

Genesis 35 - Revival in Jacob's Life

A. Jacob returns to Bethel.

1. (1) God speaks to Jacob, calling him back to Bethel.

a. **Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there:** The whole Shechem incident was because Jacob went to Shechem instead of Bethel, where he was supposed to be. We often end up in much difficulty and bring much difficulty to those around us, because we do not go where God tells us to go.

i. "The only cure for worldliness is to separate from it." (Barnhouse) Jacob had to leave Shechem and go to Bethel.

ii. Genesis 34 does not mention God once, and is one of the most sordid chapters in Israel's history. Genesis 35 mentions God over and over again, more than ten times.

b. **Make an altar there to God:** This turning back to the Lord will especially have a good effect on the children of Jacob. This reminds us the best thing parents can do for their children is to be in God's will, themselves.

i. As Jacob looked back on his walk with God, the first meeting with God at Bethel must have seemed like a high point. But to his credit, Jacob refused to think the best years of his life with God were behind him. He returned to his first love - he returned to Bethel, and God blessed it.

2. (2-4) The cleansing of Jacob's family.

a. **Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves:** Jacob's family only got right with God after Jacob himself did. This again shows us the tremendous leadership role men have within the family. A man resisting God will see the same effect in his children. A man who gets right with God will see the effect in his family also.

i. Jacob's children kept **foreign gods** because their mother did. Rachel clung to the household idols of her father (Genesis 31:19). No matter how hard we try to teach our children godly conduct they will still do what we do.

b. **And change your garments:** This was important because "Throughout the Bible, garments symbolize character.

i. Jude 23 gives the idea: *but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.* Ephesians 4:22-24 gives a similar exhortation: *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.*

c. **And the earrings which were in their ears:** Apparently, the **earrings** also had a pagan connection. Though some "reason" could be made for keeping the **earrings**, they got rid of them nonetheless. It is not saying that earrings are bad, today. It was just that during that time they were a symbol of worldliness and paganism, so that is why they needed to remove them.

i. It is important for everyone to take stock of what they may have in their home that is ungodly or occultic, and promptly get rid of those things.

ii. Castings Crowns talk about the consequences of letting yourself still be surrounded by ungodly things after your transformation in "Slow Fade".

Be careful little eyes what you see
It's the second glance that ties your hands as darkness
pulls the strings
Be careful little feet where you go
For it's the little feet behind you that are sure to follow

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to
gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day
It's a slow fade, it's a slow fade

Be careful little ears what you hear
When flattery leads to compromise, the end is always
near
Be careful little lips what you say
For empty words and promises lead broken hearts astray

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to
gray

Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day

The journey from your mind to your hands
Is shorter than you're thinking
Be careful if you think you stand
You just might be sinking

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to
gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day
Daddies never crumble in a day
Families never crumble in a day

Oh be careful little eyes what see
Oh be careful little eyes what you see
For the Father up above is looking down in love
Oh be careful little eyes what you see.

3. (5-7) God's protection of Jacob; he comes to Bethel.

a. **The terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob:** Obviously, it would be *fair* of God to leave Jacob to the consequences of his sinful lack of leadership in the family. Yet, God's grace covered Jacob even when his sin had made him and his family vulnerable.

b. **He built an altar there and called the place El Bethel:** Though Jacob had sinned, he *now* did what was right before God, despite the danger, trusting God's protection. He might have justified a lack of obedience because of fear, but he trusted God instead.

i. It dangerous for Jacob to set out to Bethel but it was more dangerous for him to disobey God. The only thing to save him was a radical obedience to the LORD. No matter what the circumstances look like, the safest place is doing the will of God.

4. (8) The death of Deborah, Rebekah's beloved nurse.

a. **Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died:** We know nothing of this woman before this account; seemingly, she came with Rebekah as a companion when she came from Haran to marry Isaac. Obviously, she was a beloved member of the family, because they named the place where she was buried **Allon Bachuth**, which means "Oak of Weeping."

b. **Rebekah's nurse:** Many commentators assume for some reason, she came to be in Jacob's household, coming from his mother's household, but we do not know for certain if this is the case.

5. (9-15) God speaks to Jacob again at Bethel.

a. **Then God appeared to Jacob again . . . and blessed him:** When Jacob finally arrived at the place God told him to go, Jacob immediately found great blessing. God appeared to him, God blessed him, and God called him by his new name (**Israel**).

i. The reminder of the new name was important, because Jacob had been acting like Jacob instead of Israel. Yet, God wants to set his mind on what God made him. God does the same with us, reminding us who we are in Him. God wants us to remember and live in the great name He gives us.

b. **God appeared to Jacob again:** Relationship is restored. This is an excellent example of what it means to return to your first love, as in Revelation 2:4-5: Jacob *remembers* to go back to Bethel. He *repents* by getting rid of all the idols, and he *does the first works* by building an altar and worshipping God as before.

