

Genesis 35 - Jacob Returns to Bethel; Covenant Reconfirmed with Jacob; Rachel Dies in Childbirth; Death of Isaac

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Genesis 35

(b) Abrahamic Covenant reconfirmed at Bethel (35:1-15)

(i) Command to go to Bethel (35:1-4)

1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

1 Later, God told Jacob, "Get up, move to Bethel, and live there. Build an altar to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."

1 And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

- God gives Jacob a divine revelation (His 4th) to move back to Bethel

- God called Jacob to return to the land (28:13-15; 31:3), but his pilgrimage took a long time

— God had to remind Jacob of his forgotten vows: apparently his indifference to those vows provided the occasion for Dinah's defilement by Shechem. Jacob should have

traveled on to Beersheba, his parents' home (28:10), without stopping at Shechem

- God commanded Jacob to make Bethel his new home (at least for a time)
- The reason God wanted him to move was that Bethel was the place God first appeared to him, while he was on his way to Haran, fleeing from Esau
- This is where God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant through Jacob, not Esau, and where God promised to bring Jacob back to the Land
- It was common practice for the Patriarchs to build altars on their own (12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20); this was the first time God commanded one to be built

2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Remove the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments;

2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments;

2 Jacob announced to his household and to everyone with him, "Throw away the foreign gods that you've kept among you, purify yourselves, and change your clothes.

2 Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:

- His "household" would've included his servants, slaves, and prisoners of war that he got from Shechem

- To complete his vows, there had to be a sanctification process

- Jacob's family had to remove all their idols, the foreign gods

- God permits no rivals; He allows only single loyalty and no magical charms

- All this purification (getting rid of idols, washing themselves, and changing their clothes) was instructive for Israel, who later would need such a consecration when they entered the land of promise (Josh 5:1-9)

3 and let's arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me on the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."

3 and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."

3 Then let's get up and go to Bethel, where I'll build an altar to the God who answered me when I was in distress and who was with me on the road, wherever I went."

3 And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

- The reason for the journey was to build an altar because of God's faithfulness to Jacob in "the day of his distress" while fleeing from Esau and Laban

- God not only answered Jacob, but Jacob acknowledged that God was with him, a fulfillment of 28:15

4 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.

4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.

4 So they handed over to Jacob all their foreign gods on which they had been depending, along with the rings that they were wearing on their ears. Jacob buried them under the oak that grew near Shechem.

4 And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.

- The spiritual cleansing of the household
- The wearing of earrings was a means of using magic (Hosea 2:13)
- The gods could be buried because they were dead

(ii) Journey to Bethel (35:5-8)

5 As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

5 As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

5 As they set out on their journey, because the people who lived in the cities around them feared God, they did not pursue Jacob's sons.

5 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.

- Jacob was under divine protection on the journey
- The fear the cities had was likely due to word that two of Jacob's sons murdered an entire city; this kept the other Canaanite tribes from attacking to avenge what happened in Shechem

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

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

6 Eventually, Jacob and everyone with him arrived at Luz (also called Beth-el) in the territory of Canaan.

6 So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him.

- Luz = Bethel; Luz was the original name before the Patriarchs renamed it

7 Then he built an altar there, and called the place **El-bethel**, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother.

7 He built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother.

7 He built an altar there to God and named the place El Beth-el, because God had revealed himself there when he was fleeing from his brother.

7 And he built there an altar, and called the place El-Bethel: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

- "...El-Bethel" - "the God of the House of God" or "the God of Bethel"

The Hebrew text of v7 clearly implies plurality in the Godhead. The word *elohim* is a plural noun, and is used of both pagan gods and God. When *elohim* is used of pagan gods, the adjective or verb that goes with it is also in the plural; but when *elohim* is used of God, then the adjective or the verb is normally in the singular. However, there are exceptions.

Sometimes the plurality of the Godhead comes out in that the adjective or the verb is also in the plural in reference to the true God, and here is one example. In Hebrew, the word "revealed" is in the plural; the plural verb is used with the plural noun, and this is unusual when used of the true God. So literally this verse reads as follows: "Gods, they revealed Themselves unto him"—a clear indication of plurality in the Godhead.

8 Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; and it was named **Allon-bacuth**.

8 Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named Allon-bacuth.

8 Rebekah's nurse Deborah died and was buried there, under the oak tree that was below Beth-el. That's why the place was named Allon-bacuth.

