

Acting on his own Jacob had managed to dig himself into a deep and dangerous hole at Shechem.

. God stepped in and actually appeared to him (not in a dream). He called him out of there to return to Bethel, “the house of God.” Jacob intended to make an altar and declared to his loved ones, “I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.” There God called Jacob to account for the vow he had taken years before at Bethel. In anticipation of this return to Bethel, Jacob took charge and ordered a major clean up. He collected idols harbored by his family and hid them under a tree near Shechem. He ordered a bath and change of clothing for everyone. (Apparently they didn’t customarily do this daily? weekly? monthly? yearly?) This outward cleaning illustrates our need for regular, prayerful, spiritual judging and restoring our souls with the word of God. What we clothe ourselves with and surround ourselves with, our habits and activities, also need our regular review if we are to be presentable to approach and walk with God, 1Corinthians 11:26-32. Note also:

Lamentations 3:21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. 22 It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. 24 The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. 25 The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

*26 It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. 27 It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. 28 He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. 29 He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. 30 He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. 31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever: 32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. 33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. 34 To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, 35 To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, 36 To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not. 37 ¶ Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? 38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good? 39 Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? 40 **Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.** 41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.*

This tended to, Jacob could return to worship and commune with His God. He was guarded from Canaanite attack by their sense of the “terror of the Lord.” As soon as he reached Bethel he built an altar and named it Elbethel, “God of the House of God.” He was finally safely back! Back, as God had promised him when he was leaving more than two decades before. And now Bethel was no longer merely a sacred palace. Jacob was communing with the God of the House of God. What is the assembly to you? Is the Lord really there? Do we commune with Him there?

So everything then went fine, right? Not. First Rebecca’s nurse Deborah died along the way. Jacob’s sidetrack had deprived his mother of a reunion with her childhood nurse.

Then Rachel, *Jacob’s beloved Rachel*, went into labor and died giving birth. She died in pain and sorrow and named her son Benoni, “son of my sorrow,” but Jacob renamed him Benjamin, “son of my right hand.” This was an evident *act of faith* based upon God’s just stated direct promise to him and his seed. His name was to be thereafter Israel, “Prince of God.” He was to be fruitful and multiply (he already had twelve sons). A nation and a company of nations were to be of him. He would be the ancestor of kings. This original promise made to Abraham had been personally renewed to Jacob. He believed it! And some six centuries later Saul, a Benjamite, became the first king of Israel. Ironically, another 120 years later, the ten tribes of the divided kingdom worshiped a golden calf at Bethel (1Kings 12).

When Rachel died she was buried at a place called Bethlehem along the well-used roadway four or five miles south of Jerusalem. Seven centuries later it was the birth place of David and 1000 years after that, the birthplace of Jesus. Rachel was commemorated by Matthew (2:18) when Herod, the wicked Edomite killed all the baby boys under two years of age. Nearby there is an ancient domed building housing her tomb. This site has been respected by Jews, Christians and Muslims for centuries and treated as an international site until Islamic authorities recently claimed exclusive right to it.

Jacob finally reached Hebron and his aged father Isaac, 44 years after leaving him. We read no more of their reunion or of the 13 years following before Isaac died. Esau and Jacob got together and buried him in the site Abraham had bought about 130 years before. Jacob and Esau apparently had an amiable meeting and possibly exchanged information regarding events during their separation. Esau’s generations and some of the historical facts and incidents about them are inserted here in scripture. The roots and early mergers of Esau’s descendants with local tribes are documented. The intermingling and merging the Horites with the Edomites. was typical of those unsettled days. Some older references state the Horites were aborigine (cave men) but more recent archeological finds indicate they were reasonably civilized descendants of Canaan who had and used written records as did other peoples of the time. Many scholars once thought that writing was not developed until after Abraham’s time. They therefore cast their doubts upon the reliability of the ancient Biblical history and records. Even though having been proven mistaken decades ago, their erroneous assumptions are still widely held and stated as fact in textbooks and the popular media.

By Ronald Canner, November 24, 2010