

## Genesis 35-36

### "Coming Back To Bethel"

Why do we have to hit rock *bottom* before we're willing to look *up*? It's almost *categorically* true of unbelievers, but it's amazing how common it can *equally* be for believers. We will go & go & go until we bottom out & then it's almost as if it's a novel concept; "perhaps I should turn to God, or turn *back* to God, or get things *right* w/God".

You recall the parable of the prodigal... That guy got as far away from his father as he possibly could, he ran & ran & ran... till he "ran out" of resources. Then when he found himself in the "pig pen" of life, completely debased, down as low as he could possibly go... **it was like a light bulb moment.** The thought flashed in his mind, "I know what I'll do, I'll go back to my father's house! & I'll fall down before him & declare to him, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven & in your sight, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son, but please, if you'll receive me as a servant...'" So he headed home, headed back to his father's house. **& The bible declares that while he was still a long way off the father saw him, & rather than standing there tapping his foot waiting frustrated & exasperated w/him (making him gravel before him), he had compassion. He took off running toward him & embraced him, put the signet ring on him & declared, "my son was dead & is alive again; he was lost & is found."** & For some, the reason that parable resonates so powerfully *in* us is because somewhere in our heart we realize it may as well be written *of* us...

Believe me when I tell you that it would've resonated in Jacob as well. Genesis 34 is one of the darkest Ch's of Israel's history. Jacob isn't where he should be geographically; he's at a low place spiritually, in his family. **His daughter was raped, his sons became mass murderers; they literally deceived & destroyed an entire city. God isn't mentioned once in the Ch. Things just weren't good in that season of his life; he was at what would seem to me to be an all time spiritual low.**

& I'm so glad that we serve a God, who when we're ready to return to *Him*, He *runs* to *receive* us; & He embraces us, loves on us, revives us & restores us to our place in the family. It doesn't mean it'll be life w/out difficulty; but as we repent He receives us because He is faithful & full of mercy.

### Vs 1

Some things that we do well to consider about this very 1<sup>st</sup> Vs, not the least of which is the *magnificence* of the grace of God... One of the lowest times in Jacob's life (the raping of his daughter & the shameful way his sons retaliated) was the result of Jacob's being in Shechem when God had told him to go to Bethel.

If we boil it down, that whole Ch 34 *disaster* was the fruit of *disobedience* to the word of God & Jacob (along w/his entire family) paid for that dearly. Listen to me: we can bring devastating/disastrous ramifications & difficult situations into our *own* lives & into the lives of those *around* us due to simple *disobedience* to the word of God.

Now again, I don't want you to think that if you're walking in obedience that it leads to a primrose problem free life. That's not true; but the devastation that we bring through *disobedience* is completely unnecessary; could be avoided totally.

It was critical that Jacob leave Shechem & go back to Bethel. Why? Because the only cure for worldliness is to cut it off completely; don't entertain it, don't try to live on the edge of it, get away from it. Jacob's Shechem was as Lot's Sodom; he had to get out.

Of course this is where God's grace shines so bright... God called out to Jacob; even though he wasn't where he was supposed to be, even though he was in a low place spiritually, God was still beckoning him to a place of intimacy.

Maybe that's a word for you this morning. We tend to think that God is mad *at* us, angry *w/us* or has had enough *of* us. Jacob wasn't where he was supposed to be, he was at a low place spiritually, but God was continuing to call him into a place of intimacy... It wasn't, "That's it, I'm through *w/you*" or "I'm sitting you *down*" ... God said, "Arise, go *up*..." Listen, your sin may abound, but God's grace abounds still more.

"Go up to Bethel & dwell there; make an altar there to God..." Remember Bethel? It was that place where you 1<sup>st</sup> met God, where He revealed Himself *to* you, assured you of His presence *w/you*, His love *for* you & forgiveness *toward* you, it's where He bridged the gap between Him & you through J.C. God says, "Arise, don't sit there in your state of slumber, arise & go back to that place, make an altar there." In other words, return to J.C. & resume a life of worship. It won't only be good for you *personally*, but it will also reap huge benefits for those around you, including your spouse, your children, your entire *family*. Listen parents, the best thing you can do for your family is to walk in obedience to the word of God. Draw near *to* Him, cultivate a life of worship & intimacy *w/Him*.

