

Genesis

Chapter 35



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Two themes run through Chapter 35: completion and correction. It is a story of completion because Jacob was back home in the land of promise, with all his family and all his wealth; victory was won, the goal achieved, and the promise fulfilled. But it is also a story of correction, for the family had not completely held to the walk of faith: idols had to be buried and Reuben had to be dealt with.

Jacob and his household return to Bethel and travel in the Promised Land. Marked by three deaths (Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac) and one birth (Jacob's last child, Benjamin), this disjointed chapter provides closure to one phase of Jacob's life and prepares the way for his next set of trials, the apparent loss of Joseph and all that it involves (chapters 37-50).¹

Torah Class: Chapter 35 is rich in information BUT largely hidden to our view due to the Greek and English translations. So, we're going to sort of detour around a bit, and connect some dots that have been obscured over the centuries, as we go through this chapter. We'll also use this as an opportunity to review some of the more difficult to decipher.....yet critically important..... matters and principles that lay the foundation here in Chapter 35 for all that will come later.²

Genesis 35:1

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.

[Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there] God directed Jacob to a safer place and put fear in the other cities so they wouldn't follow him (Genesis 35:1, 5).

Arise, go up to Beth-el—The transaction that had lately taken place rendered it unsafe for Jacob to dwell any longer at the city of Shechem; and it seems that while he was reflecting on the horrible act of Simeon and Levi, and not knowing what to do, God graciously appeared to him, and commanded him to go up to Beth-el, build an altar there, and thus perform the vow he had made, Genesis 28:20, 22.³

[building an altar] When Abram built altars during his journeys (Genesis 12:6-8), it was not for the purpose of sacrifice but for calling on the name of the Lord. This also seems to be the case with Jacob, since no reference is made to offering sacrifices on the altar. Some have suggested that the altars served to mark the territory of the deity. Alternatively they were memorials to the name of the Lord.⁴

¹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

² Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

³ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴ Bible Background Commentary

Torah Class: In verse 1, God orders Jacob, Israel, to pack up and move to Beit-el, Bethel, the place where so many years earlier Jacob had stopped on his journey *out of* Canaan, on his way to Mesopotamia, and saw the vision of the angels ascending and descending on the ladder between Earth and Heaven.

In turn Jacob orders his entire household to get rid of all their idols and idolatrous symbols. The sacking of Shechem by Israel's sons and their taking of many of Shechem's people, had introduced many newcomers into Israel's clan; and these newcomers, in particular, worshipped other gods. Even more, Jacob's sons would have stolen the idols of Shechem because this, by their way of thinking, would have stolen power away from Shechem. It was the norm for an invader or conqueror to steal his enemy's gods, because it in a very tangible way weakened his enemy in addition to humiliating them.

The phrasing of God's instruction to Jacob points out the mindset of that time; and to me, it demonstrates the supreme patience of Yehoveh in developing and maturing his infant nation of Israel. So, I want to dwell on this for a couple of minutes.

Notice that the proper translation of verse 1 has God telling Jacob to build an altar at Beit-el "to *the* God" who appeared to you.... He didn't say, build an altar to Me. This is kind of an odd way for Yehoveh to refer to Himself as "the God" who appeared to you, because it has kind of a built-in implication that there are other gods, but He is the particular god that appeared to Jacob at Beit-el. According to the traditional ways of that era, it was thought that gods were many, and they were territorial, in addition to having specific job descriptions. And gods from different territories would fight against gods from other territories. Or, perhaps better, one god was more powerful than another. So in Mesopotamia, for example, the god of rain was ONLY the god of rain for Mesopotamia. He wasn't responsible for rain somewhere else, because there were other gods of rain in other places. Everybody believed this way.....everybody. And, we really don't find Yehoveh hammering away, making a point, that He is the ONLY God that exists. Rather, He characterizes Himself as Jacob's God. We have no record of Yehoveh telling Jacob, while up in Mesopotamia, to build an altar to Him up there, and I doubt that it happened. Because Yehoveh was a God that was associated with the land of Canaan, not Mesopotamia. But, now that Jacob was back in Canaan, the God of the Promised Land, Yehoveh, tells Jacob to build him an altar. Made perfect sense to Jacob, and probably to most of his tribe (even the newcomers), although they had NO idea what reality actually was.

I tell you this, because as we read through the Torah, understand that just who Yehoveh is, and how He operated, and where His sphere of influence began and ended, was just as fuzzy to the minds of the Israelites as was the concept of what happened to somebody after they died. Certainly, after the Exodus, Yehoveh defined Himself much more extensively. But, people don't just forget centuries of traditions. Rather, Israel tended to understand Yehoveh within the context of all their long-held beliefs and traditions....He was just added to the mix.

