

Genesis Chapter 35 Commentary

1 And God said unto Jacob, 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.

In the previous chapter, Jacob's sons get Jacob in a situation of fear. Fear that they will be destroyed by the inhabitants of the land. God uses this situation to remind Jacob: you made a vow to me, and it is time to make the payment. I have kept my vow to you, and you need to fulfill the vow you made. We shall see further evidence that God is keeping his promise to Jacob as they leave the land; we shall see; God puts fear in the hearts of the inhabitants of the land through which they travel.

We see that Jacob brought this heart ache and sorrow upon himself from his own disobedience. How, you ask? God had instructed Jacob to return and fulfill his vow to him, which meant that Jacob should return to Bethel. Instead, Jacob stops Shechem, which is a place among the Hivites, a direct contradiction to what God had instructed him to do.

This is a reminder to us that when we make vows and promises to God; we should not fail to follow through and keep our promises to completion. We are reminded of this in scripture in:

- ***De 23:21 "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee."***
- ***Ec 5:4-5; 4 "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."***

It is easily discerned from these references; God expects us to do what we say we will do; just as we can rest assured God will do what he says he will do.

"when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." We notice; God even reminds Jacob of his former sin; the way he scammed the blessing of firstborn son from his brother Esau, and then he had to flee for his life.

2 Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:

Jacob now sees that he must lay aside his own will and do that which God has commanded him to do. This prompts Jacob, as he knows that he is going to the place where God is, to take his position, that he should have been occupying all the time, of spiritual leader of the household. He tells them to put away their idols and strange gods. When we consider the presence of idols and strange gods among them; we can see there is a reason that all these afflictions are coming upon Jacob and his household.

Jacob tells the whole of his family and followers; ***"be clean, and change your garments"***. This would be like washing themselves in confession of their sin of idolatry to God; then putting off the old idolatrous practices and putting on the new garments, of worshipping God only. Jacob begins to fulfill the duties of being the spiritual leader of his family and followers, which he should have been doing already.

In application to our own lives, we are told to put off the old and put on the new, seen in:

- **1Co 5:7 "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:"** Like Jacob, we must put aside our will and take up the mind of Christ. We must weigh the thoughts of our minds, against the word and will of God, and cast aside all that is not in accordance therewith.
- **2Co 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."**

Being born-again, we are to put off our old nature and put on the robes of the righteousness of Christ and live by faith in "**thus saith the Lord.**"

3 And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

Jacob tells them; when he went out from his home with the curse of death upon himself from his brother Esau; God made a promise to him, and he made a promise to God. He explains that God has done his part, and now Jacob must do what he promised.

4 And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.

Isn't it sad to think of how much anguish and tribulation we put ourselves through by disobedience and the sin of omission, by neglecting to do what we know we should be doing? This is what we see here; God must use the evil from the previous chapter, to motivate Jacob to fulfill his vow.

We also see the reason that Jacob needs to get out of this place of idolatry. Look at what has happened to his family? Why did they give up their earrings? Because in that time, earrings were part of the worship of idols, and it was necessary to put off all idolatry.

I believe that the sharp rebuke, of the last chapter, has prompted Jacob to remember that his name has been changed to Israel, and it is necessary not be misdirected and misguided by idols. It also prompts him to remember; he needs to perform the duty of a father and lead his children in the right path from henceforth. Thus, he gathers all their idols and buries them in the earth.

"and Jacob hid them under the oak" We have a prophetic picture here in this phrase. The oak is defined as a tree. We see that Jacob hid the idols and strange gods so they would be out of his, and his family band's sight. We can make application of this to ourselves when we are born-again. Just as Jacob, as the head of the family and followers, hid the strange gods and idols under the oak, Christ Jesus takes our sins of idolatry past, and they are hidden under the shed blood of Jesus, on the tree of the cross on Calvary. As Israel is commanding his family to take up the worship of God; we, being born-again, now have a new commandment to be obedient to and worship God.

5 And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.

We see, that as Jacob begins to do that which he has vowed, and cleans up the idolatry that existed in his family, that God continues to fulfill his promise to Jacob in **Genesis 28:13-15: 13 And, behold, the**

LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; 14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

"and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them" We see God fulfilling his promise to Jacob by filling the inhabitants of the land with the terror of the power and might of God. We can make application of this "***terror of God***" in our own Christian lives. Remember the scripture in ***Jas 2:19 "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."*** When we are born again; we have the protection of God by the presence of Christ, in the form of the Holy Spirit (***Col 1:27 Christ in you***), which inhabits our new minds and souls. We are preserved, not by our strength, by the presence of Christ in us, because it is the power of God that the devils tremble before.

Jas 2:19 "the devils also believe, and tremble." I would point out that just because you believe is not evidence that you are saved. Why do you say this? If the devils believe and tremble, but are not saved, certainly this gives us evidence that more than belief is required. There must be a new birth for a person to believe with faith, and to have a desire to do the will of God. The natural mind may believe the evidences that there is a God, but without the new birth this belief is vain.

We understand that it is while we are walking in obedience to God that Christ is causing the devils to fear and tremble. We understand also; when we are walking in disobedience to Christ, God will allow the devils to come in and overtake us. May we always be found obedient to Christ, that we may enjoy the blessing of his divine protection.