#### Vs 2-4

Follow the flow. Jacob gets *right w/God*, calls upon his family (those under his influence personally) to *repent*, to *rededicate* themselves to God, & they *respond* affirmatively. Don't miss the tremendously influential leadership role that God has given to men *w/in* their family. It is not uncommon when a man is resisting God's will/word, to see that same effect in his children.

Equally true, when a man gets right w/God, it's not uncommon for his family to follow.

Now we wanna spend some time here because there are some critical keys that we need not miss in our journey back to Bethel, our renewal, our revival.

The 1<sup>st</sup> step in renewing our relationship w/God is always... Repentance. "Put away the foreign gods that are among you." On the one hand it shocks us to see Jacob's family inundated/saturated w/idolatry. On the other hand we remember that when Jacob was fleeing from Laban that Rachael clung to the household idols of her father (Gen 31:19). How many of you have discovered the, "Do as I say, not as I do" motto to be an *ineffective* exhortation in your home? It doesn't matter how hard we try to teach our children to conduct themselves in a godly manner, generally (though again not categorically) they will follow our lead. They need to see a genuine desire to please God, to lead a life of holiness before God modeled in our lives. They'll never see sinless perfection; but what is your pursuit?

Have you put away the "foreign gods"? What are "foreign gods"? A foreign god is any thing that becomes more important in your life than the True & Living God Himself. It could be a hobby, it could be the pursuit of a career or money, what are the things (or what is *the thing*) that most consumes you, that you obsess over? That's your god. When we return back to the *Living* God; we've got to get rid of those things. Does that mean you can't pursue a career? No, it means it can't be your highest priority. We're to seek 1<sup>st</sup> the Kingdom of God & His righteousness... God will not compete for the highest priority of your life, nor will He *permit* any other thing to be in that place alongside Him. He wants our single-minded loyalty; He is to be our Chief priority.

#2 Personal Cleansing. When you find someone being exhorted to purify themselves in scripture, though they may be bathing physically, it's pointing to a fresh cleansing inwardly. It's pointing to the need of the washing/cleansing of the heart. For you & me it points confession of sin & the washing of the water by the Word. **1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** What does it mean to "confess"? Literally it means, "to say the same thing". In other words we agree w/God about the nature of our sin & our need to turn from it. "God what you say about my sin, I say about my sin." It's not just, "I did it", but that I acknowledge the destructive/offensive nature of it & turn from it. The truth is that confession/repentance are virtually the same.

I can't really turn from my sin w/out acknowledging the truth of my sin & I'm not really acknowledging the truth of my sin unless I'm turning *from* my sin.

So in our journey back to Bethel, back to renewal/revival. We're to repent, "put away the foreign gods", we're to purify ourselves, confess our sin & be purged. Asking God to wash & cleanse our hearts, to renew a *right spirit* w/in us.

#3 "Change your garments". Allow what's happening inwardly to transition to the way you lead your life outwardly. Change should always start on the inside, but if it never makes its way to the outside, than odds are there's not truly been a change on the inside...

We're to get rid of those "old garments" those old ways of life, the old way of thinking/acting/speaking, old ungodly habits should be falling off & a new life should be taking center stage. When Paul was writing to the Ephesians of what it looks like practically when Christ is ruling in your heart & is your chief priority he said, "*that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*"<sup>1</sup> You see the picture here is that off taking off one set of clothes (corruption, deceitfulness, old habits) & putting on a new set of clothes (in true righteousness & holiness). We're talking here about what it means to be robed in the righteousness of Christ.

To the Colossians he was exhorting the same principle when he said, "*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,*"<sup>2</sup> So it begins on the inside but it will manifest itself on the outside in the form of a changed life; you've "changed your garments".

I'm not really going to comment on Vs 3 but I want you to underline a significant portion of it, "I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress & has been w/me in the way which I have gone." This is your testimony, God answered you in the day of your distress & has been w/you in the way which you have gone. How should you respond to that practically? Worship Him openly, unashamedly, whole heartedly. When Jacob speaks of building an altar he's speaking of worshiping God openly, that his life will be a testimony of God's salvation & His faithfulness.

<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Eph 4:22-24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.  
<sup>2</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Col 3:8-10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So Vs 1 Jacob gets *right*, Vs 2 he calls those w/him to *repent* & to *rededicate* their life to God. In Vs 3 he gives his *reason* & in Vs 4 they *respond*.

