



## TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

### Talk Genesis 35:16-29: The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

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*"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. 9 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; and 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."*

#### Background Notes

In the first half of Genesis 35 Jacob returned to Bethel. This was where God had revealed himself to Jacob when he fled from his brother Esau. This is where God had promised Jacob that He would protect him, and bring him safely home. This was the place that Jacob seemed to avoid for a while, but he finally returned after the troubles at Shechem. Bethel is the place that was associated with revival in Jacob's life -- so much so, that the phrase "Back to Bethel" has come to mean "getting your act together" once again with the Lord, obeying Him fully, and no longer practicing only partial obedience. God wanted Jacob to come back to Bethel, and finally he did return.

In the second half of Genesis 35 Jacob returned to his father Isaac, who was living at Hebron. Jacob may have visited his father during the ten years that he lived in Shechem, but this may actually have been the first time he saw his father since he left home thirty years earlier. We can't be sure. Along the way to Hebron, Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, died as she was giving birth to Benjamin, Jacob's twelfth son. Rachel died near Bethlehem, and you can visit Rachel's tomb today outside of Bethlehem. It may very well be the authentic site of her burial.

In verse 22, we read of the sin of the incest between Reuben and Bilhah, one of Jacob's wives. This is the only place this sin is mentioned, except for Genesis 49, when Jacob blessed his twelve sons. Reuben did not receive the blessing of the firstborn son.

*"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" (Genesis 49:3-4).* Thus Reuben lost his legal status as the firstborn son.

In verses 23-26, the twelve sons of Jacob are listed according to their mothers, the four wives of Jacob. These twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, became two of the tribes in Israel, so there is no tribe of Joseph. So you might say, "Well, wait a minute, was the land divided up thirteen ways?" No, because the tribe of Levi received no tribal territory in Israel. So the land was divided up into twelve divisions.

Isaac lived for 180 years. When you put the chronology together, this means that Joseph had already been sold into Egypt by his brothers about twelve years before Isaac died. (The account of Joseph starts in Genesis 37.) In verse 29, we read that Isaac was gathered to his people and buried by his sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob may have visited Esau a few times before this, after they came to terms of peace back in Genesis 33. On the other hand, Isaac's death may be the first time they had seen each other since their meeting over twenty years before this time.

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. Faithfulness to God does not exempt the believer from times of sorrow.**

Jacob's return to Bethel was a high point in his life, spiritually speaking. There was revival and renewal in his own life and in the life of his family. But just when everything looked like it was going well, tragedy struck (humanly speaking).

First, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died at Bethel (v8). Deborah had been in the family for years. She was Jacob's beloved "nanny," the one who had brought him up. Then Rachel, Jacob's best-loved wife, died in childbirth at Bethlehem while the family was traveling to Hebron. How Jacob must have mourned for Rachel! Soon after this, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, committed incest with Bilhah, one of Jacob's wives. How this sin must have grieved Jacob's heart.

And then there was the loss of his favorite son, Joseph. We know that it was about this time that Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold into Egypt. When Jacob thought that a wild beast had killed his favorite son, he wept and could not be comforted (Genesis 37). Think of the heart-wrenching sorrow! Then Isaac, his father, died. All of these events took place in the course of about twelve years, after Jacob returned to Bethel.

How do you think that Jacob felt at that time? Here he had come back to the land and "back to Bethel" – back to the Lord. He was walking with the Lord. But now his life was filled with sorrow upon sorrow. I can imagine that at this point in his life, Jacob had a number of questions about what was going on!

What is God trying to teach us here in this portion of Scripture? He's trying to teach us that faithfulness to God does not exempt the believer from times of sorrow.

Is it possible that you are going through a time of sorrow right now? Don't assume that a time of sorrow in your life means that you have been unfaithful. Don't think that God

is against you. Don't be bitter! Don't try to figure God out! We don't know all the reasons why God allows times of sorrow. However, we all know that we cannot come to know God as the "God of comfort" unless we have a time of sorrow and need to be comforted. So that certainly is one reason why God allows us to go through times of sorrow, so we will come to know Him as a God of comfort.

There are certainly many other reasons as well. David said in Psalm 119:71, "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.*" We learn more of God in times of sorrow. Faithfulness to God does not exempt the believer from times of sorrow.

## **2. The faithfulness of God will sustain the believer in times of sorrow.**

Through all those times of sorrow, Jacob was sustained by God, and continued to grow in favor. As Rachel was dying, she named her newborn son Ben-Oni, which means "son of my sorrow." However, Jacob called him Benjamin, which means "son of my right hand." This is an indication that Jacob, even in his sorrow, was being sustained by the faithfulness of God. He was able to see, even in a time of great sorrow, that God was in control of the events of his life.

Let me ask you -- in times of sorrow, do you concentrate on your sorrow, or do you look to the Lord to sustain you in your sorrow? It makes a big difference, doesn't it? We should follow the model of Jacob here. He went through some great times of sorrow, but he did not become bitter and blame the Lord. He looked to the Lord for strength and comfort, and he was sustained.

My wife, Margie, recently told me of a woman in her Community Bible Study who has gone through some great times of sorrow recently. About twelve years ago, this woman's husband, who was a Vice President of a very large multi-national corporation, a very sharp man, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease while only in his 50's. With God's help, this woman faithfully nursed her husband for several years as he grew steadily worse and became completely helpless. Some time after his death, she re-married a man who was a long-time Christian friend. They were happily married for a couple of years, but just two weeks ago her new husband died instantly following a heart attack. Sorrow upon sorrow! And yet this woman was at the Bible study last week, and thanking God for his faithfulness in her time of sorrow. What a tremendous testimony! The faithfulness of God will sustain the believer in times of sorrow.

### **Practical Application**

Do you say "Ben-Oni" or "Benjamin" in your time of sorrow?

Remember, Ben-Oni means "son of my sorrow," and Benjamin means "son of my right hand." Rachel called her son Ben-Oni, son of my sorrow. Jacob called his son Benjamin, son of my right hand. You see, when you say Ben-Oni, you are tending to look only at the human side of the sorrow, and at the past. When you can say Benjamin, you are looking at the divine side of the sorrow, and how God can use this sorrow to accomplish his good purposes for the future. Many times this is very hard to do.

We know a Christian family whose teenaged son was killed about ten years ago through a freak accident. The Christian mother has never been able to accept his death,

and she continues to blame God for allowing it to happen. She is destroying the rest of the family. They even left the church, because she refused to accept the support of her fellow believers who were reaching out to help her and support her. It is a very sad story.

What about you? What about me? Will we say "Ben-Oni," or will we say "Benjamin" in our times of sorrow?