6 So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. 7 And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbethel: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

We remember that Jacob met God, when he was first in this place fleeing from the curse of death. We remember that now Jacob's name has been changed from Jacob to Israel, on the return trip back to this place. Now that all this journey is completed; God is again going to appear to Jacob and remind him, from now on you are Israel, not Jacob.

- Elbethel is from the Hebrew word 'El Beyth-'El (pronounced; ale bayth-ale') and means: *the God of Bethel*.
- Bethel is from the Hebrew word Beyth-'El (pronounced; bayth-ale') and means; *house of God*.

From these definitions, we understand that Israel building this altar is representative of a born-again sinner professing Christ as Saviour and Lord. As seen in the definitions: the house of God is occupied and overseen by God, so the life of the born-again sinner is the tabernacle of God and occupied by the presence of Christ, in the form of the Holy Spirit.

8 But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allonbachuth.

We don't have anything to tell us for sure, but most commentators believe that one of several things happened with Jacob's return.

- It is highly likely that while Jacob dwelt at Shalem, he visited his father, Isaac. Rebekah being dead already; Deborah went with Jacob and lived with them until her death. The nurse was often more mother to a child than the actual mother in that time.
- Rebekah had died and when Deborah heard of Jacob's return, she went to be with him. After all, Jacob had many of her own people with him and she could have some family time with them.
- Some commentators believe that Deborah was sent home to her people, and to Jacob, after Rebekah's death or possibly sometime prior to that. Deborah could have gone with Jacob when he fled, or she could have been sent later to watch over him. Deborah would have been like a mother to Jacob, and apparently chose to go with Jacob when he left Padanaram. This seems more likely to me as we shall see at the close of the chapter.

9 And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. 10 And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.

- Jacob is from the Hebrew word Ya`aqob (pronounced; yah-ak-obe') and means; *heel-catcher, supplanter*.
- Israel is from the Hebrew word Yisra'el (pronounced; yis-raw-ale') and means; *he will rule as God*.

We see from the definitions that God is demonstrating the change that has happened to Jacob.

God tells Jacob, your past is behind you now. Your life is secure in me as you are under my protection. You have made your confession of faith, I have blessed you with blessing, and I am reminding you that you now have a new name. You are to lay aside the old name and live up to the new name. To do this, you will have to subject your life to me completely, and then live it out, by ruling over your house according to my ways and teachings.

11 And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; 12 And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. 13 And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him.

God has manifested to Israel the way of salvation and goes up to heaven again. Jesus has done the same thing for us. He came down from heaven, established the way of salvation fulfilling the promise of God the Father, and now he has gone back to the Father's house in heaven.

God renews the promise of the inheritance of the land of promise to Israel, and to his seed after him. This is a reminder to us: every day when we wake, we should remember that we have a land of promise waiting for us. When the end of time comes, we will be carried by Christ to inhabit that place that he has gone to prepare for us. We should also remember every day; Christ also established a land of promise for us here in time on earth, which is the church.

14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. 15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel.

Jacob hears the renewed promise of God and builds an altar of worship, which is a picture of the visible church on earth. It is prophetic of the '**holy place**' in the tabernacle that God will have Israel to build later, when they are brought out of Egypt to go the land of promise. The golden altar of incense will be there; upon which the high priest offered the incense. Also, the golden candlestick is there, which was furnished with oil to provide light.

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. 17 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 Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

- Benoni is from the Hebrew word Ben-'Owniy (pronounced; ben-o-nee') and means; *son of my sorrow*.
- Benjamin is from the Hebrew word Binyamiyn (pronounced; bin-yaw-mene') and means; *son of (the) right hand*.

This is the birth of the last child of Jacob, which makes the twelve tribes of Israel complete. I would remind the reader: Joseph's tribe name will be replaced by the names of Joseph's sons; Ephraim and Manasseh, who Israel will adopt, in the place of Joseph, before his death in Egypt. There is no individual tribe known as the "tribe of Joseph" as they are brought out of Egypt to the land of promise.

Here is the blessing that Israel will place upon Benjamin before his death: ***Ge 49:27 "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil."*** Later in scripture, after they enter the land of promise; we will learn: Benjamin, and his tribe of people, will live up to all that is inferred in this blessing.

19 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.

Rachel died at childbirth and is buried where they were on their journey. Rachel was the true wife of Jacob and the love of his life. Her death would have been a great distress to his heart.

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

Here recorded is the heinous crime of Reuben, Israel's firstborn son, which will cause him to lose the blessing of the firstborn son as seen in: ***Ge 49:3-4; 3 "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."***

Not much is said here of this incident, but God will address this issue when he gives Israel their commandments through Moses. We have this same scenario in the New Testament seen in: **1Co 5:1-2; 1 "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. 2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you."** Comparing these two incidents, we see that man has not just begun to be a sinful creature by nature but has always been such, since the fall of man in Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden.

-22 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 Padanaram. 27 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.

We know now; Jacob returned to his father's house and was there when his father died. This gives support, to the supposition in verse eight, about how Deborah, at some point in time had been sent to be with Jacob. She had to go to where Jacob was; to be with him on his journey from Padanaram back to his father's house.

We see that Jacob and Esau bury their father, and they are at peace with one another. Praise the Lord for the peace and protection he provides for his people. Hallelujah! Praise ye the Lord!