c. **The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land:** God granted Jacob a precious reminder of his place in God's great covenant, begun with his grandfather Abraham. In this, Jacob did not need to hear anything new from God. He just needed to be reminded of what was true, and encouraged to cling to it all.

d. **Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him:** Seemingly, God appeared to Jacob here in bodily form. God blessed Jacob remarkably after his return to his first love. Much blessing waits for us until we do what God tells us to do.

e. **He poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it:** Appropriately, Jacob performed sacrificial acts of worship to the God who has blessed him so much.

i. The idea of a **drink offering** is found often in the Bible. Exodus 29:40-41, Leviticus 23:13, and Numbers 15:5-7 show the drink offering was made with wine poured out in sacrifice before the LORD at His altar. Paul considered the pouring out of his life before God to be like the pouring out of a drink offering at God's altar (Philippians 2:17; 2 Timothy 4:6).

ii. Jacob's heart of worship shows *gratitude* towards God. When we look back on life, we should never have the attitude that says, "I was robbed." Instead our heart should say, "God has blessed." This will probably determine if we will be perfectly miserable or perfectly delightful as we get older.

B. The birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel.

1. (16-17) The birth of another son.

a. **Rachel labored in childbirth:** There seems to be none of the contentiousness and competitiveness surrounding the birth of this last son, possibly because they are all older at this time, but more so because they are now in the Promised Land and it just isn't as important anymore.

b. **In childbirth:** We don't know how long Jacob stayed at Bethel, but it is possible this last child was conceived at this place where Jacob came back to his first love for the LORD.

2. (18) The naming of the last son.

a. **She called his name Ben-Oni:** Rachel named this last child - who before would have been seen as a cause for rejoicing and victory in the competition with her sister - she named this child **Ben-Oni**, meaning "son of my sorrow."

i. Ultimately, this shows the futility of Rachel's competition with her sister Leah. Now at the time of her final "victory," all she found was sorrow.

b. **But his father called him Benjamin:** Jacob wisely names the child **Benjamin**, which means “son of my right hand.” Perhaps he rightly sensed the special place God had for this child, or perhaps he simply prized Benjamin so greatly because he was the final link between him and the woman he loved most.

c. **Benjamin:** The right side was associated with greater strength and honor, because most people are right handed. **Benjamin** (son of my right hand) therefore has the idea of “son of my strength” or “son of my honor.”

i. The idea is expressed in passages like Exodus 15:6: *Your right hand, O LORD, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces.*

ii. The LORD is our strength and honor, as in Psalm 16:8: *I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.*

iii. God’s strength and honor are for us: *My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me.* (Psalm 63:8) *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me* (Psalm 138:7).

iv. Jesus sits at the *right hand* of the Father, the position of strength and honor, and we sit there with Him! *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God* (Colossians 3:1).

3. (19-20) The death and burial of Rachel.

a. **Rachel died and was buried:**

i. In Genesis 30:1, Rachel pleaded with Jacob, *Give me children, or else I die!* As it happened, both became true. She had children and died as a result.

b. **Jacob set a pillar on her grave:** This also shows that even when we get right with God and return to our first love it doesn’t mean life becomes a bed of roses. There are constant challenges for us to trust God.

i. We cannot prize comfort more than getting right with God. For some, comfort is their idol - a false god they worship with constant pursuit and attention. Some only want a *comfortable* life, not a godly life. The symbol for some Christians is a Lazy-Boy recliner, not a cross.

4. (21-22a) Reuben’s sin with his father’s concubine.

a. **Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine:** Reuben was the firstborn. We might expect the highest conduct from him, and might expect him to most seriously receive the covenant of his fathers. Yet, here he sinned in a most offensive way against his father and entire family.

i. However, we don’t have to wonder about where this sinful conduct was bred. In this home so filled with strife, contention, competition, and the pursuit of the flesh, it was almost to be expected.

b. **Israel heard about it:** Through their sin, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi “disqualified” themselves from the high calling of Abraham’s blessing. It will be up to the fourth son, Judah, to bring forth the Messiah.

5. (22b-26) Jacob's 12 sons.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

a. **These were the sons of Jacob:** It is actually a pretty messed-up family. God will use this family, but not because they are such great candidates, but because He has chosen them by His grace alone.

C. The death of Isaac.

1. (27) Jacob visits his father Isaac one last time.

a. **Jacob came to his father Isaac:** More than 20 years ago, Jacob left his home thinking his father's death was at hand. Now, quite unexpectedly, he has the opportunity to see his father one last time before his death.

i. We should remember our times are in God's hands. We may expect a long or short life for others or ourselves and be quite wrong. Only God knows.

2. (28-29) Jacob and Esau bury their father together.

Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

a. **His sons Esau and Jacob buried him:** The sons had already been brought together by God's hand. Now they work together again, united by the death of their father.