

We live our lives a moment at a time... across weeks, months, years and decades.

But God, who is eternal and who lives outside of time... acts in this world across decades, centuries and millenniums to make known his glory and to achieve his good purposes.

We all know the name...



But what about Shechem?



Jerusalem
Bethlehem
Nazareth
Capernaum
Jericho
Shechem

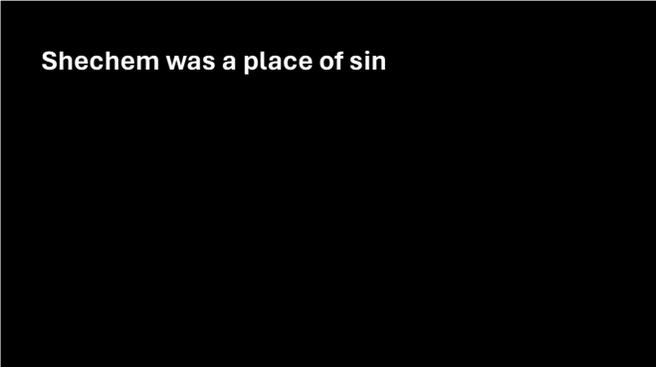
... the town that's identified in Genesis 34-35?

What do we know of this place apart from... that it was where Dinah was assaulted and its men killed by Simeon and Levi?

There are fifty mentions of Bethlehem in the Old and New Testaments.

And we all know how significant Bethlehem was.

But did you know that Shechem is mentioned 60 times in the OT? Across thousands of years.... things took place in Shechem that were orchestrated... or permitted by God... that demonstrated humanity's great spiritual need... and pointed ahead to the One who would come to rescue and redeem and restore.



Shechem was a place of sin

I already mentioned Shechem was where Dinah was raped and where her brothers murdered all the men of Shechem.

But in the time of the judges, Abimelech, the son of Gideon, was made king of Shechem and great evil happened by his hand.

He carried out a slaughter of the people of Shechem that far surpassed that of Jacob's two sons, Simeon and Levi.

After the death of King Solomon, the kingdom was divided. Under the leadership of King Jereboam, Shechem became a center for idolatrous worship practices.

King Jereboam had two golden calves made and appointed a rival priesthood and declared to the northern kingdom that they would no longer go to Jerusalem, but would worship at Shechem.

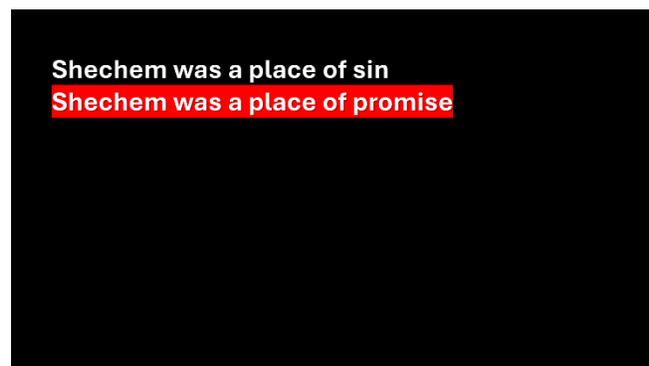
After Assyria conquered the northern tribes, and took them into exile, the Assyrians settled exiled peoples from other nations in the region of Shechem.

These transplanted people added Yahweh to their own existing faith practices.

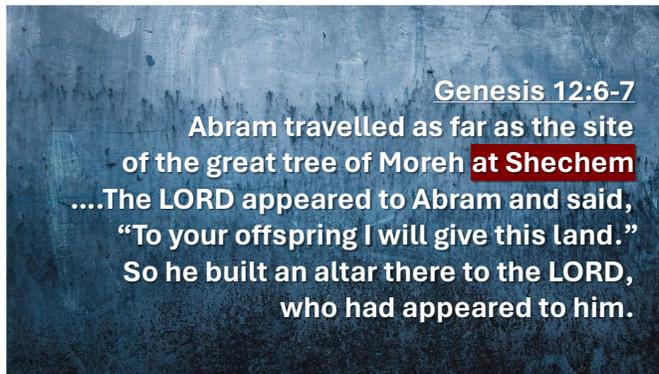
The result was a hybrid of pagan and Jewish faith, with Mt. Gerizim as its center of worship.

