

## **A Man Named Israel**

Genesis 35:9-29

This morning, we end the section of Genesis devoted to the life of Jacob, the section devoted to the generation of Jacob and Esau. We won't be studying chapter 36 in depth, since we looked at it in a previous study of Esau, and chapters 37 through 50 focus in on the one favorite son born to the beloved wife Rachel, whose name was Joseph. Any outline of Genesis will have this division, with chapters 1-11 about creation and the fall up through the flood. Then chapters 12-25 about Abraham. 25-36 about Jacob and Esau. And 37 through 50 about Joseph.

This passage is a very fitting ending to the section on Jacob, because it is a word of blessing. A word of blessing from God upon a man who has grown a great deal in his relationship with the Lord. It is the covenant blessing, passed down from generation to generation, from Abraham, to Isaac, and now to Jacob. The three great patriarchs of God's people, the three founding generations of the nation of God's people Israel. And because it is a blessing, it is a very encouraging word.

### **I. GOD BLESSES JACOB BY RENEWING HIS COVENANT PROMISES.**

v.9

This is the sixth time that God appeared to Jacob, and only one more appearance would remain, when God would instruct Jacob to move back to Egypt, recorded in chapter 46. Here we have perhaps the greatest of all the covenant promises to made to Jacob, for here, in this one appearance, is all the richness of God's blessing. We see, first of all,

#### **A. The blessing of Jacob's new name.**

Now, none of these blessings are new here, but that doesn't make them any less important. In fact, the repetition, with increasing intensity, makes the promises all the more meaningful. God has already given Jacob a new name, a name that means "he who strives with God." Israel. It was such an appropriate name, for Jacob had wrestled with God and prevailed. He sought after God's blessing and it was granted.

That was his identity. Though God had chosen Jacob by sovereign grace, and had therefore rejected the older brother Esau, still, Jacob would be called upon to wrestle with God and was blessed for his perseverance. His very name would represent that blessing from God, and God gives Jacob that name again.

v.10

Then we have,

### **B. The blessing of God's own self-revelation.**

v.11a

Note the same identification when God appeared to Abraham, Gen. 17:1 "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

I am Almighty God. In Hebrew, El Shaddai, the God of power. The omnipotent God who rules over all his people and governs and controls all their actions. This is God's most noteworthy self-identification, his most obvious revelation of his infinite power and strength. And this appearance is an immeasurable blessing, to be sure.

Now, we might think ourselves somewhat at a disadvantage today, because God doesn't appear to us in such dramatic ways any more. God's self-revelations have ended, ceased. Many Christians strongly disagree with that, those who believe that God is still giving special, direct revelation. They call themselves full gospel. Meaning of course, that we don't have the full gospel. To which I can only say, "Oh yes we do." We have the full gospel. Because the full gospel came in Christ. The blessing of God's self-revelation reached a climax in Christ. The fullest demonstration of God saying "I am Almighty God" is what John teaches us in,

John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Similarly, we read in,

Col. 2:6 "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."

"In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." And this blessing of God's self-revelation to Jacob, as great as it is, merely looks forward to the perfect revelation that would come in Christ. So Jesus Christ is the perfect, completed revelation of God, in the flesh, and so we have no more revelations and should want no more, not if we wish to honor and exalt Jesus Christ! Thus we read in,

Heb.1:1 "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power."

In the past, God spoke through various prophets. Now, he has spoken to us in Christ. And because this revelation is recorded in Scripture, we can study it as a revelation of God to us. And what a blessing it is to have this revelation from the one who identifies himself as, "I am almighty God."

The two specific promises of the covenant are then specified. First,

### **C. The blessing of fruitfulness.**

v.11 "Be fruitful and multiply."

Now obviously that doesn't merely refer to the first generation of descendants, for Jacob has 12 sons. He has already been quite fruitful and has multiplied quite effectively, at least for one generation. But so much more is to come. Indeed, as the promise continues,

v.11b

A company of nations. Kings. They would all come from Jacob. This was, of course, the continuation of the covenant promise to Abraham, which Isaac had pronounced upon Jacob when he sent him off to find a wife,

Gen. 28:1 "Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there

of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. 3 "May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; 4 And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham."

