

Scripture Reading: Genesis 35:

“9 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.

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. 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. 21 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; & Israel heard about it. 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. 27 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.”

“Of Pain and Promises”

After the Great Flood and the division of the world into seventy nations following the Tower of Babel there are three major characters who dominate from chapters 12 to 50 here in the Book of Beginnings.

We have Abraham who is considered the father of our faith, to whom God made great and precious promises. We have Jacob who seems to overshadow his father Isaac and whose story is not closed until the final chapter of Genesis. Our text this morning began with God affirming to Jacob those promises made to Abraham and Isaac and he was given the new name that would be used to identify the people God would use to bring forth our salvation in His Son Jesus: The nation of Israel. And soon we will be considering the life of Joseph, who like Enoch seems to be one of those characters who does not have the major flaws that we see in so many of the other OT Saints. He will bring us to the end of Genesis.

But this morning I want us to consider some of the various adversities that Jacob faced in the midst of receiving God’s glorious promises.

- With such a messed up life at various times, it is easy to think that Jacob could have deserved some of those troubles.

And yet as we move on to Joseph we will see a man who faces even more extreme adversities with no evidence given in the account of his life that would indicate fault on his part?

So as we consider the pain that each of these men endured we must remember that only God truly knows the heart and we should not be too quick to determine fault...

Remember how the disciples came to Jesus with regard to the blind man in John chapter nine asking who had sinned to cause his blindness:

- **The man or his parents? And Jesus pointed out how in this case the man was born blind “that the works of God should be revealed in him.”**

So as we consider some of the pain in Jacob’s life revealed in our text, we should remember that this takes place at a point where he is being obedient in his life: He has returned to Bethel and cast out the idols in his household and made his family ready to be in God’s presence. And most importantly, it occurs as God is giving Him His precious promises anew...

- **God comes to him at Bethel and reaffirms and expands upon the promises given to Abraham.**
- **Now I could spend a lot more time on the individual afflictions or the promises that we find here, but my major focus this morning is to see how the pain comes in the midst of the promises!**

Perhaps the Apostle Peter had this in mind when he wrote to the Saints in his first letter where we find him focusing on the importance of God’s promises but also the necessity of some pain in our Christian walk...

I Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

- **Peter in his second letter calls these great and precious promises, which are the fulfilment of what Jacob heard!**

6 “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”

- **So Peter stresses that we should be rightly focused on the promises that God has made, which of course we have seen fully revealed in the New Testament!**
- **But the Apostle Peter goes on to discuss the importance of pain in the Christian life:**

And of course as we would suspect the Apostle James is even more direct:

James 1: 2 “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

- **So here in Genesis 35 we have Jacob being given those great and precious promises and they come right in the midst of pain & suffering!**
- **There are three such trials that get a good deal of attention and one that is not noticed as much, which has some important lessons to teach us today.**

So in verse 16 we read: “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.”

Through much of human history the death of a child or even the mother was not uncommon during childbirth. Rachael had demanded of Jacob before the birth of Joseph that he “give her children or she die” and after the birth of Joseph she said that “Jehovah shall add to me another son” and now this son has cost her life.

- While such loss and grief is always difficult I think there is an important lesson to learn from the response of Rachael and Jacob.

Both are facing extreme suffering and while one focuses on the pain and loss, the other focuses on the promises of God... And this is seen in the names: Rachael calls the child ‘son of my sorrow’ and Jacob chooses ‘son of my right-hand’ knowing that Benjamin would be a part of the inheritance that God promised to provide for him. Now of course if we know our Bibles, Benjamin was not the most upstanding tribe that we will later find in Israel...

- But as Jamie Soles points out in his music, without Benjamin and God’s later mercy to his descendants, we would not have the Book of Romans to challenge us because the Apostle Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, the son of Jacob’s right hand!

Death is certainly the greatest source of our pain and sorrow in this life, but here in the text we also saw the pain of disappointment in Jacob’s family.

21 “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; & Israel heard about it.”

Another embarrassing episode in the life of Jacob and while he does not take immediate action we later see that this sin was not forgotten when Jacob blessed his children just before his death in Egypt many years later. There this loving and disappointed father said this,

Genesis 49:3 ““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.”

Now of course as hard as all these sinful acts by his sons must have been on Jacob, we know the rest of the story and how the line of promise would thus proceed through Judah of whom Jacob said, “The scepter shall not depart.”

- And of course that scepter is held today by Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

So after hearing the promises of God, Jacob faces a tragic death and bitter disappointment and then the writer jumps a bit forward in history to remind us that death will once again visit this Patriarch.

27 “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.”