They gave him their foreign gods & their earrings (which were evidently in someway connected to the pagan practices they'd adopted) & he took them & buried them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

Now I wanna draw attention to something here. God didn't come to Jacob & say, "If you deal w/all the pagan gods in your family then perhaps we can give this another go." He just said, "Hey, come back to Me, let's get back to that place of intimacy." & *From there* Jacob began to make changes; here's my point. God called him (& his family) just as they *were*. They didn't clean up so that God *would* call them, they cleaned up because God *had* called them; big difference. God calls us just as we are. He doesn't say "get cleaned up & I'll lead you again" but rather He calls us back to intimacy & when we see His goodness, His graciousness & mercy we don't want those things anymore.

I don't know how else to say it, God loves you... & when you truly get that you won't *want* to engage in those things that violate your relationship w/Him. So, we don't clean up so God *will* call us, we put those things away because He *has* called us.

Where do we put them? Where do we bury them? At the foot of the tree, the cross of Calvary. When Jesus died upon the cross, not only was the penalty of sin paid for completely, but power *over* sin was provided fully. We can put those things out of our lives not because of the power of positive thinking, or because our will power prevails, but because of the blood of J.C. which He shed for us upon the cross. *By faith you find forgiveness & by faith you gain the victory. Bury those things that have entangled you, ensnared you, bound you at the foot of the cross. Walk in the victory that Christ has purchased for you by His blood. Receive the reality of Roman's Ch 6* (Write it down, look it up later).

### Vs 5-7

At the end of Ch 34 Jacob was worried that he & his family would be slaughtered. But here in Ch 35 we see that God's grace abounded toward them in covering them as they journeyed.

One might argue that it was dangerous for them to travel through that area after what had just happened. But I say to you that the safest place you could possibly be is in the *will* of God walking in obedience to the *word* of God. Jacob allowed his obedience to fall short in not going back to Bethel initially, how did that work out for him?

So it may appear dangerous to walk in obedience to God's word, it's much more dangerous to walk in disobedience. God honors our obedience.

But here's what I want you to see. He built an altar & called the place "El Bethel". Before he called the place "Bethel" (the house of God). Now it's "God of the house of God." Here's the point; he's recognizing that it's not the *house of God* that's to be the focus; but the *God of the house* whom we're to worship. It's the place of God, but the God of the place Whom we focus *on*, give worship & praise *to*.

### Vs 8

This Vs sorta jumps in here outta nowhere. Rebekah was Jacob's mom, her nurse died & they buried her in this place. The thing is, we don't know when she joined Jacob's party. It could be that she came w/Esau when he came to meet Jacob & joined them at that point. Either way she was obviously dearly loved & she gets an honorable mention here & they named the place where she was buried "Allon Bachuth" which means "Tree" or "Terebinth of Weeping."

### Vs 9-15

Here are the dots I want you to connect. In Vs 6-7 Jacob came to Bethel, built an altar (that is worshiped Him) & in Vs 9 God appears to him & blesses him. When Jacob *obeyed* Him, God *immediately* gave fresh revelation of Himself to him & blessed him. Question: had he obeyed sooner, would God have blessed him sooner? Absolutely. Obedience to God's word, will bring God's blessing upon your life.

Here's the counter balance to that; if we're *not* doing what God has told us to do, why then would we expect Him to bless us or give greater insight of Himself *to* us? So many times we want God to give us greater insight, fresh revelation & blessing. But we're not being obedient to what He's already revealed to us, so why should He take us deeper? Now that Jacob is where God told him to be, doing what God told him to do, God reveals Himself to him again; gives him "fresh revelation". Jacob has returned to his 1<sup>st</sup> love

Then God reiterates to him the name change, "No longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." God is reminding him of the new creation that he is, just like He does w/you & just like He does w/me. "Hey, don't be acting like that, saying those things, harboring that attitude, that's not who you are anymore, you're a new creation. Lead your life in a manner that's befitting to Christ."

Next God reiterates the promise of the covenant to him for a 3<sup>rd</sup> time w/the basis of declaring Himself to be "Almighty God".

What's the connection? It seems to me that God is assuring Jacob that though all this water has passed under the bridge, all the sin & stumbling, failing & faltering... that he was still a child of God's promise. That the calling of God upon his life was irreversible & irrevocable & that His work in Jacob's life was never about Jacob's goodness, it's always been about God's grace. So to w/you & so to w/me.