That promise, too, goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, who were given a similar promise,

Gen. 1:28 "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

It was a promise repeated to Noah after the universal flood of God's judgment,

Gen. 9:1 "So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. 2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs."

The definition of this covenant blessing is given for us in rather boring detail, in,  
v.23-26

Don't miss the point. Those twelve sons represent the fullness of God's covenant promise. They would be the fruitful nation from whom communities of nations would come, from whom kings would come. Those twelve sons represented the fullness of God's people of the OT, just as the twelve apostles represent the fullness of God's people of the NT.

The blessing of the covenant was fruitfulness! Then, along with the blessing of many descendants, we see again,

#### **D. The blessing of a great land.** v.12

I suspect I've said about everything I could possibly say about the land, the land of Canaan, that land that Abraham understood to represent the whole earth, "the city with foundations whose builder and architect is God." What a blessing this is. God blesses Jacob by renewing his covenant promises. And with that, let me say just briefly, though very directly, we have the same blessing. For the covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are renewed in us, the church of Jesus Christ. What a blessing is ours! Secondly,

### **II. GOD BLESSES JACOB BY EMPHASIZING HIS FAMILY HERITAGE.**

Don't miss this point in the details of the passage. What we see here is God's faithfulness from one generation to another. To another.

And so we have the death of Isaac included here. Isaac would have been a very old man by now, several times before being noted as near death. But here it is. Recorded in the pages of Scripture with authoritative accuracy.  
v.27-29

The simplest thing to say about that is that,

#### **A. The covenant was passed on to Jacob from a previous generation.**

The covenant came to Jacob because he was the son of Isaac. God had grace on Jacob because he was the son of

Isaac. God chose Jacob because he was the son of Isaac. So the story of Jacob necessarily includes the story of Isaac.

v.28

Notice the way death is described, as the breathing out of the breath of life.

v.29a

And notice there was evidently some definite belief in life after death, for Isaac's death means he was going to join his people, his predecessors.

v.29b

And a side note, Jacob and Esau are presented here at peace with one another, even though they had gone their separate ways after meeting each other. But three generations are included. Not only Jacob's ancestors are mentioned and emphasized here, but also his descendants. Particularly his children. So we have the account of this twelfth and final son, born to the beloved Rachel.

v.16-17

Another son. Thus,

**B. The covenant was passed on by Jacob to a succeeding generation.**

And in an obvious expression of the fact that his children were now complete, we read of Rachel's death in childbirth.

v.18-20

Then we read about a disturbing event in the life of the firstborn, the oldest, Reuben.

v.21-22

That sinful immorality would earn for Reuben his father's

rebuke when Jacob gathered his children for the final words before his death.

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."

Even with that rebuke, you can't help but realize that you are reading about a family, generations of a family. In the OT particularly, the generations of families were together when God's people assembled for worship, and they ought to be today, and if there is one thing our church stands for today it is that same idea.

As God's people, each of you should be conscious of your family heritage. God saves some people without a spiritual heritage from a previous generation, and you become the pioneering generation to pass the faith on to the next generation. But the more common circumstances are that you have indeed received the blessing of the covenant from a previous generation, and some of you can go back for several generations of covenant faithfulness. You, too, are called to pass the faith on to the next generation.

So let's not get so caught up in ourselves and in our own generation. The covenant blessings come in the context of generations of family heritage, and our great desire ought to be to honor the generations that have gone before us and equip the generations that come after us. God works through generations. And we need that encouragement even in the raising of our own children these days.

As we see so clearly with Jacob, God's covenant necessarily involves generations of his people. So this is the invitation of the gospel, in the words of the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost,

Acts 2:38 “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

As a proper interpretation or explanation, you can add a word in that last phrase, “The promise is to you and your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

So with these great blessings, what does Jacob do? Well, no surprise, not if you’ve been studying Genesis.

### **III. JACOB WORSHIPS GOD BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT BLESSINGS.**

v.13-15

We’ve seen this reaction before, and we’ll see it again. God’s people instinctually respond to God’s blessings with worship. Sacrifices of worship.

