

From the Top

Genesis 35:1-8

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A. No Choice (vs. 1):

4. God said to Jacob – No matter that it was his sons who conspired and acted in this manner, God continuously interacted only with Jacob.
 - a) God, for a fifth time, visited Jacob (Gen. 28:10–16; 31:3, 11–13; 32:1, 22–30; also Gen. 35:9–15). After the debacle at Shechem (ch. 34), God told Jacob to continue to Bethel, the place where God had first appeared to him (28:10–19). Again, Jacob retraced his grandfather Abraham’s route (12:8). This is the first time in the Bible that God commanded an altar to be made for Him. Abraham constructed an altar, but no divine command was recorded (12:7, 8).^[1]
5. God said to Jacob – God who is sovereign and controls everything, including those who would seek to kill Jacob’s sons and maybe the entire tribe, exercises His authority and directs Jacob to do whatever He desires him to do.
6. Arise – God was not just commanding Jacob to get up and go to Shechem, God was expecting Jacob to meticulously construct a plan that he must carefully execute to make this happen. This was because Jacob was not planning to go even though he was supposed to go.
 - a) He promised to come worship God 30 years ago (Gen. 28:22 – he made a vow to God 30 years earlier during a great crisis in his life and he did not keep it – God reminds him 30 years later - God reminded him of the place by telling him it is the same place that he intellectually inspected and accepted that it was God who met him there).
7. Arise, establish – Many times we have so many distractions all week, and so much energy is burned getting things done church can become something we put off.

- a) He instructs them to continuously be in a state of movement that suggests a lifestyle change of going to Bethel so that they live responsibly before God (go up – active, perfect). These foreign gods were gods of other people, not of Jacob. Jacob recalled God's constant protection (Ch. 32) and his fulfillment of His promises (28:13-15) as a reason to obey and worship God.
8. Offering, go up - God's command reveals how God thinks about worship. It is not just being at worship, but it is carefully making a way out of no way and being committed to the journey of getting to church no matter the sacrifice; this is worship (Romans 12:1).
 9. Live there - God did not want Jacob coming to worship Him without a clear understanding that He was commanding him to be committed and spend a significant amount of time in worship.
 10. Make an altar - God commanded Jacob to put a lot of effort into faithfully (meaning once he starts he does not stop until it is done) establishing out of nothing a place of sacrifice that is totally dedicated to Him.
 11. Who appeared to you - God took it upon Himself, no initiation from Jacob, to make Himself visible to Jacob so that Jacob had a complete understanding that he was wrestling with God.
 12. Who appeared to you - Jacob's delay to fulfill what he promised God seems to create a family life of violence, vengeance, treachery and idol worship in his family. His delay to take God seriously led to the decaying family life.

B. Reconnect (vs. 2-4):

1. So Jacob said – In the same manner that God spoke to Jacob, Jacob continuously spoke to his household.

a) The disgraceful and perilous events that had recently taken place in the patriarch's family must have produced in him a strong desire to remove without delay from the vicinity of Shechem. Borne down by an overwhelming sense of the criminality of his two sons-of-the offense they had given to God, and the dishonor they had brought on the true faith-distracted, too, with anxiety about the probable

consequences which their outrage might bring upon himself and family, should the Canaanite people combine to extirpate such a band of robbers and murderers—he must have felt this call as affording a great relief to his afflicted feelings. At the same time it conveyed a tender rebuke.

2. So Jacob said – Jacob did not delay in obeying God and Jacob exercised the leadership necessary to get everyone in his household in the right direction. Sometimes we need God to push us in the right direction, but it still requires us to take the initiative to obey Him.
3. House – Jacob included not just his children, but his entire household. It could have been as many as seventy people.
4. Put away; depart – Jacob commanded everyone to turn aside meaning, they must not just put the idols away, they must no longer have any desire to worship other gods.
5. Put away; depart – Even though Jacob commanded his family and employees to worship God, he knew all along they were worshipping other gods and did nothing about it. This led to them almost being annihilated from the earth. Dead to God almost led to them being killed.

a) Jacob allowed his household to sin against God and now his life is in crisis (false gods, murder in Shechem).

6. Purify; Purge - Coming to worship is a time of preparation and it is representative of our respect of God's holiness.

a) Purification usually took the form of bathing the body, washing the clothes, and shaving (Lev 14:8–9; Num 8:7). Before the Sinai revelation, all the people were told to wash their clothes and abstain from sexual intercourse (Exod 19:10–15). Here Jacob insists that they change their “outer garments,” the poncho-type wrapper used as coat and blanket (Exod 22:25–26 [26–27]). Their change of clothes represents a new and purified way of life (cf. 41:14). Elsewhere in the Pentateuch, sexual intercourse and the spilling of blood in war are seen as polluting (Num 31:19; Lev 15:18; 18:24–29). So this command to purify themselves probably looks back to the pollution produced in chap. 34.

7. Let us arise – Jacob takes leadership in fulfilling God's orders and commands everyone in his household to make every effort to purposefully and determinedly organize themselves to go to Shechem.

