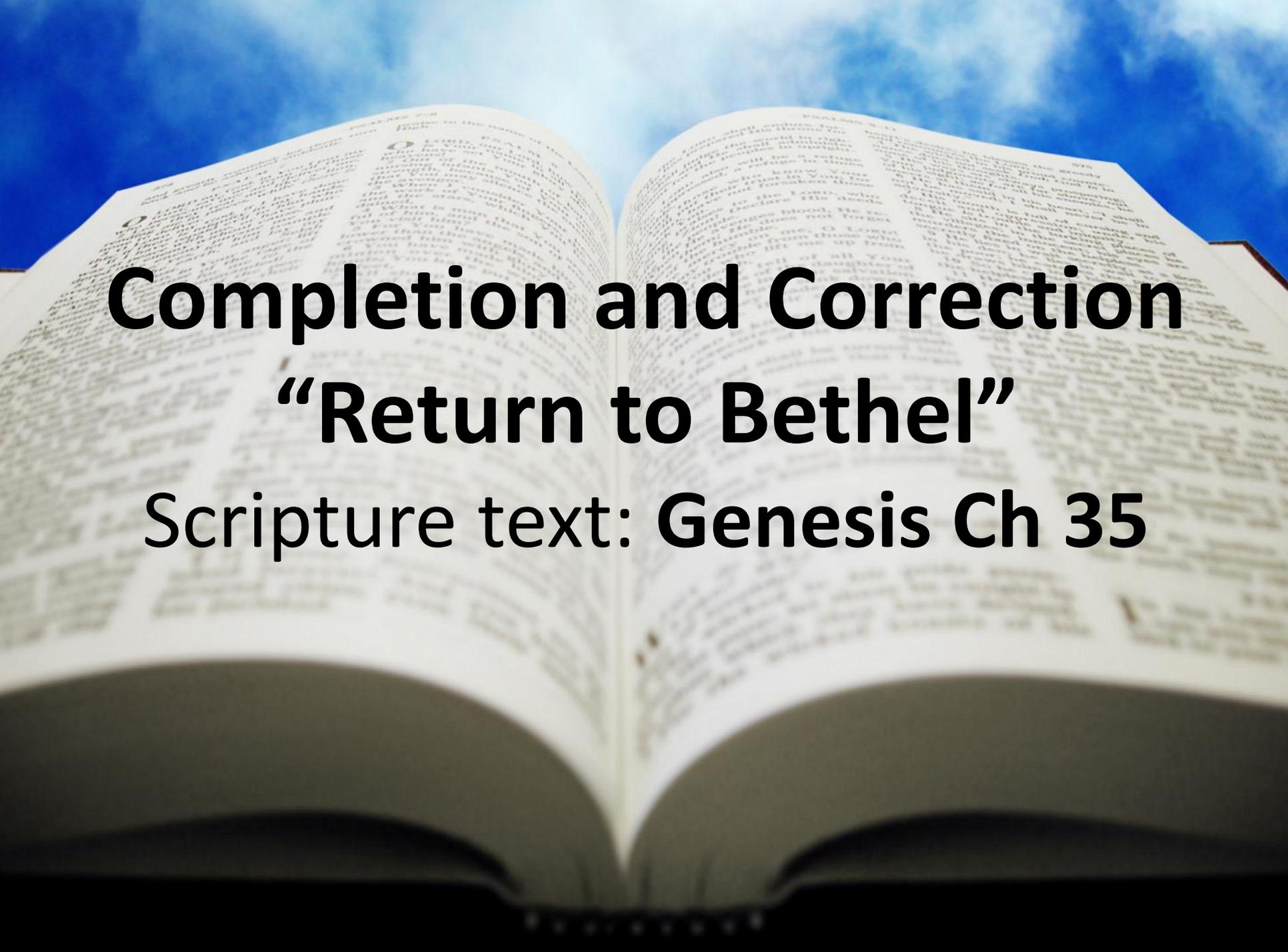


Welcome to Promise Land Bible Church
We're glad you're here!



An open Bible is shown from a low angle, looking up at the pages. The pages are filled with text, and the background is a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds. The text is overlaid in a large, bold, black font.

Completion and Correction

“Return to Bethel”

Scripture text: Genesis Ch 35

The return to Bethel (35:1–15)

Two themes run through chapter 35: **completion and correction**. It is a story of **completion because Jacob was back home in the land of promise**, with all his family and all his wealth; victory was won, the goal achieved, and the **promise fulfilled**. But it is also a story of **correction, for the family had not completely held to the walk of faith**: idols had to be buried and Reuben had to be dealt with.

The first 15 verses **record Jacob's return to Bethel**, about 15 miles south of Shechem, as **the completion of his vows**. Those vows, made earlier at Bethel, **included making Yahweh his God, making Bethel God's house, and pledging to tithe to God** (Genesis 28:20–22). God called Jacob to return to the land (28:13–15; 31:3), but **his pilgrimage took a long time**. **God had to remind Jacob of his forgotten vows**. Apparently his **indifference to those vows provided the occasion for Dinah's defilement** by Shechem (chap. 34). Jacob should have traveled on to Beersheba, his parents' home (28:10), without stopping at Shechem.

