



Genesis 35-37

"And God said unto Jacob, Arise go up to Bethel, and dwell there..." When did God say this? When Jacob's family was falling apart. His daughter, Dinah, had just been involved in an illicit relationship with Shechem, the son of Hamor and his sons had just committed a horrible crime. It was deceitful and treacherous, but when rebuked by their father; they gave no indication of repentance at all. Their crime brought a threat of extermination upon the family as word of what they had done went into the surrounding villages. Surely they would gather together in a large number and destroy Jacob and his family. Jacob is afraid and knows that he must flee and it is at this point that God speaks to him.

There is tremendous significance in going to Bethel. The first time that Jacob came to Bethel, he was fleeing for his life. His brother Esau had vowed to kill him; because, he had deceived his father and had stolen the blessing that Isaac had intended for Esau. Jacob had slept on a stone, there at Bethel, and had a vision of the LORD standing at the top of a ladder. The LORD spoke to Jacob and told him that He would be with him in his journey and would bring him back safely into the land and would prosper him. When Jacob awoke from the dream, he was conscious of the presence of God. For the first time, he had a personal encounter with God. So, Jacob is again fleeing for his life and God brings him back to Bethel, where he had his first encounter with God.

God said to Israel, at a later time, as they were lamenting their lost love, "...I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." (Jer.2:2). Where is that love now?

Jesus, when he addressed Himself to the Church of Ephesus, said, "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (Rev.2:2-4).

God is bringing Jacob back to Bethel where he had made his commitment to Him. Jacob had promised that if God would be with him on his journey and bring him back into the land that he would give Him a tenth of all he had. God had kept His side of it, but Jacob had not. God was with Jacob and blessed him while he was in Padan-aram; but, when he came back he settled at Shechem and seemed to leave God out of his life. The ten years around Shechem had its effect on his family and they became polluted by its morals and now Jacob is fleeing for his life. God takes him back to Bethel where he had his first encounter with Him.

God will often take "you" back to Bethel to remind you from where you have fallen; so, repent and go back and do your first works again. God will call you back to your first love and the excitement you felt when you first met Him.

"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." (Gen.35:1).

"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." (Gen.35:2).

When Jacob had fled from Laban, his wife, Rachel, had taken her father's little idols. At the time, Jacob did not know it. When Laban pursued Jacob and caught up with him, he accused him of stealing his gods and Jacob said whoever they were found with should be put to death. Laban searched, but didn't find them. Jacob was angry because of the accusation and he rebuked Laban. They made a covenant not to cross over a certain pile of stones to do each other harm and then Laban left. Perhaps, when Laban was gone, Rachel brought out the gods and made a laughing remark that she had been sitting on them. They began to

admire her cleverness, her deceitfulness in that her father didn't find them and Jacob tolerated this and didn't rebuke her. By his allowing Rachel to keep them, the idolatry spread in the family so that, at this time, Jacob had to address the whole family to put away their foreign gods. No doubt when the sons had sacked the city of Shechem, they probably picked up a lot more of these gods from the people of Shechem. Idolatry was rampant in Jacob's family and he told them to put them away and cleanse themselves and change their garments.

"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." (Gen.35:3). Jacob realized that God had kept his part of the bargain, but that he hadn't; so, he was going back to Bethel and build an altar and keep his vow to God. His lack of spiritual leadership in the home and the lack of setting a good example was very costly. Even as your lack of establishing a strong spiritual example before your family can be costly.

It's sad the things that we tolerate today and even worse are the things that we have come to accept. Things that were once shocking to us are now very common and we're not shocked anymore; so, we, sort of, overlook these things. Too many families are allowing pornographic magazines in the house, bringing in pornographic videos or having cable with the Playboy Channel. Too many families are allowing their children to listen to the "porno rock" in a lot of the new albums which are popular with the kids. Have you heard what Prince and Madonna are saying to your kids? You haven't resisted the complaints of your children and taken a firm stand against these. You've accepted it when they say, "Everybody listens to it" and you've left it go and said, "Stay in your bedroom and keep the door closed, I don't want to hear it," but, you've left them go in and pollute themselves. You haven't made a strong spiritual stand. Jacob is making a strong spiritual stand, with his family, against these foreign gods. He is establishing God's word within the family again. A purifying by the word of God.

Jesus said that we were clean through the word and David said that a young man could cleanse his way by taking heed to the word of God. Give God's word a place in your family life. It is unfortunate that we, often, give more time to the television and the newspaper than we do to the word of God.

Jacob told his family to change their garments. They probably had begun to dress in the fashion of the Shechemites. "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." (Gen.35:4). Jacob buried these foreign gods and earrings that had been in their ears. Instead of taking them and melting them down, he buried them and moved on to Shechem.

"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." (Gen.35:5). The people were stronger than Jacob, but God put a fear upon the people's hearts and they did not go after them.