These people came to be known as the Samaritans.

Shechem was a place of sin.



When Abraham and Sarah arrived in Canaan, having travelled there from Haran at God's prompting, the first place they stopped... was...

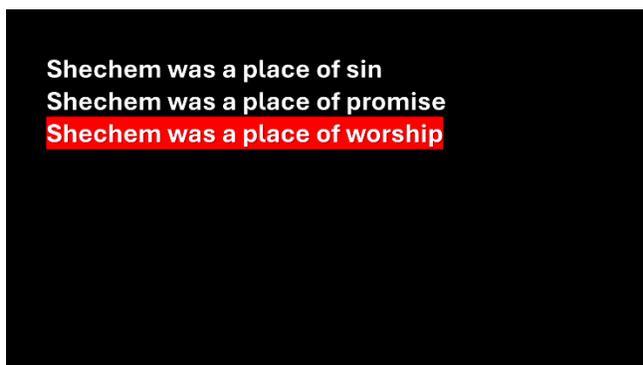


There is no mention in Genesis 12... that the city of Shechem then existed... only that the Canaanites were in the land.
The feature that is mentioned... was the great tree of Moreh.
It was most likely a place used by the Canaanites for their worship.

There at Shechem God appeared to... and spoke with... and promised Abram that he would give to his descendants... the land of Canaan.

The Scripture teach in the book of Genesis... and repeatedly reinforce through the Scriptures... that the earth is the LORD's and that he determines the times for every people group and nation and the exact places where they should live – Acts 17:26.

Shechem was a place of promise.

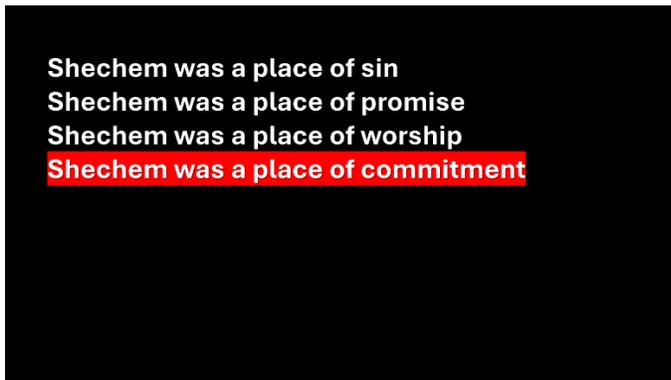


At Shechem Abraham built his first altar in the land of Canaan and there he and Sarah worshiped God.

Two hundred years later, when Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, he and his family travelled to Shechem.

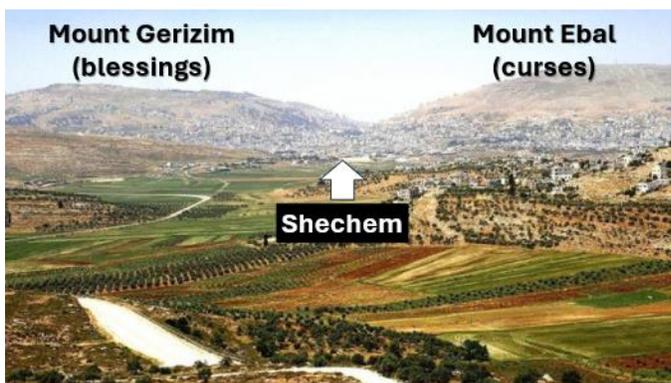


Like his grandfather, Jacob too, built an altar there.
The passage doesn't say if Jacob's altar was built at the same place his grandfather had built his altar.
But we are told that Jacob named his altar... El Elohe Israel – meaning God is the God of Israel.
Shechem was a place of worship.



After 400 years in Egypt and almost forty years in the desert, Moses gave to the people instruction of what they were to do after they entered Canaan.

Read Deuteronomy 11:26-31.



