



Sermon Notes

Pastor Lynn Howe

Title: The Path of Growth

Text: Genesis 35:1-29

Theme: Profiting through trials

Type: Exposition

Thought: How does God build your faith?

Introduction: God wants us to grow in our faith in Him. Faith in God who He is and what He is doing.

Jacob the Traveler chapter 35:5, 16, 21 he goes from Shechem to Bethel to Bethlehem to Hebron. It involves a short amount of time.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Romans 4:3-5 "For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. 5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

Hebrews 11: 1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Hebrews 11:8-12 8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is

God. 11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude-innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Not only are there sorrows in the family of the dedicated believer, but there are also sins (v. 22).

Reuben was born amid great expectations (29:32), God had called him to go “back to Bethel” (v. 1), back to the place of the vision and the vow.

When a person is backslidden (as Jacob was), there is nothing else for him to do but go back to the place of dedication and renew his vows.

Before he could take his company back to the altar, however, Jacob had to “clean house”- he strange gods and the jewelry associated with heathen worship had to be buried.

The only place for sin is in the grave. In fact, there are four graves in this chapter: the grave of the idols (v. 4), Deborah's grave (v. 8), Rachel's grave (v. 19), and Isaac's grave (v. 29).

Jacob returned to Bethel and built an altar.

God met him in a new way and reminded him of his new name, Israel.

God reaffirmed the promises He gave to Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob responded by erecting a new pillar and anointing it as he had done years before.

A backslidden believer does not need a new experience to get right with God.

He needs only to reaffirm the old experience in a new way.

How strange that Rachel should die soon after Jacob is restored to fellowship with God. Great spiritual experiences are not security against the sorrows and trials of life. And certainly Jacob was better able to bear this sorrow now that he had again built his altar. Everything that Jacob had lost before had been

regained because he had met God at the altar.

Jacob said in later years that Reuben could have accomplished much (49:3).

I. Growing through Distress 1-4 (Perplexity)

1 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.”

2 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.

Every believer face crisis and have personal examination. (over the events of Shechem)

God Why?

God what am I missing?

God what do you want me to do?

1 Bethel - This was the place where God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob (28:13-15).

1 “Put away the foreign gods” Moving to Bethel necessitated spiritual preparation beyond the level of an exercise in logistics.

Possession of idolatrous symbols such as figurines, amulets, or cultic charms (v. 4, “earrings”) were no longer tolerable, including Rachel's troubling teraphim (31:19).

Idols buried out of sight -

1 bathing and changing to clean clothes - all served to portray both cleansing from defilement by idolatry and consecration of the heart to the Lord.

It had been 8 or 10 years since his return to Canaan and, appropriately, time enough to clean up all traces of idolatry.

1 terebinth (Oak) tree ... Shechem - Possibly this was the same tree as in Abraham's day (12:6).

II. Growing through Devotion 5-7 (Prayer)

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.

1 "the terror of God" - A supernaturally induced fear of Israel rendered the surrounding city-states unwilling and powerless to intervene and made Jacob's fear of their retaliation rather inconsequential (34:30).

1 "built an altar there"

act of worship,

fulfillment of his vow (28:20-22),

renaming the site,

reconfirmed his allegiance to God,

God affirmed His commitment to Jacob by re-appearing to him, repeating the change of name (v. 10; cf. 32:28), and rehearsing the Abrahamic promises (vv.11,12). In response, Jacob also repeated the rite he had performed when he first met God at Bethel (v. 14) and reaffirmed its name (v. 15).

III. Growing through Design 9-15 (Plan)

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.

1 Israel, be fruitful & multiply, a nation, a company of nations, kings will come from your body, land!!!!

"kings shall come from your body" God's words, here included for the first time since His promises at Abraham's circumcision (17:6,16), served as a reminder of future royalty.

"went up" The presence of God was there in some visible form.

"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." A commonly done way to make a covenant (see note on 28:18-21).

IV. Growing through Death 8, 16-19, 27-29 (Pain)

What does death teach us? All must learn to respond to loss through death.

(3 people closest to him were now gone in a very short time)

1. Life is short
2. Life changes are not in our control
3. God's strength is sufficient
4. Eternal verities are all important
5. God is totally in control
6. God knows the number of our days

7. Life is by the grace of God

1 Deborah - 8

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.

Martin Luther “a wise, godly matron who served and advised Jacob, had supervised the domestics of the household and offer counseled and comforted Jacob in dangers and difficulties.”

She was probably sent with Jacob by his mother when he left for Laban's place. She would have know people and culture and customs. Indeed she served as a great helper to Jacob.

1 Rachel - 16-19 “Ephrath” A more ancient name for Bethlehem (v. 19; 48:7; cf. 5:2).

Rachel had passionately said, Give me children, or else I die; and now that she had children, she died!

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.

“Ben-Oni ... Benjamin”

“Son of my sorrow,” The dying mother appropriately named her newly born son

“Son of my right hand,” the grieving father named him

Assigning him a place of honor in the home. Her prayer at the birth of her firstborn was answered (30:24).

The memorial to Rachel could still be seen in Moses' day, about one mi. N of Bethlehem.

“tower of Eder” Likely a watchtower for shepherds, near Bethlehem.

1 Isaac - 27-28

27 Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba[e] (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. 28 Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years.

“Mamre ... Hebron”

V. Growing through Depravity - 21-22 (Peril)

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; and Israel heard about it.

Reuben's crime

Reuben was unstable; he lacked godly character (49:4);

he lost the birthright that belonged to the firstborn son (1 Chron. 5:1-2) and had to give it to Judah and Joseph.

Sin never brings blessing; it is always costly.

VI. Growing through Descendants - 22-26 (People)

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.

“the sons of Jacob” The birth of Benjamin in Canaan (v. 18) furnished reason to simply review the sons born outside of Canaan, with only one sad note preceding it, i.e., the sin of Reuben, which tainted the qualifier “Jacob's firstborn” in the listing (see 49:3,4; Deut. 22:30; 1 Chr. 5:1,2).

VII. Growing through Destiny - 29 (Posterity)

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.

Israel, be fruitful & multiply, a nation, a company of nations, kings will come from your body, land!!!!

his sons Esau and Jacob. Ca. 1885 b.c. Isaac's funeral brought his two sons back together, as Abraham's funeral had done for Isaac and Ishmael (25:9). Jacob, back in the land before his father's death, fulfilled yet another part of his Bethel vow (28:20, “come back to my father's house in peace”).

The final act on this journey was for Jacob and Esau to bury their father.

Isaac lived about forty years after he had made his will, chap. 27:2. We shall not die an hour the sooner, but much the better, for timely setting our hearts and houses in order.

Particular notice is taken of the agreement of Esau and Jacob at their father's funeral, to show how God had wonderfully changed Esau's mind.

It is awful to behold relations, sometimes for a little of this world's goods, disputing over the graves of their friends, while they are near going to the grave themselves.

Jacob had planned to see his mother again, but she died before he arrived home.

Life Lessons:

1 Every believer face crisis and have personal examination.

1 Every believer needs to clean house of sin before God.

- 1 Every believe must go the alter of an all Knowing God.
- 1 Every believer must acknowledge God Almighty.
- 1 The heart of man can only find peace in the Hands of God.
- 1 Facing loss in death will make one bitter or better.
- 1 God can and will handle sinful offenses.

The Path of Growth [Bulliton insert]

Genesis 35:1-29

I. Growing through Distress

II. Growing through Devotion

III. Growing through Design

IV. Growing through Death

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V. Growing through Depravity

VI. Growing through Descendants

VII. Growing through Destiny

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