

“Hearing God” (Genesis 35:1–15)(7.4.21)

Genesis 35:1–15 (NIV84) *Jacob Returns to Bethel*

35 Then **God said** to Jacob, “Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to **God, who appeared to you** when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”

² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. ³ Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to **God, who answered me** in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.” ⁴ So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. ⁵ Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

⁶ Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. ⁷ There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that **God revealed himself** to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

⁸ Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth.

⁹ After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, **God appeared** to him again and blessed him. ¹⁰ **God said** to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” So **he named him Israel**.

¹¹ 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. ¹² The land **I gave** to Abraham and Isaac **I also give** to you, and **I will give** this land to your descendants after you.” ¹³ Then **God** went up from him at the place where he had **talked** with him.

¹⁴ Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where **God had talked** with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. ¹⁵ Jacob called the place where **God had talked** with him Bethel.
The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Hearing God”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Did you know that God wants to speak INTO your life; to speak to you? Last week, we learned about Spiritual Breathing: exhaling by confessing our sin according to 1 John 1:9 and inhaling God the Holy Spirit according to Ephesians 5:18. This spiritual breathing is done in faith, trusting God to fulfill His promises in scripture.

This week, I learned about another kind of spiritual breathing. In Judaism, the name of God, Yahweh, is too holy to be used by human lips. Instead, Adonai is used as the name of God – meaning my master or my Lord. Imagine you are breathing through your mouth instead of your nose. You inhale on Yah and exhale on weh, Yah-weh, Yah-weh, Yah-weh. So, at one point or another, every human being has breathed the Name of God.

When I heard this thought provoking concept, another scripture came into my mind.

Genesis 2:7 (NIV84) the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Think about the intimacy that this conveys. Without the breath of life from God, human life cannot be sustained. Our God created man, male and female, in our Triune God’s image, to have Communion with us. Our God is about a love relationship. In a love relationship, there must be communication.

BODY:

On the back of your bulletin, there are some reflection questions about hearing from God. Let’s look at them now.

1. When was the last time you specifically heard God speaking to you? What did He say? How did you respond? How long did it take you to adjust your life in obedience to what God said?

2. Hebrews 5:11 warns us of becoming a “dull” hearer, lacking sensitivity to the voice of God. What are some things that cause dullness of hearing?

3. We are told in 1 Peter 2:2 to desire the pure milk of the Word. How is your appetite for the Word? How is your hunger and thirst for God visible or obvious in your daily life? What “junk food” do you partake of that does not nourish your soul and spirit?

4. What things distract you from spending time listening to God? How much time do you give to daily Bible reading?

5. What is God speaking to you about in your quiet time? What is He asking you to do differently?

I took these questions from the book *Praying with Fire: Seeking His Presence through the Revival Passages of Scripture* by Mark D. Partin. I bought this book to specifically use as a reference in my preaching about Christians living the supernatural life. Hear this illustration that the author gives:

“The story is told of a farmer visiting his cousin in the big city. The farmer stopped in the middle of the busy sidewalk with all the hustle and bustle and said to his cousin, “Do you hear the cricket?” The city cousin replied, “No. How can you hear a cricket in the midst of all the noise? The squealing brakes, the horns blowing, people talking, laughing, sirens blaring?” The farmer replied, “You hear what you are used to hearing.”

We hear what we are used to hearing. Are you accustomed to hearing God speak to you? God, our heavenly Father, communicates. He speaks. He initiates conversation. To be able to hear God is crucial for our spiritual lives and for revival. God speaks, and we are responsible to listen and hear Him [and to obey].

There are always four voices competing for our attention: the voice of God, the devil, others, and our own. We must discern which is which. By faith, we can hear God and distinguish His voice. By faith, we can receive God’s Word. By faith, the children of God are enabled to hear divine truth and convert that truth to action. God speaks in several ways today. He speaks primarily through the Bible. The Holy Spirit speaks to us by impressing God’s Word and God’s will upon our hearts and minds. God also speaks through godly ministers and speakers, such as pastors, preachers, teachers, and evangelists. God even speaks through our circumstances.”