"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." (Gen.35:6) It is interesting, although Jacob lived in Shechem for ten years, there is no account of him going back to Beth-el and yet, Shechem was only about fifty miles away. You'd think that Jacob would have gone back to the place of his first encounter with God; but, he was so into the material things that he didn't think of the spiritual until he had to flee for his life.

"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. 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." (Gen.35:7-8).

When Isaac married Rebekah, her father gave her Deborah as her nurse and she came back with Rebekah and lived with them. She was probably the governess for the children and so, Jacob had known Deborah all of his life. Oftentimes the nurse would have the full care and training of the children as they were growing up. After Rebekah died, Jacob, probably, visiting his father in Hebron may have insisted that Deborah come back and live with him and now she is quite old. Perhaps the trauma that they just went through, at Shechem, was too much for her and Deborah, who has played an important part in their lives,

dies.

"And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him." (Gen.35:9). It's an interesting thing how God so often waits for us. He's always there waiting. We often stray in our hearts from God. There is a song that says, "You may be a million miles from the gates of peace, but you're one little step from God." It's so easy to drift from the path, but it's hard to get back. Here Jacob had been journeying thirty years, traveling here and there messing things up and now he is desperate and fleeing for his life and so he comes back to Beth-el and God is waiting to bless him. How wonderful is the patience of God.

"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." (Gen.35:10). God said to Jacob, "This is it." "You've gone far enough after your own self, but from now on you will be governed by God."

"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." (Gen.35:11) God Almighty is translated "El Shaddai." Shad in Hebrew is breast. God said, "I am the breasted one." You see, they lived very close to nature and the breast was thought of as nourishing and sustaining life. It is the source of life to the infant and God is saying that He is Jacob's source of life. God revealed himself to Abraham and to Isaac and now to Jacob as El Shaddai.

"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 went up from him in the place where he talked with him." (Gen.35:12-13). God revealed himself to Jacob and blessed him with the renewing of the covenant that He had made with Abraham and Isaac and now declares it will be fulfilled through Jacob.

"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." (Gen.35:14). The drink offering was actually the pouring of the oil upon the rock which was a symbol of consecration. "Here I have met God and here I make my consecration." Later on in the Levitical offering, the drink offering became one of the offerings within the Levitical system.

"And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el." (Gen.35:15). Beth-el means the house of God.

"And they journeyed from Beth-el; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath; and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son, also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin." (Gen.35:16-18).

"And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem." (Gen.35:19).

As they were journeying down toward Hebron, where Jacob's father was, Rachel went into hard labor. It could be that the child was being born prematurely as Rachel was older at this point. At the time of Joseph's birth, her first child, she called him "adding;" meaning that God was going to give her another child. Joseph was probably around fifteen at this time. Now God has given Rachel another son, in her old age, and she dies in childbirth. She called him Ben-oni which means, "child of my sorrow," but Jacob changed the name to Benjamin which means, "the son of my right hand."

"And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day." (Gen.35:20). This probably refers to the time of Moses as he might have copied this from Jacob's writings and made comments upon it.

To the present day outside of Bethlehem, there is a pillar which they say is the pillar of Rachel and the Jewish people go there to pray. They have such reverence for the dead saints of God that they go to the various tombs to pray.

"And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar. And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve." (Gen.35:21-22). Reuben is his oldest son, about thirty years old at this time, and Bilhah, his concubine, is the maid-servant of Rachel. Israel didn't take any action against Reuben at this time, but when he pronounces the blessings upon his sons in the forty-ninth chapter; he takes away the birthright from him.

Now, Moses lists the twelve sons of Jacob by their mothers. "The sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph, and Benjamin. And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid: Dan, and Naphtali. And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad, and Asher; these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padan-aram." (Gen.35:23-26).

"And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years." (Gen.35:27-28). Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old. He had been blind for a long time and at this point he was probably incapacitated.

"And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him." (Gen.35:29). Jacob and Esau joined together and buried Isaac.

Chapter thirty-six gives us the generations of Esau. The scripture is not interested in the line of Esau as he is not in the line of the Messiah; but, the following facts help us put into perspective what happens to him. Let's begin with verse six. "And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob. For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle. Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir; Esau is Edom. And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir." (Gen.36:6-9)

Esau was the father of the Edomites and King Herod, who killed all the babies in Judah at the time of the birth of Jesus, was an Edomite. We want to mention a few of the genealogy which we might have an interest in; such as: Eliphaz, the son of Esau and his son was Teman. It might be the same Eliphaz the Temanite that was Job's comforter. Later on in the genealogy, it talks about Jobab who could have very possibly been the Job of the Book of Job. If you're trying to put the Book of Job in a historic perspective, as far as the time of the Book; it is quite possible that Job lived shortly after Jacob and that he was not of the tribes of Israel, but rather a descendent of Esau.

"And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan." (Gen.37:1) Esau had moved on to mount Seir, the land that became known as Edom; but, Jacob remained in the land that God had promised to him.

"These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report." (Gen.37:2).

