

Genesis 35: Return to Bethel 10-14-18

Genesis 35 may be a composite of multiple events in the life of Jacob placed into one chapter. At the beginning it seems that this takes place after Jacob has met with Esau, but it may also be a refresher of Jacob's first meeting with God, then his return from Paddam-Aram. Whatever the timetable, it really contains two parts: Jacob called to Bethel by God, and some of the difficult events in the life of Jacob.

Already Jacob's life has become hard. In chapter 34 his daughter Dinah was violated by a Hivite prince, and in response, under a banner of peace, his sons Simeon and Levi murder the entire town (bringing Jacob's wrath on them in Genesis 49:6-7). In Chapter 35 more difficulties are put on Jacob (now Israel). He will lose his beloved wife Rachel, his father Isaac will die, and his mother's nurse Deborah will die. Additionally, his firstborn son will violate his household sanctity by having an intimate relationship with Bilhah, his concubine. And still more is yet to come, with the "death" of Joseph in the upcoming chapters.

With all of this there is little wonder why at the end of his life Jacob would say to Pharaoh: *"The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life..."* (Genesis 47:9).

This call to Bethel may well be looking at these events. Ahead of these difficult moments God calls Jacob to worship at Bethel; He calls Jacob back to the covenant and reaffirms that Jacob is His own. This may be meant to sustain or encourage Jacob so that he does not feel forsaken in the coming years.

When called to Bethel, Jacob prepares himself and his family in three ways. First he orders the removal (and burial) of all idols in his home. Second, he orders the purification of his home. Finally, he orders that new garments be put on (a symbol of renewal).

These things may be a good example for us too. We are promised tribulations in serving God (Acts 14:22) as well as being told that we will suffer the same things that other men suffer (1 Cor. 10:13). We are also called to "Beth-El", which means "House of God". The church is the House of God (1 Tim. 3:15). Perhaps God calls us to come to Bethel every week in order to prepare us to overcome the difficulties we will face in life.

Let us consider how we are to prepare ourselves by Colossians 3:5-14. First, we are told to purge our lives of the idols that are ungodly living. Then we are told to purify ourselves by righteous conduct. Then we are told to put on Godliness as a garment, topped off with love.

Our lives are like those of the patriarchs. Our home is not here; here we are but straying pilgrims. Our home is not seen except by faith.

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." John 16:33