

God speaks to Jacob in a time of anxiety and instructs him to return to Beth-el, the place where he first encountered God. Jacob then leads his family in repentance as they prepare to rededicate themselves to the LORD. There are times when we have to follow Jacob's example and return in repentance to our own personal Beth-el and rededicate ourselves to Jesus Christ.

The previous chapter (chapter 34) describes a sordid incident where Shechem, the son of a local king, sees Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and in his lust forced her to have sex with him. He then comes to her father and brothers to ask them to give him Dinah as a wife, claiming to love her, although he was likely motivated by his lust for he would not have raped her if he truly loved her. The brothers deceive Shechem and his father, claiming that they would allow the marriage on the condition that Shechem, his father, and all the men of their city become circumcised as they were. The men agree to the condition but on the third day (when the men of the city were the most sore from being circumcised) Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah's brothers, arm themselves with swords and kill the men of the city while they were unable to adequately defend themselves. Jacob rebukes his sons for endangering them since they were easily outnumbered by all the Canaanites around them if they should decide to seek justice for what Simeon and Levi have done. It is in the context of this looming danger that we come to chapter 35.

¹ And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

In the midst of his anxiety that the Canaanites might try to destroy him and his family, God speaks to Jacob and instructs him to travel to a new dwelling place: Beth-el, the place where God first appeared to him (Gen. 28:10-22). Jacob is to build an altar unto God so that he may worship and renew his trust in the LORD. We all need to recommit ourselves to the LORD by going back to where we were spiritually when we first trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, the place where we realized that nothing else will meet our needs but Him.

² Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that *were* with him, Put away the strange gods that *are* among you, and be clean, and change your garments: ³ And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

“Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that *were* with him” – Jacob addresses not only his family (wives and children) but “all that were with him” (the servants he's accumulated over the years). Most of these servants probably came from the area of Padan-aram where Laban lived but possibly also from Canaan since Jacob's arrival back in the land. Commentators believe that Jacob had been in Canaan some 6-8 years by this time.

“Put away [set aside; reject] the strange [foreign] gods that *are* among you” – Jacob calls on them all to abandon their idols so that they may dedicate themselves to worshiping the LORD. We can easily understand that some of Jacob's servants might have brought idols with them since they came from such a background, but we might be surprised to find that even some within Jacob's family might also have these idols. We know that Rachel stole her father's gods when Jacob had taken his family and possessions and left Laban (Gen. 31:34), and it's possible that Leah and/or the children might also have had idolatrous tendencies. Apparently Jacob had been aware of their idols but had not insisted that they get rid of them before now.

“and be clean, and change your garments” – Bathing and putting on clean clothes symbolized leaving behind the sin and idolatry of the past and getting a clean start as they consecrated their lives to the LORD. This is what Biblical repentance is: turning away from sin and leaving everything associated with it behind.

“And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God” – Jacob is taking his family and his servants back to where he first met the LORD so that they can all worship the LORD and commit themselves to Him at the altar that he will build.

“who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went” – Jacob wants his family and servants to understand why the LORD is worthy of their worship by describing God as the One Who not only answered him when he needed Him but has also been with him ever since.

⁴ And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which *were* in their hand, and *all their* earrings which *were* in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which *was* by Shechem.

“And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which *were* in their hand, and *all their* earrings which *were* in their ears” – Jacob's family and servants respond by giving up the idols in their possession, as well as the earrings (and possibly other jewelry) that was associated with the strange gods. Many times these earrings with images of the gods engraved on them were worn to celebrate and show their allegiance to these gods. The family and servants may have obeyed because of Jacob's authority as the head of the household or they may also have obeyed as a sign of true repentance.

“and Jacob hid them under the oak which *was* by Shechem” – Jacob disposes of the idols and the associated jewelry by burying them so that they could not be easily retrieved. When we repent of our sin and our dependence on things other than the LORD, we should likewise put them behind us in such a way to make it difficult to return to them.

⁵ And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that *were* round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.

