

## Jacob Renewed the Covenant at Bethel

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that rape is a very serious offense that can affect entire extended families, in addition to the one who was raped. In this topic, we are going to see that the Lord told Jacob that it was time for him to return to Bethel where he had seen the Lord in a dream.

Genesis 35:1-4 says, “Then God said to Jacob, ‘Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.’ And Jacob said to his household and to all who *were* with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that *are* among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.’ So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which *were* in their hands, and the earrings which *were* in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which *was* by Shechem.” In these verses, we see that Jacob began to exercise real spiritual leadership in his family and led them to separate themselves from the false idols they had brought with them from Haran.

God had told Jacob while he was in Haran, in Genesis 31:13, “...I *am* the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar *and* where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.” In the first verse here in chapter 35, we see that God told Jacob what he was to do now that he was back in the land. He was to return to Bethel and live there. In addition, he was to make an altar there to God. The Lord reminded Jacob that Bethel was the place where He had appeared to Jacob when Jacob fled from his brother Esau. Suddenly, we see that Jacob began to take real spiritual leadership in his family. First, he told his family that it was time for them to get rid of their foreign gods. He had taught them some things about the True and Living God, but, at the same time, his family had also continued to worship their idols. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...” True repentance is turning to God from idols and serving Him.

Second, Jacob told his family to purify themselves. The word translated “purify” means *to be clean or to purify*. In these verses, each person in the family of Jacob was to take a bath as an outward sign that they were turning from their idols and turning to the True and Living God. Third, they were to change their clothes. It is possible that some of their clothing was also associated with the worship of idols, particularly the earrings that were in their ears since they removed those as a part of changing their clothes. We see that Jacob buried both the idols and the earrings under the terebinth tree. Jacob also told his family that they would go to Bethel and build an altar to God at Bethel. Jacob said that Bethel was the place where God had answered him during the time of his distress when he was fleeing from his brother Esau. Jacob also explained to his family that God had been with him throughout the time since he had seen the Lord in his dream and the Lord had spoken to him. Then, the family gave their idols and the rings in their ears and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree.

Genesis 35:5-8 says, “And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that *were* all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz (that *is*, Bethel), which *is* in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who *were* with him. And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother. Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.” To get to Bethel, Jacob and his family had to travel near other cities that had heard what the sons of Jacob had done to the city of Shechem. That could have produced anger and revenge. However, we see that the terror of God was on all those cities. This is the only place where the word translated “terror” is used in the Old Testament and it speaks of the supernatural terror that caused the people of the area to be so fearful that they were afraid to try and do anything to the family of Jacob.

When Jacob had been given the dream by God, Genesis 28:19 says, “And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.” Until this time, only the family of Jacob called this place Bethel, so everyone else knew it by its old name of Luz. “Luz” means *almond tree* while “Bethel” means *house of God*. We see that Jacob built an altar there and this time called the place “El Bethel” which means *The God of the House of God*. We see that he used this name because that was where God had appeared to him when he fled from Esau. We also see that Isaac was near Bethel at that time because of the fact that, Deborah, the nurse of Jacob’s mother died and was buried near Bethel. Then, the name of the place where she was buried was called “Allon Bachuth” which means *oak of weeping*, because she was buried under an oak tree.

However, something else that was also very important in the life of Jacob happened to him at Bethel this time. We read that the Lord appeared to him again at Bethel. Genesis 35:9-15 says, “Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, ‘Your name *is* Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.’ So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: ‘*I am* God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.’ Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him. So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.”

The Lord had changed the name of Jacob to “Israel” when the Lord wrestled with Jacob the night before Jacob met Esau. That name means *God rules or God prevails*. However, except when he met his brother Esau, Jacob continued to act like his old name nearly all of the time. Here, we see that the first thing the Lord said to Jacob when He appeared to him this second time at Bethel was “Your name *is* Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” However, we see that a change had happened in the life of Jacob. He had begun to take the spiritual leadership in his family. He told them to give him their idols and had buried them. His family had also taken a bath and changed their clothes. Then, he had come to Bethel and had called on the name of the Lord. As a result, when God appeared to him, He reminded Jacob that his name was now Israel. This time, God told Jacob, “Your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” This time, God told Jacob that he should not be called by his old name any longer. Jacob had done what God had told him to do when he returned to

Bethel and built an altar. Now, it was time for him to be called by his new name as he was beginning to let God rule in his life.

However, the Lord did more than just remind Israel of his new name. The Lord also renewed the promise that had originally been given to Abraham. First, God reminded Israel that “I am God Almighty.” That name points out the fact that God is the One who is all powerful. As a result, He is the One who can do whatever He chooses. Then, he told Israel, “Be fruitful and multiply.” Israel already had eleven sons and would have one more in the future. However, his descendants would continue to multiply. Even today, in spite of the efforts of many rulers and nations to try to destroy his descendants, they continue to multiply. Then, God said, “...a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you.” Even though his descendants have been scattered throughout the world, they have had a great impact on many nations throughout the world. God also told Israel, “...kings shall come from your body.” That has happened also. In fact, One descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, will rule forever.

God also reminded Israel of the promise of the land, as we read, “The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.” In spite of the fact that most of the descendants have been out of that land for more than 2,500 years, in the last century the Lord has begun to bring part of those descendants back into that land. God has certainly been faithful to the promises He made to Israel that day. Then, God went from the place where He had appeared and reminded Israel of his new name and passed the promises made to Abraham and Isaac on to him.

We also see the response of Jacob (Israel) after the Lord had talked to him and went up from him that day. The fact that the verse says the Lord went up from him probably indicates that he saw the Lord leave him to return to heaven in some way. Jacob set up a pillar in the place where the Lord had talked with him. Many years earlier when Jacob was fleeing from Esau, he set up a pillar and poured oil on it. This time, he did two things. First, he poured a drink offering on the pillar of stone that he set up. Then he poured oil on the pillar. A drink offering was usually offered along with other offerings. This is one time when it was offered alone. Exodus 29:41 says, “And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in the morning, for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.” In this verse, we see that the evening sacrifice also included a grain offering and a drink offering as a sweet aroma to the Lord. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that the purpose of the drink offering was to be a sweet aroma to the Lord. Jacob offered this offering to the Lord in obedience to the Lord when he returned to Bethel. In this way, his offering of a drink offering was an offering that was pleasing to the Lord as it showed his submission to the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain why Jacob offered a drink offering to the Lord.