Yehoveh was THEIR God....Jacob's god, Israel's god.... but what happened when THEIR God matched wits and powers with a god for another people of another land? Who knew? This was constantly on their minds. So, here we are 200 years after Abraham got the call, and STILL Jacob doesn't quite get who God is, and his wives and the others who have made themselves part of his family certainly don't get it, either. So, as part of an ongoing education process by Yehoveh, we see Jacob saying: OK, we're now under

the sphere of influence of my God, and we're going to build an altar to Him; so I don't want your gods upsetting my God, and besides your gods are useless here in a territory that is outside their primary area of influence, anyway. So, give them to me, and I'm going to bury them under a tree. Why bury them? Why not smash them, or burn them? Because, this was more a repudiation of their gods than an absolute belief that those gods didn't exist.⁵

Genesis 35:2

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:

Missler: 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.⁶

(Genesis 28:13-) ¹³And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; ¹⁴And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

(Genesis 31:3) And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.

Idolatry was abolished in Israel. Purification was always necessary when going up to Bethel, the house of God.

[Put away the strange gods] *elohey hannechar* the gods of the foreigners, which were among them. Jacob's servants were all Syrians, and no doubt were addicted less or more to idolatry and superstition. These gods might belong to them, or, as some have conjectured, they were the teraphim which Rachel stole; but these have already been supposed to be astrological tables, or something of this kind, called by Laban his gods, because by them he supposed he could predict future events, and that they referred to certain astral and planetary intelligences, by whose influences sublunary things were regulated. But it is more natural to suppose that these gods found now in Jacob's family

⁵ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

⁶ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

were images of silver, gold, or curious workmanship, which were found among the spoils of the city of Shechem. Lest these should become incitements to idolatry, Jacob orders them to be put away.⁷

[strange] *nekar* (H5236) *nay-kawr'*; from Hebrew 5234 (*nakar*); *foreign*, or (concrete) a *foreigner*, or (abstract) *heathendom* :- alien, strange (+ -er).

[gods] *'elohiym*, (H430) *el-o-heem'*; plural of Hebrew 433 ('elowahh); *gods* in the ordinary sense; but specifically used (in the plural thus, especially with the article) of the supreme *God*; occasionally applied by way of deference to *magistrates*; and sometimes as a superlative :- angels, × exceeding, God (gods) (-dess, -ly), × (very) great, judges, × mighty.

[Be clean, and change your garments] Personal or outward purification, as emblematical of the sanctification of the soul, has been in use among all the true worshippers of God from the beginning of the world. In many cases the law of Moses more solemnly enjoined rites and ceremonies which had been in use from the earliest ages. "A Hindoo considers those clothes defiled in which he has been employed in business, and always changes them before eating and worship."—WARD.

Cyril of Alexandria: "We too must change our garment"

After he was called by God, Jacob ascends to Bethel, that is to the house of God (this is how the name Bethel is interpreted), offers sacrifices to God and is declared chief and master of the holy rites. He teaches his successors and descendants how they must enter the house of God. He orders the foreign gods to be rejected like dung and filth and to change the garments. It is fitting for us to do likewise when we are called before God, or enter the divine temple, especially in the time of the holy baptism. We, as if we drive away the foreign gods and part from such error, must assert, "I refuse you, Satan, and all you pomp and all your worship." We also must change completely our garment by stripping off "the old self that is corrupt through deceitful lusts" and by clothing ourselves with "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to image of its Creator."⁸

ridding of foreign gods. The call to rid themselves of foreign gods is a call to commit themselves exclusively to Yahweh. This does not mean that they understood or accepted philosophical monotheism, but that they accepted Yahweh as their family patron deity. The belief in a personal god who gave protection and provision to the family was common in early second-millennium Mesopotamia. This deity was not understood to replace the great cosmic gods but was the principal object of worship and religious devotion for the individual.⁹

Why did the people have these idols ("foreign gods")? Idols were sometimes seen more as good luck charms than as gods. Some Israelites, even though they worshiped God, had

⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

⁸ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

⁹ Bible Background Commentary

idols in their homes, just as some Christians today own good luck trinkets. Jacob believed that idols should have no place in his household. He wanted nothing to divert his family's spiritual focus.

Jacob ordered his household to get rid of their gods. Unless we remove idols from our lives, they can ruin our faith. What idols do we have? An idol is anything we put before God. Idols don't have to be physical objects; they can be thoughts or desires. Like Jacob, we should get rid of anything that could stand between us and God.¹⁰

The actions Jacob commands to his entourage are associated with preparations for ritual service (e.g., Num. 19:7-8) and with a deepened and renewed consecration to the one god (cf. Josh. 24:14).¹¹

God, One God—Jacob commanded his household to get rid of their foreign gods—their false gods. He recognized that all other gods are crude human attempts to counterfeit the one, true God. Humans have fashioned many symbols for God and have developed many different ideas about gods. God is known only where He makes Himself known. Jacob was trying to purify the religious practices of his household by putting away all other ideas and images of God. Getting them out of the house was one thing. Getting them out of the minds and hearts of the Israelites was quite another! Modern gods may be more subtle, but they are just as tempting—and just as false: sensualism, money, pleasure, drugs, sports, etc. Many of us serve them wholeheartedly and end up just as empty as those who worshiped a block of stone or wood. There is only one God. He has no competitors, not even of lesser rank.¹²