He says, "I am God Almighty". He's saying, "I'm gonna do what I said I would do & nothing will stand in My way." Is there anything too hard for God? Has He said it & will He not do it? Has He spoken it & will He not make it good? Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will be faithful to complete it till the Day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6).

"Then God went up from him in the place where He talked w/him." So somehow & in some way God appeared to him in bodily form here. What a blessing! God wants to bless you to, come back to Bethel.

So Jacob set up a pillar of stone where God had talked w/him, poured a drink offering on it, & poured oil on it. The pouring out of a drink offering was representative of saying, "God I'm pouring out the totality of my life to You in worship, I'm all in, have Your way, use my life." You might write down Phil 2:17, 2 Timothy 4:6. This is how Paul the apostle perceived his life. As a drink offering being poured out upon the altar of sacrifice & service to the glory of J.C. He just wanted to be used up for J.C. May that be true of each of us, that our heart would long for God to use our lives totally & exclusively for His glory...

### Vs 16-21

Does getting right w/God ensure a life apart from challenge, affliction, sorrows or difficulty? No. Let's not forget that the symbol of life in Christ is a cross, not an easy chair. Earlier Rachel had said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die". Ironically it was in childbirth that she did die... & As she was dying she named her son "Ben-Oni" which means, "Son of my sorrow". But Jacob couldn't let him bear the burden of always being reminded that his life cost his mother's death & so he changed his name to "Benjamin" or "Son of my right hand" or "Son of my strength" or "honor".

Some folks see in this the 2-fold ministry of Christ who was a Man of sorrows, Who suffered greatly, & has been exalted to the right hand (the place of strength & honor) of the Father (Col 3:1).

### Vs 22

Not only will there be *sorrow* in the family of a believer, there's also sin...

This will cost Reuben the birthright. In reality this was more than a sexual fling, in lying w/his dad's concubine Reuben (the 1<sup>st</sup> born) was seeking to usurp the patriarchal position of the family (2 Sam 3:6-11, 2 Sam 12:8, 2 Sam 16:20-23, etc).

& Though he doesn't rebuke him initially Jacob will speak of it eventually as he's dying & this will cause the birthright to pass over him & the covenant that brings forth Messiah will fall to Judah (Jacob's 4<sup>th</sup> son).

### Vs 23-26

Were they super spiritual? 😊 Absolutely not. Would God use them tremendously? Yes He would. We (you & me) are not the product of amazing spiritual potential, we're the products of the grace of God... & nothing more.

### Vs 27-29

Isaac though he was gonna die decades earlier; that's what started the whole thing spinning regarding Jacob jockeying for the birthright, 20 yrs w/Laban, contention w/him & Esau... Only God knows the # of our days. Now that Isaac passes, Esau & Jacob come peaceably together once again & bury their father.

Now as far as Ch 36 is concerned, God said that He would make a nation of Esau & this demonstrates that He did. I would just point out a couple of interesting things for you. Vs 6-7 tells us that the reason Esau didn't coincide w/Jacob was simple, they had so much that the land couldn't support them both.

In Vs 10 you see that one of Esau's sons was named Eliphaz, in Vs 33 you see Jobab. Now it isn't provable, but it's plausible that Jobab is the Job of the book of Job & Eliphaz is the Eliphaz mentioned in Job who would've been one of his uncles that came to comfort him when his life fell apart. We can't know for sure, but it seems plausible & would date the time of Job in this patriarchal period & would make the book of Job one of the oldest if not *the* oldest book of the bible.

Listen, God has called you, God loves you, let's put away the foreign gods, other priorities among us, purify ourselves & change our garments. Let us arise, & worship God openly, serve Him wholeheartedly & may He bless us & be glorified in our lives. Amen?



**Prayer Points:**

God we're grateful for Your word, we're in awe that You've called us. That though we stray from You regularly, You are always calling us back to that place of intimacy, back to Bethel. May we return to our 1<sup>st</sup> love even now. Putting away other priorities, confessing our sin & receiving Your cleansing & now we ask You to make it obvious that we belong to You through having Your way in our lives. May what You're doing in our heart be demonstrated in the patterns & habits of our lives.

It could be that God's not calling you back, because you've not come to Him before. If that's the case I want to give you an opportunity to respond to His calling even now. God loves you, Christ has died for you & if you will turn from your sin & believe on the Lord J.C. God will forgive *you* of your sin & will make *you* a new creation. Your sin may abound, His grace abounds more... Surrender to J.C. today.