And he says, I beg the Lord God of Israel's forgiveness when I do this thing. But he said to him, go in peace. Elijah says, go ahead.

This is a part of your official duties. We may not like it. We know that Ramon is not God.

Naaman knows there is no God in Israel. But he is not going to make a big stink about this when he goes back to the king who gave him leave, who gave him the provisions, who enabled him to come and get this healing. He is going to go back and be loyal to that king, that pagan king.

And he is going to assist that pagan king in his pagan worship. And he makes a point of asking Elisha about this. And Elisha says, go do that in peace.

And it is not our call. This is just a little free, no extra charge lesson. It is not our call to go make a big stink and evangelize at every opportunity and confront everyone who is engaged in false worship or worthless behavior.

Naaman's faith is between himself and the Lord. But this is the point we are trying to get to here in chapter 5. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, look, my master has spared Naaman, this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought. But as the Lord lives, I will run after him and I will take something from him.

This guy has all these pack animals full of gold and jewels and precious stone and raiment and costly goods. And Gehazi sees this stuff disappearing over that last sand dune. And he says, my master is a nut case for letting this stuff go.

We can use that stuff. So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from his chariot to meet him and said, what's the matter? Is all well? He said, all is well.

My master has sent me. Now this is a lie. Gehazi lies and says, my master has sent me saying, indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim.

Please give them a talon of silver and two changes of garments. This is just a bald-faced lie. What is the motivation behind this lie? Is Gehazi seeking the blessing? Is he looking to please God? He swears to himself, as the Lord lives, I'm going to go get some of that stuff.

He sort of invokes the Lord's name. But it is manifestly a selfish, materialistic slave to passion motivation that drives him to do this. So he makes up this story.

Two poor guys have just showed up. My master doesn't have anything to give them. He wondered if he might be able to turn loose of a couple of changes of clothes and a talon of silver for each.

So Naaman said, please, take two talons. He urged him and bound two talons of silver in two bags with two changes of garments, handed them to two of his servants, and they carried them on ahead of him. When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand and stored them away in the house, and he let the men go, and they departed.

Now he went in and stood before his master. Now, Gehazi can't be thinking too clearly. Elisha, in the past, Gehazi has seen Elisha have all kinds of supernatural knowledge, do all sorts of supernatural things.

He's operating with a double portion of Elijah's spirit. The Holy Spirit is on him. Gehazi has somehow been in the presence of all these things, and like Israel in the wilderness, standing in the shadow of the pillar of cloud, somehow thinks that he's going to get away with this, and that Elisha's not going to know, God's not going to know.

What is he thinking? But this is how foolish we are when we're in the grip of lust, when we're in the grip of passion of any sort. The obvious escapes us. So he comes and stands before his master.

In verse 25, Elisha said to him, Where did you go, Gehazi? We've seen throughout Genesis when God says, Where are you? to Adam. When he says, What is it you have done? Where is your brother? to Cain, and so forth. There's this question.

Giving somebody the last chance to own up before the shoe drops. Gehazi says, Your servant did not go anywhere. Then he said to him, Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Not only does Elisha know exactly what transpired when he ran out to meet Naaman, he knows exactly what Gehazi plans to do with these two talents of silver.

His innermost meditations. Gehazi, he sees these two big chunks of silver. This is quite a lot of money.

This is up in the five digits. He's thinking about olive groves. He's fantasizing in his mind.

If you don't think God knows the thoughts and intents of the heart, God not only knows them, but he communicated them through his spirit to Elisha. And Elisha is telling Gehazi his daydreams. Gehazi is thinking, How could he? Was he looking? Was he peeking around a tree or over the top of the sand dune when I went out there to Naaman? He didn't have to.

He's looking right at the very center of the heart. And in the heart, in his innermost little fantasies, Gehazi was thinking, You know, I can plant an olive grove. I can plant some vineyards.

I'll buy me some sheep and some oxen. I'll get some servants. I won't have to be a

servant anymore.

I'll have servants of my own. And Elisha tells him the innermost hidden thoughts and intents of his heart. And he goes on to say in verse 27, Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever.

