

# Explore the Bible: Assurance

January 9, 2019

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 27 focuses on Genesis 35:1-15.*

At the beginning of each new year, many Christians make vows to God with intent to keep them throughout the year. A vow is simply a promise made to God—usually with a stipulation that he does something or gives something in return. The vow could be a request from God to get you out of trouble with the promise to correct a bad habit or sin. Many times, vows are not kept.

Hannah prayed for her womb to be opened and God granted her request. She vowed to give back the child to be used for the service of the Lord (1 Samuel 1:10-11). Jonah made a vow to preach to the people of Nineveh while in the belly of a large fish (Jonah 2:9). Each of the characters in the Old Testament encountered God in a time of great need. God heard and answered their prayers.

## **Purify Yourself (Gen. 35:1-4)**

In order for Jacob's family to encounter God at Bethel, the fundamental requirement is clear. The family must go through the ritual of becoming clean before they enter into God's presence. These are people who have traveled with other people as well as animals over long and dusty trails. Not only were the people required to make themselves clean, all idols in their possession had to be destroyed.

During Dinah's visit to the women in the land of the Hivites, Shechem raped her. Although Jacob and Shechem's father, Hamor, made an agreement to resolve the dilemma by circumcising the males, allowing marriage between the families, and sharing the land, animals and crops,

the revenge of Dinah's rape was carried out by her brothers (Genesis 34:1-28).

One may wonder if Jacob's trickery surfaced through the lives of his sons. Subsequently, the sons of Jacob killed Shechem and Hamor, taking everything, including the women and children, the livestock and the wealth (Genesis 34:29-31). Everyone had to be purified.

Likewise, before Christians enter into the presence of God, there must be an act of purification. Through prayer and humility, we present our bodies before God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2). The believer must confess sin before entering his presence (1 John 1:9).

*In what ways do we present our bodies as living sacrifices?*

### **Obey God's Directives (35:5-8)**

God directed Jacob to "Go up to Bethel" to settle there and build an altar to the Lord (Genesis 35:1). He reminded Jacob of the promise on his way to Haran (Genesis 28:13). Jacob obeyed the voice of God as "they set out" and God protected the clan from surrounding tribes (Genesis 35:5). Jacob followed God's directive to build an altar when he arrived at Bethel. Now, he has come full circle to Bethel to fulfill the promise of God, "I will give you and the descendants the land on which you are lying" (Genesis 28:13-15).

Believers easily forget God's directive or even question whether God actually spoke. We may ask for guidance in a particular situation, but will not follow God's directive because the answer was not what we expected. Believers must trust God in every way. "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15).

*Discuss some difficulties or obstacles regarding following God's directives.*

### **Remember God's Promises (35:9-13)**

Jacob vowed to God to make Bethel a place of worship if he would return him safely to his Father's house (Genesis 28:20-22). When Jacob was in Harran, God protected him from Laban. Also, God protected Jacob on his journey to Bethel. At Bethel, God appeared to Jacob and kept his promise to bless him. At Bethel, Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Genesis 35:10). God had been faithful throughout Jacob's deceptions, hardships and disappointments, and God granted Jacob the opportunity to come into his presence to worship him.

Believers will continue to experience change as they grow closer and learn more about God. "Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled" (Joshua 21:45). Even though, we may experience hardships and disappointments, we can find assurance by focusing on God's promises and faithfulness.

### **Treasure God's Promises (35:14-15)**

On his journey to Harran, Jacob laid a marker to remind him of this awesome place in which he poured oil on the stone as an act of worship (Genesis 28:18). Now the changed man, Jacob, finally returns to the place where he first met God. He presents his worship differently this time by pouring oil and a drink offering on the stone to fulfill his vow. Jacob left his homeland without a future or hope, running from a brother who vowed to kill him. The pillar set up in Bethel is the marker that reminded him of the place of forgiveness, of mercy and of the promised blessings.

Believers should place markers along the journey to remind them of God's protection, promises and provisions. God has placed thousands of promises in the Bible and expects us to trust him to fulfill those promises. His greatest promise is the gift of his only son, Jesus. Let us celebrate his gift and his promises and continue to live the Christian life directed in his word.

*Think of some spiritual markers you have left to remind you of God's faithfulness.*

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