Jacob's command included the household idols that Rachel had stolen (31:22–35) as well as any idols among his servants. These **foreign gods** were gods of other people, not of Jacob. Indeed, the only true and living God is Jacob's God. **purify yourselves, and change your garments:** Jacob's household prepared for an encounter with the living and holy God. They cleaned themselves. Later, the Israelites would clean themselves in similar ways at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19).¹³

McGee: There are several things that Jacob tells his household to do. First of all, they are to “put away the strange gods that are among you.” We are almost shocked at this. You will recall that when Jacob fled with Rachel and Leah, Rachel slipped out with the family gods. Apparently, she had sat on them while riding the camel—she just crawled on top of the luggage that was on the camel's back and sat down because these little images were underneath. Jacob did not know at the time that she had taken them. He was very honest when he told Laban that the little images were not in his entourage at all. That may have been one of the few times he was truthful with Laban. He really had not known they were there.

When they were discovered, I think that we would all assume that Jacob would get rid of them because he knew of the living and true God. In fact, he had had a personal

¹⁰ Life Application Notes

¹¹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

¹² Disciple's Study Bible

¹³ The Nelson Study Bible

encounter with Him. But he didn't get rid of the images, and now we find that his entire family is worshipping these strange gods. For the first time, Jacob is the one to take the spiritual leadership, and he says, "Let's get rid of these false gods, these strange gods." The first thing they have to do is to put away that which is wrong.

There are too many folk who six days a week are serving some other god, and on Sunday they try to serve the Lord. Many Christians, even fundamental believers, have their strange gods, and then they wonder why their service in the church on Sunday is not a thrilling experience. My friend, you are going to have to put away your strange gods. I don't know what yours might be. It could be covetousness. There is many a good fundamental businessman who is out after every dollar he can get. He gives more devotion to getting the dollar than he does to serving the Lord on Sunday. And then he wonders what is wrong with his spiritual life. If you are going to come back to Beth-el where you met God at the beginning, then, my friend, you must put away those things that are wrong.

Then Jacob says, "Be clean." For the believer, that means confession of sins. You have to deal with sin in your life. You cannot come to church on Sunday and dismiss the way you have lived during the week that has just passed. After all, you take a physical bath and use a deodorant before you come to church, and yet there is spiritual body odor in our churches because there is no confession of the sin, no cleansing. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). There must be the confession. He will forgive, but we must confess.

"And change your garments." In other words, get rid of the old garments. In Scripture "garments" speak of habits. We speak of an equestrian wearing a riding habit or of a football player wearing a uniform—which is his habit. In like manner, the child of God should dress in a way to mirror who he is and to whom he belongs. Do you wear the habits of the Lord? Can you be detected in business or in school or in the neighborhood as being a little different in your life? You *are* wearing a habit. The day that Jacob went back to Beth-el, he started living for God. Up to then, I don't think he was. Now he says, "Let's go back to Beth-el"—that's the thing that we must do.¹⁴

Genesis 35:3

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.

Answered me in the day of my distress—Not only when he fled from the face of his brother, but more particularly when he was in his greatest strait at the brook of Jabbok.

McGee: Abraham and Isaac had made altars, and now Jacob will make an altar—thank God for that. He will now have a witness for God.

"Who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." The thing that Jacob remembered is that when he was running away from home as

¹⁴McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:142). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

a young man, homesick and lonesome, he had come to Beth-el, and God had been faithful to him. God had said, “I will be faithful to you.” The years had gone by, and God certainly had been faithful to him. Now God says, “You’ve got to go back to Beth-el. You have to go back to where you started. You have to begin there.”

We need to recognize that the years we spend in living a shoddy, shabby Christian life are a waste of time, absolutely a waste of time. God called the children of Israel to get out of Egypt and into the land of promise. God appeared to them and told them to go into the land, but they didn’t go in. Forty years they wandered around, and then God appeared to Joshua and said, “Go into the land.” He picked up right where He had left off. They had wasted forty years. How many people are wasting their lives as Christians? My, the tremendous spiritual lessons that are here for us! I don’t know about you, but some of us are just like Jacob, and that’s the reason this is so applicable to us today. Thank God that He says He is the God of Jacob. I love that! If He’ll be the God of Jacob, He’ll be the God of J. Vernon McGee also—that’s wonderful! This chapter is a great encouragement to us.

Notice that Jacob is assuming authority in his home.¹⁵

Genesis 35:4

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.

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).¹⁶

(Joshua 5:19) ¹*And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.* ²*At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time.* ³*And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.* ⁴*And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died*

¹⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:142). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁶Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. ⁵Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. ⁶For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD swore that he would not show them the land, which the LORD swore unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey. ⁷And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way. ⁸And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole. ⁹And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.