8 But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allonbachuth.

- This is the first revelation that Rebekah's nurse was part of Jacob's household; this shows that by this time, Rebekah had died

— Apparently Rebekah died while Jacob was in Haran, and Deborah joined him in Haran and then came back to the Land with Jacob

— This would have made Rebekah about 180 years old at her death

- "...Allon-bachuth" - "the oak of weeping"

(iii) Jacob's name changed and Abrahamic Covenant reconfirmed (35:9-15)

9 Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him.

9 Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him.

9 God appeared again to Jacob after he had arrived from Paddan-aram and blessed him.

9 And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him.

- This is the second appearance to Jacob since he returned to the Land, and the fifth appearance since God began to deal with him

— The purpose of this appearance was to once again reconfirm the Abrahamic Covenant; this was the second reconfirmation of the Covenant through Jacob

10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; **You shall no longer be called Jacob**, But Israel shall be your name." So He called him Israel.

10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name." Thus He called him Israel.

10 Then God told him, "Your name is Jacob. No longer are you to be called Jacob. Instead, your name will be Israel." So God called his name Israel

10 And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.

- God reconfirmed Jacob's name change to Israel

- "...You shall no longer be called Jacob" - from this point, God called him by both Jacob and Israel, so this should be taken in the sense of "no longer only" be called Jacob

— He will no longer only be called Jacob, but will also be called Israel

11 God also said to him, "I am **God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a multitude of nations shall come from you**, And **kings shall come from you**."

11 God also 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 forth from you."

11 and also told him, "I am God Almighty. You are to be fruitful and multiply. You will become a nation— in fact, an assembly of nations! Kings will come from you— they'll emerge from your own loins!

11 And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;

- Now that the patriarch was back in the land of promise, the promise of the nation ("seed"), kings, and the land was once again confirmed (Cf. 12:2-3; 15:5,18; 17:3-8; 22:15-18; 28:13-14)

— And both times God promised Jacob many descendants in the land (28:13-14; v11-12)

- "...God Almighty" - *El Shaddai*; this is the way God referred to Himself to Abraham (17:1)
- "Be fruitful and multiply" - Jacob had 11 sons, so he already fulfilled this command; however this command was to be applied to his sons
- "...A nation and a multitude of nations shall come from you" - one specific nation will arise out of Jacob, and that nation will be Israel
- "a multitude of nations" - *kahal*, this Hebrew word is used uniquely of Jacob; it was not used in reference to Abraham
- In 17:5, God told Abraham that "a father of a multitude of nations I will make you"; this referred to other nations that came out of Abraham besides Israel, such as the Arab states
- The use of *kahal* here was not a reference to other nations, as was the case with Abraham, but a reference to the Tribes of Israel
- No other nation than Israel came out of Jacob
- "...kings shall come from you" - this was a promise made to Abraham (17:6) and Sarah (17:16), and now was made to Jacob
- Here God added that kings would be included in Jacob's offspring; this is new revelation

12 "And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, **I will give to you**, And I will give the land to your descendants after you."

12 "The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you."

12 Now as for the land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I'm giving it to you and to your descendants who come after you. I'm giving the land to you!"

12 And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.

- "...I will give to you" - the Land is promised personally to Jacob, not only to Jacob's seed

13 Then God went up from him at the place where He had spoken with him.

13 Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him.

13 After this, God ascended from the place where he had been speaking to him.

13 And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him.

14 So Jacob set up a memorial stone in the place where He had spoken with him, a memorial of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it.

14 Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it.

14 Jacob erected a pillar of stone at that very place where God had spoken to him. He poured a drink offering over it, anointed it with oil,

14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon.

- Jacob's actions here are almost identical with those in his earlier Bethel experience:

setting up a stone pillar, pouring oil on it, naming the place Bethel (Cf. 28:18-22)

— However, the drink offering was new. In 28:22 Jacob promised to make this place the house of God; in this passage, he fulfilled that promise

— By giving a drink offering here, Jacob treated the place as the house of God

15 And Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

15 So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

15 and named the place where God had spoken to him Beth-el.

15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel.

- Jacob had already done this before (28:19; v3,7), but now it is the house of God, not only of a previous event, but a place of worship and offerings

(F) Transition from Jacob to Joseph (Gen 35:16—36:43)

(a) Birth of Benjamin and death of Rachel (35:16-20)

16 Then they journeyed on from Bethel; but when there was still some distance to go to **Ephrath**, Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe difficulties in her labor.

16 Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor.

16 Later, they set out from Beth-el. While still a long way from Ephrathah, Rachel started to have trouble giving birth.

16 And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour.

- "...Ephrath" - located in the vicinity of Bethlehem

17 And when she was suffering severe difficulties in her labor, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son!"

