

Genesis 35:16-29 to 37:1-11

It's strange how God always seemed to use adversity in Jacob's life to bring him back to Himself.

Maybe adversity isn't as bad as we think.

Jacob had spent about 20 years of his life working for Laban, and might have spent the rest of his life in Padan-aram accumulating wealth had not God sent adversity into his life in order to call him back to the Promised Land.

But even in Canaan, it was when he was under the threat of complete annihilation that he clung to God and became the new Israel **"---for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."**

What a provision that was when he entered the Promised Land as God's third patriarch.

However, as we learned in last week's lesson, the new Israel was soon overshadowed by the old Jacob, who immediately started on a very long and a very disastrous detour.

And the amazing thing is, although he had lived on the very edge of worldly Shechem, and even tolerated idol worship in his home, he continued to be a very religious man.

He built an altar just outside of Shechem and called it "God the God of Israel," the God of the *individual*, and never again sought Bethel, "the house of God."

But finally, and again through adversity,
God called him back to Himself.

Once again Israel had begun his pilgrim
journey, but not before his children
had made him **"stink among the
inhabitants of the land."**

That's always the result when Christians
live with one foot in the world.

And God's only answer to this dilemma is to
return unto Himself.

Revelation 2:5 **"Remember therefore from
whence thou art fallen, and repent, and
do the first works; or else I will come
unto thee quickly, and will remove thy
candlestick out of his place, except
thou repent."** And for Jacob, that
meant going back to Bethel.

Genesis 35:1 **"---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."**

And that's where we found Jacob at the end of
last week's lesson.

Once again we have Israel, the new man,
worshipping at a new altar; a man to
whom God could reconfirm His unchanging
promises.

Yes, in spite of a most grievous detour,
Jacob was still Israel, and **"as a
prince hast thou power with God and
with men, and hast prevailed."**

It is a story of amazing grace!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Jacob had been commanded to **"go up to
Bethel, and dwell there: and make there
an altar unto God."**

Well, Jacob did build that altar, and he called it "**El-beth-el**" (the God of the house of God), but it wasn't long before he moved on, and as I said last week, I wonder if that wasn't a mistake.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

V 16 "**And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour.**"

Certainly, as far as Rachel was concerned, Jacob's move was a mistake.

In that day, travel was a difficult business, even if you were young and healthy, and at Rachel's age and in her present condition, I'm sure it was not a good idea.

In fact, the rigors of the journey might have brought on a premature birth, but, of course, that is only speculation. Whatever the case, things didn't go well.

V 17-18 **"And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also.**

18: And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin."

Rachel called her first son Joseph, which means "adding," for she had faith to believe that **"The LORD shall add to me another son."**

I'm sure she prayed fervently for a second son, but it was 15 long years before little Benjamin came along.

In the anguish of her soul, Rachel called him Ben-oni, which means "the son of my sorrow," which would have been a hard name to bear.

However, his father called him Benjamin, which means "Son of the right hand," and that name would have given him an honoured place in the family.

V 19-20 **"And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. 20: And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day."**

In fact, her grave rests in the very land that was eventually given to Benjamin's tribe.

1 Samuel 10:2 **"Thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah."**

Yes, God keeps very long records, and He
does all things well.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

So Rachel died, and Jacob's heart died with
her, along with all his worldly
ambitions.

Yes, it was Jacob who buried Rachel, but it
was Israel, the pilgrim, who moved on.

V 21 **"And Israel journeyed, and spread his
tent beyond the tower of Edar."**

He was a pilgrim once again.

His feet were dragging like lead, and his
heart was completely broken, but his
affections were fixed on things above.

One after the other, the ties with this
earth had been broken, but now he was a
man who was much closer to his heavenly
home.

Certainly this was not true of his sons.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

V 22 **"And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it."**

We have already seen Simeon and Levi's murderous work. Now Reuben has committed a sin that even their heathen neighbours would have considered disgraceful.

In fact, in 1 Corinthians 5:1, Paul described this sin as **"such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife."**

And as bad as this sin was in itself, it was particularly cruel, coming as it did shortly after the death of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel.

Jacob would never forgive him, even at the time of his death.

Genesis 49:3-4 **"Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: 4: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Genesis 35, beginning to read at the end of V22: **"Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: 23: The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun: 24: The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin:**

**25: And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's
handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali:**

**26: And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's
handmaid; Gad, and Asher: these are the
sons of Jacob, which were born to him
in Padan-aram."**

With the birth of Benjamin, Jacob's sons
were complete, and so were the very
beginnings of the tribes of Israel.
It was time for the Holy Spirit to set down
their names in order in God's Holy
Word.