[earrings] Earrings not used in idolatry were permitted by God (Genesis 24:22,30,47; Exodus 32:2-3; Exodus 35:22; Numbers 31:50; Judges 8:24-26; Job 42:11; Proverbs 25:12; Ezekiel 16:12; Hosea 2:13; 1 Peter 3:5-6). They were made of gold, silver, brass, ivory, and wood and were often adorned with precious stones. Here they were connected with idolatry so Jacob commanded them to be given up. For this reason they were condemned in Isaiah 3:20 and Hosea 2:13. In idolatry they were used as amulets and charms to ward off evil, and are still used by some in the East for this purpose.¹⁷

And—ear-rings which were in their ears—Whether these rings were in the ears of the gods, or in those of Jacob’s family, we may rest assured that they were not mere ornaments, but served for superstitious purposes. Ear-rings were certainly worn as amulets and charms, first consecrated to some god, or formed under some constellation, on which magical characters and images were drawn. A very ancient and beautiful one of this kind brought from Egypt, cut out of a solid piece of cornelian, now lies before me. It was evidently intended for the ear, as the opening is too small for any human finger; and it is engraved all over with strange characters and images, which prove that it was intended for a talisman or amulet. It seems to be such a one as St. Augustine describes, Epist. 73, which was suspended from the tip of the ears both of men and women, not for the purpose of ornament, but through an execrable superstition, for the service of demons.¹⁸

buried under the oak. The objects were buried under a special tree in Shechem, which possibly figures also in Genesis 12:6, Joshua 24:23-27 and Judges 9:6, 37. Sacred trees played a significant role in popular religion of the day, which would have viewed stone

¹⁷ Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

¹⁸ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

and tree as potential divine dwellings. In Canaanite religion they are believed to be symbols of fertility (see Deut. 12:2; Jeremiah 3:9; Hosea 4:13), though there is very little in the archaeological or literary remains of the Canaanites that would clarify the role of sacred trees.¹⁹

As suggested by the nearby phrase **foreign gods**, these **earrings** probably represented some form of idolatry. In two other passages, earrings are mentioned in connection with idolatry (Judg. 8:22–28; Hos. 2:13). In many other passages, earrings are simply items of jewelry (Ex. 32:2, 3; 35:22; Prov. 25:12). The **terebinth tree** is a long-living deciduous tree, such as an oak. The tree has red berries and leaves shaped like feathers and red berries. Because the tree lived a long time, ancient people often used the terebinth tree to commemorate important events or to mark places of worship (see Hos. 4:13).²⁰

Torah Class: The part in verse 4 about getting rid of the earrings has nothing to do with God condemning ear-jewelry; these rings were worn in honor of foreign gods...they were amulets.... so they too had to be removed from their midst and buried. As part of this process, they were also instructed to change clothes, and to purify themselves. Changing their clothes simply means washing their clothes or changing into clean ones. The changing of clothes was a rather usual part of the purification procedures.

These idols and symbols were buried under what some Bibles call an oak trees, and others a pistachio tree. Actually, it was a Terebinth tree, that is of the pistachio family....but it is NOT an oak tree. I'm not quite sure where that notion ever came from.

After purifying themselves and burying the foreign god symbols, the clan moves to Luz and there Israel builds the altar. Don't let the name Luz confuse you: Luz was simply the name the Canaanite peoples called the place; Hebrews called it Beit-el. We'll see a lot of this double naming in the Bible, often using both the Canaanite and the Hebrew names.²¹

Genesis 35:5

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's fear was unnecessary. God had made many promises of protection and had kept them with Abraham (Genesis 12:17; Genesis 20:7,17), Isaac (Genesis 26:6-31), and thus far with Jacob (Genesis 27:41-42; Genesis 31; Genesis 32:10-32; Genesis 33:1-17); it was to be expected that God would continue protecting him if His plan for Israel was to be completed.

The terror of God—A supernatural awe sent by the Almighty, was upon the cities that were round about, so that they were not molested in their departure. This could be owing to nothing less than the especial providence of God.²²

¹⁹ Bible Background Commentary

²⁰ The Nelson Study Bible

²¹ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

²² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

This verse may be the conclusion to the tale told in Ch 34.

Genesis 35:6

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

Genesis 35:7

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

[**'El Beyth-'El**] (H416) *ale bayth-ale'*; from Hebrew 410 ('el) and Hebrew 1008 (Beyth-'El); the *God of Bethel*; *El-Bethel*, the title given to a consecrated spot by Jacob :- El-beth-el. Hebrew: for God of the house of God. It was the same place and same promise as when God first appeared to him (Genesis 28:13-15). The first "*el*" is wanting in one of De Rossi's MSS., as it is also in the Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, and some copies of the Arabic. The sentence reads much better without it, and much more consistent with the parallel passages.

This passage functions as a kind of fulfillment to Jacob's vow in 28:20-22. God's protection has indeed been with him, and he is about to return safely to his father's house.

Beth-el, meaning "the house of God," was the name that Jacob had given to it before. Now he calls it *El-Beth-el*, which means "*God of the house of God.*" This reveals spiritual growth in Jacob's life.²³

Genesis 35:8

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

[**Rebekah's nurse died**] Nothing has been said of Rebekah since Genesis 27:46, when Jacob left home. Her death isn't recorded. Either Deborah joined Jacob when he came to Canaan, or he simply attended her funeral. She had been the nurse of Jacob and Esau in childhood. Ramban says that Jacob brought her with him to support her in her old age out of respect to his mother, got it was the custom among the notables to have many nurses.

