

## GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

### The Return to the House of God – Genesis 35

**35** God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." <sup>2</sup> So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments." <sup>3</sup> Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."

<sup>4</sup> So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

<sup>5</sup> And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. <sup>6</sup> And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, <sup>7</sup> and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. <sup>8</sup> And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth.

<sup>9</sup> God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. <sup>10</sup> And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. <sup>11</sup> And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. <sup>12</sup> The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you." <sup>13</sup> Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. <sup>14</sup> And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. <sup>15</sup> So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

#### The Significance of **Bethel**:

- This is where – 30 years prior – God met Jacob as he fled from Esau.
- This is where Jacob made a \_\_\_\_\_ to God – a vow he has not yet \_\_\_\_\_.

*"If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you" (28:20–22)*

- When God appeared to Jacob while he was laboring under Laban's control, he reminded him that he was the *God of Bethel*. There God reminded him of his vow.
- God had kept his promise to Jacob these many years, but Jacob had not yet returned to Bethel as God commanded. (v. 1) It is now time for Jacob to fulfill his promise to God.
- It was God's intent that Jacob establishes Israel in the heart of \_\_\_\_\_. Bethel was a longstanding Canaanite worship site. God's intention for Jacob and his return there was to establish for all time that there is but one true God, and that Jacob and his descendants are God's unique people.

A few interesting **elements of the story**:

Members of his household and company still had \_\_\_\_\_ in their possession.

*It's clear that a clean and total break from \_\_\_\_\_ had not yet happened.*

*The \_\_\_\_\_ of pagan nations and their idol worship would prove to be a constant challenge to Israel at every stage of their history ...*

*Why?*

*What did Jacob do?*

*What did Jacob say?*

*Jacob – at God's direction – is establishing spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ for (future) Israel.*

God caused a " \_\_\_\_\_ " to fall on the established and armed cities around them.

*This would be the first of several occasions when God would use panic to enable Israel to win a victory, or to avoid battle altogether.*

*Israel did nothing to deserve this. God had made a unilateral covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob. This was part of that fulfillment. This is a very practical picture of the sovereignty of God.*

The text mentions the death of \_\_\_\_\_, Rebekah's nurse, but not the death of Rebekah.

*Presumably, Rebecca has already died. Remember that she willingly took on any curse Jacob might bring on himself when he hesitated about deceiving his father and robbing his brother of the blessing.*

*<sup>11</sup> But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. <sup>12</sup> Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing." <sup>13</sup> His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me." (27:11-13)*

Jacob becomes **Israel**:

Like Abraham before him, God changes Jacob's \_\_\_\_\_.

*His \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are no longer the same.*

Like He did for Abraham, God reveals \_\_\_\_\_ name.

*He is El Shaddai – \_\_\_\_\_.*

As he \_\_\_\_\_ Abraham, so He commands Jacob.

As He \_\_\_\_\_ with Abraham, so He covenants with Jacob.

A \_\_\_\_\_ (and offshoot nations) ...

\_\_\_\_\_ ...

\_\_\_\_\_ ...

Jacob erects a PILLAR ...

*Do I have any "pillars" in my life?*

## Faith and Testing

<sup>16</sup> Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. <sup>17</sup> And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son." <sup>18</sup> And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. <sup>19</sup> So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), <sup>20</sup> and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. <sup>21</sup> Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

<sup>22</sup> While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. <sup>23</sup> The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. <sup>24</sup> The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. <sup>25</sup> The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant: Dan and Naphtali. <sup>26</sup> The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

<sup>27</sup> And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. <sup>28</sup> Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. <sup>29</sup> And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

None of us can stay at "\_\_\_\_\_". Life goes on. And as it does, testing and trials are normal and to be expected. But what we \_\_\_\_\_ at "Bethel", or \_\_\_\_\_ at "Bethel" should forever be a "pillar to us".

God commanded Jacob to "be fruitful and multiply". Rachel had \_\_\_\_\_ for another son to be added to the first (30:24). God does not always answer our prayers or fulfill His promises as we expect.

Rachel – who died during childbirth – wanted her son to be named "son of my sorrow". But Jacob, ripe with faith from his God-encounter at Bethel, named him "son of my right hand." Even in great pain and loss, he saw the provision of God.

To display his love for Rachel – and to honor her – he \_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin and sets up a \_\_\_\_\_.

A brief note on Reuben's sin:

*Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch! (49:4)*

Reuben, who should have been honored as the first born, disgraced himself. When Jacob gave his deathbed blessing, Reuben was passed over. You also recall in chapter 34 that Simeon and Levi brought their father into disrepute and also sinned grievously. That put Judah, the fourth in line to inherit the birthright privileges. Later on, we will see Judah being the family spokesperson in Egypt.

A couple final **footnotes**:

Now the sons of Jacob are 12. This number will be matched by the \_\_\_\_\_ that Jesus calls and is used in Revelation to symbolize the completed people of God, both Old and New Testament.

Also, we see the death of \_\_\_\_\_. By God's grace, Isaac was able to live long enough to see the restoration of his family and the reconciliation of Esau and Jacob. His death was an occasion for celebration and not sadness. Verse 29 tells us that he was *gathered to his people*. This is a beautiful reminder of the reunion that we – a God's people – have before us on the other side of death. This is enduring \_\_\_\_\_.

*Genesis 35 brings to an end the full account of the Jacob stories. Jacob appears in the last section of the book, but that portion is essentially concerned with his sons. In this chapter his self-inflicted wanderings had temporarily come to an end. He had returned in peace and prosperity to the land. But in it all he had to be reminded to keep his vow.*

*In organizing an expository idea of this entire chapter, we shall have to be general, for many ideas are present. There were sad deaths that marked the end of an era, but the promises continued. There was sin that ruined an inheritance, but it could not nullify the obvious blessing of God. And there were forgotten vows, but God ensured that they were kept, and when they were kept he confirmed his promises. The unifying principle of the chapter is the completion of the blessing of God and the compliance with the will of God through purified worship.<sup>1</sup>*

Next week: Genesis 37\* – Joseph, the Dreamer

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<sup>1</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 583.