After they crossed the Jordan River and conquered Jericho and Ai, Joshua led the nation... as Moses had commanded... to Shechem. Joshua 8:30-34 says that...

...there an altar was built on Mt. Ebal and sacrifices were made.

...there in the presence of the entire nation Joshua copied on stones, the law of Moses.

... there, with the ark of the covenant between them, half of the nation stood in front of Mount Gerizim and the other half stood in front of Mount Ebal

... there Joshua read aloud to everyone – men, women, children, and foreigners - all that Moses had written – the blessings and the curses.

This would have been an awe-inspiring event for the nation.

It would have been day long remembered.

It was a sacred moment, a holy moment for the nation.

At the end of his life, Joshua again gathered the nation together...

...at Shechem, Joshua 24:1.

There Joshua rehearsed for them their history.

There he recapped how God had given to them a land on which they had not toiled, houses which they had not built, and vineyards and olive groves they had not planted.

There he challenged the nation to choose that day whom they would serve – the LORD... or the gods their forefathers had served beyond the Euphrates... or the gods of the Amorites.

With one voice the people answered, **“We will serve the LORD, because he is our God,”** Joshua 24:18.

Shechem was a place of commitment.

Shechem was a place of sin
Shechem was a place of promise
Shechem was a place of worship
Shechem was a place of commitment
Shechem was a place of provision

Soon after he arrived at Shechem, Jacob did something that is not mentioned in the book of Genesis - he dug a well.



In that region water was absolutely crucial.

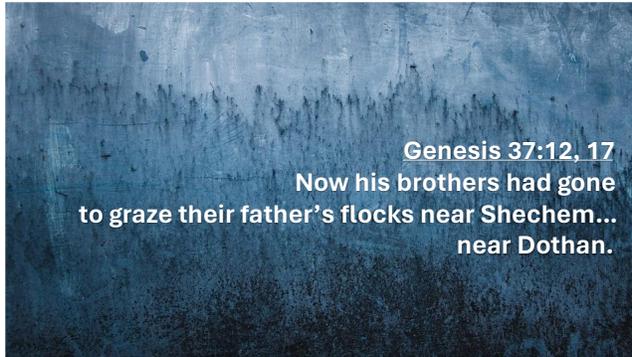
The well Jacob dug was so abundant, and so reliable... that it still produces water to this day.

Shechem was a place of provision.

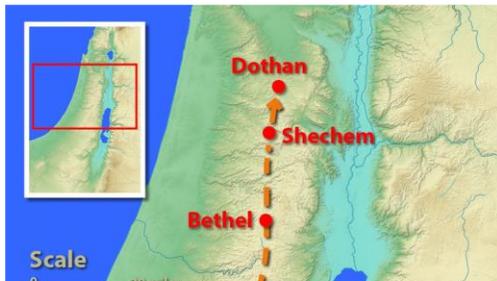
Shechem was a place of sin
Shechem was a place of promise
Shechem was a place of worship
Shechem was a place of commitment
Shechem was a place of provision
Shechem was a place of hope

Jacob's son Joseph was so hated by his older brothers that they captured him and sold him as a slave at 17 years of age.

They did this...at a place near Dothan...



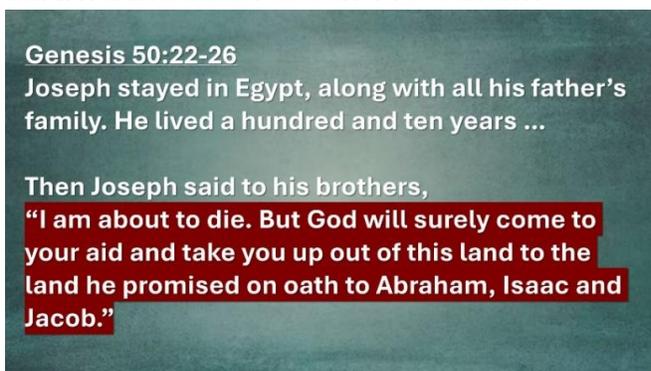
... which was about 12 kms from Shechem.



After he was taken to Egypt, Joseph never again lived in Canaan. But he never forgot the promises of God to his great-grandfather, grandfather and father... which included him.

Though Joseph lived 93 years in Egypt, he never stopped looking upon Canaan as his home.

As his death came near, Joseph testified of his confidence in the faithfulness of God. He said...



Joseph was so convinced that God would fulfill what he had promised Abraham regarding the land of Canaan... that he made his family and the nation of Israel swear an oath...

Genesis 50:22-26

And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."

So, Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

...to carry up his bones from Egypt and bury them in Canaan.

When the Israelite nation left Egypt 300+ years later, they fulfilled that oath... they took with them the bones of Joseph.

The book of Joshua tells us that after entering Canaan, Joseph's bones were buried at ...

Joshua 24:32

And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem

in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants.

In his death and burial, Joseph testified of his hope in God.
Shechem was a place of hope.

The things that happened at Shechem...

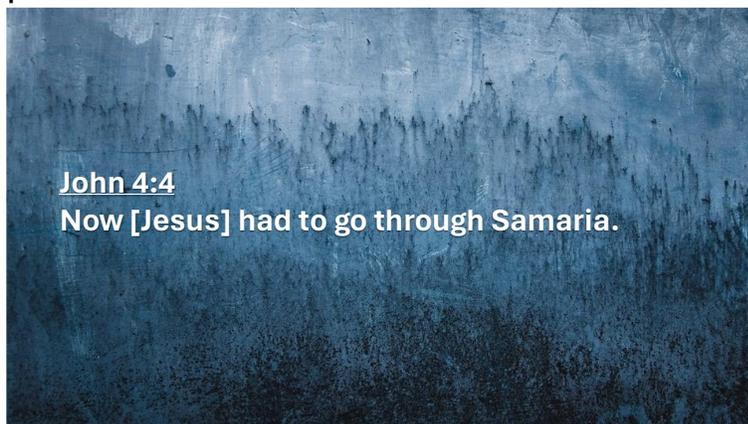
...testify of human disloyalty to God and cruelty to others and the resulting heartbreak and devastation that follows in a world broken by sin and cursed by death.

But there is more to the story of Shechem.

At Shechem there is resounding evidence of the faithfulness of God as he carried out his plan to rescue; a plan that did not rely on humanity's fallible nature, but on his sovereign grace, his unfathomable wisdom, and his own inexhaustible life.

Shechem was a place of sin
Shechem was a place of promise
Shechem was a place of worship
Shechem was a place of commitment
Shechem was a place of provision
Shechem was a place of hope
Shechem was a place of redemption

There... a reversal happened that testifies of the mighty redeeming power of the Messiah.



Why was that?

Why did Jesus have to go through Samaria?

I believe we need to look at the events that happened there over thousands of years as a microcosm of the world.

In Shechem, we see the evidence of God's faithful pursuit after the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve.

But the evidence is also clear, that there were many at Shechem... who suppressed the truth of God.

Many who refused to glorify God and to give him thanks.

And as a result, there were many whose thinking, as Romans 1 says... became futile and whose hearts were darkened.

Stubbornly defying God, in wrath and mercy, God let them go.

God allowed them to pursue their depravity.

There at Shechem so many became senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless.

The Scripture says that the wages of sin is death.

And at Shechem these wages were paid in full.

Again, I remind you, the story that unfolded at Shechem is the story of this world and the human race.

The folly of sin is that it convinces us to live for our own glory and to look to ourselves to solve our sin problem.

And a life lived like this as but one destination... hell.

Someone once asked, why is God silent?

But that is the wrong question.

The right question is why is humanity deaf.

The evidence of God is clear.

The heavens declare his glory.

And so, humanity is without excuse.

While we are helpless to rescue ourselves, the greater story written at Shechem is the story of the God who relentlessly pursues sinners.

At Shechem God revealed himself to Abraham and Sarah... and to their descendants.

Remember what he did at Egypt?

Remember what he did at the Red Sea?

Remember Joshua?

Remember the judges?
Remember King David?
Remember King Hezekiah?
To name but a few....