[**Allown Bakuwth**] (H439) *al-lone' baw-kooth'*; from Hebrew 437 ('allown) and a variation of Hebrew 1068 (b^ekiyth); *oak of weeping*; *Allon-Bakuth*, a monumental tree :- Allon-bachuth.

Deborah = Bee

²³McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:143). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died—She was sent with Rebekah when taken by Abraham’s servant to be wife to Isaac, Genesis 24:59. How she came to be in Jacob’s family, expositors are greatly puzzled to find out; but the text does not state that she was in Jacob’s family. Her death is mentioned merely because Jacob and his family had now arrived at the place where she was buried, and the name of that place was called Allonbachuth, “the oak of weeping,” as it is likely her death had been greatly regretted, and a general and extraordinary mourning had taken place on the occasion. Of Rebekah’s death we know nothing. After her counsel to her son, Genesis 27:5-17, 42-46, we hear no more of her history from the sacred writings, except of her burial in Genesis 49:31. Her name is written in the dust. And is not this designed as a mark of the disapprobation of God? It seems strange that such an inconsiderable person as a nurse should be mentioned, when even the person she brought up is passed by unnoticed!²⁴

Nothing else is known about this Deborah. The story of her death serves as an etymology for the name of what must have been a well-known land-mark. A different story suggests that a tree in the same region is named after the more famous Deborah, a heroine of the book of Judges (Judg. 4:4-5). A Midrash, ingeniously connecting oak (Heb. “’alon”) with a form of the Greek word for “other” (“alon”), reports that while still mourning Rebekah’s nurse, Jacob received the news of another death, that of Rebekah herself (Gen Rab. 81:5) – an event strangely unreported in the Torah. Another midrash gives a reason: Her funeral was held at night so that “everybody would not say; Cursed be the breasts that suckled a person like this [i.e., her wicked son Esau]” (Tanh., ki-tetze 4).²⁵

Barnes: Jacob returns to Bethel. “And God said unto Jacob.” He receives the direction from God. He had now been six years lingering in Sukkoth and Shekem. There may have been some contact between him and his father’s house during this interval. The presence of Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, in his family, is a plain intimation of this. But Jacob seems to have turned aside to Shekem, either to visit the spot where Abraham first erected an altar to the Lord, or to seek pasture for his numerous flocks. “Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there.” In his perplexity and terror the Lord comes to his aid. He reminds him of his former appearance to him at that place, and directs him to erect an altar there. This was Abraham’s second resting-place in the land. He who had there appeared to Jacob as the Yahweh, the God of Abraham and Isaac, is now described as (house of El), the Mighty One, probably in allusion to Bethel (house of El), which contains this name, and was at that time applied by Jacob himself to the place. “His house;” his wives and children. “All that were with him;” his men-servants and maid-servants.

The strange gods, belonging to the stranger or the strange land. These include the teraphim, which Rachel had secreted, and the rings which were worn as amulets or charms. Be clean; cleanse the body, in token of the cleaning of your souls. Change your garments; put on your best attire, befitting the holy occasion. The God, in ontradistinction to the strange gods already mentioned. Hid them; buried them. “The oak which was by Shekem.” This may have been the oak of Moreh, under which Abraham pitched his tent

²⁴ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

²⁵ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

Gen. 12:6. The terror of God; a dread awakened in their breast by some indication of the divine presence being with Jacob. The patriarch seems to have retained possession of the land he had purchased and gained by conquest, in this place. His flocks are found there very shortly after this time Gen. 37:12, he alludes to it, and disposes of it in his interview with Joseph and his sons Gen. 48:22, and his well is there to this day.

“Luz, which is in the land of Kenaan.” This seems at first sight to intimate that there was a Luz elsewhere, and to have been added by the revising prophet to determine the place here intended. Luz means an almond tree, and may have designated many a place. But the reader of Genesis could have needed no such intimation, as Jacob is clearly in the land of Kenaan, going from Shekem to Hebron. It seems rather to call attention again Gen. 33:18 to the fact that Jacob has returned from Padan-aram to the land of promise. The name Luz still recurs, as the almond tree may still be flourishing. “And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el.” Thus has Jacob obeyed the command of God, and begun the payment of the vow he made twenty-six years before at this place Gen. 38:20-22. “There God revealed himself unto him.” The verb here נִגְלוּ *nîglû* is plural in the Masoretic Hebrew, and so it was in the copy of Onkelos. The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint have the singular. The reading is therefore, various. The original was probably singular, and may have been so even with its present letters. If not, this is one of the few instances in which Elohim is construed grammatically with a plural verb. Deborah dies in the family in which she began life. She is buried under “the well-known oak” at Bethel. Jacob drops a natural tear of sorrow over the grave of this faithful servant, and hence, the oak is called the oak of weeping. It is probable that Rebekah was already dead, since otherwise we should not expect to find Deborah transferred to Jacob’s household. She may not have lived to see her favorite son on his return.²⁶

McGee: Since Deborah was with Jacob at this time, we assume that Rebekah had already died, and Scripture does not tell us when her death took place. Poor Jacob never saw his mother again. That part is not as tragic as the fact that she never saw him again—she had just sent him away for a little while, you know. The nurse apparently had brought a message of Rebekah’s death and had come to stay with Jacob—and now she dies.²⁷