Certainly Jacob's sons had shown themselves
to be ungodly men, and at least to some
extent, it was the result of being
raised in a polygamous family, and in
close proximity to Shechem.

And yet, by the grace of God, Jacob's
descendants would become God's Chosen
People.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

V 27-29 **"And Jacob came unto Isaac his
father unto Mamre, unto the city of
Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham
and Isaac sojourned.
28: And the days of Isaac were an
hundred and fourscore years.
29: And Isaac gave up the ghost, and
died, and was gathered unto his people,
being old and full of days: and his
sons Esau and Jacob buried him."**

Those who carefully compute the ages of
biblical characters tell us that
although Isaac's death was recorded
here, actually he did not die until he
was 180 years old.

In fact, at the time of his passing, Joseph had already been sold into Egypt. However, when his time finally came to leave this earth, Isaac was buried with Rebekah, Abraham, Sarah, and, later on, Leah, in the cave of Machpelah. And incidentally, although Jacob would die in Egypt, by his own request, he was laid to rest in this same family tomb.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

So Isaac's death was recorded in V 29, and Jacob and Esau, who had been so at odds in their early years, were now living in harmony, and attended their father's funeral together.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Chapter 36 is completely dedicated to the genealogy of Esau.

We will not be reading this large list of names, but merely commenting on a few interesting events.

In V 6-8, we see a distinct change in Esau's life.

V 6-8 **"And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob.**

7: For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle.

8: Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau is Edom."

A herdsman requires a lot of land to make a living, so as their flocks grew larger, Jacob and Esau faced the same problem that Abraham and Lot had encountered many years ago.

Apparently, after Jacob had returned to Canaan, the two brothers had lived quite close to each other, but now it was time to part.

However, with all of Canaan before him, Esau was not content to stay in the Promised Land.

After all, it had not been promised to his descendants.

No, he knew that God had promised this land to his brother, so with an air of independence and a certain amount of disdain for God's promises, he left Canaan behind, and moved southward into

the mountainous regions southeast of the Dead Sea.

In fact, Esau chose a central range of mountains known as Mount Seir, an area that had already been settled by the descendants of Seir, so it is obvious that he gained his territory by conquest.

Actually, that was in line with his father's blessing: **"By thy sword shalt thou live."** And this fact is borne out in Deuteronomy 2:12 **"The Horims (who were the sons of Seir) also dwelt in Seir beforetime; but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead."**

This same area included the impregnable fortress of Petra (also called Sela),

which quite certainly would have become the possession of Esau.

Owning Petra would allow him to control the great East-West trade route and impose any toll he wished, while at the same time being able to defend himself from any invaders.

Over the process of time, his descendants intermarried with the descendants of Seir, thus producing the Edomites.

And if you follow Esau's genealogy laid down in this chapter, you will find that his sons and grandsons rose to positions of considerable prominence, being called "dukes" or chieftains.

Esau's descendants became the ever-present enemies of Israel. So the struggle that began in Rebekah's womb has continued down through the centuries.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Although we will not concern ourselves with all the genealogies in this chapter, I would like to pay particular attention to the Amalekites.

We see their beginnings in V 12 **"And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek."**

Normally we would expect a concubine to occupy second place in the family, but this was not the case with Timna.

Actually, she was a duke, not because of any connection to her husband, but in her own right.

We see that in V 40 **"And these are the names of the dukes that came of Esau, according to their families, after their places, by their names; duke**

Timnah, duke Alvah, duke Jetheth," and
so on.

And not surprisingly, her son Amalek also
became a duke or chieftain.

His descendants, the Amalekites, were the
bitter enemies of Israel, and in
scripture, they are a type of the old
nature.

Let's just take a moment to look at this
nation.

Exodus 17:8-14 **"Then came Amalek, and
fought with Israel in Rephidim.**

**9: And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose
us out men, and go out, fight with
Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the
top of the hill with the rod of God in
mine hand.**

**10: So Joshua did as Moses had said to
him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses,**

Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

11: And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

12: But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

13: And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

14: And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for

I will utterly put out the remembrance
of Amalek from under heaven."

Later on, God called upon King Saul to
exercise this judgment against the
Amalekites.

