

Genesis 35

This chapter records a number of events in the life of Jacob as we see the life of Isaac coming to an end. Chapter 36 will shift to Esau for a brief period and then chapter 37 will turn its focus on Joseph until the end of the book. Since Moses turns his attention, largely, to Joseph, this chapter also signals, effectively, the end of Moses' attention given to Jacob, although Jacob will not die until the end of the book. He will be 130 years old when he is presented to Pharaoh (47:9).

TRANSLATION - 35:1-7:

1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there and make there an altar to God, the One Appearing to you, when you fled before Esau, your brother."

2 So Jacob said to his house and to all who [were] with him, "You all, put away the foreign gods which [are] before you and you all purify yourselves and change your clothes. **3** Then let us arise and let us go up to Bethel and I will make there an altar to God, the One Answering Me in the day of my distress and He will be with me in the way in which I go."

4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which [were] in their hand and the rings which [were] in their ears and Jacob hid them under the tree which [was] with Shechem. **5** Then they journeyed and the terror of God was on the cities which [were] around them and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. **6** So Jacob came to Luz, which [was] in the land of Canaan. It [was] Bethel, and all the people who [were] with him. **7** Then he built there an altar and he called on, at the place, the "God of Bethel," because there God revealed Himself to him when he fled from the face of his brother.

WORDS:

"Put away" (verse 2; 298 times) can mean "turn aside, leave, or remove, take away." "Foreign" (36 times) means "foreigner or stranger." "Purify yourselves" (94 times) is especially important in the Law of Moses. The adjective is found 96 times while the concept "purification" is found 13 times. "Change" (26 times) means to "pass on or pass away, change or replace." "Distress" (verse 3; 70 times) is "distress, anxiety, or trouble." "To hide" (verse 4) is used 31 times. "Terror" (verse 5) is only used twice; here and perhaps in Jeremiah 10:3. "To reveal" (verse 7; 136 times) means to "meet, encounter."

ARCHAEOLOGY:

For comments on Bethel, see 12:8; 13:3; 28:19; 31:13.

COMMENTS:

Perhaps while Jacob was still in fear of the Canaanites, God appears to him and tells him to move to Bethel. "Go up" is literally accurate since Bethel is roughly 1,000' higher than Shechem. For the first time in human history, God commands anyone to build an altar, this one in Bethel for Jehovah God, the One who had appeared to Jacob (28:13-15; 31:3, 11-13; 32:24-32).

In obedience to God's command, Jacob informed his household that they were moving to Bethel. So, he commanded them to put away any and all foreign gods, not just the teraphim which Rachel had stolen from Laban but also any false gods obtained when they plundered Shechem. False gods were first mentioned in chapter 31. Here, for the first time, we see that the two (idols and Jehovah) are not mutually compatible. Furthermore, they were to purify themselves and change their clothes. We are not sure what rituals might have been involved this early in the purification process.

Jacob's family obeyed his command, including the ear rings which apparently were used in some way as an amulet in pagan worship practices but so far no evidence has been unearthed in archaeology with rings in the shape of deity unless the crescent symbolizes the moon god, Sin. These Jacob buried under a tree in Shechem.

As they continued traveling, Moses informs us that God caused terror to settle on the hearts of the Canaanites so they did not fight Jacob and his family. Thus, we see that Jacob's fear of the inhabitants of the land (34:30) was largely unfounded.

Jacob finally arrived at home in Bethel and built the altar there, just as God had commanded. It was in Bethel that God had appeared to Jacob more than twenty years previously (28:19).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - This is the first "purification" ritual we have seen in Scripture. Later rituals will include changing clothes, washing, and restraining from sexual relationships.

Contemporaries of Moses - At the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses commented that peoples around Egypt have the fear of God on them (Exo. 15:14-16). Israel will have to purify itself at Mount Sinai (Exo. 19:10, 14; cf. Deut. 2:25; 11:25). The verb "to purify" is often used in the Law relative to leprosy.

Later Hebrew writers - The Canaanites will fear Israel when God brings them across the Jordan River under the leadership of Joshua (2:9). Joshua will issue a similar challenge as Jacob does here, at Shechem many years later (24:23ff).

TRANSLATION - 35:8-13:

8 Then Deborah died, the nurse for Rebekah, and she was buried on the way to Bethel, under the oak and he called its name the Oak of Weeping.

9 Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Padan Aram and He blessed him. **10** And God said to him, "Your name Jacob will not be called your name again, Jacob because that Israel will be your name." And He called his name "Israel." **11** Then God said to him, "I myself [am], El Shaddai, Be fruitful and multiply into a nation and an assembly of nations will be from you and kings from your thighs will go out. **12** And the land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, to you I am giving it and to your seed after you, I will give the land." **13** Then God went up from him where He spoke to him.

WORDS:

"El Shaddai" (verse 11) is translated usually into "God Almighty." It is found in 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3 and in Exodus 6:3; Ezekiel 10:5.