17 When she was in severe labor the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for now you have another son."

17 While she was suffering due to her difficult labor, the midwife told her, "Don't fear! You're going to have another son."

17 And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also.

18 And it came about, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him **Ben-oni**; but his father called him **Benjamin**.

18 It came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.

18 Just before she died, Rachel called her son's name Ben-oni, but his father Jacob named him Benjamin.

18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

- "...Ben-oni" - the son of my sorrow

- "...Benjamin" - the son of the right hand

— Once in the Land the family was completed by the birth of Benjamin

(Interestingly, 11 of Jacob's 12 sons, progenitors of the nation's 12 tribes, were born outside the Land in Paddan-Aram (29:31—30:24); Benjamin was the only son born in the Land

19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrathah, also known as Bethlehem.

19 And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

20 And Jacob set up a memorial stone over her grave; that is the memorial stone of Rachel's grave to this day.

20 Jacob set up a pillar over her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

20 Jacob erected a pillar over her grave, and that pillar stands over Rachel's grave to this day.

20 And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.

- The pillar memorializing Rachel's burial place was still standing when Moses later wrote Genesis

— It was also a well-known sepulcher in Samuel's day near his home in Ramah, and it was still visible in Jeremiah's day as the Jews were being taken to Babylonian Captivity (Jer 31:15)

(b) Sin of Reuben resulting in loss of rights of firstborn (35:21-22)

21 Then Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

21 Then Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

21 Jacob continued his travels, and eventually pitched his tent facing Migdal Eder.

21 And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.

22 And it came about, while Israel was living in that land, that Reuben went and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard *about it*.

22 It came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine, and Israel heard *of it*.

Now there were twelve sons of Jacob—

22 But while Israel lived in that land, Reuben went inside his father's tent and had sexual relations with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard about it. Now Jacob had twelve sons.

22 And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:

- It is possible that Reuben, Jacob's eldest, was trying to replace his father as patriarch as a usurper sleeping with a king's concubine (2 Sam 3:7; 12:8; 16:20-22)

— It doesn't appear that Jacob addressed it with Reuben at the moment, but the consequences for Reuben because of this act is that he lost his inheritance (his birthright) (Cf. 49:3-4; 1 Chr 5:1-2)

(c) Sons of Jacob (35:23-26)

23 the sons of Leah *were* Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, then Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun;

23 the sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, then Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Zebulun;

23 Leah's sons were Reuben (Jacob's first-born), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

23 The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun:

- Reuben was identified as Jacob's firstborn, but because of his sin with Bilhah (v22), he will lose his firstborn rights

24 the sons of Rachel *were* Joseph and Benjamin;

24 the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin;

24 Rachel's sons were Joseph and Benjamin.

24 The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin:

25 and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's female slave, *were* Dan and Naphtali;

25 and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali;

25 Rachel's servant Bilhah's sons were Dan and Naphtali.

25 And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali:

26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's female slave, *were* Gad and Asher. These *were* the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

26 Leah's servant Zilpah's sons were Gad and Asher. These were Jacob's sons who were born to him while he lived in Paddan-aram.

26 And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid; Gad, and Asher: these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padanaram.

(d) Death of Isaac (35:27-29)

27 Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre of Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had resided.

27 Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre of Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.

27 So Jacob reached his father Isaac at Mamre, in Kiriath-arba (also known as Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had lived.

27 And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.

- This is Jacob's first contact with his father Isaac since Jacob left for Haran

- Isaac never met Rachel

- Jacob was 79 years old when he left Hebron for Haran, and 108 when he returned; this means that Jacob would be with Isaac for the last 12 years of his life

28 Now the days of Isaac were 180 years.

28 Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years.

28 Isaac had lived a total of 180 years

28 And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years.

- Jacob was 120 years old when Isaac died

29 Then Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

29 Isaac breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

29 when he died and joined his ancestors at a ripe old age. Then his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

29 And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

- ~1,885 BC

- Isaac's funeral brought back together his two sons (as had Abraham's funeral had done for Ishmael and Isaac, 25:9)

Isaac's death is only reported here in order to end this particular story and this particular *toledoth*. This was not when it happened chronologically; but in keeping with the purpose of Genesis, one person's account is ended so that a new account can be started. Second: Isaac lived for twelve more years after Jacob returned to him, and the last twelve years they spent together. Third: Isaac witnessed Jacob's grief at the loss of Joseph at the age of 167 years. Fourth: Isaac died about the time of Joseph's elevation in the court of Pharaoh, never learning that Joseph was still alive and in Egypt. Fifth: Isaac died about ten years before Jacob's move to Egypt during the famine.