

Genesis (2011) 35A

- Last week we watched as Jacob experienced a sad and shameful episode in his family
 - His daughter is assaulted by the local prince, and Jacob's family is asked to join the local pagan culture as a way of compromising over the dispute
 - We watched as Jacob's life-long struggle to demonstrate moral leadership within his family has caught up with him, in the actions of his sons
 - Sons who, out of revenge, deceive, murder, plunder and enslave the local people
 - And in the end, all Jacob can think about is his own misfortune at being made a pariah among the local tribes
- Remember, at the beginning of Chapter 34 we learned that Jacob had put down roots here in Shechem
 - Shechem was to be his home, Jacob was done wandering, he hoped
 - Now his sons' actions put him in danger again
 - And the newly taken slave families bring with them the sinful pagan influences of their culture
 - Now in Chapter 35, Jacob begins the chapter fleeing for safety according to God's word
 - The chapter continues with God confirming his covenant and ends with Him fulfilling His promises

[Gen. 35:1](#) Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

[Gen. 35:2](#) So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments;

[Gen. 35:3](#) and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."

[Gen. 35:4](#) So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.

[Gen. 35:5](#) As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

- This is the fourth appearance of the Lord to Jacob
 - Jacob is commanded to leave Shechem for Bethel, to build an altar in Bethel, and to make Bethel his home for a time
 - Notice God says to dwell in Bethel
 - Jacob had made Shechem a place of dwelling, but God wants Jacob to move away from the now empty town
 - Perhaps God wanted to remove Jacob's family from the temptation of settling into the city, since it was now vacant
 - In fact, we have evidence that Jacob had intended to make the land around Shechem his permanent place in the land
 - At the end of Chapter 33, Jacob spent 100 pieces of money to buy the land he occupied
 - And he has now lived in Shechem for 10 years since returning from Haran
 - This was a degree of investment in the land that exceeded anything his forefathers had done
 - According to the promise God gave Abraham, He intended Jacob's family to wander in the land of Canaan and in the land of Egypt for 400 years
 - He didn't want them to put down roots and blend into the local culture
 - So now Jacob's circumstances have made it impossible for his family to remain in one place for long
 - They are pariahs in the land of Canaan
 - They must remain separate from everyone, since they carry a reputation of the massacre in Shechem
- I wonder what he would have done in response to God's command to leave if he weren't so hated by the local population?
 - Would he have obeyed a command to leave in a situation where everything was perfect?

- God is more than willing to make our circumstances uncomfortable to the point we feel forced to make a change
- God wants us forever moving in this world, whether physically or spiritually or both
 - So we won't try to put roots down into a world where we can't find common ground
- Speaking personally, my own moves or changes in location have usually been preceded by circumstances that made staying unattractive
 - When God wants our obedience, He often stacks the deck of our life circumstances in His favor
 - When we encounter that stacked deck and ignore the obvious trying to beat the odds, so to speak, then the time we spend in denial will only make the inevitable adjustment all the more painful
 - Even more remarkable is God's ability to work through Jacob's own mistakes to produce God's desired outcome
 - The need to move was prompted by the sins of Jacob and his sons
 - God wasn't the author of that sin, but it plays directly into God's purpose by serving as the fulcrum to dislodge Jacob from his comfort in the land
 - The more we study God in the scripture the more amazing are His ways, His ability to ensure His purposes are met
 - In particular, I'm continually amazed at God's ability to turn our sins into vehicles by which He drives us into obedience
 - Doesn't it warm your heart and bring awe to your mind to know you serve a God who can make so many details in life – even the regrettable ones produced by our own hands – lead to His glory?
- As Jacob departs Shechem, he tells his household to dispose of all idols and to purify and change garments
 - Remember as Jacob's family absorbed the women and children of Shechem, these families brought idol worship with them into Israel
 - These idols must be purged from Israel

