

JANUARY 17

Genesis 35-36

Genesis 35

Vs. 1-8 I suppose it makes sense to think about God's timing. Today we see God lead Jacob to a place of commitment, formally renaming him and reaffirming the covenant He made with Abraham. But why now? They had been in the land some years already. If God had done this earlier, maybe the massacre at Shechem could have been avoided. On the other hand, with God leading Jacob this way now, after Shechem, it certainly isn't a reward for Jacob's seeking and devotion to Him. Whatever the lesson here, it gives some insight into God's mercy and patience in dealing with fallen humanity.

My sense is this. Before we are willing to follow God, we have to be made to be willing. Sometimes He just makes things happen to move us, or, more often than not, He allows life to bring us to a place of readiness. That readiness could be anything from boredom to joy to utter desperation. Looking at Jacob's life, he has a new start in Canaan and everything is fresh. Yet, he doesn't seem very devoted to God at all and appears to be showing no leadership to his family. But life was good up until now.

V. 1 Notice that God took the initiative. Remember the vow that Jacob had made to God in Genesis 28:22? Jacob had called Bethel *God's house* and vowed to return there to offer God a tenth of all he had. Jacob had now been in the land 10 years and had never fulfilled that vow.

V. 2 Note that they all had idols. Rachel actually left Haran with idols. They were becoming like the people around them. And then, there is the dysfunctional family life they have lived. The point being, they already knew how to truly worship God, but had no need because they were sufficient and were happy the way they were.

The events leading up to this time were not "caused" by God. This was just "life on earth" taking its normal, fallen course. God simply allowed them to have their way, to let them see their need. How else do you realize that life without God is futile and that He is the only real security on earth?

But even in this disaster, I don't see Jacob and his family turning to God. They really are in danger because of what the houses of Simeon and Levi did. So God takes the initiative to save them, and to give them an opportunity to get serious with Him. This might have been a "teachable" moment.

V. 4 Burying the idols would have meant leaving money behind. Usually the idols were made from precious metals. I wonder why he didn't destroy their gods/idols. This might indicate a lack of devotion on Jacob's part since they could come back to these.

V. 5 This could have had two purposes. As protection, God put the fear of them into the hearts of the neighbors. This would have not only saved Israel (Jacob & Co.) from attack, but they also would have been totally ostracized from everyone, possibly keeping the influence of Canaan from entering deeper into their clan.

Vs. 6-7 Can you figure out how many years earlier Jacob had slept here? He finally fulfills the vow.

V. 8 Since it mentions that his mother's nurse was with Jacob, he must have had some communication with his father. This woman would have been with Rebekah since she left her father's house to join Isaac. In mentioning the nurse's death, and later, the death of Isaac, it is safe to assume that Rebekah was already dead, probably before Jacob returned from Laban. If so, it means that Rebekah and Jacob never saw each other again after their trickery with Isaac. Self-inflicted punishment?

Vs. 9-15 Once Jacob fulfilled his vow (at God's urging), God faithfully confirms the covenant of Abraham. Again, there are no conditions mentioned. God's working to save mankind, by fulfilling the promise to Adam and Eve, to Noah and to Abraham, are firmly set on His faithfulness, not Jacob's or ours. There are some pretty notable people of faith in that line, but His **working** to save us is not dependent on our faith. As Paul & the Spirit say to Timothy, *If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself*. Jacob certainly had faith in the promise, but there is no reflection of God elsewhere in his life that I can see. The fact that Jacob is named Israel does, however, denote his tenacity and endurance in pursuing the promise. He might have created a little "hell on earth" for himself due to his lack of following God personally, but he still had faith and he still fought. And so he was named Israel.

V. 13 It looks like the Lord met with Jacob in bodily form, as He had at the wrestling match.

Vs. 16-29 After the "mountain top," life comes crashing in again on Israel.

Get a Bible map and find Bethel, where the sacrifice took place, and then find where Rachel dies near Bethlehem. Because they had so much livestock, this wouldn't have been a day trip.

Notice that Jacob changes the baby's name. As Rachel died she wanted to call the boy *Ben-oni*, "son of my sorrow," but as she was dying Jacob told her he would call the boy *Benjamin*, "son of my right hand." It was a name and place of honor.

Notice also, that Rachel is buried along the way, not in the family grave. Her burial place will later be where the shepherds were told of Jesus' birth, and it is the region where Herod killed all the children.

V. 22 This is a very sad story with huge ramifications.

First, Reuben, the firstborn of the unloved wife, sleeping with the maid of the loved wife (who incidentally was the mother of two of his brothers, Dan and Naphtali) was a dominant and aggressive act. I don't think they fell into "forbidden love," like you see in the movies. Bilhah was still his father's wife. This was the Alpha dog telling the other dogs he was the boss. Rape is a strong word, but I think Reuben forced himself on her. That is my take on this event. Imagine the animosity this would have created in the family between the Leah and Rachel sides.

Second, Jacob "hears" about it, but apparently does nothing. There should have been immediate justice of some kind. Imagine the effect in the family of doing nothing.

Third, Reuben, as the firstborn, has just lost his birthright. Jacob reveals this later at the end of Genesis when he dies. Of his first three sons, Jacob now has a "???" (whatever you want to call Reuben) and two murderers. Nice family. This will mean that the birthright will now skip past Reuben, Simeon and Levi to _____. And we get a whole chapter devoted to him later. For Jacob, it will still get worse.