And he went out from his presence leprous, white as snow. And we say, Well, my goodness. Is there some race of lepers someplace that are all descended from Gehazi? Well, how many descendants is Gehazi going to have? We don't really know.

His genealogy is not in the scripture. But I suspect if you're a leper colony, your wine's going to die out after a few generations. Who's going to go say, Oh, me, me.

Let me go marry into the leper colony. And so whatever family Gehazi has, whatever he does, they're going to be afflicted with disease. There's going to be this skin issue.

And it's not necessarily the leprosy of our modern day. It has different symptoms if you go back and read Leviticus. But whatever it was, it was incurable, and it persisted in the line of Gehazi until his line died out.

So this is a deception for the purpose of personal gain. And it is manifestly known to God and cursed by God. Gehazi should have known better.

He's been in the company of the prophet too long to not have known better than this. But in the very next chapter, and this is another one of my favorite parts of scripture, partly because it's so little covered and because it has such great significance. This is the floating ax head.

A lot of times children, if you're in a decent Bible teaching church, will get this story. But they don't go on to the next one. And the next one is what I really like.

The men are going. There's too many of them. They don't have enough room.

Kind of like with Isaac having to leave Bimelech. We're too crowded. Let's spread out.

So they go out by the Jordan. They start chopping down a tree. The ax head flies off.

The guy says, Oh no, I lost the ax head, and it was borrowed. My integrity is on the line here. I owe this man for this ax head.

So Elisha throws a stick in the water, and the ax head bobs to the surface, and they pick it up. It's also very interesting to those who study the history of Israel, because supposedly iron was a rare commodity at this time. When you look at the early, middle, and late Bronze Age, as they gauge pottery and archaeological layers in Palestine, they don't think iron came in until later.

But you have the Philistines forging iron and only letting Saul and Jonathan have an iron sword. There's iron going all the way back to the time of Abraham, and because the archaeologists can't find it, they have to try to explain away these passages. But this is an iron ax head.

But now pick up in verse 8. Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel. He consulted with his servants, saying, My camp will be in such and such a place. And so he told them where he was going to camp as his base of operations to attack Israel.

This is northern Israel. This is Samaria. The capital is in Samaria.

So the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there. This is another thing that Elisha knows because of the ministry of the Spirit. So the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him, and he warned him, and he was watchful there.

Not just once or twice. He set up a little recon position out there. They've got a listening post.

They've got observers out there watching to see if and when the king of Syria is going to set up camp there. So the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing. He found out through his recon that Israel was watching the place where he was going to set up camp.

And he says, How did they know that that was going to be my headquarters? So he called his servants together. This is 2 Kings 6.11. And he says to them, Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? Who's the traitor in the camp that leaked our information? One of his servants said, None, my lord, O king, but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom. He's got supernatural knowledge of secret things.

So he said, Go and see where he is that I may send and get him. And it was told him, saying, Surely he is in Dothan. Now, Dothan is up some distance north of Samaria, which is the capital of the northern kingdom.

It's at some distance. You can look on a map in the back of your Bible. And if you find Samaria during the time of the divided kingdom, look up north of that and you'll find Dothan.

So this king sends horses and chariots and a great army there. And they came by night and surrounded the city. This huge force is out there to get one guy, Elisha.

When the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, Alas, my master, what shall we do? So he answered and said, I do not fear, for those who are with

us are more than those who are with them. Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray open his eyes that he may see.

Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. These are the chariots of fire.

They have a movie by that name. One of these chariots is the one that gave a taxi cab ride to Elisha. So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, Strike these people, I pray, with blindness.

And he struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. Now Elisha said to them, Now here is verse 19 of 2 Kings 6. Elisha is now going to tell a bald-faced lie. This is a whopper.

This isn't a little white lie. He is telling them an outright untruth. He says, This is not the way, nor is this the city.

Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek. Well, he is the man that they seek. And this is the town.

And this is the way. And he tells them three lies, one on top of another. But he led them to Samaria.

So it was, when they had come to Samaria, this is several miles south and just a little bit west of Dothan. Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men that they may see. See, now they are at the capital city.

They are surrounded. They are outflanked. They are not at the edge of the territory.

They don't have a plan for taking one man. Now they are at the capital city and they are surrounded. And he says, Okay, Lord, open their eyes.

The Lord opened their eyes, and they saw, and there they were, inside Samaria. Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them? But he answered, You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Here is a principle for treatment of prisoners of war.

You don't just kill them. Set food and water before them that they may eat and drink and go to their master. He prepared a great feast for them, and after they ate and drank, he sent them away, and they went to their master.

So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel. So to accomplish the purpose of God in defeating these men without firing a shot, without swinging a sword, without bloodshed, Elisha tells a lie. He tells three lies, and he blinds them.

Isn't that what a lie does? Doesn't a lie blind you to what is the truth? Turn with me back, for another example, to Exodus 5. Exodus 5. Moses has his encounter with God at the burning bush. He gets his commission. They have an exchange.

God shows him the signs. He shows the signs to the people. The people say, Okay, fine.

You lead. We'll follow. Afterward, in chapter 5 of Exodus, Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, Thus says the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, so that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.

Now, I have reviewed what God told Moses in the first couple of chapters here of Exodus, and I don't find any mention of a feast to the Lord in the wilderness. Do you see that anywhere back in the past? God is talking to him in chapter 3 at the burning bush, and he says, I have come down in verse 8 to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Cry, the children of Israel, has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

Come now, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. He goes on down and tells him to address the people, and they will heed his voice. In verse 18, You shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt, and you shall say to him, This is 18 of chapter 3, The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us.

Now, please let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Now, is this God's intention? Does God want Moses, as He brought him all the way back from Midian, to take the children of Israel three days' journey to celebrate a feast, and then the idea is they're going to return? They just want to sort of take a little trip to the wilderness, three days, have this feast, and then come back? This is what God is telling Moses to tell Pharaoh. And that is in fact what He says in verse 3 of chapter 5. Let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.

If we don't go out and worship our God three days' journey in the wilderness, we're going to be smitten with a curse. The king of Egypt said to them, Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor. He says, look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor.

So the same day, Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, no more straw for the bricks. And not only is he not going to let them go, but he says, you're distracting them with all this talk of worship of their God, so I'm going to give them something to concentrate on. And he makes their work more difficult.

But my question is, does it appear to you, as it appears to me, that God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh a fib? Because God said at the beginning, I'm going to lead you out to the land of the Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and so forth. But I want you to tell Pharaoh that you're going three days' journey to sacrifice and have a feast. And that is, in fact, what Moses says.

Is there ever any intention of just letting them go for three days and come back? God tells Moses, I know He's not going to let you go, but you tell Him this anyway. So, we're back to the question. Apparently, and I suppose it's open to interpretation, apparently God tells Moses to deceive Pharaoh.

Very clearly, Elisha deceives the Syrians when they come into the land. He says, this is not the town. This is not the way.

I am not the man by implication, but I'll take you. Follow me and I'll take you. It's also a very interesting form of blindness, isn't it? Because when he prays to God and says, strike them with blindness, they don't seem to be alarmed.

When Elisha says, follow me and I'll take you, they seem to go, this is a selective kind of a blindness. They are blind to where they are. They're blind to who they're talking to.

Apparently, Elisha was well known enough that they should have recognized him, but they did not. This is a blindness to the reality of things. They are being deceived.

God puts a blindness on them that keeps them from seeing what is true, that they are talking to Elisha. And we could ask the same question that we're asking in our chapter, because when we think about Jacob and the blessing, we say, well, why did he have to resort to subterfuge? Could God have not struck Esau dead and then Jacob would be the heir? Why did God not supernaturally intervene? Well, why does God not supernaturally intervene here and strike the Syrians dead or propel them away with water or some other thing like he does in other military situations? Why is it this deception that takes place? Well, this is the question we want to answer when we come back from our break. We're going to pause here and partake of various forms of refreshment.

And when we resume, we'll see if we can find an answer in Scripture for this question.