COMMENTS:

It is extremely rare for a servant, much less a female servant, to have her name mentioned, much less her death recorded. Deborah was apparently close to the Jacob family and had traveled with them for some time. When she passed away, she was buried under an oak which was then named "the Oak of Weeping." Perhaps her death is recorded, even though Rebekah's and Leah's is not, because she represented a connection from Padan Aram which is now severed.

A second time, God appeared to Jacob and blessed him, just as he had promised in 28:13-15. Then, in a repetition of the name change in 32:28, God reiterates the change of Jacob's name into Israel. In this monologue, God identifies Himself, for the third time in Genesis, as "El Shaddai," God Almighty. Subsequently, God commands Jacob to be "fruitful" and "multiply" into a nation and an assembly ("congregation") of nations. See 28:3 for comments on "assembly / congregation." Being "fruitful" then has to do with *nations*, not just individuals.

God also promises Jacob that "kings" would come from him. We saw in Genesis 17 that God promised both Sarah (17:16) and Abraham (17:6) that kings would come through them. Eventually this promise of a king would be narrowed down to the family of David (2 Samuel 7) and his descendant (Matt. 1:1). This shows that God had always foreseen His

people being a royal nation so that the request of the Israelites in 1 Samuel 7 did not take God by surprise.

God also promised to give that land to Jacob, as He had promised to Abraham and Isaac. Finally, God returned to His heavenly throne (cf. 17:22 where the same phrase is used with Abraham).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - The command to “be fruitful” repeats God’s promise to Adam and Eve (1.26-28). What Adam and Eve had failed to do - stay faithful to God as they populate the earth - God calls on Israel to do. Yet, they will also fail.

NT writers - Jesus will successfully fulfill all God’s expectations and will then tell His followers to be fruitful and multiply (Matt. 28:18-20).

TRANSLATION - 35:14-20:

14 So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He spoke to him, a pillar of stone, and he poured on it a drink offering and he poured on it oil. **15** Then Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke to him there, Bethel.

16 Then they journeyed from Bethel and there was still a distance of land to come to Ephratha and Rachel became pregnant and struggled to give birth. **17** Then it happened in her struggling to give birth that her midwife said to her, “Do not fear because even now this [is] to you a son.” **18** Then it was when her soul was going out that she died and she called his name “Ben-Oni” but his father called him “Benjamin.” **19** So Rachel died and she was buried on the way to Ephratha, this [is] Bethlehem. **20** So Jacob set up a pillar on her grave. This [is the] pillar of the grave of Rachel to this day.

WORDS:

“Pillar” (verse 14) was first seen in 28:18, 22 as well as in 31:13, 45, 51-52. “To pour” (the first verb) is used 25 times and is related to “drink offerings,” a related word found 60 times. The verb can also be used in the context of pouring out metal to make an idol (26x). “To pour”, the second verb, is completely unrelated to the first, and found 53x. “To struggle” (verse 16; 28x) means to be “heavy, hard, difficult.” Here, the verb describes the child birth. “Midwife” (verse 17) is used three dozen times. It is the gerund form of the verb “to give birth.” “Ben-Oni” means “Son of Sorrow” while “Benjamin” means “Son of My Right Hand”. “Right hand” could denote honor (Psa. 110:1), skill (Psa. 137:5), or soundness (Ecc. 10:2).

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Ephratha was a small village. It is found in Scripture only a half dozen times; here (twice), in 48:7 (twice), the prophecy in Micah 5:1, Psalm 132:6 and Ruth 4:11.

Bethlehem (41 times) is the combination of two words: “house” and “bread” so the name means “house of bread” as “Bethel” means “house of God.” This village was not famous until King David was born there (1 Sam. 16:4) and then the Son of David, the Messiah (Luke 2:4).

COMMENTS:

Jacob set up a pillar, as a memorial to the promise God had made to him. As an act of worship, likely an act of thanksgiving, Jacob poured out a drink offering at the pillar and then anointed the memorial with oil, consecrating it as a special place where God had appeared to him. Consequently, Jacob reiterated naming the place “House of God” (Bethel).

On the way, Rachel began giving birth in a difficult pregnancy. While she was struggling, a little boy was born. Her midwife tried to encourage her, that she was giving birth to a boy. But, Rachel’s spirit was already in the process of leaving her body. Rachel had expressed in 30:1 that she would die if she did not have children. She had two and died in the birth of the second one. Yet, she did have the strength to name him “Son of Sorrow” (Benoni) but Jacob

altered the name to “Son of My Right Hand” (Benjamin), likely an allusion to the encouragement he would receive from Benjamin despite his mother’s death. Jacob set up another pillar (his fourth; 28:18; 31:45-50; 35:14) to commemorate his beloved wife.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Rachel had wished, at the birth of Joseph, for another son (30:24). God answered her prayer but she gave her life in the process.

