

GENESIS 35

GET BACK TO WHERE YOU ONCE BELONGED

In studying this chapter of Genesis, a few songs came to mind. This first part of this chapter is about getting back to where you once belonged. That of course brings to mind a Beatles' tune. Then there are the country songs that say things like "Happiness was Lubbock, Texas in the rear view mirror" or "Tulsa Time."

The last two songs deal with guys that thought it would be great to leave their hometowns so they go and make something of themselves in the big city. Both of them came back home realizing that they never should have left in the first place. Some of us have come to that conclusion. I have found that there are generally two types of folks from around here. There are those that love it and want to stay and then there are those that can't wait to leave. As you get older you tend to realize that there is no place like home.

Jacob finally gets this realization today in chapter 35. You may recall that Jacob left Bethel earlier to go to the big city of Shechem. There his daughter was raped and his sons murdered all the men in the city. Jacob disobeyed God and paid the price for it. Now he is returning to where he was supposed to be in the first place. Remember that this comes on the heels of Dinah's rape and the slaughter of the men of Shechem. Jacob was scared of being killed by the other tribes in the region because of the actions of his sons.

Let's look at what blessings await us when we are where God wants us.

Gen 35:1 *And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.*

Gen 35:2 *Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:*

Gen 35:3 *And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.*

Gen 35:4 *And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.*

Each time Jacob was in great distress God spoke to him. He does us the same way. We don't hear Him sometimes because we aren't listening. We are either too busy or we simply don't listen for His voice. Many times though, God isn't telling us something new, He is simply repeating something He has said earlier. In this case He tells Jacob to go back to where He had spoken with him last time.

God tells him to go back and build an altar there. Building an altar was considered an act of worship. It commemorated and sanctified the place and the occasion. It was the same place God comforted Jacob when he was worried about being killed by his brother.

The next question is whether or not Jacob will obey. He does, but he doesn't just decide to get up and leave. Something had to be done before they left.

Gen 35:2 *Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:*

We don't know how long Jacob stayed outside the city of Shechem but it had a profound effect on his family. As we can see here they were

worshipping false gods. Some of it was picked up from Rachel as we saw in chapter 31. The point is that the kids picked up what was being shown them in the home as well as gleaning from the environment in which they were placed.

As parents we cannot take this responsibility lightly. More is caught than taught. We are to shelter our children as much as we can. You can't keep them from everything, but you can keep them from a lot. It is when they begin to see the abnormal as the everyday thing that they become desensitized to it. They are going to see and hear things but they should see and hear them as *abnormal, not normal*.

Jacob's family had been tainted by Rachel's idols and their neighborhood. They were living in a mixed message. They were being sent conflicting signals.

So they were told to put away their strange gods, be clean and to change their clothes.

Clothes were seen as measure of character in the Bible, and are still today. You know what I mean. Some folks dress casually, comfortably, conservatively while some dress “hoochie” or thug-like. There is a reason you are told to dress a certain way when you go for a job interview. You want to make a certain impression. Your clothes make an impression whether you want to admit it or not.

Jude 23 gives the idea: but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

Ephesians 4:22-24 gives a similar exhortation: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Jacob wanted everyone to start fresh and new.

Now, would they do it?

Gen 35:4 *And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.*

They did. I think everyone there had a bad taste in his or her mouths from that place. Some folks just have to get tired of their lifestyle before they are ready to return to God.

Gen 35:5 *And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.*

As you may recall Jacob was worried about having to travel after being involved in the slaughter at Shechem. However, he had to go! It can be a scary thing walking in God's will, or trying to get back to that place. People will attack you and say you are crazy. The move had to be made though.

Often times though we find that there is nothing to our greatest fear. The devil uses our fears to paralyze us. God put a fear on the surrounding people and they left Jacob alone. We have to remember that the mission is God's mission. It is His plan and He will see that it is accomplished. God's grace protected Jacob, not because he was perfect, but because he was chosen. If you are saved you have been chosen also.

Now we will see that just because we are in God's will, we are not immune to tragedy.