Joseph was with his half brothers and when they didn't do their jobs or did something bad, he went and snitched on them. That didn't make him very popular with his brothers.

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colors." (Gen.37:3) This tunic of many colors could have also meant a coat with long sleeves. This is the only time that this particular Hebrew word is used and the scholars are diverse on their opinion of this translation. It is the accepted indication that it was a coat by which Jacob was indicating his intention of leaving the birthright with Joseph. He was intending to make him the primary heir of what he had and the brothers in seeing Jacob giving this colorful tunic to Joseph had a great jealousy and hatred

towards him.

"And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceable unto him." (Gen.37:4). Imagine living with ten older brothers who hated you. They were mean and treacherous and much bigger than Joseph. Joseph did not have an easy life.

"And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren; and they hated him yet the more, And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed." (Gen.37:5-6).

Joseph wasn't too smart revealing his dreams to his brothers who already hated him.

"For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words." (Gen.37:7-8). They already suspected that Jacob was going to give Joseph the birthright and this telling of the dream made them hate him even more.

"And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying." (Gen.37:9-11).

In the Book of Revelations, chapter twelve, where we have listed some symbolic personages: the woman clothed with the sun and the moon and the twelve stars; many interpret this woman as the church and they see the church going through the tribulation. This is a stretching of biblical symbolism.

To interpret a symbol, you need to go back to where it is used in scripture and see how it is used there. There is in Hermeneutics the Law of First Use and also the Law of Expositional Constancy. Whatever the use in one area of scripture is also the use in another area of scripture. The Expositional Constancy is extremely important in the understanding of the Parable.

In seminary, I had a professor who told us not to preach on the parables until we had been preaching for thirty years. I respected him, but thought he didn't know my capabilities; so, the very first year I preached on the parables. I knew what they meant; I thought I had them all wired. I've repented! I have only begun to understand the parables by using the Laws of Hermeneutics. Here, the sun, the moon and the eleven stars refer to Jacob and his wife and sons or the nation of Israel. If these symbols refer to the nation of Israel in Genesis, then it is foolhardy to try to interpret the woman with the sun, the moon, and the twelve stars in Revelation as anything but Israel.

The dreams of Joseph are no doubt of God, because we see them come true later on in the story; but, in the meantime, his brothers are going to do all they can do to thwart the purposes of God.

"And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem." (Gen.37:12). Why would they go back to the place that they had to flee from? Shechem was some fifty miles away and you wonder why they traveled such a distance.

"And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem." (Gen.37:13-14).

"And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou?" (Gen.37:15). Joseph was probably looking for tracks. His brothers weren't in Shechem so he was trying to track them down.

"And he said, I seek my brethren; tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren,

and found them in Dothan." (Gen.37:16-17). Dothan was another fifteen miles up the road toward Megeddo, along the route which was later to become one of the major highways which went down to Egypt from the area of Syria.

"And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him." (Gen.37:18).

Even before he got near, his brothers conspired to kill him. They are really treacherous and there is not much to be admired in them.

"And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams." (Gen.37:19-20).

You see how they are trying to thwart the purposes of God by doing away with the dreamer. How often we find ourselves trying to change the plans of God. The Bible says, "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!" (Isa.45:9a).

"And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again." (Gen.37:21-22).

Reuben, the oldest son, thought to keep his brothers from killing Joseph and instead put him in a pit. Later, he planned to go back and take Joseph to his father Jacob.

"And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colors that was on him. And they took him, and cast him into a pit; and the pit was empty, there was no water in it." (Gen.37:23-24).

And they sat down to eat bread; and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelite came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelite, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content." (Gen.37:25-27).

As we read further on in the story, we find that during this time that they were talking whether to kill him or sell him, Joseph was crying and pleading with them; but, they showed no mercy at all. This later came back to them when they were dealing with Joseph (who they didn't recognize) down in Egypt.

"Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelite for twenty pieces of silver; and they brought Joseph into Egypt." (Gen.37:28).

"And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?" (Gen.37:29-30). Being the oldest, he would probably be held responsible for Joseph's well being.

"And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colors, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found; know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." (Gen.37:31-33). So, the brothers deceived Jacob and let him think that a wild beast might have killed Joseph.

"And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him." (Gen.37:34-35).

Even though Jacob's sons and daughters all tried to comfort him, he would not be comforted. Joseph

was his best loved son and so he continued to mourn for him. It talks about Jacob's daughters in the plural, so, even though Dinah is the only one named; it seems that he had other daughters.

We have that law of God of sowing and reaping. Jacob, earlier, had killed a little goat to deceive his father. He put the fur on his wrists, fixed the meat to taste like venison and gave it to his father to deceive him in order that he might get the blessing. He used a goat to deceive his father and now, his sons are using a goat to deceive him. They killed a goat and put the blood on the tunic of Joseph. Jacob is reaping what he sowed many years ago.

And now a little footnote at the end of the chapter concerning Joseph. "And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard