

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY DECEMBER 28
GENESIS 35

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JACOB COMES HOME



Welcome and Happy New Year! To our guest we welcome you. We had a great time over Christmas.. the church held a wonderful Community Christmas brunch last Saturday, then the kids sang on Christmas Sunday, then we had the Christmas eve service and stealth run – it was awesome!! Thank you all who participated!

Now today we are back to our study in Genesis and will be looking at the story where Jacob finally goes back home,

Jacob goes back where he started 20 years prior. We will be answering the question “What does it mean to go back where you started”? Before we begin to answer that let’s seek the Lord in Prayer.

Gen 35:1-8

Ever go back to a place you knew long ago and see it with new eyes? I like to drive by the various houses I grew up in as a child. I moved six times by the age of nine... My earliest memories are from a house in southern Bedford Co. I

remember that my two older brothers had bunkbeds in a room in our basement. I remember my dad had a hunting dog in our back yard by the crick where there was a big weeping willow and our old swing set. And I remember that my parents often invited people to stay with us that needed a place to stay.





It was at this house that my family's spiritual journey with the Lord began. We were living at this house when my parents both came to know Jesus thru being invited to a neighbor's bible study. It was there that as a very young child my oldest brother led me in a prayer to accept Jesus into my heart.

I have the opportunity to drive by that house in Bedford county often. (SL house) My parents today live just around the ridge from there, and that house is on the route we drive visiting our son and grandson in Ohio. I often marvel at that house when we drive by – that's where my family and me as a young child met the Lord. Such a simple and beautiful faith.. and God started me there on a journey. And now 52 years later, when I drive by I see that place of my spiritual beginnings, I see that sacred place thru the lenses of my whole life. My spiritual journey, my struggles, my sufferings that God used to purify me, I see that place thru the lenses of God's sovereignty, love and covenant faithfulness. When I look at that house thru the lenses my life has given me, it as if I'm seeing that sacred place for the first time.

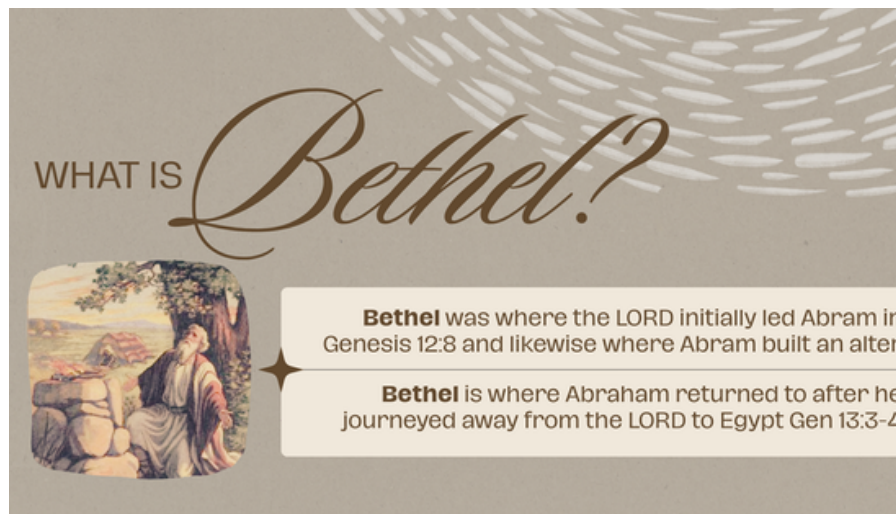
In Gen 35:1 Jacob was instructed by God to go back to the sacred place where Jacob first met the Lord twenty years prior-Bethel. After all Jacob went thru - the deception that led him fleeing for his life, being under the cruel power of Laban for twenty years – being tricked into marrying someone he didn't love.. and now the Lord wants Jacob to go back to the beginning, Bethel - How would Jacob see Bethel now?

