

## Revival 11-11-07

### Genesis 35

It had been a long journey for Jacob, one that took over 20 years. He was now back in the Promised Land, but he hadn't come full circle, not quite yet. The rape of his daughter Dinah, and the slaughter of the Shechemites were new low points in the family story. Once again, fear began to fill the heart of Jacob. Would the clans in league with Shechem come and exact justice on Jacob's family? Where should they go? What should they do? How could they recover?

It is in those times of uncertainty that we most desperately need to hear from our Maker. It is in times of confusion and distress that we make ourselves available to hear what He would speak to us. (Psalm 118:5) This was a time when God could get Jacob's attention. Isn't it sad that we have to get in these predicaments that result from our sins of neglect before we are desperate to hear from God? If we would regularly listen to Him, we would avoid many of these painful situations. (Psalm 55:17; Proverbs 8:34) Still, God faithfully and patiently comes to us in our hour of need. (Psalm 138:3)

<sup>1</sup> Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." I wonder why Jacob had not visited the place where he had such a powerful experience with God, the place he called the House of God. If he believed he would encounter God there, why didn't he go much earlier? Could it be that Jacob was putting it off as long as he could? After all, the last encounter had left him handicapped. (Genesis 32:31)

I know that there are times when I will avoid prayer because I don't want my agenda interrupted. Being chosen by God isn't always the easiest route to take, and it is often filled with sacrifice. If you are set on doing your own plan, you will avoid hearing from God. His plan is usually different from the one you have chosen. (Proverbs 16:9) When you finally do hear, it isn't that it is just inconvenient; it is often a complete death to your will and ways. (1 Corinthians 15:31)

Jacob had already built an altar at Shechem. (33:20) He had already declared that the LORD was his mighty God, but he hasn't let the implications of that declaration filter down to his daily decisions. Now that he is going to the place he named the House of God, he has to get serious about his part in accepting the LORD as God. It reminds me of people on their deathbed. Suddenly they are willing to face the fact that they haven't been living up to their side of a relationship with God and they don't have much time left to do so. They get serious about changing the way they act and think. Some wise people get to that point earlier in life. They know God will call us to account for our actions, and they want to clear things up or finally do what they know God expected of them. They realize it is better to put your life in God's hands than keep it in your own. (Ecclesiastes 3:15) Jacob was

**Commented [notes1]:** 5 In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free.

**Commented [notes2]:** 34 Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.

**Commented [notes3]:** 17 Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

**Commented [notes4]:** 3 When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted.

**Commented [notes5]:** 31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

**Commented [notes6]:** 9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

**Commented [notes7]:** 31 I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Commented [notes8]:** 20 There he set up an altar and called it El Eloe Israel.

**Commented [notes9]:** 15 Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account

standing at that crossroad. Maybe some of you are there today. (2Corinthians 5:8-10)

Have you ever been to Bethel? It was a place where you realized that God was real and that He cared about you personally. (Revelation 2:4) You made some kind of vow or deal like Jacob made. Now God is reminding you, calling you back to that commitment, and showing you how He was faithful to you and asking if you are going to be faithful to Him. What do you do? Will you go back to Bethel?

<sup>2</sup> So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. You start by cleaning up your act. Maybe, like Rachel, you took those gods for security. Maybe you gathered them from victories of the past, like the sons of Jacob took them off the bodies of the Shechemites. Those things are an insult to the God of creation. He made the metal those gods are made of. He made anything you are looking to for security. What a mockery it is when we look to those things instead of the hand that made it all. If you are going to get serious with God, it's time to get rid of what insults Him.

James tells us to get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent. If you want to get serious with God it has to go. (James 1:21) The author of Hebrews says we must get rid of every weight that slows us down and the sin that entangles us. (Hebrews 12:1) If you want to respond to God's faithfulness, you need to start being faithfully consistent. No more compromising. (Romans 13:12)

Purifying yourself and changing your clothes would later become a part of Hebrew culture. The priests put on special clothing to minister. It was also the responsibility of a soldier after battle to take a time of purification. (Numbers 31:19-20) They had just been in battle, and needed to be cleansed from the contact with the dead. It symbolized the washing away of the past and a new clean beginning.

The Apostle Paul picked up on this imagery when he spoke of baptism and putting on Christ. Baptism was the burial of the old nature, the sinful past, and then to rise with Christ and put Him on like a robe. (Romans 6:3-5 ; Galatians 3:27) This is nothing short of revival for the clan of Jacob.

<sup>3</sup> Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." Jacob was saying, "God has been faithful to His word. He answered me when I called out in distress. He kept his word to go with me and keep me. Now it is time for me to be faithful to return and build an altar." Our greatest distress in life is not being reconciled to God, of having to answer for our sins, and God was faithful to meet that need. He was faithful to be with us wherever we went. In the midst of all our unfaithfulness, he was still with us, patiently calling us to righteousness. (2Timothy 2:13) Has God answered you in your day of distress? Has He been with you wherever you have gone? Perhaps it is time to return to your Bethel.

