

Genesis 35:5 — The Terror of God Was Upon Them

Self-Judgment, the Power of God, Fruitfulness, and Three Turnings at the Voice

Scripture Reading: Genesis 35:5; Psalm 80

“And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.”

(Genesis 35:5)

“Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” (Psalm 80:17–19)

The Terror of God: Power Through Self-Judgment

Jacob had no military strength. When the affair with Shechem had taken place, and Simeon and Levi had slain all the men of the city, Jacob’s response was not triumph but fear: “I being few in number, I shall be destroyed.” He had no power of his own. But now, as they journeyed from Shechem to Bethel, the terror of God was upon the cities round about them, and none pursued.

What had happened? The exercise of self-judgment. Jacob had required his household to put away the strange gods and to be clean. The idol earrings were buried under the oak at Shechem. It was not military preparation or political alliance that produced the terror upon their enemies. It was the divine power that attends the people of God when they take self-judgment seriously. Not the power

that the world talks about — influence, numbers, resources — but the power of the Spirit of God, which operates through the people of God when they are clean before him.

This has personal application. We each have our own tendencies, the things that pull us away from the Lord, that divide our hearts. These must be kept short. The Lord has his way of pruning, of stopping things from growing in the wrong direction. And when self-judgment is exercised — not as a single dramatic act, but as a daily keeping of short accounts — there is a divine protection that works on behalf of God's people that no amount of natural strength could produce.

Psalm 80: The Vine, the Boar, and the Man of God's Right Hand

Psalm 80 is a psalm of Israel in distress, using the figure of a vine planted by God, brought out of Egypt, set in the land with its boughs covering the hills and its branches reaching to the sea — and now broken down, devoured by the wild boar of the wood, wasted, burned, cut down. The cry goes up three times: Turn us again, O God; cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

The remedy is in verse 17: let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself. Benjamin — the son of my right hand. Rachel died in his birth; so Israel died in the birth of their Messiah. Jacob by faith called the child Benjamin, son of my right hand. And Israel's cry in Psalm 80 is that God's hand would rest upon that one, and through him, restoration would come. Their response: we will not go back from thee; quicken us and we will call upon thy name.

The subject throughout the psalm is fruitfulness — the vine, the vineyard, the boughs, the branches. It is the same subject that God lays upon his people. Fruitfulness for God. In Galatians the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. There is conflict to the end of our lives in this world. But we are not to be in bondage; we are to walk in the Spirit and produce the fruit of the

Spirit. The book of Judges shows again and again what happens when that is abandoned: delivered into the hands of enemies, crying out, and the Lord in mercy delivering. The pruning that stops the wrong tendencies — thank God for it.

Micah 5: The Remnant as Dew and as a Lion

Micah 5:7–8 gives two characters of the restored remnant of Jacob among the peoples. First, they shall be as the dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass — refreshment, blessing, entirely of divine operation with no human hand behind it, as independent of man as rain that tarries not for the sons of men. This speaks of the gracious ministry that will flow from Israel to the nations in the millennium.

Second, the remnant of Jacob shall be as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep who treads down and tears and none delivers. This speaks of power over enemies, the counterpart to the terror of God that rested on the cities round about Jacob in Genesis 35. Israel restored will be both: channel of blessing like the dew, and wielder of power like a lion. Both characters are God's, operated through his people.

Turn Us Again: Three Turnings at the Voice

Psalm 80 cries out three times: turn us again, O God. The question is, how does such a turning come about? The answer is found in three short passages.

The first is in John 20:16. Jesus said to Mary: “Mary.” She turned herself and said, Rabboni. One word. A single word spoken by the Lord Jesus. What turned her was not a long discourse or complicated doctrine — it was his voice. She had already turned away from two angels because they could not satisfy her. Only the voice of the Lord Jesus could turn her and satisfy her heart. The world offers constant promises of satisfaction through every channel available — and none of

them satisfy. The voice of the Lord Jesus satisfies, and it turns.

The second is in Acts 12. Peter was in prison; the church was praying. A young servant girl named Rhoda went to answer the gate. She heard Peter's voice and was so turned by it that she forgot to open the gate and ran back in to tell the others — who told her she was mad. Her whole life was changed by a voice. She became a messenger of resurrection news in a company that did not believe it. Just his voice. The words of God cannot be surrendered to the infidels without surrendering the voice of the Lord along with them. It is the voice that turns.

The third is the coming of the Lord himself. First Thessalonians 4:16: "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." The Lord will come with a shout, with a voice having archangel character. The only recorded instance of Michael the archangel speaking, in Jude 9, is: "The Lord rebuke thee." Satan will recognize that voice at the Lord's coming. The rest of us will not have heard it before. But the dead in Christ will hear it and rise, and those alive will be caught up.

The practical import is this: the turning at the Lord's coming should be as small as possible. To hear his voice today, to be satisfied with Jesus today, to have our hearts so occupied with the Lord that the object of our souls is above — that is what makes the turn at his coming a small one. To be filled with idols and divided affections and the things of this world makes the turn a large one. The goal is to hear his voice today, to be turned today, to be fruitful today — so that when he comes with that shout, there is very little turning left to do.

Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts; cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.