

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 35:1-15

“The Covenant Renewed”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

Genesis 35:1-15

Verses 1-5

¹ Then God said to Jacob, “Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”

² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes.

³ Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.” ⁴ So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. ⁵ Then they set out, and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

- After all that had happened at Shechem (see Genesis 34 and the notes prepared for that passage), God told Jacob/Israel to go to Bethel. Bethel was the place where Jacob/Israel had wrestled with God. There, he had set up a stone and anointed it. He renamed the place Bethel which means “house of God” (see Genesis 28:10-22). God told Jacob/Israel to return to Bethel and to build an altar there.
- Jacob then cleansed his household. Apparently, the people in his household had “household gods” which they carried with them when they left Shechem. These “household gods” were idols to which they prayed for various reasons. Jacob/Israel ordered that all these idol gods be disposed of. The word means destroyed (see Genesis 31:19 - even Rachel, Jacob/Israel’s wife had these idols). He ordered his people to wash and to put on clean clothing. Earrings were often cultic “good luck” charms which people wore to protect themselves. Jacob/Israel took these from his people, too. He buried the idols and earrings under an oak tree at Shechem. This was an act by which the people with Jacob/Israel renewed their allegiance to YHWH.

- Having done all this, Jacob/Israel and his household set out for Bethel.

Verses 6-7

⁶ Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. ⁷ There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

- Luz was the name of Bethel before Jacob/Israel renamed the place Bethel. “El Bethel” means “God of the house of God.”

Verse 8

⁸ Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried under the oak outside Bethel. So it was named Allon Bakuth.

- Rebekah’s (Jacob/Israel’s wife’s), nurse died at Bethel. She was buried there under an oak tree. The tree was named “Allon Bakuth.” It means “oak of weeping”.

Verses 9-10

⁹ After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. ¹⁰ God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel.

- At Bethel, YHWH renamed Jacob, which means “tricky.” He called him “Israel” which means “he struggles with God” *(see Genesis 32:28).

Verses 11-13

¹¹ And God said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants. ¹² The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.” ¹³ Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him.

- God then blessed the man, Israel. The covenant God made with Abraham is renewed with the man named Israel (see Genesis 12:2-3). Here, YHWH declared himself to be “El Shaddai, “God Almighty or Almighty God,” the God who has unlimited power.
- The Holy Spirit had been with Israel in a special way during this time of renewal. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit visited people at times, but

he did not abide with them. Since the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit abides with those who claim Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Verses 14-15

¹⁴ Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. ¹⁵ Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.

- Jacob set up a stone at Bethel to commemorate the events which happened there. He poured a “drink offering,” an offering of wine, over the pillar to remember what had happened.

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