8. Go up - Jacob commanded them to join him in sacrificially making their way to worship God in Shechem.
 - a) Bethel was 1,010 feet higher than Shechem and situated on the road that led to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron. Jacob had tarried too long on his way to that holy place. He was now to build an altar there, as Abraham had done on his memorable journey into Palestine. Jacob had set up a *maššēbâ*, [i.e., a stone pillar, after his never-to-be-forgotten experience with Jehovah, when he fled toward Haran.](#) This return visit to the holy place would involve a full commitment of his life to the Lord. He had neglected the altar of God. The spiritual emphasis had been absent from his thinking and living. ^[2]
9. Make an altar to God - Jacob commands everyone to collectively make every effort, no matter the sacrifice, to construct a place where they can experience the powerful presence of God.
10. Answered me – Jacob remembers meeting God at Bethel. In that meeting God responded to him in his time of need. Jacob is again going through a crisis. He comes before God expecting to experience God in the same manner.
11. Distress – No matter if our decisions or lack of leadership put us in the same place God is always ready to listen especially when we follow His direction.
12. Has been with me – God never leaves us nor forsakes us.
13. I have gone – Whatever Jacob was completely committed to do, so much so it became a lifestyle, God remained committed to him.
14. So they gave you – Jacob’s household responded to him by continuously bringing all the idols they had accumulated and put it in his possession.
15. Given you – When Jacob submitted to God’s direction his house came back to order.
16. Given you – It is when Jacob’s house was back in order that they were in the best condition for worship.

C. His Presence (vs. 5-6):

1. As they journeyed, there was a great terror - When Jacob’s household was fully prepared for worship their entire focus was to continuously head to God’s designated place of worship.

- a) God's promise to be a sustainer and protector of his people is repeated often (26:24; 28:15; 31:3; Jos. 1:5; Isa. 41:10; Jer. 1:8,19; Mt. 28:20; Acts 18:10).
 - b) The Hebrew term for terror is related to the verb meaning "to be shattered" or "to be dismayed" (for examples of the use of this verb for divine judgment read Is. 7:8; 30:31).^[3]
2. They did not pursue - When we submit to God's way God protection is comprehensive. Jacob's enemy had completely no desire to hunt them down for what they had done.
 3. They did not pursue - When our hearts and lives are surrendered to worship God's protection and blessings guide us to experience Him.
 4. Jacob came to Luz (Bethel) – Jacob continuously kept going until he completed what he promised he would do thirty years ago and with God's protection the journey has now been completed.
 - a) When Jacob came to Luz all the people were with him – seem to imply that they had gotten rid of their idols, ear rings, and had purified themselves.
5. He built; rib – Jacob continuously applied himself to completing what God told him to do.
 - a) Jacob first had to make an altar. He was already here but needed to make a fresh altar (28:13).
6. He built; rib – Our devotion to God is a reflection of our dedication to apply God's divine directive.
 7. He built; rib – You know a person's heart by the manner by which they worship God.
 - a) The first of several that Abram built at places where he had memorable spiritual experiences (v. 8; 13:18; 22:9). He acknowledged that the land of Canaan belonged to the Lord in a special way (Ex. 20:24; Jos. 22:19).
 - b) Jesus had a zeal for worship even when the people in the temple were corrupt; it did not curtail His worship (John 2:17).

8. Called – Jacob’s naming of God's place of worship is a reflection of his relationship of what God continuously means to him. God gave Jacob the freedom to name ‘El-Bethel’ because the name defined what God meant to him.

a) Jacob, Abraham's grandson, had a life-changing experience at this site. He had a vision of a staircase reaching into the heavens with the angels of God "ascending and descending on it" ([Gen 28:12](#)). Jacob called the name of that place Bethel, "the house of God" ([Gen 28:19](#)). He erected a pillar at Bethel to mark the spot of his vision ([Gen 28:22; 31:13](#)). Jacob later built an altar at Bethel, where he worshiped the Lord ([Gen 35:1-16](#)). (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

b) After the death of Solomon and the division of his kingdom, Jeroboam, the king of Israel (the Northern Kingdom), set up two calves of gold, one in Bethel and one in Dan ([1 Kings 12:29,32-33](#)). Thus, Bethel became a great center of idolatry ([1 Kings 13:1-32; 2 Kings 10:29](#)) and the chief sanctuary of Israel, rivaling the Temple in Jerusalem (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

c) Still later in Israel's history, Bethel was occupied by Jewish people who returned from the Captivity in Babylon with Zerubbabel ([Ezra 2:28; Neh 7:32](#)). The place again reverted to the Benjamites ([Neh 11:31](#)). The city was destroyed about [540 B.C.](#) by a great fire. This destruction may have been the work of Nabonidus of Babylon or of the Persians in the period just before Darius. Today the site of Bethel is occupied by a small village called Beitin (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

9. Revealed – When the scripture states that ‘God had revealed Himself’ it is the same as saying that God made Himself naked before Jacob like a husband and wife are to each other. God had established Himself completely to Jacob ([32:24-30](#)).

a) Everything that Jacob had lost before had been regained because he had met God at the altar.^[4]

10. When he fled from his brother – When once before Jacob needed God’s protection (that time from Esau) he experienced God in the same place. El-Bethel did not just have meaning because God sent him there it had meaning because of God’s history with him as it relates to El-Bethel; God's place of worship stretching back to his grandfather Abraham.

11. When he fled from his brother – When our life experiences are sensitive to God's leading, God's care, and God's protection, our worship is deeper and even more meaningful.

^[1]Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (Ge 35:1). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

i.e. *id est* (that is)

^[2]Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Ge 35:1). Chicago: Moody Press.

^[3] Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). [*Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary*](#) (p. 61). T. Nelson Publishers.

^[4] Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). [*Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*](#) (Ge 35–36). Victor Books.