1 Samuel 15:1-3 "Samuel also said unto
Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee
to be king over his people, over
Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto
the voice of the words of the LORD.
2: Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I
remember that which Amalek did to
Israel, how he laid wait for him in the
way, when he came up from Egypt.
3: Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly
destroy all that they have, and spare
them not; but slay both man and woman,
infant and suckling, ox and sheep,
camel and ass."

Well, Saul disobeyed the Lord in that he saved the king and some of the cattle, and for that God rejected him, and eventually David took his place.

In scripture, the Amalekites are a picture of the flesh, the old man who is ever the arch-enemy of the new man.

And, as the Amalekites kept popping up in Israel's history even though they were supposed to be annihilated, so the old man keeps rearing his ugly head in the life of the Christian.

God's only remedy is to keep him in the place of death.

Romans 6:6 **"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Chapter 36 ends with the words, "**he is Esau the father of the Edomites.**"

Esau was a man of the world, and like many men of the world, he obtained great power and prestige, but with the end of this chapter, we hear the last of him.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The rest of the book of Genesis is devoted to one man, and his name is Joseph. Of course he was not perfect, especially in his early years, but throughout scripture, his life portrays a fitting type of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's begin Genesis Chapter 37.

V 1 "**And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.**"

This verse reminds us of Hebrews 11:9-10 "**By faith he** (that is Abraham) **sojourned in**

the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

So Joseph was born into a very special family, but humanly speaking, he was born into a very dysfunctional family. Right from the beginning, Jacob's home had been a battlefield.

Rachel was Jacob's favourite wife, and there is no doubt that she should have been his only wife.

However, Laban's little scheme had changed all that.

Leah had been disappointed, Rachel was frustrated, and the handmaids had been used as pawns in the dispute.

So right from the beginning, there was intense competition, and no doubt this attitude had been passed down to the children.

So at the impressionable age of 17, and having recently lost his mother, Joseph would be quite a lonely boy.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

But there was another reason for his plight. Partly because of his father's favouritism, and no doubt partly because of his own attitude of importance, he was alienated from the rest of the family.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Certainly Jacob had not been wise in showing favouritism, and we could spend a lot

of time discussing the detrimental affects of this course of action in a family.

However, in this particular lesson, I would like to look at the whole situation from an entirely different point of view.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Some commentators feel that an individual must be specifically identified in scripture as a type before we can apply that status to him.

Others do not follow that rule entirely, and certainly when it comes to Joseph, I have to agree with this latter group.

No, Joseph is not identified in scripture as a type of Christ, but his life is simply filled with attitudes and events that picture our Lord Jesus Christ.

So with this particular interest in view, I would like to put aside for the moment the obvious fact that Jacob was unwise in showing favouritism, and look at this special relationship as it relates to our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ His only begotten son.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Certainly it is true that Jacob was not a perfect parent, as indeed none of us are, for he had exposed his children to some very worldly influences.

However, whatever the cause may have been, and we can't blame our parents for everything, you know, the fact remained that most of his sons were very worldly.

Levi and Simeon had even stooped to murder,
and Reuben had defiled his father's
bed.

And before long, we will find that the whole
lot of them were not to be trusted.

This was Jacob's dilemma as he grew older
and realized there was no one he could
trust to manage his rather large
business.

Under normal circumstances, Reuben, being
the firstborn, would have taken the
leadership in his family, but he had
driven a wedge between himself and his
father that would never be removed.

So what was a father to do?

Well, by this time, Joseph was 17, the age
when many young man in his society were
shouldering adult responsibilities.

He had shown leadership ability, was obedient and respectful, and unlike his brothers, he was an example of chastity.

He would not be running around the country giving the family a bad name!

So his mind was made up. Jacob would bypass the rest of the family and groom Joseph, the firstborn of his dear Rebekah, to eventually take control of the family affairs.

Of course, this was never verbalized, but it wasn't long before it became painfully apparent that his hopes and dreams rested upon Joseph.

And if Joseph was to take over his affairs, he would have to learn the business from the bottom up.

So Joseph's apprenticeship began.

V 2 "---Joseph, being seventeen years old,
was feeding the flock with his
brethren; and the lad was with the sons
of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah,
his father's wives: and Joseph brought
unto his father their evil report."

No doubt Jacob's flocks had been divided up
between the various groups of sons, but
you would wonder why he would assign
Joseph's training to the sons of the
handmaids.

Perhaps he felt, being sons of servants,
they would be more inclined to comply
with his orders, but probably that
didn't work.

No doubt they felt their second-place
position in the family very keenly, and
would be very resentful of this young
upstart.

And maybe some of their attitude was
Joseph's own fault.