**Commented [notes10]:** 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

**Commented [notes11]:** 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

**Commented [notes12]:** 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

**Commented [notes13]:** 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

**Commented [notes14]:** 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

**Commented [notes15]:** 19 "All of you who have killed anyone or touched anyone who was killed must stay outside the camp seven days. On the third and seventh days you must purify yourselves and your captives. 20 Purify every garment as well as everything made of leather, goat hair or wood."

**Commented [notes16]:** 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

**Commented [notes17]:** 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

**Commented [notes18]:** 13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

To "go up" is a phrase in Scripture that means to come to a place where you present yourself before God. It was a very serious time of worship. Every Sunday we should have that same mindset. God is always with us, and we fellowship with Him throughout the week, but when we come to worship together we should have the serious attitude of presenting ourselves before the Lord. We often come to worship in a flippant manner. It is a joyous but serious thing to "go up". (Isaiah 2:3)

<sup>4</sup> So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. It is unclear if the rings in their ears were rings in the ears of the idols or the people. There is archeological evidence that people of that day did put rings of precious metals on the ears of their idols. You might recall that Aaron built the golden calf from the rings in the ears of the Israelites. (Exodus 32:3-4) These rings must have been common in some cultic idolatry. Some that have been discovered from that era were in the shape of a crescent, symbolizing moon worship.

It does seem strange to me that he would bury them. Later in the story of Israel, the nation will destroy things that are devoted to the Lord. The idols of other nations will be ground up, beaten in pieces, and burned and precious metals would go into the Temple treasury. We would hope that the burial of these valuable items was not leaving room to take them back up again. God sees the heart!

Great oaks were places of worship both for the heathen nations and for Israel. We have some great oaks near my home. The deer wallow in their shade and other creatures come for the acorns. They do seem to provoke a sense of reverence. It may be that this oak was used for the worship of other gods and so Jacob buried them there in that defiled place. In any case, he at least had the sense that they must remove from among them anything that would provoke God. We would be wise to do the same. Anything in our life that would vie for first place in our thoughts and be an alternative focus for our devotion needs to be buried - buried or crushed. I don't want to have the opportunity to dig it up again. (2Chronicles 34:4)

<sup>5</sup> Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them. Any other clans that were in league with Shechem for defensive purposes would be obligated to seek revenge upon Jacob's family. They would be glad to do so because of the great wealth they could take as spoils of war, but God intervened and caused them to fear doing so. This is the third time that God has spared Jacob from those who sought his life. Our life is in God's hands. Even when we do things to provoke others in our sinful nature, God has a day for our graduation from this world. He is the one that keeps us. (Psalm 121:3-4)

Jacob returned to Bethel and built an altar. Perhaps he was sacrificing the 10% that he promised to give to God when he was leaving. He named it El Bethel or the

**Commented [notes19]:** 3 Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

**Commented [notes20]:** 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.  
4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

**Commented [notes21]:** 4 Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them.

**Commented [notes22]:** 3 He will not let your foot slip - he who watches over you will not slumber;  
4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

God of Bethel. God brought him full circle just as He had promised, and Jacob acknowledged God's faithfulness by worshipping.

Then, shortly after this submitted time of worship, Deborah died. Deborah had been Jacob's mother Rebekah's nurse. Since Rebekah's death, she had probably been like a mother to Jacob and the clan. He buried her under a great oak just below Bethel and named it the Oak of Weeping. God spoke to Jacob when he was fearful and wondering where to turn. Now, in a time of great loss He appeared to him to give encouragement and reiterate the promises.

<sup>9</sup> After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. <sup>10</sup> God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel. Just in case he didn't really get it at Peniel, God reminded him of his name change. This was a parallel to the name change of his grandfather Abraham whose name was changed from exalted father to father of many nations. Jacob was the deceiver, but now he is the overcomer. Was God reminding him to act in accord with his new name? There are times when we are moving forward spiritually, but our old way of reacting to situations and our daily patterns have yet to catch up with what has transpired in our hearts. (Romans 12:2) Old habits do die hard. Transformation is a lifelong process. God has given you a new name too. (Revelation 2:17) He may have to remind you of it from time to time. It causes us to check our behavior and see what is not in line with that new identity.

God reiterated the promise to multiply his progeny, that kings would come from him, and to give him the land, all of which He had promised Abraham. Jacob then repeated his actions of over 20 years earlier. He set up a stone pillar and poured oil over it. This time he added a drink offering. He was thanking God for the fellowship and anointing the place again as a sacred site. His heart was assured and his confidence renewed. We need that as we walk through this fallen world. The Lord encourages me with the same words time and time again. I need it. I need the comfort of His promises refreshed to my soul. (Psalm 19:7-8) We all do. Words like [Jeremiah 29:11](#) and [John 15:16](#).