Contemporaries of Moses - Drink offerings will become part of the Law of Moses (Exo. 29:40-41; Lev. 23:13; Num. 4:7; 6:15; 15:5).

Later Hebrew writers - Bethel was conquered by Joshua (8:1-29). Here, as Jacob builds an altar, his ownership of the land is suggested. However, Bethel will become the center of idol worship under King Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:26-33). His altar combined the image of Baal with the name of Jehovah God. Bethlehem, being the home town of King David (1 Sam. 16:4) will be the home town of David’s descendant, the Son of David, the Messiah (Micah 5:2).

Jeremiah will mention Rachel’s tomb in 31:15. Her tomb was located in the territory of Benjamin in Ramah of Benjamin. In Jeremiah’s day, the Israelites are being led through Ramah as exiles under the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

NT writers - Jesus will put Bethlehem on the map once and for all when He is born there (Luke 2:4; John 7:42). Matthew will quote Jeremiah 31:15 in 2:18 as he pictures the lamentation of the women of Israel over the death of their baby boys under the hand of King Herod.

TRANSLATION - 35:21-26:

21 So Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond Migdol-Eder. **22** And it was when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and slept with Bilhah, the concubine of his father and Israel heard and the sons of Jacob were twelve: **23** The sons of Leah, the first born of Jacob: Reuben and Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Zebulun. **24** The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. **25** The sons of Bilhah, the maid of Rachel: Dan and Naphtali. **26** The sons of Zilpah, the maid of Leah: Gad and Asher, these [were] sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Migdol-Eder (verse 21) or “Tower of Eder” is only found here and at Micah 4:8. Its location is unknown.

COMMENTS:

Observe that “Jacob” is referred to here as “Israel.” He continued his journey. This verb has been used three times in this chapter: 35:5, 16, 21. The route they are taking is the main north-south road through the hill country of Palestine. It is about 20 miles from Bethel to Bethlehem. While Jacob and his family (the “Israelites,” although they are not yet considered a nation), were at Migdol-Eder, Reuben, the oldest son slept with Jacob’s concubine, Bilhah, Rachel’s maid. The guess is that he did so in order to either lay some claim to his dad’s estate or make Bilhah the “next-in-line” after Rachel’s death. The text does not say. We believe it was recorded to show why Reuben lost the birthright as the true oldest son.

In verses 23-26, Moses gives a complete list, after the birth of Benjamin, of the sons of Jacob, twelve in all. While Moses writes these boys were born in Padan Aram while the reader knows Benjamin was not, we believe Moses was writing in general terms since eleven out of twelve were born there.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Jacob will chose not to give the birthright to Reuben (49:3-4) because of his behavior with Bilhah.

Contemporaries of Moses - Since polygamy was, potentially, widely practiced, under the law of Moses, God forbid Israelites to have sexual relations with the wife of the father (Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Deut. 27:20).

Later Hebrew writers - Simeon and Levi have lost their birthright because of their violence in chapter 34. Here, Reuben has lost his birthright. Consequently, 1 Chronicles 5:1 informs us that the birthright passed to Rachel's firstborn, Joseph, but through him, to his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. For other instances of a man having sexual relations with his father's wife / wives, see 2 Samuel 3:7; 16:20-22; 1 Kings 2:22.

NT writers - The twelve sons of Jacob will serve as the prototype for the twelve apostles of Christ (Matt. 19:28) and the two groups, the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, will serve as a symbol of all the faithful in heaven in Revelation 21:12, 14.

TRANSLATION - 35:27-29:

27 So Jacob came to Isaac, his father, at Mamre of Chiriath-Arba, this [is] Hebron where Abraham stayed temporarily there and Isaac. **28** And these were the days of Isaac, one hundred years and eighty years. **29** And Isaac breathed his last and died and he was added to his people, old and full of days and Esau and Jacob, his sons, buried him.

WORDS:

"To breathe one's last" (verse 29; 24 times) means to "die, expire, pass away." We want to translate it differently here than "to die" since that verb is also used here.

COMMENTS:

Jacob went to visit his dad who really was on his death bed this time (cf. 27:1-2). Isaac was living in Mamre, also known as Hebron. He had lived a good, long life of 180 years. But, the end comes to every one and Isaac finally took his last breath, died, and was "added to his people." While he was old, he was also "full of days," a term used to designate a generally full, blessed, happy life (cf. Abraham's last days; 25:8). It was surely happy as his two sons, who had been at enmity with one another, came together to bury him. Jacob will comment in 49:31 that Isaac was buried in the cave of Machpelah. Observe that Esau is mentioned first.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - When Jacob left home, more than two decades earlier, Isaac was living in Beersheba (28:10). He has now moved north, to Hebron where Jacob finally gets to see his dad. God's promise is fulfilled, that He would bring Jacob back to his home (28:15, 21). On the expression "was gathered to his people" and how it suggests a belief in life after death, see comments on 25:8.