It’s a sad commentary upon our day that biblical worship is not the primary focus of the church. It’s not the sacred event that comes before all others. It’s not the primary thought in all that we think and do. The church of our days spends so much of her time and energy on things of lessor importance. Worship is to be the main thing. Simple, reverent, God-centered, biblically based worship. Offering to God the acceptable sacrifices that he has prescribed for us in Scripture.

When God appeared to Jacob, Jacob worshiped him. And we see that,

#### **A. Jacob worshiped at the place where God had revealed himself.**

v.13-15

Now, this is certainly a case of *deja vu*. We’ve been here before, Genesis 28:18. But the repetition isn’t a mere empty cycle, as if Jacob were just going through the motions a second time. No, this was real. You should see the repetition here as a spiral, not a mere cycle. And the difference is that a spiral goes somewhere. A cycle is just a circle, going round and round. And quite honestly, it’s not hard to find yourself on that cycle when it comes to worship. We just come here each week and go round and round.

How do you get out of that rut? But seeing the repetition as a spiral, winding its way up to heaven, so that when you are made perfect in glory, your worship in heaven will simply be a continuation of your worship on earth.

The answer to all the discouragement in the world, all even the sense of despondency or hopelessness, is to discover the spiral upon which God has put your life, and to realize that in God’s providence, even when you are going in circles, you may well be rising up that spiral. And the way to discover that is to get your eyes off yourself and to put your focus on God. That is where pure worship comes from.

In that context, be sure that our weekly worship not become merely a routine, and endless cycle of vain repetition, performed twice each Sunday. Instead, every time you come here to worship, fix your eyes upon God who has blessed you with these great and rich blessings of his covenant shown to Jacob. Learn to sing praise with the Apostle Paul for those spiritual blessings,

Eph. 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons

by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

Jacob worshiped at the very place where God had revealed himself, for his worship was directly connected to God’s self-revelation. What prompted his worship was the awareness of God’s presence.

And so it should be for us. THIS is God’s self-revelation, and our worship must be directly connected to the living words written in this book. This is the written record of God’s presence among us, the written record of Immanuel. And this place is the house of God. This place is Bethel, not because God can be confined to a building made by human hands, but because this building, for this hour, is set apart as a sanctuary to meet with God in the splendor of his glory, in the majesty of his presence.

And if you are consciously aware of the glorious presence of Almighty God, then your worship will never be merely routine. It certainly wasn’t for Jacob. Look closer at,  
v.14

Jacob poured out a drink offering. The common translation for the word “drink offering” is the word libation. Unlike an animal cut up upon an altar, a libation was a sacrifice of pouring out. We have, in the NT, excellent commentaries on the meaning of this

sacrifice, this libation or drink offering that was poured out. Look at,

Phil.2:17 “Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.”

Paul’s own life was a drink offering. His own life was poured out for the people to whom he ministered. Such a perspective governed his whole life, for near the end of his life he wrote to Timothy,

2Tim. 4:6 “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

The point is that the drink offering, the libation, was a sacrifice of your whole life. And that is to be your acceptable worship. As Paul urges the church at Rome,

Rom. 12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

So we see that, at Bethel,

### **B. Jacob worshiped by offering his whole life as a sacrifice to God.**

So, as you think about all this, as you think about Jacob, think about your own life. And pour out your own life as a drink offering to God. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices. Surrender everything. Everything, to God.

What are you holding back? Anything? Put it to death. Pour it out to God as an offering. Give your life, lose your life for the sake of the gospel. And if you do, then what you do here in worship will become the most important thing that you do anywhere!

Let me end by pointing you to the one who so perfectly poured out his life as a drink offering to God. And because of his perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice, our sins are forgiven and the wrath of God which we deserve is satisfied. I am, of course, talking about Jesus Christ, the one who looked at his disciples at that last supper and,

Matt. 26:27 “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Luke 22:20 “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”

Because of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice, represented before us in this sacrament, all the blessings of the covenant of grace are ours, by faith. Therefore, let us respond to him by offering the sacrifices of our worship today.