Let's catch up where we are in our story about Jacob. In chapter 34 we saw that Jacob on returning to Canaan pitched his tent near Shechem where there was a really ugly incident involving one of Jacob's daughters being sexually assaulted by a Canaanite. Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi, in defending their sister's and family honor, deceived the local Canaanites into thinking they would all become family thru marriage, and unbeknownst to Jacob his sons went and slaughtered all the Canaanite men in that town.

Our chapter today immediately follows that brutal and ugly story. And in 35:1 God tells Jacob to go back to Bethel and make an altar.

Here is what we know about Bethel. Bethel was where the LORD initially led Abram to in 12:8 and likewise where Abram built an altar. Bethel is where Abraham returned to after he journeyed away from the LORD to Egypt Gen 13:3-4.

So Bethel, prior to Jacob's story, was already a place of beginning and returning. It was also at this same Bethel where Jacob, early in his journey slept when he was fleeing from Esau. At Bethel Jacob had a dream where there was a staircase leading to heaven where the LORD was at the top and it was there that the LORD extended the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob. The Lord said to Jacob Gen 28:13-15



And in response to the LORD meeting Jacob at Bethel and blessing him, Jacob still at Bethel vows to the LORD, Gen 28:20- 21

Bethel was Jacob's spiritual start with the LORD – Jacob was on the run, he was headed to a foreign land, and the LORD meets him and LORD gives him the covenant blessing, and promises to bring Jacob back to this very spot – Bethel – meaning “the house of God”. And Jacob vows that if the Lord has done all that he said he would, “then the LORD will certainly be my God” – meaning Jacob would choose to only have one god, the LORD, and no other gods. And there at Bethel Jacob erected a memorial stone of the covenant and his vow to the LORD.

So now twenty years later in Ch 35 has the LORD done all he said he would for Jacob? Has the LORD brought Jacob back to the land where he started? Yes. So in accordance with Jacob's vow, now Jacob belongs to God alone – meaning he will have no other gods. What does that mean? Well, stop and meditate on that for a moment - what would that look like for your life.. to have no other gods but the LORD? If you are going to have only one God and it is the LORD, meaning have no other gods, then you have to separate yourselves from other gods. For Jacob and his clan, this purification process we see in (v2) was the separation process of ridding his household of any other gods and anything having to do with other gods... including clothing and jewelry. It was not uncommon for clothing to have some connection to the local gods, as did their jewelry - like earrings - mentioned in v4. These are real Mesopotamian earrings roughly from this era all connected to local gods.



If you are surprised by the fact that Jacob knew his household had other little gods, remember Jacob's wife Rachel hid her idols/figurines called teraphim from her father in her saddle. We can assume then that other servants who also came from the same region would also have their little gods as well.

So from that purification process – separating themselves from the gods...Jacob takes all these little figurines and earrings and buries them under a mighty oak tree near Shechem.

So what is happening here spiritually for Jacob? Well this is not just spiritual talk... Jacob is actually walking his faith and commitment out. Big picture... the LORD separated Jacob from Laban and Mesopotamia physically, and brought Jacob back to the land of his spiritual beginning, the land of promise - Canaan. The LORD then holds Jacob to his vow and Jacob separates himself and his household from all the other gods of Mesopotamia. If Jacob is going to be the Shepherd of Israel then it will only be with Jacob having one god, the LORD.

After all the purification and separation from other gods, we see in v5 (HL terror) that Jacob and his clan journey on to Bethel.

An interesting thing happens while they journeyed. The text says a "terror from God" spread over the local people. After Jacob's sons had deceived and killed all the men of Shechem, (34:30) Jacob was worried that the other local Canaanites would band together and destroy him...We know that doesn't happen because 35:5 says that terror from God spread over the people.

There is lots of speculation about what this "terror from God" was. But here is what we know about this terror from God. This terror from God kept the Canaanites from pursuing Jacob after what Jacob's sons did in Shechem. That's pretty powerful! This reminds me of the story back in Gen 31 where when God told Jacob to leave Mesopotamia and go back to Canaan, Laban his father-in-law pursues Jacob. But God intervened (31:24) to thwart whatever Laban was going to do so that Jacob could arrive successfully where God sent him. So now in 35:5 God told Jacob to go to Bethel, again God intervenes to make it possible for Jacob to arrive where God told him to go the second time.

