

Devotional Thoughts

Genesis 35:1

"Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

Jacob again hears the voice of God. This time he is being called to return to a place called Bethel, meaning "[House of God](#)." This was the site of Jacob's first encounter with the Lord. There he had been the recipient of the great and precious promises that revealed the plans and purposes that God had for his life. Decades have since passed by and Jacob has grown from a lonely bachelor to the head of a large a prosperous family. Jacob is now returning to a time when he made a commitment to the Lord to be sure that commitment is being fulfilled. Jesus gave a similar call to the church when he wrote,

Revelation 2:5

"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works..."

Jacob's actions in returning to Bethel serve as a model of returning to the Lord. **First** he had to put away the false gods that had crept into his life. Living in a pagan culture it would be easy to pick up the practices of the people around them. In the same way we often unknowingly develop the practices of the world we live in. Returning to the Lord involves doing inventory and removing ungodly practices that have become a part of our lives. Jacob had his family bury the false gods under a tree; I suggest a more permanent solution. Don't leave sin at an arm's length but remove it completely.

Secondly, after removing the idols, Jacob and his family began the long journey to Bethel. Sons, daughters, wives children, grandchildren and supplies would make this a slow and difficult trip. In addition the route they had to take was a dangerous one. There were many reasons not to make the journey to Bethel, but for Jacob the desire to return to the Lord was greater. Whenever we choose to move forward in the Lord there is always opposition. We face the difficulty of overcoming our past and our present as well as the fear that we will not be able to change. It is encouraging that in Jacob's case the Lord stepped in and held back the "would be attackers" of their caravan. In the same way once we begin to pursue the Lord, He will aid us along the way making our return to Bethel successful.

Thirdly, upon arriving at their destination Jacob built an altar and poured a drink offering upon it. The drink offering is symbolic of a life poured out to the Lord. Paul used the phrase to describe his commitment to the Lord. Once we determine to go back to the Lord we must decide to surrender all to Him.

Finally, it was at Bethel that the Lord unveiled his plan for Jacob. After he chose to leave the idols behind, do the work required to return and pour himself out to the Lord he received the promises of God. There is no doubt that God has a plan for each of us, but that plan is wrapped up in a life of surrender to Him. Let's return to Bethel where we can experience the life God intends for each of us.

Pastor Jim