- Moreover, the sons of Israel must also come before the Lord seeking forgiveness for the sin of murder in the city
 - This is why the Lord orders Jacob to build an altar
 - An altar is specifically a place of sacrifice, where sin is acknowledged and blood is spilled to ritually atone for sin
 - God intends Jacob's family to make sacrifices to Him, in seeking to be cleansed for their sins in Shechem
 - Animal sacrifice doesn't actually atone for sin by the ritual
 - Like water baptism, it pictures a spiritual truth that God forgives sin through the application of blood
 - When Jesus provided His own blood as a sacrifice on the cross, He was atoning for all sin
 - This is why today churches should not have altars
 - Altars are a place of sacrifice but now that Jesus has atoned for our sin, no more sacrifice is required
- So Jacob orders his household to purify themselves
 - This command refers to ritual washing, which is an act picturing a repentant heart seeking forgiveness
 - Furthermore, they are to change their garments
 - This declaration is likely happening on the same day, or the day after, the murder in Shechem
 - Their clothes may have still carried bloody marks from the massacre
 - So they needed to be changed
 - God says change your garments as a part of purifying yourself
 - This act also pictures our new walk with Christ having come to repentance and faith
 - Paul tells us to "put on Christ" after we come to faith
 - Jacob's family knows God, but it's time they begin to walk in Him

- Not only do the slaves have idols, but it's likely that the sons of Jacob took a few for themselves as well
 - In v.2 we're told Jacob spoke to his household and all that were with him
 - The household refers to his natural born family
 - And those that were with him refers to the foreigners who have joined with them
 - The corrupting influence of the surrounding peoples had already begun to take its toll among Jacob's family
- But Jacob has turned a corner in his own life
 - Though he still has a long way to go, he realizes that he again finds himself in need of God's protection
 - And he knows from experience how God does protect him, even mentioning it in v.3
 - This is a big step for Jacob
 - He is afraid of imminent attack, but rather than make his own scheme, he responds first in obedience and secondly in loyalty
 - This is a good sign
- Interestingly, Jacob hides the pagan gods under a tree
 - Perhaps Jacob wanted to make a point to God and his family that these idols were forever dead to Jacob's family, as pictured through a burial
 - I believe there may have been a more practical reason
 - Perhaps Jacob knew that if he didn't bury them, his family would have secretly returned for them before they departed
 - Jacob has clearly become wiser about the importance of obedience and holiness
 - He will forever contend with sons' disobedience
 - This is a consequence he can't avoid
 - But he seems determined to follow the Lord's commands from here forward

- Finally, we read in v.5 that the Lord was faithful to produce such fear among the peoples that Jacob was protected in his flight

Gen. 35:6 So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him.

Gen. 35:7 He built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother.

Gen. 35:8 Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named Allon-bacuth.

- Jacob has returned to an important place in the life of his family: Bethel
 - This was the place where Jacob stopped in his flight from Esau
 - He saw the ladder of angels ascending and descending to Heaven at this point
 - He heard the Lord promise to keep him and bless him
 - He learned of the covenant from God for the first time
 - It's been 30 years since Jacob last heard from God here
 - Jacob's first act upon returning is to build the altar God commanded and he names the altar "God of Bethel"
 - And at this moment Jacob's obedience is complete and God's promise is fulfilled
 - Remember that when God appeared to Jacob in Bethel 30 years ago that God promised:

Gen. 28:15 "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

- And in response Jacob said"

Gen. 28:20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear,

Gen. 28:21 and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God.

Gen. 28:22 "This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

- Then when it was time for Jacob to leave Laban's home and return, God appeared to Jacob with this reminder:

Gen. 31:13 'I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'

- The Lord reminds Jacob that he should return to Bethel where he set up an altar and made his vow
 - In this place, Jacob would see God's faithfulness
 - But until this moment, Jacob has been delaying obedience
 - And because his obedience was delayed, so was God's blessing and fulfillment of His promise
 - God's faithfulness was never in doubt, but the timing was connected to Jacob's obedience
 - Ultimately, God pressed Jacob to obey by allowing Jacob's sin to become the motivation for Jacob to complete his journey back to Bethel
 - Why did Jacob delay ten years in moving to Bethel?
 - We can only guess, but it seems that the cares and pleasures and concerns of the world intruded, and left Jacob without sufficient cause to seek for God
 - Now Jacob has reason and so he obeys
- I wonder if Jacob could possibly have realized how much time would pass, how much sorrow and grief he would experience, between the time he received the promise and the time he would see it fulfilled
 - God's will will be done, and we will be conformed to God's purposes one way or another
 - We can be conformed the easy way or the hard way
 - The easy way is to listen to the word of God and live according to it
 - The hard way is to pretend God isn't listening and God won't care, until we force Him to act against us
 - For us, the hard way can be really, really hard