Genesis 28:13-15 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. **Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.**"

Genesis 28:18-22 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. **He called the name of that place Bethel**, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then **Jacob made a vow**, saying, "**If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God**, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, **shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.**"

Note how often Jacob “journeyed” in these chapters (35:5, 16, 21). God had called him to go “**back to Bethel**” (v. 1), **back to the place of the vision and the vow**. When a person is backslidden (as Jacob was), there is nothing else for him to do but **go back to the place of dedication and renew his vows**. Before he could take his company back to the altar, however, Jacob had to “**clean house**”—the strange gods and the jewelry associated with heathen worship had to be buried. **The only place for sin is in the grave.**

Genesis 35:1 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 91:15 When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.

Genesis 35:2-5 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "**Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments.** Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, **so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.**" So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem. And as they journeyed, **a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them,** so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

Verses 2–5. To complete his vows, there had to be a sanctification process. Jacob’s family had to remove all their idols, the foreign gods. God permits no rivals; He allows only single loyalty and no magical charms. All this purification (getting rid of idols, washing themselves, and changing their clothes) was instructive for Israel, who later would need such a consecration when they entered the land of promise (Josh. 5:1–9).

Joshua 5:6-9 For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, **perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD**; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. **So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place**, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. And the LORD said to Joshua, "**Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.**" And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

ear-rings. These rings were not worn as mere ornaments, **but for superstitious purposes;** perhaps as amulets or charms, first **consecrated to some false god,** or formed under some constellation, and stamped with magical characters

After burying the idols at Shechem ... Jacob and his family **set out for Bethel.** People in surrounding towns, apparently having heard of the massacre at Shechem (Gen. 34:25–29), **feared Jacob.**

Genesis 34:27-30 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "**You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.**"

Psalm 101:2-7 I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me? **I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.** I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall be far from me; **I will know nothing of evil.** Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure. I will look with favor on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me. **No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes.**

Joshua 24:14-16 "Now therefore **fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.** Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and **serve the LORD.** And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, **choose this day whom you will serve,** whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. **But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."** Then the people answered, "**Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods,**

2 Corinthians 7:1 Since we have **these promises**, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.**

Hebrews 10:22-25 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, **with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.** Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And **let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**

Genesis 35:6-8 And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, and **there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel**, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. **So he called its name Allon-bacuth.**

Verses 6–8. Arriving back in Bethel (which used to be called Luz, 28:19), **Jacob built an altar there as God had told him to do (35:1).** Meanwhile Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, Jacob's mother, died. **This death seemed to indicate that another stage in the patriarchal narratives was ending.** The naming Allon Bacuth ("**oak of weeping**") commemorated the weeping over this old nurse, buried under an oak tree. Interestingly Jacob's wives' idols were also buried under an oak, back in Shechem (v. 4).

Verses 9–15. At Bethel God confirmed the promise He had made there earlier (32:28). **Jacob's name-change to Israel was proof of the promised blessing.** God's reference to Himself as God Almighty ('ēl šadday; cf. comments on 17:1) was also an assurance that His promise would be fulfilled (cf. 28:3). Now that the patriarch was back in the land of promise, the promise of the nation ("seed"), kings, and the land was once again confirmed (cf. 12:2–3; 15:5, 18; 17:3–8; 22:15–18; 28:13–14).

Jacob returned to Bethel and built an altar. God met him in a new way and **reminded him of his new name, Israel.** God reaffirmed the promises He gave to Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob responded by erecting a new pillar and anointing it as he had done years before.

A backslidden believer does not need a new experience to get right with God. **He needs only to reaffirm the old experience in a new way.**

Jacob's actions here are almost identical with those in his earlier Bethel experience: setting up a stone pillar, pouring oil on it, naming the place ... Bethel (cf. 35:6–7, 14–15; 28:16–19).

And both times God promised Jacob many descendants in the land (28:13–14; 35:11–12). But **here He added that kings** would be included in Jacob's offspring.

Genesis 35:16-20 Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, **Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor.** And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "**Do not fear, for you have another son.**" And as her soul was departing (**for she was dying**), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. **So Rachel died,** and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (**that is, Bethlehem**), and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day.

How strange that Rachel should die soon after Jacob is restored to fellowship with God.

Great spiritual experiences are not security against the sorrows and trials of life. And certainly Jacob was better able to bear this sorrow now that he had again built his altar. Everything that Jacob had lost before had been regained because he had met God at the altar.

Not only are there sorrows in the family of the dedicated believer, **but there are also sins** (v. 22). Reuben was born amid great expectations (29:32), and Jacob said in later years that Reuben could have accomplished much (49:3). **But Reuben was unstable; he lacked godly character** (49:4); and, as a consequence, **he lost the birthright that belonged to the firstborn son** (1 Chron. 5:1–2) and had to give it to Judah and Joseph. **Sin never brings blessing; it is always costly.**

Genesis 35:28-29 Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. **And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.**

The **final act** on this journey was for Jacob and Esau **to bury their father**. Jacob had planned to see his mother again, but **she died before he arrived home**. Chapter 36 gives the history of Esau, for God did make him a mighty nation. **Unfortunately, the Edomites were the enemies of God's people for centuries.**