

## Such Is Life

### Gen. 35

Richard Tow 6.21.15

Life is a journey; for every one of us, that journey is filled with a wide variety of experiences. Such is life. Sometimes those experiences feel real good and sometimes they feel pretty rotten. Sometimes we understand what is going on and sometimes we are baffled. “God, what are You doing and what am I supposed to do next?” Have you ever prayed that prayer?

I want us to go, this morning, to Genesis 35. In this chapter Jacob is leading his family on a journey.<sup>1</sup> Three times in Genesis 35 we read the words, “*And they journeyed.*” We’re going to look into this chapter and learn from their journey. Perhaps the Lord will speak to us from it about our own journey. Maybe He will answer some of the questions that are on our hearts. 1 Cor. 10: 6 tells us that these Old Testament stories were written for our instruction. There are principles at work here that are also at work in our lives. We will see eight Episodes in Jacob’s life here. We will consider possible life lessons in each episode.

The first event actually occurs in the previous chapter, Genesis 34, but it is referred to in our text.

### **I. Conflict with the Hittites**

Jacob had spent over 20 years living with his Uncle Laban. There he married his wives, had children and accumulated livestock. Then God told him to return to his homeland in Canaan.<sup>2</sup> On his way, he came to a town called Succoth that was in the territory of the Hittites. It is about 40 miles north of Jerusalem and north of where he was supposed to go (Bethel). Living short of full obedience, he settled in and bought a piece of property near Succoth.<sup>3</sup>

His only daughter, Dinah, went into Succoth to visit with some of the girls there. While there she met the son of the ruling sheik and the guy raped her. In retaliation, Jacob’s sons (Simeon and Levi) attacked and plundered the city.

Genesis 34 ends with Jacob arguing with Simeon and Levi. Look at Genesis 34:30-31, “*Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ‘You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I.’ But they said, ‘Should he treat our sister like a harlot?’*”

Two life lessons from this event:

- 1) Jacob’s incomplete obedience left his family vulnerable to problems. He was supposed to go back to Bethel (where God had spoken to him) and return to his father’s house. By the end of Gen. 35 he has done that. But in Genesis 34 he has stopped short of full obedience. Had he fully obeyed in the first place, all of this might have been averted.
- 2) God providentially redeemed the mess and worked it all together for Jacob’s ultimate good. Israel was to be a separate people unto God’s covenant. Jacob was getting way

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<sup>1</sup> This message was delivered on Father’s Day. All Scripture quotes are New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 31:11-13

<sup>3</sup> Jacob may have lived at Succoth “from eight to eleven years.” Gen 34:1-2 (from Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

too cozy with the ungodlily world around him. God used the conflict to separate him from these ungodly people and protect him from something even more negative.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes a negative event can be protecting us from something even more negative. Never is God the author of sin; but often He is working preemptively in our behalf.

Second event:

## **II. Word from the Lord**

This is sovereign grace. Jacob and his family have made a mess of things. Yet God speaks to Jacob. Events have chastened him and prepared him for this visit. He is humbled by what has happened to his daughter. He is apprehensive about what the surrounding tribes may do to him. Genesis 35:1 begins with the word “*Then.*” In this context God speaks to Jacob. “*Then God said to Jacob, ‘Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.’*”

Notice the instruction, “*Arise, go up to Bethel....*” Go do what you were supposed to do in the first place. Now get up and do it! “*And make and altar there....*” He had erected an altar at Succoth (Gen. 34:29) which was a good thing to do. But he was supposed to go all the way to Bethel and make the altar “*there.*” With that instruction also came words of comfort. God graciously reminds him of his previous encounter at Bethel—a time when he was in fear of Esau’s retaliation. Now he is afraid of Hittite retaliation. “Remember, Jacob, I protected you then; and I will protect you now—but you need to fully obey me.”

Life Lesson: God’s grace is amazing in our lives. Even when we have made a mess of things, he meets with us and speaks to us. He patiently reminds us of what He has already told us to do: Something for everyone of us to be grateful for.

## **III. Leading the Family**

Gen. 35:2-7, “*And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. 3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.’ 4 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. 5 And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. 6 So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. 7 And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.’*”

Jacob’s imperfections do not negate his responsibility to lead his family. Sometimes fathers become tentative in leading their families because they are very aware of their own shortcomings. But the answer to that problem is not spiritual passivity; the answer is to draw near to the Lord, hear his voice, and lead your family. Jacob has gotten right with the Lord himself. He has committed himself to fully obey the Lord. He is emboldened by his encounter with the Lord. He has heard the voice of the Lord. “We are going to Bethel and we’re building an altar there. But first we need to get rid of some junk in our lives.”

Everybody in this household is going to put away their idols—everything that grieves the Holy Spirit. Jacob buries that stuff where nobody will find it. There’s little use in building altars if

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<sup>4</sup> Gen 34:31 (from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by Biblesoft).

you're going to keep the wickedness at the same time.<sup>5</sup> And it seems that everyone obeyed his lead and put the idols out.