Are we intentionally trying to discern the voice of God? I know that I am trying to hear God speaking to me and guiding me. On Monday of this week, I chose this scripture and sermon topic. The next morning I believe I received affirmation when I opened The Upper Room devotional from Tuesday morning. 1 Kings 19:6-18 – Elijah hears God as a small voice.

1 Kings 19:6–18 (NIV84)

⁶He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

⁷The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” ⁸So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁰He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹¹The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came

a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁴ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

¹⁵ The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. ¹⁸ ... I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

Yes, it is sometimes challenging to hear God speaking in our topsy-turvy world. There are all kinds of things interfering with our hearing. Often, our expectations get in the way of hearing God speak to us. At other times, there is noise and distractions. Fear can interfere.

We must commit and be determined to hear God speak. Practice makes perfect and once we start hearing God speak, we should do everything we can to enhance our hearing. Like the farmer in the city, even though there were many hindrances, he was able to hear the cricket.

Our God, the God of the universe, wants to be known by us. Let us quickly step through this portion of scripture from Genesis 35 verse by verse: God said to Jacob; God appeared to Jacob; God answered Jacob; God revealed himself to Jacob; God appeared to Jacob again; God said to Jacob; God named Jacob Israel; God said, "I am God Almighty; God gave the promised Land to Abraham, to Isaac and promised to give it to Israel; In each of verses 13, 14, and 15, we are told that God talked with Jacob, with Israel. When you are looking for God to act, you will see it. When you are determined, you will hear or see God active in this world.

Six times in these 15 verses, the name of Bethel is given. Bethel means the house of God. El Bethel means God of Bethel. God is the God of God's house. Isn't that strange that it should be specified? The idea should be obvious. But do we hinder God from being God in God's house?

This place of Bethel is very significant as shown by it being referenced frequently. This is where Jacob had a vision of a staircase leading into heaven upon when angels ascended and descended. When Jacob awoke he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.... How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 28:16–17). In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that He is that connection between heaven and earth through which the messengers of God do the Lord's bidding.

Let me also remind you that just three chapters previous to today's scripture, in Genesis 32, Jacob had wrestled through the night with God begging for a blessing. When he awoke he had an injured hip; it caused him to limp with every step the rest of his life. You would have thought this encounter with God face to face could never be forgotten.

To give us some context for chapter 35, in chapter 34 a great calamity came up Jacob and his family. One of his daughters had been violated. The young man fell in love with her, spoke tenderly to her, and asked his father to negotiate a marriage. While an agreement was reached, two of Jacob's sons when and murdered many men in revenge.

So, chapter 35 opens with God telling Jacob to move, with his whole family to Bethel. But before they can move, they must properly prepare themselves; "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes." Wait a second, Jacob's family was hosting foreign gods? This man who was blessed with revelations from God; this man who was reconciled to his brother through God's grace; this man who was reminded of his struggles with God by every step he took in his life; This Jacob allowed foreign gods in his household?

Uh, yeah. Apparently so. Oh my. So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Might this explain the evil, conflict and trials

that had come upon his family? The scripture does not explicitly explain this, but it seems like a logical conclusion by the arrangement of chapters 34 and 35.

God is saying to Jacob, "You need to be restored. Your faith needs to be restored. You need to return to the House of God. In fact, it is the place of your homecoming. I am reminding you of your roots and your place in my divine plans for you and the whole human race. Bethel is the place that I want you to settle. My brothers and sisters, each of us needs to settle at the house of God.

Ok, maybe I can read your thoughts. You are thinking that you are not harboring any little "g" gods in your household. Well, did you notice that they also brought the rings from their ears to Jacob to be buried with all their gods? Maybe you thought that was just a random fact thrown in to fill out the story. I do not think so.

What might these earrings be representing? Well, they might have been some type of charms. For instance, they might have been occult related. They might have been used to ward off evil spirits or had some other superstitious purpose. Maybe they signified being part of a cult-like group.