Torah Class: Suddenly we get this interesting little aside in the Scriptures. You’ll recall that when Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, brought Riva (Rebecca) back from Mesopotamia as a wife for Isaac, that her nurse, or nanny, accompanied her back to Canaan. Well, now the much beloved nurse Deborah dies, and there is much grieving in the camp. But, why does the Torah even mention Deborah, a seemingly minor role player in the grand scope of things; after all, the deaths of the matriarchs Rivka and Leah.....prominent female figures in the creation and formation of Israel.....are not even recorded. While the explanation is not universally accepted among Jewish scholars, it is generally thought that Deborah represents a link between Israel and Mesopotamia ...a link that God is in the process of dissolving. We have examined in an earlier lesson that for Abraham and Isaac, and up to this point Jacob, Mesopotamia was, as far as they were

²⁶ Barnes’ Notes on the Old Testament

²⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:143). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

concerned, more their homeland than Canaan. But, Canaan was the land God set apart and promised to Abraham and his descendants, and so God wanted to erase any notion of ties between Israel and a “foreign” land...Mesopotamia. So, the death of Deborah is almost a metaphor for the death of any family ties or relationship between Israel and the land of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.²⁸

Genesis 35:9

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

[God appeared unto Jacob again] Sixth of seven times (Genesis 28:13-15; Genesis 31:11-13; Genesis 32:1-2,24-32; Genesis 35:1-5,9-13; Genesis 46:2-4).

God appeared unto Jacob again—He appeared to him first at Shechem, when he commanded him to go to Bethel, and now that he is arrived at the place, God appears to him the second time, and confirms to him the Abrahamic blessing. To Isaac and Jacob these frequent appearances of God were necessary, but they were not so to Abraham; for to him one word was sufficient—Abraham believed God.

Genesis 35:10

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.

Interestingly Jacob’s wives’ idols were also buried under an oak, back in Shechem (v. 4). At Bethel God confirmed the promise He had made there earlier. Jacob’s name-change to Israel was proof of the promised blessing.

God reminded Jacob of his new name, Israel, which meant “he struggles with God.” Although Jacob’s life was littered with difficulties and trials, his new name was a tribute to his desire to stay close to God despite life’s disappointments.

Many people believe that Christianity should offer a problem-free life. Consequently, as life gets tough, they draw back disappointed. Instead, they should determine to prevail with God through life’s storm. Problems and difficulties are painful but inevitable; you might as well see them as opportunities for growth. You can’t prevail with God unless you have troubles to prevail over.²⁹

Genesis 35:11

²⁸ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

²⁹ Life Application Notes

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;

[**God Almighty**] Hebrew: 'El (HSN-410) Shaddai (HSN-7706), the All-Bountiful or All-Sufficient One, a title in accord with this promise of a unified nation or a company of nations, referring to the unity of the distinct tribes of Israel.

Dake: The Company of Nations

This prophecy was to be fulfilled through the loins of Jacob, though he was not the father of all the nations coming from Abraham in fulfillment of Genesis 17:4-6. This company of nations refers to the thirteen tribes of Israel.

The word nation simply means a tribe. The Hebrew word is *goy* which is translated nation(s) 374 times, Gentiles 30 times, heathen 143 times, and people 11 times. Here it literally means "a people, and a company of people." The word for "company" is *qahal* (HSN-6951), assembly, company, congregation, or multitude. The Peshitta reads, "Be fruitful and multiply; a people and a multitude of peoples shall come from you." The passage doesn't mean that the Gentiles, heathen, or other nations were to come from Jacob, for this would contradict the Biblical origin of those nations as recorded in Genesis 10.

This much is certain—the passage doesn't refer to Anglo-Saxons, who are sometimes erroneously called "the ten lost tribes of the house of Israel." The ten tribes were never lost (except in sin, as is the case with the other three tribes and the Gentiles). They never lost their identity as descendants of Jacob. The Jews scattered abroad among the nations have always been the thirteen tribes of Israel. They were dispersed just as God predicted regarding all of them, not just a part. Prophecies of the dispersion were spoken to all the tribes and could not be fulfilled in Judah only. Note the following passages in the Pentateuch, spoken to all Israel:

1. I will scatter you among the heathen ... your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste ... ye shall perish among the heathen (Leviticus 26:32-45).
2. The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations (Numbers 23:9).
3. When you have remained long in the land and corrupted yourselves ... the Lord shall scatter you among the nations and you shall be left few in number (Deut. 4:25-31).
4. The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies ... thou shalt be removed into all kingdoms of the earth ... thou shalt become a proverb and a byword among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee ... and the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other ... among these nations thou shalt find no ease ... but trembling of heart ... thy life shall hang in doubt before thee (Deut. 28:25,37,64-66).
5. When all these things are come upon thee ... thou shalt call them to mind among all nations whither the Lord hath driven thee ... shalt return to the Lord and obey His voice, ... then the Lord will turn thy captivity ... and will return and gather thee from all nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee ... and bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it (Deut. 30:1-5).