Notice what immediately followed in verse 5. The “*terror of God*” came on their enemies and those enemies backed off. When they put away the evil in their house, God put away the external threat of evil. The surrounding enemies did not pursue (notice the exact wording) “*the sons of Jacob*” (Simeon & Levi). That’s specifically who they wanted to destroy because of what happened at Succoth. I have seen that fear come on wicked people and watched them back off—baffled and confused by their own feelings. When my uncle and I were evangelizing his old gang, it happened a number of times.

Life Lessons:

- 1) An encounter with God, hearing & obeying His voice, will give you boldness to lead.
- 2) When we obey, God will give us the protection from our enemies that we need.

#### **IV. Grieving a Loss**

Genesis 35:8 “*Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.*”

Allon Bachuth means “Terebinth (Oak) of Weeping.”<sup>6</sup> The death of Deborah came as a great loss to the family. Deborah had been Jacob’s mother’s nurse. She was elderly and probably died a natural death. The whole family felt the pain of her departure.

Life Lesson: Obedience does not shield us from the natural flow of life. I don’t care how obedient you are—if the Lord tarries, you will grow old and one day die.<sup>7</sup> There can be some modifications on the timing of that by trusting the Lord for healings and health, by honoring father and mother, etc.<sup>8</sup> But we are part of the human race. Salvation does not come to exempt us from the human experience. God comes into our lives to be with us through this journey, to reveal Himself to us and strengthen us for the journey, and prepare us for eternity.

In the midst of their revelations from God, in the midst of their protection from enemies, still their beloved Deborah passed from this life to the next and they felt the loss.

#### **V. Another Encounter with the Lord**

Genesis 35:9-15, “*Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. 10 And God said to him, ‘Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.’ So He called his name Israel. 11 Also God said to him: ‘I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. 12 The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.’ 13 Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him. 14 So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. 15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.*”

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<sup>5</sup> This is what was happening in Gen. 34: building altars and hiding idols at the same time. This was a problem in Israel’s history ( for example, 2Kings 17:33) and is a problem in the Church today.

<sup>6</sup> *New Spirit-Filled Life Bible*, exec. Editor, Jack W. Hayford (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002) p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:19; Hebrews 9:27.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 38:5; Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:2.

So Jacob has fully obeyed the Lord. He has led his family in that obedience. He has fulfilled his vow made 30 years ago to return to Bethel. He has built an altar to the Lord and instructed.<sup>9</sup> Of course, all these Old Testament references to building an altar speak of prayer and worship (in our context).

God appears to Jacob and confirms His covenant with Him. He reminds Jacob of who he is, Israel, not Jacob (Prince with God, not Cheat and Supplanter). He assures Jacob of His commitment to bless him and multiply him, and He confirms His promise to give him the Promise Land.

Jacob set up a pillar or memorial as a testimony of all this and as a reminder of God's promises.

Life Lessons:

- 1) Whole-hearted obedience positions us to hear from God and to enjoy His blessings. This sermon came out of two prayers I was making to the Lord. (a) God, how do I position myself to hear you better? (b) How do I position myself for your blessing and protection in the days ahead? Jacob did it by: (a) Getting fully obedient (b) leading his family into that obedience with him (c) building an altar—a prayer life unto the Lord and (d) erecting a memorial to remind him to continue in these things.
- 2) Three things God wants you to know: (a) your identity in Christ: you are no longer Jacob, you are Israel, Prince with God (b) assurance of fruitfulness in the Lord. Jesus promise to His followers: John 15:16 *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.”* (c) your inheritance in Christ.<sup>10</sup>
- 3) Establish memorials that remind you to stay faithful to the Lord in all you do.

## **VI. A Mixture of Joy and Sorrow**

Genesis 35:16-20, *“Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor. 17 Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, “Do not fear; you will have this son also.” 18 And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.”*

Rachel, the mother of Joseph, wanted another son. I suspect it was one of the happiest days of her life when she learned that she was pregnant again. And now the day had come. But something was wrong. The labor was unusually hard; maybe the child was breach. The desire was fulfilled—the baby boy came. But it came with such pain and sorrow she gave this terrible name for him—Benoni, which means “son of my sorrow.” Thank God, Jacob revised it to Benjamin which means “son of my right hand”.<sup>11</sup>

Rachel was the love of Jacob's life. It broke his heart to lose her. So here is a day filled with both joy and sorrow all at the same time—addition and subtraction—gain and loss. What do you do with your emotions when that happens?

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 28:19-22; 31:13; 35:1.

<sup>10</sup> 1Peter 1:3-5; Eph. 1:3-12.

<sup>11</sup> Gen 35:16-26 (from The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press)

One way Jacob dealt with his grief was to erect another memorial, this time to his beloved Rachel.

Life Lesson: Into every life comes this mixture of joy and sorrow<sup>12</sup>—maybe not all on the same day as in this case. But nobody gets through the journey with no sorrow. And there are joys to be embraced. One day that will change. One day there will be no more tears, no more sorrow, no more death, no more pain (Rev. 21:4). That is where it is all going; but we are not there yet. The Lord gives and takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord, said Job (1:21). Don't let that reality throw you. Every life has this mixture.