Vs. 23-26 With the completion of the twelve sons, and therefore, the twelve tribes of Israel, a summary is given here of who they were.

Vs. 27-29 Isaac dies and this creates a few questions and a cause/effect event into the next chapter.

I find it interesting that Isaac lives longer than Abraham, and still, we have very little information on him.

Jacob apparently didn't spend much time with Isaac. It seems this was the first time they saw each other. Was it because they both had huge amounts of animals or was it because of the bad air between them, or both? Who knows, but it is interesting. Although blind, Isaac would have been able to meet all the children before he died.

With Isaac's death, all that he owned, the animals, the workers, the money, the whole shebang, would now go to Jacob. As we'll see, I think that Jacob split this with Esau.

Genesis 36

God had promised Rebekah that she had two nations in her. The parents should have taught the boys all about the promise to Abraham and what He had promised at their births. This is the fulfilling of God's promise to make Esau a nation.

Vs. 6-8 The fact that both Esau and Jacob were now "super rich," and could no longer live in the land together gives me the idea that Jacob must have shared some of the inheritance with Esau. Again, I'm impressed with Esau. He gently takes the initiative and moves, leaving green Canaan for a less green area around Mount Seir.

The wrapping up of Esau's history means, among other things, that the history in Genesis is about to focus on Israel becoming a nation.

Matthew 12:1-21

Matthew is showing the increased opposition Jesus encountered from the religious leaders. Jesus left the Passover in Jerusalem under deep scrutiny. He had claimed to be God's Son. Apparently a contingent of Pharisees, returning from the Passover, went with Jesus. They were probably all returning to Galilee. If you read John 5, you'll see what happened there.

Vs. 1-2 It was considered work to "grind" or "husk" grain to make it edible, even if you did it with your fingers. So eating raw, husked grain was forbidden on the Sabbath. This was not a rule God made, but one of hundreds the Pharisees and scribes had forced on the people to make them obey the Sabbath. Notice how excited the Pharisees were.

Vs. 3-4 David was their hero, and in his hour of need, God allowed David to violate the law. In David's case the actual law, not a man-made rule, was violated, and yet God showed mercy.

Vs. 5-6 And then on the Sabbath, God commanded the priests to work and violate the Sabbath. The priest could have said, "Well, that is because that's the temple." But Jesus told them what they could not see. Something greater than the temple was there.

Vs. 7-8 These verses show that some of these Pharisees were in Capernaum when Jesus had healed the paralytic and had attended Matthew's party. These were the Pharisees Jesus had challenged with this statement. Not only could they not grasp God's heart of mercy in interpreting the law, they were missing something awesome that was right in front of them. Jesus was *the Son of Man*, the eternal King and Son of God. He was *lord of the Sabbath*.

You may be awed by this, but it only made the Pharisees mad.

Vs. 9-14 It is amazing to see how often Jesus ventured into harm's way. Even when the Pharisees wanted to kill Him, He still took their invitations to dine. When they blasphemed His character and His Spirit, He called them to come together and talked about it. Here it says that He went into the *synagogue* of these very Pharisees. You can say that Jesus had "guts," but He was probably showing them mercy, giving them a chance to understand.

V. 10 The man with the *withered hand* was probably a "set up."

Vs. 12-13 Between these two verses, Mark says, *And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."* (Mark 3:4-5) To my knowledge this is the first time it says that Jesus was angry.

V. 14 Matthew is showing the official point where the Pharisees said, "We really need to kill Him." In John 5, John explains this need to kill Jesus in a more complete way.

Vs. 15-21 When you read the prophecy that Jesus fulfilled, you wonder, as disciples, imitators and slaves of Jesus, how we think we have the right to be the opposite of Jesus. He never bashed the government. He was gentle and quiet, bringing a message of hope to lost and desperate

people. Just like with Jesus, those who listen to us will be saved and those who reject the message are God's concern. We don't need to judge sin. We follow our Lord in the harvest, making disciples and bringing the lost His message of life and hope.

Psalm 15

Vs. 1 The question is, "God, who do You let get close to You and dwell in the safety of Your care?"

Vs. 2-5 The answer can be boiled down to "Those who hallow Your name and obey Your Word."

Jacob was invited to connect with God, but had other interests. For us as disciples, the answer to v. 1 is not living an "outwardly righteous" life. This is where we get fooled and think that if we are not "bad" people, we must be "good" people. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus says that this person who gets close to God is the one who hears His words and does them. That person is the true follower. The focus is living with Jesus, and that itself will clean up the behavior, but cleaning up the behavior does not mean living with Jesus. Jesus isn't fooled. Many Christians are simply outwardly righteous people who live by a list and don't rob banks, kill people or get pregnant out of wedlock. They have some faith, like church, listen to music and get religiously emotional. But Jesus' commands are commands like the Great Commission. They are commands of discipleship, following Jesus in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:21-23)

Proverbs 3:21-26

These are great words, but for us as disciples, there is something else to *not lose sight of*. God's redemptive plan, His mission to us, frames this life and this world and all our reality. What Christ has done for us makes us someone in Christ: an ambassador, a disciple, a witness, a missionary. Life for us is not about being "wise" and staying out of trouble. Security and confidence for us means abandoning ourselves to His care as we follow Him in the harvest. Life for us is being "wise" in the wisdom of Christ and the reality of this world we are called to reach.