Generalizing this, when God tells us to do something, God orchestrates the supernatural to facilitate our success just like he did now twice for Jacob. Our job is to obey and go and God then works in the supernatural to create the environment for success. Isn't that a beautiful partnership bw us and God? What is the key to unlocking the supernatural? – our obedience to go where God wants us to go. But be careful discernment wise, my guess is the majority of the time we never see all that God orchestrates supernaturally when we obey him and go.

So Jacob and his clan arrive safely in Bethel and in (v7) Jacob builds the alter God told him to build and renames the place El- Bethel. (SL rename) When you rename something it means that you see it differently. And to see something differently means that something has changed inside you and your thinking. This renaming of Bethel to El-Bethel seems to be further evidence that Jacob truly was changed - Jacob now truly only has one God – the LORD, and now Jacob upon returning to Bethel, sees Bethel, the place of his spiritual beginning, differently than he did at the beginning of his journey.

In this chapter we are going to see naming and renaming happen several more times. And the naming renaming is intentionally paired with the multiple burials. Both the renaming and burials serve to emphasize the transformation or inward change in Jacob from when he started at Bethel till now when he returns to Bethel.

So let's talk about inward change. Often for there to be real change, we have to trust the LORD and say goodbye to things we thought we needed. And in no longer needing them we let those things that we thought we needed go. In a way thenthose things die to us and we

are dead to them. For example - if you are dependent on something in life you think you have to have, when God changes you inside you to be dependent on him, you can then let those things go - it then dies to you or you are dead to it. You symbolically burying it. That is what I think all of the burials in this chapter are symbolically pointing to.

Here is another burial in (v8). Deborah dies and is buried. The first burial was the idols Jacob buried under the oak tree, the second burial Deborah. Deborah was Jacob's mom's nurse who had also come from Mesopotamia, like the idols. As Rebekah's nurse Deborah was probably was young Jacob's primary care giver - so imagine the attachment. Somehow Deborah ends up with Jacob on this journey back to Bethel, then dies, and like the idols buried, she also is buried, also under an oak tree... that Jacob names the "Oak of weeping".

So now we have two burials both under oak trees and followed by another renaming. You will see this pattern again.

Gen 35:9-10 READ Note here the sequence - this blessing from God happens after Jacob separates and purifies himself and clan from other gods.

And note the first thing the LORD does in this blessing is the LORD renames Jacob. So the LORD has brought Jacob back to Bethel, the place where Jacob started spiritually and now the LORD confirms that Jacob truly is different by renaming him. This renaming seems to be redundant as God already renamed Jacob - changed his name to Israel after Jacob wrestled with him all night in chapter 32. In that story the renaming emphasis was on the literal meaning of Jacob wrestling with or struggling with God - what the name Israel means. But now the renaming the LORD gives Jacob in 35:10 from Jacob to Israel emphasizes the second meaning of Israel's name not applied to the person but to the future of the nation of Israel - that Israel will struggle but with God endure under pressure. Isn't that true still today?

In v11-14 God restates the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob which echoes the covenant God gave Adam & Eve in Gen 1:27-28. Let me point this out though, this is the same covenant that God gave to Jacob the first time Jacob was at Bethel. READ. Do you think Jacob heard this covenant differently now after all the LORD has seen him thru?

Interesting that Jacob in v14 sets up a memorial stone at Bethel. That is exactly (28:18) what Jacob did the first time he was in Bethel after the LORD spoke to him there. Do you think that after all the LORD has seen Jacob thru, that Jacob will see this memorial stone at Bethel differently than he saw the first memorial stone?

Now in (v15) the renaming continues - Jacob renames this place where God just spoke to him "Bethel" the house of God.

To rename something the same name means that you now understand its original meaning - like knowing it for the first time.

In v16-20 you can guess what we will see more of: naming/ renaming, and burials, and now added to the pattern, are memorial stone. Watch for those three things.