Gen 35:6 *So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him.*

Gen 35:7 *And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbethel: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.*

Gen 35:8 *But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allonbachuth.*

Once Jacob got back to Luz, he built the altar and called it Elbethel, meaning literally God, the House of God.

But then Deborah died suddenly. This was a setback, I'm sure. She was a part of the family. *Being in God's will doesn't immunize us from tragedy. It allows us to cope with it. It allows us to put things in perspective.*

They buried her under an oak and called it Allonbachuth meaning "Oak of Weeping."

Then God appeared to Jacob again.

Gen 35:9 *And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him.*

Gen 35:10 *And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.*

Gen 35:11 *And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;*

Gen 35:12 *And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.*

Gen 35:13 *And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him.*

Gen 35:14 *And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon.*

Gen 35:15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.

God spoke with Jacob again to reaffirm His promises to him. He wanted let Jacob know he was on the right track. God does the same thing to us today. Once again, ***God said nothing new. He simply reaffirmed what He had already promised.***

He also made sure that Jacob knew his new name. It was Israel, which is where the nation gets its name today. From this family comes that nation. Jacob then poured out a drink offering and called the name of the place Bethel, meaning House of God.

We have all left some place. You left home to get here today. We will all return to some place. Most of us will return home today. ***What we can't afford to leave and not return to is God's will.***

God's will for you may be a place, a job, a relationship or a calling on your life. We can't leave our first love as the church in the book of Revelation did. We have to have that same zeal for God we had the first day we were saved. If you have left something, someone or someplace where God wants you, then I pray you go back their today. God will bless you and protect you.

Genesis 35:16-29

THE ALL-STAR TEAM THAT WASN'T

The last half of chapter 35 is a little different than many of the previous chapters with which we have dealt. Chapter 36 is the same way.

The second half of chapter 35 is not a regular narrative. It doesn't flow like your normal story. Rather, it is a series of statements that seem to be open ended. These open-ended statements leave out many details. You

will see that the responses to the statements that are made seem to be missing. As you will see, they aren't missing they are just answered later on in the book.

Details are important to God. The issues, which seem to be overlooked are not forgotten, they are dealt with in God's time. We need to remember that.

In the first half of chapter 35 Israel (Jacob) attempted to get his family back on track. Everyone gave up their idols and Israel moved his family back to where they should have been in the first place, Bethel. God provided protection for Israel and his family. Then God appeared to Israel to reaffirm His promise and His plan.

After the family settled in, Israel journeyed south to reunite with his father, Isaac. The last half of this chapter deals with the happenings of that journey. It ends with Israel and Esau burying Isaac.

Though this section is a little different we can still mine some nuggets of truth from it.

Gen 35:16 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.

Gen 35:17 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."

Gen 35:18 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.

Gen 35:19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

Gen 35:20 And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

So as the family headed south towards Hebron to see Isaac. Just before they got to Ephrath, (Bethlehem) Rachel went into labor. It was hard

labor and she died shortly after giving birth. Before she died she named the boy Ben-Oni, meaning son of my pain or son of my misfortune.

If you remember, Rachel had been in what we called an arms race or a baby race with her sister Leah. They each wanted to have more sons than the other in order to gain the love and respect of Jacob.

Many scholars wonder why she named her son Ben-Oni. I believe it was because she knew she was going to die. That would explain her naming the boy "son of my pain."

I don't know how wise it was to hang that on your child, but Israel thought better of it and renamed him Benjamin, meaning son of my right hand.

The idea is expressed in passages like:

- *Exodus 15:6 Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces.*
- *The Lord is our strength and honor, as in Psalm 16:8: I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.*
- *Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, the position of strength and honor, and we sit there with Him! If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1).*

As it turns out, this birth was a fulfillment of prophecy. Let's go back to chapter 30 and see what happened at the birth of Joseph.

Gen 30:23 *And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach."*

Gen 30:24 *So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."*

This is another example of things coming about in God's timing. So Benjamin is the baby boy. For this I know Israel was thankful. However, he has just lost the love of his life. That is a big hit for anyone to take. I told you this part of the chapter is different. There is no mention of a time of grieving or how hard Israel took it. The Bible just says that she was buried on the way to Bethlehem and Jacob marked her grave. The grave was still known at the writing of this portion of Genesis.

