

Revisiting the Place



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.”

1. Revisiting the Old Ground

Going back to some of the old places can be a strange experience. Eg. Visiting my old swimming pool; Bundoran; Cliff College.

In this passage God tells Jacob to visit Bethel once again. That was where he had the vision of the ladder when he was fleeing from Esau and received tremendous promises from God. Then later we looked at when he struggled with God and his name was changed to Israel, from deceiver to struggler.

In this passage he meets again with God and again builds an altar and gives it the name ‘El Bethel’ (= ‘the God of the house of God’). Just as he gave a previous altar the name ‘El Elohe Israel’ (= ‘mighty is the God of he who struggles with God’), this time also there is repetition in the title. Bethel is the church, the house of God, but he didn’t just meet the church there, rather he met the God of the church there.

Jacob is going to church, look at how he goes.....

1. He gets rid of the foreign gods – his mind is fixed on God.
2. He and his family purified themselves and changed their clothes – ie they prepared to come to church.
3. They head off to church as a family prepared to worship and give thanks to God.
4. The enemy was terrified.

All of this was as a result of hearing God say it was time to go to church. Verse 7 tells us why he built an altar there. It was for a memorial to when God spoke to him whilst he was fleeing from his brother.

This is not the experience of the fleeing man or the struggler; this is the experience of the normal Christian who is giving thanks to God because it is the right thing to do and God loves it.

Cf. Psalm 28:7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.)



But in this context, God speaks clearly to him, no fighting, no running, no stars, no panic, just the voice of God speaking to him.

Look at the promises in verses 11-12 *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 come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you."*

This is significant because of all the promises God gave to Jacob, this is the one he quotes in Genesis 48, just before he dies: (verses 3&4) *Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.'*

This was one of the most significant meetings Jacob ever had with God and it happened at church when he went back to where he had seen God in the past.

2. Elijah, Go back the way you came!

1 Kings 19:15

Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. (1 Kings 19:15 NKJV)



1 Kings 19:1-18

God has used Elijah in a miraculous way. But he is tired and runs away from Jezebel. But again here, God speaks to his child and says, "What are you doing?" He tells God his little story:

1. He has been very busy for the Lord (vs.10)
2. Everyone else has let God down (vs.10)
3. He is the only one left (vs.10)

God reveals himself to Elijah not in the wind, earthquake or fire, but in a still small voice. In verse 15 God says, "Go back the way you came," ie revisit where you have come from. Take a bit of time to settle yourself and see what God has been saying to you in the past.

Elijah does that and in his revisiting the old path discovers the plan of God once again.

3. Let's Go Back, Somebody needs Jesus!

John 11:3-7 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "*Let us go back to Judea.*"

Jesus revisited where he had been at the request of someone who really needed him. He loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

Sometimes we get to the place where we feel we can go no further, M&M called for Jesus and thank God he came back for them.

In all three situations it was the voice of God that came and it brought such comfort and hope. Sometimes we strive to go on and achieve and look to the future and run at a million miles per hour when perhaps we need to settle our minds and take a backward glance to where He has brought us from and take time to listen to the voice of God once again.

Jeremiah 6:16 This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."