Ephratha -is the famous region within the tribal territory of Judah whose central town is Bethlehem. So all the connections to Bethlehem where Jesus is born begin here in v16. This is the same Ephrath that was prophesied in Micah 5:2

WHAT DOES IT
MEAN TO *Rename*
SOMETHING?

GENESIS 35:7

When you rename something, it means that you see it differently.

And to see something differently means that something has changed inside you and your thinking.





Ephrath means "to be fruitful". That is so what Jesus became isn't it? ... fruitful!!

So in route to Ephrath – Jacob's favorite wife Rachel has hard and dangerous labor. As she is dying in child birth she names her son she just bore – "Ben Oni, Son of My Sorrow". But Jacob renames the baby "Benjamin – son of my right hand." Naming and renaming. And yes both of these names point to Jesus, likewise a son born in Ephrath, Bethlehem. "Son of my sorrow" captures the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was the son of a mom who would grieve greatly when she saw her son Jesus die. "Son of my right hand" captures Jesus divinity... That as the Son of God, Jesus would sit at God the Father's right hand.



Isn't it fascinating the true agent of inward change, Jesus, that causes us to be transformed, and that transformation then allows us to see things differently – he is subtly referred to here in this chapter?

Now Jacob's journey home isn't over – Jacob is still not quite back home to his father Isaac. Jacob was in Shechem, then Bethel and now he is headed home to Mamre where his father is, but once again Jacob stops en route in (v21), sets up his tent near Migdal Eder.



Migdal Eder is highly symbolic and is so fitting for Jacob being renamed and having a new perspective of where his walk with the LORD started. Migdal Eder means “Tower of the Flock. Shepherds used this high vantage point to watch out for danger to the flocks. This is an original “Shepherds tower”. Jacob, now renamed Israel, having seen the covenant faithfulness of the LORD, and now having been transformed by the LORD, will use his new perspective to watch out for the flock – like shepherds did from the tower of the flock. In essence Jacob, now renamed Israel, symbolically is the shepherd in Tower of the Flock of the nation of Israel.

And it seems from v22 that Jacob's first duty as Shepherd watching the flock of Israel was to protect future Israel from his own evil sons. READ. We already saw the evil of the second and third oldest sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, who deceived then killed the men of Shechem. Now the firstborn son of Jacob, Reuben, who is the rightful heir of the covenant, tries to usurp power over Jacob's clan before his dad's death, and he does so by sleeping with his father's concubine. To sleep with your fathers wife is to put yourself as head of the family. This is the same sin and power grab that Absalom does with David's wives. Jacob was a usurper as Jacob's name means, and so is his firstborn son Reuben.

The Gen 3 serpent is alive and well in the next generation. And if you want to find out how Jacob, the shepherd who is to watch over his flock Israel, responds to his evil son Reuben actions, you'll just have to wait for chapter 49.

We are almost at the end of the chapter. V27-29 READ. And of course there is one more burial- Isaac's.



MIGDAL EDER

Means:

“TOWER OF THE FLOCK”

Shepherds used this high vantage point to watch out for danger to the flocks

I want to end with a poem and the story that goes with it. The early 20 th Century Anglo American poet T. S. Eliot famously wrote: (SL T.S Eliot):

"With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling,
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."
-T. S. Eliot "Little Gidding" Part V



Here is the story behind T.S Eliot's poem. In England there is a small Anglican community called Little Gidding. Little Gidding was founded in 1620 and was dedicated to daily prayer, scripture harmony, and reconciliation between divided Christians. This little town was destroyed during the English Civil War and rebuilt. Eliot visited there in the 1930's during a time of war time bombings and European collapse. Now Eliot was raised unitarian, and as a young adult became deeply skeptical of religion and philosophy, and confessed to be very spiritually fragmented. Consequently Eliot suffered from deep depression and isolation and during these very hard years are reflected in his writings called "The Waste Land". But God was drawing Eliot to himself thru that. In 1927 Eliot converted to Anglican Christianity and later made a pilgrimage that included Little Gidding in England. Little Gidding became a place of deep spiritual reflection for Elliot.