- And as if to emphasize the trials and grief that came to Jacob for his life of disobedience, the family experiences yet another death; Deborah, Rebekah's nurse
 - Remember that Rebekah is Jacob's mother, the one who cared so much for Jacob
 - Deborah is Rebekah's wet nurse, a woman who has produced milk after the birth of one of her own children
 - A wet nurse is a necessity for a woman who had several children by another woman, as Rebekah did through her concubine
 - Deborah is first mentioned by name here, but she was mentioned earlier in Genesis 24
 - In Genesis 24:59 we're told of Rebekah taking her nurse when she leaves her home to join with Isaac
 - She would have lived with Rebekah and Isaac until the death of Rebekah
 - The Bible never tells us when she joined Jacob's household
 - But the mention of Deborah's death at this point in the story is intended to communicate to the reader that Rebekah is no longer alive
 - Rebekah probably died while Jacob was in Haran and Deborah joined him there
 - Having been with Jacob ever since, she now dies at age 180
 - Why is it important for us to see that Rebekah is gone?
 - Because the Lord wants us to recognize that the sin of Jacob's deception impacted everyone, including Rebekah
 - She participated in the deception of her husband
 - And as a result, she lost her favored son
 - And she died before Jacob ever returned to see her
 - The sadness of Jacob and his family losing Deborah is reflected in the name of the oak, which means "oak of weeping"

- I wonder if Jacob's mourning over Deborah filled the void in his heart for his inability to be with his mother when she died
- This would be appropriate since Deborah would have been a surrogate for his mother when Jacob nursed
- So in some ways, Jacob mourns for Deborah like he would have mourned for his mother

Gen. 35:9 Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him.

Gen. 35:10 God said to him,

“Your name is Jacob;
You shall no longer be called Jacob,
But Israel shall be your name.”
Thus He called him Israel.

Gen. 35:11 God also said to him,

“I am God Almighty;
Be fruitful and multiply;
A nation and a company of nations shall come from you,
And kings shall come forth from you.

Gen. 35:12 “The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac,
I will give it to you,
And I will give the land to your descendants after you.”

Gen. 35:13 Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him.

Gen. 35:14 Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it.

Gen. 35:15 So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

- God appears for the fifth time in his life and the second time since Jacob has returned to the land
 - God pronounces a blessing upon Jacob
 - And this isn't just any blessing of course
 - This is THE blessing that was given to Abraham
 - This is the seed promise, the inheritance that God created for Abraham and his descendants
 - We know the blessing well by now
 - The changing of a name to indicate Jacob has become part of God's covenant

- The new name of Israel refers to Jacob's partnership with the Lord
- And Jacob will bring forth a company of nations
- And kings will come forth from Jacob
 - Furthermore Jacob's descendants will inherit the land one day
 - But that day will await for the Kingdom of Christ
- The promise as spoken here, is a little different than it's been in past times
 - Jacob is promised a company of nations
 - This is a different promise than the one Abraham received
 - To Abraham, the Lord said he would be a father of many nations
 - This referred to the Arab states that came from Ishmael
 - But Jacob will be a father of a company
 - The Hebrew word for company implies a collection of the same
 - We know this refers to the tribes of Israel
- Ironically, this is the blessing that Jacob has long sought from the Lord
 - This is the blessing Jacob schemed to get from Isaac
 - This is the blessing Jacob demanded of God when he wrestled
 - This is the very thing Jacob has always worked to obtain
 - But in all that we've seen happen, God has never before given the blessing to Jacob
 - This is the first time we've seen God deliver Jacob with the blessing of the seed promise that Jacob so desperately wanted
 - You may be thinking that surely God delivered this promise in one of the four earlier moments when He appeared to Jacob

- But if we look at each of those earlier moments carefully, we find only promises to bless Jacob in the future
 - When Jacob returned to the land and to Bethel
 - When he obeyed the voice of the Lord
 - Then he would be blessed
 - In all these years since, Jacob has yet to complete every step of obedience
 - Only in this moment has he finally returned to Bethel as required, sacrificed and tithed
 - Notice we see him setting up the pillar
 - And anointing it with oils and a drink offering
 - These are symbols of tithing
 - Only now has Jacob completed all that God asked
 - Abraham experienced a similar moment
 - Only after Abraham had obeyed the voice of the Lord when he took Isaac to the mountain for the sacrifice, only then did the Lord deliver the blessing completely
- Blessing follows obedience
 - Relationship is established on the basis of faith in God's promises but the blessing of that relationship await obedience
 - God has the power to compel our obedience and He will use our sin and its consequences, if necessary, to create that outcome
 - But in the wise words of Samuel:

[1Sam. 15:22](#) Samuel said,

“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
 As in **obeying** the voice of the LORD?
 Behold, to **obey is better** than sacrifice,
 And to heed than the fat of rams.