God entered into a covenant with and provided the means for
Abraham and his family to live in relationship with him...
... to enjoy his fellowship...
... and to function as a light to the world...
... testifying to all nations, of the goodness and the worthiness of the
Creator.

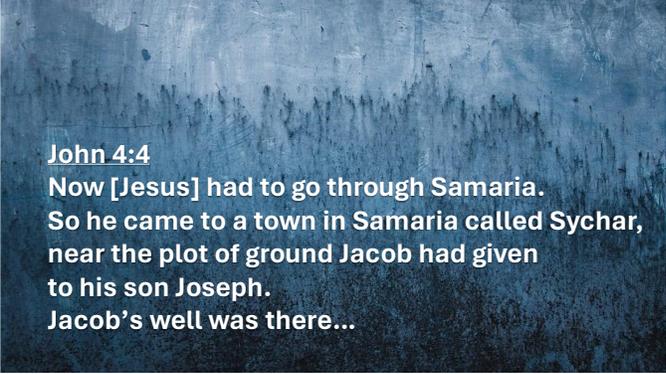
But Abraham's family failed.
This is why in eternity past God the Son was chosen to be
humanity's Rescuer.

At the Father's right moment, Jesus came into the world to
accomplish the impossible.
He came to bring us home to God.

Jesus came and carried our sorrows and gave to us his joy.
He came and was afflicted by God that our souls might be healed.
The LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all that we might be forgiven.

Jesus came and was pierced for our transgressions so that we might
be set free from our slavery to sin and death.
He came and was crushed and punished that we might be forgiven
and that we might enter into an enduring peace with God.

This is why the Rescuer came.
This is why... Jesus had to go to Shechem.



John 4:4

Now [Jesus] had to go through Samaria.
So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar,
near the plot of ground Jacob had given
to his son Joseph.
Jacob's well was there...

It was no accident that Jesus came to Sychar; that he came... to Jacob's well.

He had a divine appointment.

An appointment that would complete the story of Shechem.

Almost 2000 years after Dinah was attacked, and her life was shattered... another woman, who had been married to five different men, likewise went out, as Dinah had, but not to meet other women of that area.

The woman of Sychar had been shunned because of her marital status.

We are not told the circumstances.

But she had been married five times.

And at that moment, though single, she was living with a man.

This was why she went to the well alone.

You can imagine her surprise, when she saw a man sitting there.

She didn't know him, but she knew he was a Jew.

And shockingly, he spoke to her and asked for a drink.

It was quickly obvious, that this man had not come to take from her, or to ruin her, as had happened with Dinah.

He had come because of her spiritual thirst.

He had come to give to her... 'living water.'
He had come to heal her soul from the ravages of sin and the ruin in which she lived.

My intent is not to unpack their conversation.
But I would encourage you to read and reread it this week.

Just before the disciples returned, the woman told Jesus,

The woman:
"I know that Messiah is coming,
and when he comes, he will explain
everything to us."

Jesus:
"I who speak to you am he."

This is amazing.
Up until this point, Jesus had not openly spoken of his identity.
But to this woman... he revealed himself, like the LORD had done long ago with Abraham and Sarah.

In hearing Jesus, this woman responded with faith.

But the passage reveals that she was not alone in her spiritual thirst.
In the town of Sychar were many others like her.
For almost 2000 years Jacob's well had provided water for those who had lived in that region.
It had satisfied their physical thirst.
But not their spiritual.

This day... when Jesus visited... was a divine moment, a fullness of time, when God's mighty work of redemption was seen.

There... where the character and promises and commands of God had been proclaimed in times past... the Savior visited and brought salvation.

The thirsty were satisfied with living water.

The hungry were fed with living bread.

The prisoners of sin were set free.

The spiritually dead were raised to life.

The unnamed woman at the well, could not keep the news of Jesus to herself.

She ran back into town and testified to her neighbors of the man...

“who told me everything I ever did.”

The townspeople went out to the well.

They came to the man who had come to them.