No Anglo-Saxon nation ever has or ever will fulfill these scriptures; but the Jews scattered throughout the world have fulfilled the sin and curse part of these prophecies, and are now fulfilling the regathering part.³⁰

Torah Class: God appears, once again, to Jacob. Part of what is communicated by God is His reassurance and reiteration of stuff that Jacob has already been told; for instance, that his new name...and therefore new nature..... is Israel. Like all of us, Jacob needed God to constantly remind him of the truth....especially if it brought with it a new reality..... and of His commands, and of His direction for us. Yet, there is another reason for God to repeat this command for a name change: Jacob had His name changed to Israel.....**by divine oracle**.....on the OTHER side of the Jordan River, OUTSIDE of the promised land. Now that Jacob is INSIDE the Promised Land, it needs to be reaffirmed. Why? Because in Jacob's mind.....just like in the minds of all the peoples of the world in that era.....gods were numerous, and they were territorial. When Jacob's name was first changed to Israel, he was still in the province of the Mesopotamian gods, and therefore under their sphere of influence. Now that Jacob is in Canaan, he is in the province of El Shaddai, Yehoveh, the god whose territory is Canaan, and so he needs El Shaddai to affirm that what he was told before still stands. Did Jacob believe there were other gods? Yes. That Jacob mistakenly thought this is true we, of course, know his thinking was false. Yet, God showed grace and mercy and played along, and didn't insist that all at once, Jacob was to understand all the truths about God.....that He is one, that He is the God of everything, that there are no such things as other gods. Don't think for a minute that God doesn't play along with each of us on many matters that may prove, in the course of time, to be error. For reasons I can't fathom, He allowed the Church to go unchallenged for centuries in our belief that we had replaced Israel.....something that was manmade doctrine and the Holy Scripture completely refutes. Somehow, He used that blind spot in the Church for good, to spread the Gospel to the gentiles of the world. But, over the last 50 years, He has begun to correct us, showing us that He NEVER replaced Israel with us, nor did He ever decide He was finished with His people. That time when the Church will make the Jewish people jealous for our faith.....and the stony hearts of His people will be softened so that they can accept their own Messiah..... is upon us.

Now, there is another part of this conversation from God that on the surface seems redundant, but a little closer look throws a little different light on the matter. And, this is important stuff so I want to take one of those little detours I told you at the outset of this week's lesson that we would go on.

One of the best descriptions I've heard of the way that God operates through the Bible, is that He **progressively** reveals truths to us using the Word, Holy Scripture, in concert with the Holy Spirit. That somehow, somehow, men go along for decades and centuries utterly blind to a great Scriptural truth, and then suddenly they...hopefully WE... see it. That Yehoveh reveals progressively really shouldn't be so tough to accept. If you pick up ANY piece of literature, a novel, an essay, whatever, about which you have no prior knowledge, and begin to read it, page after page you get more information as the characters are developed, the plot is unfolded, details are added, and then the conclusion is arrived at. This is an example of the simplest sense of progressive revelation.

³⁰ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

In the case of scripture, so much of what is told in the Word is prophetic. Most often, the prophecy is BOTH literal AND symbolic, and it was happening then, and would happen again. The difficulty for us in dealing with prophecy comes in that the literal truth about what is going to happen in the future is told by scripture within the context of the ancient culture and language of the people and time in which it was written. So, although we can look forward in space and time by studying Bible prophecy, and fairly clearly see the major prophetic milestones, the details can be pretty shadowy. Yet, as the time for a particular prophecy to be fulfilled draws closer, the final pieces of the puzzle start to fall into place and the formerly shadowy details start to come into focus.

As an example: we learn in Genesis 1 that the seed of the woman will strike, or bruise, the head of the serpent. I got news for you: Adam and Eve were nearly clueless as to what that meant, let alone how it would happen. And, if we read no further, we too would be in the dark. But, progressively, page-by-page, through scripture we learn more details about how it will all happen. From Adam to Seth, details are added. From Seth to Noah, more details are added. From Noah to Shem, then to Abraham, then to Isaac, then to Jacob, and now to the birth of the tribes of Israel, the puzzle pieces keep appearing, new information gets added, and the picture starts getting clearer. We're at a point, right now in our study, in which the exact tribe Judah has now been created from which that "seed of the woman" will come, who will defeat Satan and restore Man's relationship with God. However, Jacob didn't know that. We only know that Jacob's son Judah is going to be that special tribe because we have the benefit of hindsight; of studying the recorded history of prophecy as it is being revealed to us at a breathtaking rate in modern times. We know every important detail, the order it happened, generally *how* it happened, and what it all meant: Yeshua, our Savior, paid for our sins and conquered death. The seed of women struck the head of the serpent and defeated him at the Cross.

Most of the prophecies of the Bible have already been fulfilled. Yet, there are a few that have yet to happen. As each prophecy is fulfilled, and we can see how it happened, we get a better picture of how the unfulfilled prophecies might happen. For instance, in many of our lifetimes, we have seen Israel re-born as a nation, and Jerusalem taken back from the gentiles. This information, and the way it all happened, now gives us insight into the next round of prophecies to be fulfilled.....information that the generations just before us didn't have. Yet, we still don't have all the details.