Likely, these earrings were made out of some type of precious metal. They would be a sign of wealth.

We do know that the LORD had blessed Jacob materially. In our modern age, we can relate to wealth as an idol. Even if this wasn't what was going on, we can see the lesson.

How about this? No other jewelry is mentioned, only earrings. Obviously, we hear with our ears.

Something about these earrings was contributing to them being led away. These little "g" gods are deaf and dumb so they could not speak; **but, belief in them speaks volumes.** Also, what others would say about the gods could be heard. And, did they interfere with hearing the Almighty God of all creation? By associating with others that believed in these household gods, Jacob's family could be influenced. And, in fact, that seems to be the case. Jacob describes God as the one who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone. This was a highly patriarchal society and what the father said was law. And yet, the family had gone astray.

Each and every one of us is much more susceptible to outside influences than we would like to admit. There was a Dr. Stanley Milgram who did experiments in social psychology in the 1960's & 70's. Most famous were those experiments on obedience that he conducted to try to discern how people could commit the atrocities of the Holocaust. The results of the experiments show how easily people are influenced by circumstances and authorities to do what they don't want to do; to resist the voice of their conscious.

In other experiments, subjects were influenced by peer pressure. People were asked to match one line to its match from a group of three. The group was told which wrong answer to agree on. The subject person normally agreed to the wrong answer. **Groupthink** is a phenomenon that occurs when a group of well-intentioned people makes irrational or non-optimal decisions spurred by the urge to conform or the belief that dissent is impossible.

My point is that who and what we associate with are extremely important. Who and what you see as authority can control you. The people and activities you participate in affect your decisions and actions. What is taught in classrooms; your entertainment; what you read; and, what you listen to, help define who you are and how you behave.

This can be a bad thing or it can be a good thing. When you are hearing God, it is a good thing. When you are reading God's word, it is a good thing. When the authority in your life is Father God and His word, it is a good thing. When you settle in Bethel it is a good thing. When your group is a group of Christians, it is a good thing. By worshiping and celebrating Holy Communion, you are aligning yourself with the will of God for your life.

CONCLUSION:

Not only did the LORD command Jacob to move to Bethel, the LORD also commanded that an altar to God be built. Jacob heard and Jacob obeyed – he set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked to him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it.

Altars were constructed at places which were considered to have a sacred character, points where contact between the human and the divine could occur. Generally speaking, we consider the altar the front portion of our sanctuary; our house of God. Do you expect to encounter God when you come to church? Do you expect to actually encounter our Triune God during Holy Communion?

As part of Jacob's family's preparations, he also told them to purify yourselves and change your clothes. How do we rightly come before God? 1 John 1:9 (NIV84) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

It is my hope that you have heard God speak to you this morning through this text, the word of God. During The Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me." Let us hear. Let us obey.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.

Scriptural Prayer for Revival (from Praying with Fire)

Initiating Father, just as You spoke to Jacob, I thank You for speaking to me (Genesis 35:1). Let my ears be attentive to Your voice, and let my mind be focused on Your Word. Your Word is truth and nourishment to my soul. Speak to me through Your Word and ignite a revival in my spirit.

Just as Jacob arose in obedience to Your Word, teach me to arise from things that distract me, things that consume my time, energy, and resources so that I may obey You. Show me my sin and cleanse me. Teach me, Father, how to change, how to repent, how to be purified, so I can know You and walk with You. Let repentance flow through me like a mighty river. Give me a hunger for You.

Teach me to recall Your faithfulness in times past. As You answered Jacob in the day of his distress, answer me, Lord. Father, teach me to establish reminders of my meeting with You as Jacob did. Let me make spiritual markers, so I won't ever forget our meetings or Your Word. Let me build my own personal altar where I can run daily. Thank You for letting me hear Your voice. I praise You. Send revival to me, the church, and our land. All in Jesus' name, amen.