I'm sure he knew what his father was doing,
and so he might have been a little too
cocky for a 17-year old.

And, in spite of his special position, he
was just a novice, and would have to
rely on their goodwill if he was ever
going to be a successful shepherd.

And there was a lot to learn.

He must master the art of breeding to obtain
best results. He had to know where to
find suitable pasture and watering
holes.

He must be able to ward off predators, both
human and animal.

And if he was to cut his losses, he must
know how to care for the lame, the
sick, and the weak.

So Joseph would be obliged to take the humble place of the learner, but at the same time, he had probably been asked to keep an eye on things.

Actually, it was quite an impossible situation, but being young and full of enthusiasm, he was probably dreaming of the day when he would be in charge.

V 2 **"---and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report."**

Even with specific instructions from his father, his brothers would have considered him a tattletale, which, of course, he was.

I can almost hear them saying, *Now, don't breathe a word of this to father or we'll get you.*

It was a lot of pressure to put on a 17-year old, and in addition to that, there was

always the temptation to go along with his brothers' way of life.

Come on, Joseph. Don't be such a stick in the mud!

Yes, any way you looked at it, it was a bad situation.

But Joseph stuck to his guns.

He had determined to serve God, and to serve his father, and someday he would be in charge.

V 3-4 **"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.**

4: And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him."

There is some question whether this should have been translated "**a coat of many colours**" or a coat with long sleeves.

But the important point is--this garment emphasized the fact that Joseph already possessed a certain amount of authority.

In today's world it would be like the white hard hat in a construction company.

So the message was clear.

Someday Joseph would be running the show, and even now he was his father's right-hand man.

Yes, Joseph would be taking his place as the head of the family, the place that would have normally belonged to Reuben.

As such, he would also be the spiritual leader in the family, and he would

receive a double portion at his
father's death.

Yes, this coat made it abundantly clear that
Reuben had been bypassed, and Rachel's
firstborn would be taking this place.
It was a badge of authority, and it
infuriated them.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

You would think by now that things just
couldn't get any worse, but they did.

V 5-6 **"And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he
told it his brethren: and they hated
him yet the more.**

**6: And he said unto them, Hear, I pray
you, this dream which I have dreamed:**

**7: For, behold, we were binding sheaves
in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose,
and also stood upright; and, behold,**

your sheaves stood the round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf."

At this point, I'm sure Joseph needed all the encouragement he could get, for his brothers "**could not speak peaceably unto him**" anymore.

But under the circumstances, don't you think it would have been wiser if he had just kept his mouth shut?

But he hadn't.

Maybe this new coat had gone to his head, or possibly he thought this dream would convince his brothers that he was justified in wearing it.

In fact, it did the very opposite.

V 8 **"And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And**

**they hated him yet the more for his
dreams, and for his words."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Before we go on with these unhappy events,
let me point out the first indication
we have that Joseph was a type of
Christ.

Although it didn't make for a happy family,
there's no doubt that this special
relationship between Jacob and his son
pictures another special relationship
between our Heavenly Father and His
Son, Jesus Christ.

As Joseph was obedient to his father, so
Christ did "**always those things that**"
pleased His Father, and for that His
brethren hated Him.

This was true both of His *natural* brethren
and His *national* brethren, the children
of Israel.

We see this attitude in John 7:4-5 where His
brothers mockingly said "--- **If thou do
these things, shew thyself to the
world.**

**5: For neither did his brethren believe
in him."**

And the very first chapter of the book of
John tells us that "**He came unto his
own, and his own received him not.**"

So even as a teenager, when he wasn't
showing a great deal of wisdom, the
circumstances of his life paralleled
those of our Saviour.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Genesis 37:9-11 **"And he dreamed yet another
dream, and told it his brethren, and**

said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

10: And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?

11: And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying."

Joseph's first dream would be literally fulfilled many years later.

His brethren would obediently bow before the governor of Egypt, little realizing that this great man was their brother.

And the second dream that prophesied his complete authority over the family would even be surpassed.

Not only would Jacob's family depend upon him for their very lives, but he would provide all the sustenance for Egypt and the rest of the Gentile world around it.

This also speaks of Christ.

In the millennium, not only will Christ rule over His brethren, but He will exercise complete dominion over all the earth.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Next week, we will witness the most unusual way in which God sets Joseph's feet on the path to his dreams.

It was not what he would have wished, but it was what he needed.

In fact, Joseph's whole story will prompt us
to say---"**How unsearchable are his
judgments, and his ways past finding
out!**"