## **VII. Big Disappointment**

Here is a different kind of sorrow coming into this family's life.

Genesis 35:21-22, *“Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. 22 And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it....”*<sup>13</sup>

Here is a family, chosen by God, in covenant with God, got an altar; yet highly dysfunctional with serious problems. Something like this does not happen in thin air. Something was wrong in the relationships before this tragic event.

The sin cost Reuben dearly. I can only imagine what it did to Bilhah's relationship with her husband. But we see the cost to Reuben in Jacob's final blessing over his sons.

Gen 49:2-10 *“Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, And listen to Israel your father. Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. 4 Unstable as water, you shall not excel, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it --He went up to my couch. 5 Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. 6 Let not my soul enter their council; Let not my honor be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. 7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel. Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”*

So Reuben was the firstborn—the first in line for the Messiah to come through his lineage. He disqualified himself with this sin.

Simeon and Levi were the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> born. So they were next in line. They disqualified themselves at Succoth.

So the privilege came all the way down to Judah, the 4<sup>th</sup> in line. Gen. 49:10 *“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 2Cor. 6:8-10; Phil. 4:12; Rom. 12:15.

<sup>13</sup> Gen 35:22-26 *“...Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: 23 the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; 24 the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; 25 the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; 26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.”*

Life Lesson: Sin will take you farther than you want to go and cost you more than you want to pay. Reuben was still under the Abrahamic Covenant, but it is impossible to measure what a few moments of pleasure cost him. Simeon and Levi were still in covenant with God, but the venting of their wrath was just as costly.

### **VIII. Passing of a Generation**

Isaac is at Hebron about 13 miles south of Bethlehem. He dies of old age and his sons bury him.<sup>15</sup>

Eccl 1:4 *“One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever.”*

Life Lesson: “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”<sup>16</sup>

#### Conclusion

In this one chapter we have seen a vast range of life experiences; experiences that are common to mankind in many ways. We have also considered the lessons these episodes speak into our own lives. Life Lesson

#1: Incomplete obedience can leave us and our families vulnerable to problems (Conflict with Hittites).

#2: God mercifully intervenes in our lives even when we have messed up (Word from Lord).

#3: When we obey God He will give us the protection needed (Terror of Lord on enemies).

#4: Living for God does not exempt us from the human experience (Deborah’s death).

#5: Wholehearted obedience positions us to hear from God and enjoy His blessings: (Covenant affirmed).

#6: Into every life comes a mixture of joy and sorrow (Rachel’s death & Benjamin’s birth).

#7: Sin will take you farther than you want to go and cost you more than you want to pay (Reuben’s sin).

#8: Life is relatively short; live it for God (Isaac’s death).

Pray

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<sup>14</sup> For an explanation of how this refers to Messiah see Gen 49:8-12 (from Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

<sup>15</sup> Gen 35:27-29 *“Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. 28 Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. 29 So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”*

<sup>16</sup> C.T. Studd. The complete poem is beautiful: <http://hockleys.org/2009/05/quote-only-one-life-twill-soon-be-past-poem/> accessed 6-26-15. The portion I quoted, hung on the wall in my godly great grandmother’s room when I was a child. Long before I knew Christ, the saying was impressed on my mind.



Map accessed at

[https://www.google.com/search?q=map+of+jacob%27s+journey&rlz=1C2CHLA\\_enUS436US465&biw=1005&bih=595&tbm=isch&imgil=RMLw0VC11SkwjM%253A%253BP4m7eOtOLT9DgM%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Fwww.bibletrack.org%25252Fcgi-bin%25252Fbible.pl%25253Fincr%2525253D-1%25252526mo%2525253D2%25252526dy%2525253D1&source=iu&pf=m&fir=RMLw0VC11SkwjM%253A%252CP4m7eOtOLT9DgM%252C\\_&usg=\\_\\_gDJxv-MZ7IIBm6uMCLbWjxXywHo%3D&ved=0CCsQyjc&ei=g8OVVb3iA4aryATr7Zq4Dg#imgc=RMLw0VC11SkwjM%3A&usg=\\_\\_gDJxv-MZ7IIBm6uMCLbWjxXywHo%3D](https://www.google.com/search?q=map+of+jacob%27s+journey&rlz=1C2CHLA_enUS436US465&biw=1005&bih=595&tbm=isch&imgil=RMLw0VC11SkwjM%253A%253BP4m7eOtOLT9DgM%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Fwww.bibletrack.org%25252Fcgi-bin%25252Fbible.pl%25253Fincr%2525253D-1%25252526mo%2525253D2%25252526dy%2525253D1&source=iu&pf=m&fir=RMLw0VC11SkwjM%253A%252CP4m7eOtOLT9DgM%252C_&usg=__gDJxv-MZ7IIBm6uMCLbWjxXywHo%3D&ved=0CCsQyjc&ei=g8OVVb3iA4aryATr7Zq4Dg#imgc=RMLw0VC11SkwjM%3A&usg=__gDJxv-MZ7IIBm6uMCLbWjxXywHo%3D) on June 26, 2015.