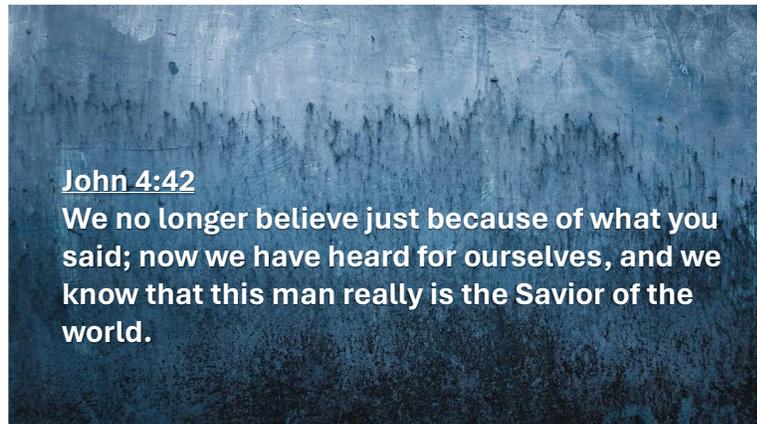
They urged Jesus to stay and for two days he remained with them.

The result?

Many became believers in Jesus.

They had initially believed in Jesus on the basis of the woman’s testimony.

But after talking with Jesus themselves... they said...



Is it not incredible... what God did in Shechem?

His wisdom, like his love...



... is wider, longer, higher and deeper... than we can fathom.

The long story that had unfolded in Shechem over generations was completed by Jesus Christ.

In fact, he has come to write a greater story in all of our lives.

Every human soul craves God like our bodies crave water.

Every single human being is created to live in fellowship with God.

Everyone was made to worship God and to enjoy him forever.

The answer to our troubling questions... the answer to the problem of evil... is the person of Jesus Christ who is God in human flesh.

Followers of Jesus... you have an amazing God.

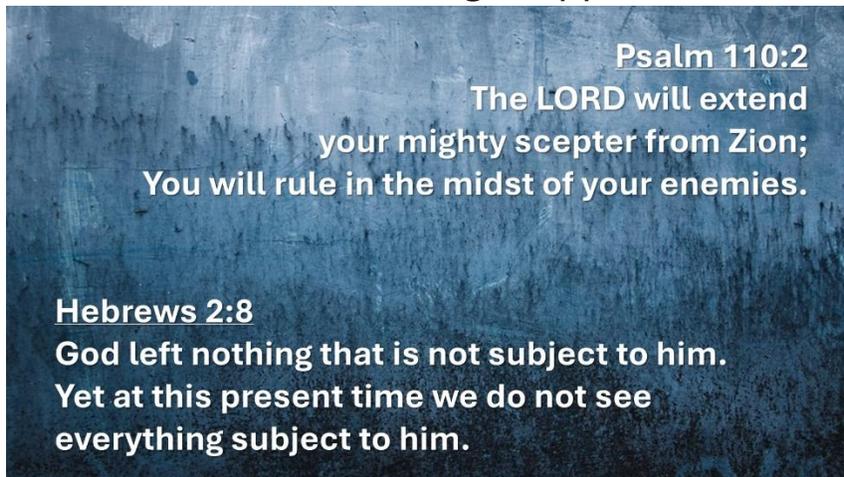
I urge you to love him with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.

Dear friend, to those of you who thirst and hunger... there is a Savior... Jesus of Nazareth.

He has come.

I urge you to come to him today!

As we studied last week... no human being can fathom how God is sovereign and how he works out his good purposes in a world where evil is active and bad things happen.



We read a passage like Psalm 110:2 that says Jesus rules in the midst of his enemies... and another passage like Hebrews 2:8 that says God has left nothing that is not subject to Jesus, though in this present time we do not see everything subject to him... and we ask ... how is this so?

Is the daily news right... or is God's word right?
Do forces of chaos govern our world?
Or is God in control?

As followers of Jesus, God's word teaches that we live by faith, not by sight.
His Spirit is active to lead us to focus on what is unseen.
And as we fix our eyes on Jesus, his Spirit floods our hearts with hope and peace.

Victor Hugo wrote two amazing sentences...



There is another wondrous mystery regarding who our triune God is and how he is actively present in our lives and in global circumstances.

God further reveals that he lives outside of time.

For him a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day.