I am sure that the typical funeral took place here, but it just isn't recorded. I know there was a time of grieving. It just wasn't recorded. Once again, some of these things we have to fill in for ourselves.

After the funeral and all that it entailed, the family continued to move southward.

Gen 35:21 *Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.*

Gen 35:22 *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. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:*

Don't think of the word tower here as referring to a great structure. It was a structure used for watching flocks of sheep. Israel went beyond this tower so as not to interfere with the flocks of the locals. It was there that he made camp.

While there, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn went in unto Bilhah, the mother of some of his brothers. Bilhah was Rachel's maidservant. She was given to Jacob when Rachel was unable to bare children. Bilhah held a position of a wife in a sense. This made what Reuben did a type of incest.

We don't see Jacob dealing with it here, but it will be dealt with later in chapter 49.

Gen 49:2 *"Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, And listen to Israel your father.*

Gen 49:3 *"Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.*

Gen 49:4 *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.*

Gen 49:5 *"Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place.*

Gen 49:6 *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.*

Gen 49:7 *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.*

Gen 49:8 *"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.*

Here we see the matter being dealt with along with what Simeon and Levi did in the slaughter of the men at Shechem.

The blessing was then passed down to Judah. This was the tribe to which Jesus would trace His lineage. It could have been Reuben's blessing.

This should be a lesson to all of us. **Just because we think we have gotten away with something doesn't mean that we have.** God didn't forget. He was instructing Israel as he blessed those boys.

- **How many blessings have we disqualified ourselves from by being disobedient?**
- **How many things have come upon us and we ask why?**
- **Have we considered that our pasts may have come back to haunt us?**

Let me clarify something here because some people will see God as being vindictive and not gracious. **God is not being vindictive.** Go back and see if these boys ever repented of their actions. We also have to know that some things we do that just automatically disqualify us from things. How many times have you seen some public official do something so crazy that they can't be considered for that type of position again, even if they do truly repent and even apologize to the world on camera?

Is there any wonder that these boys are somewhat damaged after all the strife and envy we have seen in this household? Jacob and his wives are to blame for much of this.

This isn't an all-star team we have here. This family isn't being used of God because they are better than anyone else. God is using them because they have been chosen by His grace alone.

It is no different for us. **We aren't used of God because we are better than anyone else. God wants to use us because He has chosen us.** He will use us according to how much we make ourselves available to Him. You will see in the future that some of these boys make themselves available to God more than others.

Now we will see the roster of this not so All-Star team.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:

Gen 35:23 the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun;

Gen 35:24 the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin;

Gen 35:25 the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali;

Gen 35:26 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.

Gen 35:27 *Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt.*

Gen 35:28 *Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years.*

Gen 35:29 *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.*

The boys are listed here according to their mother. This is more of a legal listing than one of rank.

Jacob now returns to Hebron and his father Isaac. When Jacob finally left his father in law he probably thought that his father was long dead. However he was still alive. Jacob left Hebron with nothing but a staff and the clothes on his back. Now he has 12 sons and many flocks. He is now a rich man in many ways. He has what he needs to fulfill his part of God's plan.

He has returned to see his father before he dies. He is able to talk with him and see his brother again also.

Gen 28:20 *Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on,*

Gen 28:21 *so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.*

That vow was also fulfilled.

- **What would our lives look like if they were written down in this book? Would we be as dysfunctional as Jacob's family?**
- **Would people see this much envy, strife and jealousy?**
- **Would they see our children going off the deep end?**
- **Would they see us following in the faith of our parents, whatever that may be?**

- **Would they see our children following in our steps?**

I imagine they would see a lot of ups and downs. They would see good days and bad days. They would see us grow in spurts. They would probably see us get weary and preoccupied with the things of this world at times just as Jacob did.

There is nothing new under the Sun. All things are common among men.

Let's pray that we be filled with the Spirit daily and that we would walk in the Spirit so as not to fulfill the lust of the flesh. As you go through this week, I ask you to think about what it would be to have your life catalogued in the best seller of all time for the world to see. What would you want changed? Ask God to change you so that those things can change.

Know that God knows what our lives are like.