As I mentioned, our journey through the Book of Beginnings will now begin considering the life of Joseph and how God protected His people! How Joseph and a famine will bring Jacob and his family to Egypt as God had promised Abraham and so the writer is bringing the account of Isaac to a close and bidding Esau goodbye.

- Death brings great sorrow and often brings people together as we see here with Jacob and Esau.

The death of Rachael was an example of early death which is always hard to understand from the human perspective and now Isaac is said to be old and full days.

He had lived a full life and his death while not unexpected would still bring great sorrow that reunited these brothers and a burial to remind them, and us, of the hope of the resurrection.

As we close I want to cover one more important painful event, but before I do that I have a little quiz I would like to give:

- If we are recalling some of the characters we see in the Bible and I mention the name Deborah... Who comes to mind?

If you are like me, it was Deborah the warrior Judge who came to mind!

She is often talked about and her life seems to fit nicely into our modern thinking that wants to see women as equal to men as we send them into battle or see them as the real tough guys in all the latest movies & TV shows!

Now there are some lessons that can be learned from this Deborah who was a judge in Israel, but there is another Deborah here in Genesis 35 that is mostly forgotten...

- In fact if someone had asked me a few weeks ago to name the second Deborah mentioned in the Bible I might well have failed the test!

Her mention comes in verse 8, just before God gives His promises to Jacob which I read in our text:

Genesis 35: "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."

- So there is pain on both sides of the giving of God's promises!

Back in Genesis 24 we learned that Rebekah's nurse was sent with her when she left to marry Isaac and now we learn that her name was Deborah. We are given no information on the death of Rebekah, which likely happened while Jacob was away and yet here we find that Deborah has now joined with Jacob's family and was obviously very dear to them.

- With her death she is buried under a tree which they then name "tree of weeping."

So here in the chapter where God's promises are repeated and where we are given the names again of the sons that Jacob has been blessed with, we have this account of Deborah's death. No mention of Rebekah's death or burial and yet Deborah has a tree named after her burial.

The Spirit in Chapter 36 will give us an account of all the leaders and kings who will come in the line from Esau and yet here we have mention also of a nurse who helped to raise he & Jacob!

- So here in the midst of death and weeping we are reminded of how God remembers the faithful service of quiet Saints.

We are a celebrity culture today and we want to focus on every detail of the lives of those celebrities. Even in our churches, it is often the notorious sinner who comes to Christ who gets to go on stage and share what God did to bring him or her back to God...

- While the quiet Saint who has served God their entire life is left to wonder if they are truly saved!

Now I am pretty sure we will see Rebekah in heaven despite all her faults because of the power of the Gospel, but here in the inspired text it is the death of Deborah that is honored. The Saint whose name we are not even given until the very end who served in three different households as God's story of redemption unfolded! Perhaps as we often do with the quiet Saints her work had gone largely unnoticed until the Lord took her home and they felt her absence! But with her passing, there is such a felt absence that the tree that she is buried under carries the name of that sorrow!

This should be an encouragement to all of us who serve in the various ways that God has called us to serve. As Francis Schaeffer rightly pointed out in one of his most famous messages, 'with God there are no little people!'

In fact, the Bible does not really call us to be heroes or celebrities, but rather servants who quietly serve others. Peter gives advice to wives who are in pain over a disobedient husband later in his first letter and it gives us a principle that we can apply broadly:

I Peter 3:3 “3 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

We see the quiet spirit as a precious thing elsewhere in the Scriptures:

Here at Church of the King we often pray for the authorities over us to do their job, so as Paul instructed Timothy, “we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”

Deborah is honored here in the text as a faithful servant and Saint and is certainly example of the Proverbs women that we see in chapter 31 of that Book of Wisdom: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, And let her own works praise her in the gates.”

Her works were the quiet works of the home where she provided well for her husband and family.

And we see the same in the NT when men are encouraged to work in their vocations: **I Thessalonians 4:7** “7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. 9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; 11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, & that you may lack nothing.”

So I trust that our take away this morning is to more fully understand those precious and very familiar words found in Romans chapter eight: Jacob heard the promises of God in the midst of various trials and tribulations and we will see the same in our lives.

- As Christians on the one hand we have promises and peace and yet on the other we must face death and disappointment in our fallen world.

Let these not make us ones who sorrow as Rachael did, but ones who have hope as Jacob did! Believing and practicing what Paul told the Church at Rome so many years ago:

Romans 8:16 “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” [Let us pray]

- Let us rise and respond with the singing of God Moves in a Mysterious Way!

Communion Meditation: John 6

“51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” 52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” 53 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed,[h] and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”