

'Assurance
January 27, 2019
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Genesis 35:1-5

Here's a famous quote: *"I knew I should've taken that left turn at Albuquerque!"*

Who said it? What in the world does it have to do with Jacob and Genesis 35?

Over and over again in those cartoons they repeated the same "gag." Bugs is tunneling under the ground, pops up in the middle of trouble, takes out a road map and says the same thing every time about taking the wrong turn.

Before we had GPS navigation, when some people got off course and went the wrong way how did human nature kick in and keep them off course? How has GPS made it easier to get back on course despite our pride?

People don't just get off course on a trip; we can take a wrong turn in life.

If someone is not a follower of Christ they are already off course and thankfully God pursues them to turn them around. Even those of us who are followers of Christ can take a wrong turn from God's will.

"Lord, am I where you want me to be in my life? Am I where you told me to be? Did I make a wrong turn?"

It happened to Jacob. God came to Jacob supernaturally; God told Jacob his destiny; God gave Jacob an amazing promise; and yet Jacob took a wrong turn both geographically and spiritually away from God's will. Here's the good news:

Big Idea: If we've taken a wrong turn from God's will, we can be assured He will redirect, protect, and put our lives back on track if we will ask Him for direction.

- Before we look at Genesis 35 we need some review and context.

- Two weeks ago in chapter 33 Jacob was reunited with his brother Esau.
- Jacob was expecting a war but God brought peace and reconciliation.
- When Jacob left Laban God had told him to go back to Bethel (31:13.)
- You remember Bethel (house of God) where Jacob first personally encountered God in a dream. “Surely the Lord is in this place...”
- After the Esau meeting, instead of going home to Bethel as God instructed, Jacob turned aside first to Succoth then to Shechem.
- On the surface Jacob seemed to be doing the right things. He built an altar near Shechem and worshipped God. But God wanted him in Bethel.
- Jacob was still God’s man but he was not where God told him to be.
- In chapter 34 this “dislocation” from God’s best begins to take a toll.
- A prominent pagan named Shechem forces himself on Jacob’s daughter Dinah. Jacob is upset but rather passive. His sons were out for blood.
- The father of the rapist proposes that Jacob give Dinah to his son as his wife to resolve this.
- Two of Jacob’s sons see their chance. No wedding until every man in town is circumcised. While the Shechemites were incapacitated, Simeon and Levi not only avenged their sister by killing Shechem, they slaughtered the whole town and plundered it.
- Jacob was panic-stricken. He feared the Canaanites and Perizzites would rise up and destroy his whole family.
- Jacob and his family were in this mess because Jacob took a slight detour from God’s will. **What happens when a plane veers just a couple degrees off course?**
- Shechem was only 15 miles from Bethel. Jacob spent ten years just 15 miles from where God told him to go, but way off course from God’s will.
- Now he and his family were paying the price for living in that pagan place.

- If only Jacob hadn't taken that "right turn" at Succoth!
- Good news: Jacob was about to experience our "big idea." If we've taken a wrong turn from God's will, we can be assured He will redirect, protect, and put our lives back on track if we will ask Him for direction.
- Look at Genesis 35 beginning in verse one.

Genesis 35:1–15 (ESV)

35 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." ² 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." ³ 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." ⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, ⁷ 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.

- God redirected Jacob to Bethel. The place where he first met the Lord.
- **How can we apply Jacob going back to Bethel to our spiritual lives today?**
- Sometimes in our spiritual life we need to go back to the place where our relationship with God first began. We need to rekindle that "first flame."
- The church at Ephesus had done a lot of things right, but Jesus said ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Rev. 2:4–5) (ESV)

- Jacob was doing some of the right things. He built a church in Shechem. God was blessing him materially. On the surface it looked good.
- Warren Wiersbe: *“Many of the problems in the Christian life and in local churches result from incomplete obedience. We know what the Lord wants us to do, we start to do it, and then we stop.”ⁱ*
- Later in Revelation 3:2 (ESV) Jesus said to the church at Sardis, ² Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.
- That verse indicates being out of God’s will not only keeps you from future impact and blessing, it begins to “dry up” the growth you had in the past.
- If we’ve taken a wrong turn from God’s will, we can be assured He will redirect, protect, and put our lives back on track if we will ask Him for direction. Once God got Jacob’s attention, he began planning his “U-turn.”
- **What did Jacob tell his family and servants to do in verse two? Why?**
- The “foreign gods” may have been idols they worshipped, or things they treated as “good luck charms.” Either way, Jacob knew they had to go!
- *“Lay down with dogs and you get up with fleas.”* Live among the pagans and get slack in your relationship with God and you pick up some idols.
- Cleansing and changing clothes was a ritual before worship, **how is it symbolic for us today if we are getting back on track with God’s will?**

As he repented in Psalm 51:2 (ESV) David prayed, ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Psalm 51:7 (ESV) ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Isaiah instructed in Is.1:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,

We know what 1 John 1:9 (ESV) says, ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- Step one to getting back on course with God's will is putting away any idols and all sin that have grown up between Him and me (repentance.)
- When we seek to get back on course with God's will, there can be fear.
- Jacob was understandably afraid his family would be attacked on the journey by pagan tribes seeking revenge for the slaughter at Shechem.
- We said, when God redirects, He also protects.
- **How does verse five say God accomplished this?**
- God promises in Isaiah 41:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
- Verse seven says Jacob knew what to do when they arrived back at Bethel. He built an altar, worshipped God, and God showed UP!

⁹ God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. ¹⁰ And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. ¹¹ And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. ¹² The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you." ¹³ Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. ¹⁴ And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. ¹⁵ So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

- Truth: If we're off course from God's will not only will He redirect us and protect us, He will CONFIRM to us when we're back where we should be.

- When we talk about getting off course regarding God's will, we might imagine some kind of dramatic sinful behavior that would put our scandal on the tongues and prayer list of all our Christian friends.
- Question: **How can it be less dramatic than that? Practically speaking, what are some examples of how a believer can veer just a few degrees off course?**

Bob Deffinbaugh writes: *“Jacob’s condition is not that different from many Christians in our own time. We may appear to be walking close to God while the opposite is true. We may still continue to preserve the forms and observe the rituals of piety, but, in fact, the reality is not there. Paul described this condition as “...holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power...” (II Timothy 3:5)...Since every one of us will face times when we have strayed from an intimate walk with God, Genesis 35 provides us with a pattern for finding the way back. And so this chapter not only describes the way back for Jacob, but it also outlines the way back for any believer who has grown cold and indifferent by failing to walk in the path which God has made clear.”ⁱⁱ*

So, What's the Takeaway?

- How did we get from Bugs Bunny to Bethel? How did we draw a parallel from a wrong turn at Albuquerque to Jacob's wrong turn at Succoth?
- All of us, in our human nature, can get off course with God's will. Scratch that; WILL get off course with God's will at some time in our life.
- We may be going through the motions and things may look good; it only takes a slight turn a few degrees from God's plan to put us way off course.
- The good news is we can be assured He will redirect, protect, and put our lives back on track if we will ask Him for direction.
- The first step to getting back on course is to put off anything that has grown up like “kudzu” between God and us. That means confession and repentance for any sin or any idol blocking our fellowship with Him.

- The BEST news is God doesn't play games with us. If we will sincerely seek His will, He will confirm to us where to go and when we are there.

ⁱ THE WIERSBE BIBLE COMMENTARY: OLD TESTAMENT © 2007 Warren W. Wiersbe

ⁱⁱ <https://bible.org/seriespage/36-way-back-genesis-351-29>