Eliot believed three sequential principles: suffering was not meaningless, purification precedes joy, and return is deeper than progress. Return is deeper than progress! Suffering, Purification and Return.. Sounds like the life of Jacob doesn't it?

What Jacob experienced on his journey back to Bethel and then home where it all started was a series of transformations and renamings, a series of purifications separating himself from what was not of the true God; a series of deaths and burials and memorials that symbolically were about being freed from his false self so he could be what God wanted him to be in the present. What God wanted Jacob to be was Israel, the Shepherd of the Flock of the nation of Israel. See, like what T.S. Eliot captures in his poem, because of what God brought Jacob thru, Jacob "arrived where he started (Bethel), and now as Israel, knows the place for the first time

So what would it take for you to be who God wants you to be here and now? To be free from the things of the past that prevent you from being who God wants you to be in the present? I think it may look like Jacob's journey in Ch 35."

JACOB'S CHAPTER 35

Journey

1. JACOB OBEYED & WENT

Where God wanted
him to go

2. JACOB SEPERATED & PURIFIED

Himself of things tied
to false gods.

3. JACOB TRUSTED

in God's covenant faithfulness
to protect him on the way.

4. JACOB LET GO

of the old
and buried it

5. JACOB SET UP MEMORIALS

to remind himself of
what God did and said.

6. JACOB ALLOWED THE STRUGGLE

and suffering to transform him into who
God wanted him to be in the present –
then God renamed him.. in essence gave
him a new identity in God.

1. Jacob obeyed God and went where God wanted him to go.
2. Jacob separated and purified himself of things tied to false gods.
3. Jacob trusted in God's covenant faithfulness to protect him on the way.
4. Jacob let go of the old and buried it.
5. Jacob set up memorials to remind himself of what God did and said.
6. Jacob allowed the struggle and suffering to transform him into who God wanted him to be in the present – then God renamed him.. in essence gave him a new identity in God.

And when that happens you will look back on where the journey started for you and you will know it for the first time.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

35:2 Ritual purification: This is the first mention in the bible of ritual purification done prior to approaching an altar of the LORD.

35:4 buried. The word buried here is not the same in Hebrew as used later in the chapter for burying the dead. Rather it means to hide - as in hiding a treasure. If ever that treasure hid under that tree was found I pity them spiritually.

35:5 terror from God - the original is not clear on it being "el or El" - meaning "god sized terror" or "terror from God". Some suggest that because all the men of Shechem were circumcised then slaughtered that was enough to inspire "god sized terror". I personally prefer the "terror from God" translation as it is consistent with the text of what God promised Jacob.

35:7 El Bethel: Jacob renames Bethel, meaning house of god to El- Bethel - meaning God, the house of God. Perhaps Jacob did this just in case there was any misinterpretation that the "el" in Bethel was a reference to many gods, rather than the "el" being a reference to the one true God "El".

35:11 El Shaddai: meaning is uncertain. However the use of the name is usually associated contextually with fertility, nurturing, sustaining etc, implying that God is able to fulfill the Gen 1:27-28 blessing of being fruitful and multiplying.

35:11 "sets up his tent" (lit in Heb) is the same language used prior to the ugly sexual incident in Shechem in 33:18. This same language serves to foreshadow that Jacob setting up his tent in 35:21 also happens prior to an ugly sexual incident.

Sources on T.S. Eliot history: Cambridge Univ Press, Wiki, The New Yorker, Britannica

Sources for teaching notes:

1. The Pentateuch as Narrative: John Sailhamer
2. The Literary Structure of the Old Testament. David A Dorsey
3. The Five Books of Moses - a translation with commentary. Robert Alter
4. The IVP Bible Background Commentary - Old Testament
5. Enduring Word website and podcast. David Guzik
6. "Jacob" Bible Project Classroom notes. Tim Mackie.
7. Blue Letter Bible website.
8. NET Bible. NETbible.org. Click on the numbers in each verse.