As Jacob and his company travel down to Beth-El, God keeps His promise to be with Jacob and keep him safe wherever he went by preventing the Canaanites from going after them. Apparently God put a fear in the hearts of the Canaanites that was greater than the indignation they may have felt for what the sons of Jacob (Simeon and Levi) did to the city where Shechem lived (Gen. 34:25-29).

⁶ So Jacob came to Luz, which *is* in the land of Canaan, that *is*, Beth-el, he and all the people that *were* with him. ⁷ And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

“So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Beth-el, he and all the people that were with him” – Jacob and his company arrive at Beth-el. The area was still called Luz by the locals even though Jacob had named it Beth-el decades earlier (Gen. 28:19), but the Jews will honor the name that Jacob gave it when they eventually occupy the land.

“And he built there an altar” – The previous time Jacob was here, he had only set up a stone as a monument to mark the place but now he builds an altar to worship the God Who had kept His promise to take care of him all these years.

“and called the place El-beth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother” – Jacob names the spot where he built the altar “El-beth-el” which means “The God of Beth-el” or “The God of the house of God.” It seems that originally Jacob had focused on the place where he met God, calling it “the house of God” but now decades later Jacob’s focus has moved to God Himself Who was with him no matter where he went. He had learned by experience that God was powerful not only at Beth-el but everywhere that Jacob had traveled.

⁸ But Deborah Rebekah’s nurse died, and she was buried beneath Beth-el under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.

A “nurse” was the rough equivalent of a “nanny” who was looked at as a sort of second mother. Deborah may have been the one who helped raise Jacob and so she was like a member of the family. She may have been helping with Jacob’s children. This verse implies a couple of things: (1) Rebekah is likely now dead because her nurse had been staying with Jacob; (2) there had apparently been contact between Jacob and his father’s household since he returned to Canaan in order for Deborah to have moved from Isaac’s household to Jacob’s. The name Jacob gives the spot where they buried Deborah means “the oak of weeping” which indicates how much she was loved.

⁹ And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him. ¹⁰ And God said unto him, Thy name *is* Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.

“And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him” – This verse seems to be a summary of what transpires in vs. 10-15. It may be that Jacob’s journey from Padan-aram (where Laban lived) was not considered complete until he arrived back at Beth-el.

“And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob...and he called his name Israel” – God repeats the name change that He gave to Jacob previously (Gen. 32:27-28). God apparently wanted to remind Jacob that he had left the old life behind because he had a new name that reflected his new life in the blessings of God. Today we must always remember that we have left behind our old life when we came to Christ and now walk in newness of life in Christ with the new name that He has given us: “Child of God.”

¹¹ And God said unto him, I *am* God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; ¹² And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.

“And God said unto him, I am God Almighty [El Shaddai]” – God identifies Himself with a name that declares that He is powerful enough to perform all the promises that He is making to Jacob.

“be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins” – These are repetitions of the promises God gave Abraham concerning his descendants. God will bless Jacob with numerous descendants, including many nations and kings. As a descendant of Abraham, Jacob automatically inherits the promises that God gave to Abraham.

“And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land” – The promise of possessing the land of Canaan also passes on to Jacob and his descendants.

¹³ And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. ¹⁴ And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, *even* a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. ¹⁵ And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el.

“And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him” – Commentators seem to agree that God had appeared to Jacob in some sort of physical form rather than speaking to him with some disembodied voice. God had spoken to Abraham in a similar manner when He promised that Sarah would give Abraham an heir (**Genesis 17:21-22** ²¹ *But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.* ²² *And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.*”).

“And Jacob set up a pillar in the place ... and he poured oil thereon” – Setting up pillars to mark the spot and pouring drink offerings and oil were common practices when establishing a covenant, which Jacob did the first time he was at Beth-el (Gen. 28:18-22). He now repeats the process as he recommits himself to God and reaffirms the covenant he made with the LORD many years ago.

“And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el” – Jacob again calls this place “the house of God,” this time in the presence of his family. We should always be a good example of faith before our family.