In both Abraham and Jacob's encounter, the theophany referred to Himself as El Shaddai. This is the sovereign God who makes things happen, who orchestrates history. He is the One who brought Jacob back safely and kept his enemies at bay. He is the all-powerful One who keeps confronting us to change our very nature.

We live in this fallen world among fallen people. (Genesis 3:17-18) We fail to be the people God has called us to be and we face the consequences. It is easy to give in to fear and discouragement, but El Shaddai is faithful. In the midst of all the difficulty and the struggle to be what God has called us to be, He lifts us up on wings of eagles and renews us with His word. (Isaiah 40:31)

<sup>16</sup> Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. God's instructions were to settle there. Perhaps he did and God then told him to move on, but we

**Commented [notes23]:** 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**Commented [notes24]:** 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

**Commented [notes25]:** 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

**Commented [notes26]:** 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

**Commented [notes27]:** 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

**Commented [notes28]:** 17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

**Commented [notes29]:** 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

don't have a record of that. It looks like he decided to go when God said to stay. Rachel's desire and prophecy came to pass. She had once cried out to Jacob, "Give me children or I'll die." (30:1) At the birth of her first son, she named him Joseph saying, "May the Lord add to me another son." She was going to give birth to another son but she wouldn't survive the birth. Before she died she named him Ben-oni, son of my sorrow. Jacob changed his name to Benjamin, son of my right hand. Just as God had changed Jacob's destiny by changing his name to Israel, so Jacob wanted this special son to have a destiny different from the one his mother was giving him in the name Ben-oni.

**Commented [notes30]:** 1 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

Rachel had always been the delight of his eyes. She was the one he truly loved. Now she had gone from this world at a young age. After losing Deborah, this had to be a difficult blow that would be with him to his dying day. (48:7) God had prepared him by giving him another appearance and renewing the promises, but it was still hard to bear. He buried her on the way to Bethlehem.

**Commented [notes31]:** 7 As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem).

Today, the tomb of Rachel can be visited. Women who have trouble becoming pregnant drag a red piece of yarn around the tomb and then wear it. They believe it will help them overcome bareness.

Then adding sorrow upon sorrow, <sup>21</sup> *Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder.* <sup>22</sup> *While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.* Reuben was the oldest son, and probably only about ten years in age difference from Bilhah. With Rachel gone, Reuben may have thought that his father would now favor Bilhah instead of his mother Leah. It was probably to assure that his mother would have first place that he seduced Bilhah. Once the sin was discovered, Bilhah would have the status of "living widowhood". Leah would then be the wife of first importance. Reuben also may have been claiming inheritance rights. The son who possesses the concubines is the heir. But Jacob would have none of it. Before Jacob died he gave Reuben's inheritance to the sons of Joseph. (Genesis 49:3-4)

**Commented [notes32]:** 3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power.  
4 Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.

After the list of the sons from the different wives, we learn that Jacob finally returned to his father who was still living. He lived to be 180 years of age. Esau met Jacob one last time to bury their father beside their grandparents in the cave of Machpelah. The next chapter tells us that they could not live together, because, like Abraham and Lot, their herds were too large to be together. (Genesis 36:7)

**Commented [notes33]:** 7 Their possessions were too great for them to remain together; the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock.

The sins of Jacob's life have come back to haunt him in the behavior of his children, and in the enemies he has made. Yet Grace will not let Jacob escape His grip. He has more troubles yet to face, troubles from playing favorites, troubles that are a reaping of what he has sown, but grace has the final word. Isn't this what we see in our own lives? (Ephesians 4:7) Just because he finally did what the Lord required of him was not a reason to spare him from the natural troubles of life. We all face the death of those we love. We are all affected by the sins of others as well as our own. That is not a reason to complain to God, it is a reason to embrace Him and allow Him to help us go through those times. That is much easier to do when our idols are forsaken and we cling to Him alone. (Psalm 34:19)

**Commented [notes34]:** 7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

**Commented [notes35]:** 19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

Look at all the death and pain that surrounded Jacob's return to Bethel. First it was Deborah's death. Shortly after, Rachel died. Then Reuben violated his father's concubine, Bilhah, and finally Jacob's father, Isaac, died. Those things would have happened even if he didn't go to Bethel. Bethel only made him better prepared to deal with them.

Life is full of trouble and death. It is painfully sad at times. But here is the question we all must ask ourselves. Do we want to go through it alone and hopeless, grabbing whatever bits of fleeting pleasure we can find, or do we want our transcendent Maker to walk through it with us, giving everything meaning and purpose? Will you go back to your Bethel and hear the promises renewed even if it means abandoning your agenda? Will you "go up" and worship? Will you live up to your new name, or sink back into the old?