

Sent: Wednesday, April 03, 2019 2:48 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Genesis 35-36

"For the sake of My servant Jacob, and Israel My chosen, I call you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me!" (Isaiah 45:45) (Speaking of Cyrus, king of Persia, who, many years later, would be raised up, and anointed by God, to allow the children of Israel to return to Israel, after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, and to oversee the re-building of the temple in Jerusalem--as prophesied by the prophets, Jeremiah and Isaiah--"for the sake of God's servant Jacob, and Israel My chosen"!)

Our lesson begins, in Genesis 35, with God calling for Jacob to "arise and go (return!) to Bethel and live there, and make an altar to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau" (30 years ago)!

Jacob's response is legendary! Instructing his household and all who were with him, to "put away all the foreign gods which are among you (including you, Rachel, perhaps still "hiding" your father's household idols!), and purify yourselves, and change your garments; and let us arise and go up to Bethel" (back to Bethel)! And, as God instructed, he would make an altar there to God, "who answered me in the day (days?) of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone!" Wow! (It's always easier to look back and see what we've never seen before--how God has worked through sometimes difficult times in our lives!)

And so, they're off, with all the idols "buried" under the oak tree "which was near Shechem"!
(When we follow the Lord, some things in our lives need to be buried and left behind!)

Willmington, in his "Guide to the Bible," calls this "the first recorded revival in the Bible"!

There's a "great terror" upon the surrounding cities as they "journeyed" (MacArthur calls it a "supernaturally-induced fear"), allowing them to proceed in peace, and without further delay! And, upon arriving, Jacob builds the altar, and after the death and burial of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (an interesting side-note included in the narrative), God appears to him for the fifth time--identifying Himself as "El Shaddai, God Almighty"--to reaffirm the covenant promises! (Constable notes that it would take an omnipotent God to fulfill all these promises--and that " we can enjoy fellowship with God only when we commit ourselves wholeheartedly to Him and obey His Word"!)

We next see Jacob "journeying" to Ephrath (an ancient name for Bethlehem) where Rachel gives birth to a second son, whom she calls Benoni ("son of my sorrow"), but whom Jacob would re-name "Benjamin" ("son of my right hand"). Ironically, Rachel, who had once cried out in desperation to Jacob: "Give me children, or else I die" (Genesis 30:1), died giving birth to a second son, which she also desperately sought (Genesis 30:24). Jacob would build another "pillar" (he was into pillars!) over her grave, which was "near Bethlehem" (the first mention of Bethlehem in the Bible)!

Interestingly, the narrative also cites the "tower of Eder," which was actually a "watchtower," apparently established to help shepherds watch over their sheep! "Near Bethlehem," where one day the "Lamb of God" would be born, and Shepherds would keep their "watch"!

Then, "it came to pass while Israel was dwelling in the land," that Reuben, Jacob's "first-born" son, went and lay with Billah, his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it!" This was a blatant act of rebellion, in addition to unbridled lust, on the part of Reuben (bringing to mind the scandalous act of Absalom in publicly defiling his father David's concubines, "on the roof of the palace," as a way of asserting his right to his father's throne (II Samuel 16:20-21) As a result, Reuben would lose his "birthright" (just as Absalom would lose his life!) and, as we'll see in Genesis 49, the "scepter" would pass to Judah!

Finally, Jacob would be re-united with his father Isaac at Hebron, prior to his death at a "ripe old age"--and what a reunion that must have been--having left as the "deceiver" and returning as "Israel, blessed of God"! Thus, completing the fulfillment of God's promises to Jacob at Bethel--and the Jacob narrative!

Genesis 36 records, in great detail, the generations of Esau--and we want to ask: why the coverage? According to Constable, "It shows God's faithfulness in multiplying Abraham's seed, as He promised, and provides connections with the descendants of Esau, including the Edomites and the Amalekites, referred to later in the history of Israel!" In fact, he notes that the "relationship between Esau and Jacob, and then the nations of Israel and Edom, is the theme of the entire Old Testament"!

It also shows God's blessing on Esau! The Edomites would become a powerful people, with kings and "chiefs" (or "dukes") even before there were kings in Israel! Matthew Henry writes: "We may suppose it was a great trial to the faith of God's people (Israel) to hear of the pomp and power of the kings of Edom, while they were bond-slaves in Egypt; but those who look for great things from God must be content to wait for them! God's time is the best time!"

Interestingly, as Constable notes, Esau's sons were born in Canaan and then moved out of the Promised land, to Seir (Edom), while Jacob's sons, except for Benjamin, were born outside Canaan in Paddan-aram (Mesopotamia), and later returned to the Promised Land!

Arnold seems to put it all in context with this: "Having tied off the non-elect line of Esau, the narrator is now prepared to follow the promises of God through the descendants of Jacob, which he will do in the last major unit of Genesis--the Joseph narrative!"

We might add: "All for the sake of My servant Jacob, and Israel My chosen!"

So on to Genesis 37 and the beginning of the Joseph narrative!

May God bless you as go with God--in your own journey "back to Bethel"!

Lowell