Add to this that the Holy Spirit, which is our true teacher and revealer of God's mysteries, supernaturally quickens men's minds and spirits at the proper moment in history, in order that we might see and understand things in the scripture that for some reason mankind had been blind to. In our time, this recent understanding of a spiritual connection between the Church and the Jewish people, and the more recent yearning by many Believers to knock down the wall of partition between Christian and Jew, and this VERY recent love of Israel that we find exploding within the gentile Church is a fine example of this mysterious progressive revelation at work.

So, as we go through the OT, don't be surprised that we will see some things differently than scholars a mere 50 years ago.....in some cases even 15 or 20 years ago..... COULD NOT see, because the details were just too shadowy, but now some are clearer. And, what I'm about to show you is a case in point.

God says to Jacob in V11, "A nation, indeed a company of nations, will come from you". A better translation is "A nation AND a company of nations will come from you".

In other words, God is *not* saying “ A nation (singular).....oh, check that.....make that a whole bunch of nations...” rather He is saying there will be a particular nation, and in addition a group of nations, that will come from Jacob. See the difference?

Well, it gets more complex. We saw that in Genesis 28:3, God promised to Jacob a company of nations. But, when we looked up the Hebrew, the words “kahal ammin” were used for company of nations AS OPPOSED to what Abraham was told when God said Abraham would be a father of a nation, and later the father of many nations. The word used for nation in that instance with Abraham was “goy”. God told Abraham you will be the father of “goy”, a nation at large, an unspecific nation. On the other hand, God told Jacob that he would produce a “kahal ammin” “a convocation of fellow countrymen”. Abraham would produce a variety of nations and peoples; Jacob would produce a certain kind of homogenous and holy people, united in purpose..... this would be the congregation of Israel. Quite a difference.

Well, some time has now passed since Gen 28. Here in Chapter 35, V11, things once again have evolved. God now tells Jacob basically the same thing He told Abraham, employing the Hebrew word “goy” in V11, meaning nations at large. But, there is an important different from what was said to Abraham, God says that Jacob will produce a “holy convocation of goy”.

Let me review with you, that by Jacob’s day, God had divided the world into two kinds of people: Hebrews, and everybody else. Goy is the name for everybody else.

So, allow me to paraphrase that part of V11 that I’m talking about, because I think this is the meaning: “ Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, and in addition a holy convocation of BOTH Hebrew AND NON-Hebrew nations will come from you”. That may sound confusing and even like double-talk until we realize this: ALL of these conditions promised to Jacob would eventually prove to be true.

See, technically, Jacob was the first person to produce only Hebrew children: the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob’s father, Isaac, produced Hebrews (Jacob) and non-Hebrews (Esau). Isaac’s father, Abraham, also produced both Hebrews (Isaac) and non-Hebrews (Ishmael and several others). Later, in an event that we’ll cover towards the end of Genesis, Jacob adopts his son Joseph’s two Egyptian children away from him, with one of them, Ephraim, taking over the authority that would have been Joseph’s. Even later, hundreds of years after that event, Ephraim, an Israelite tribe that had Egyptian blood mixed in, would be scattered by the conquering Assyrians, and the genes of the bulk of their population would become fused with the gentile world. Then, in a prophetic event that has yet to occur, as recounted in Ezekiel, Ephraim will somehow be reunited with the remnants of the tribe of Judah, the modern-day Jews.

Why am I spending so much time with this prophecy of Genesis 35:11? Because it’s manifestation has begun. You see, this prophecy also connects seamlessly with the prophecy of Ezekiel 37 that explains that in the end-times Ephraim and Judah are going to supernaturally be brought back together.

Now, with Gen 35:11 in mind, listen as I read to you Ezekiel 37, beginning with verse15. What I want you to listen for is this: first God is going to state that He IS going to somehow bring this lost and scattered and absorbed Hebrew people group home (a large portion of which became non-Hebrew) and rejoin it with the group that has steadfastly retained it’s Hebrew identity, Judah, the Jews. Then, I want you to listen to just how God is going to do it. Then think about the “holy convocation” that would

eventually come from Jacob, and watch as that holy convocation is miraculously brought to fruition.

READ EZEKIEL 37:12-end

God has brought the holy convocation to its fullest. He is dwelling with His holy convocation. A member of the house of David will be eternally Israel's.....OUR...king. Who is that King? Jesus! All of the holy convocation will have one shepherd. Who is our shepherd? Yeshua, of the house of David.

How is this going to happen? It's still too shadowy to know entirely. But, I can tell you with absolute certainty that the process of bringing Ephraim back together with Judah is currently underway. Just this year, the government of Israel has recognized that the 10 lost tribes that make up Ephraim weren't so lost after all, and that they still exist, and that they have retained a memory of their Hebrew heritage for over 2500 years. These people are now being allowed to migrate to Israel.....not as Jews, but as Israelites, as Ephraim. And, the first hint of this event is what we have just read, in Genesis 35 V11. This is decidedly NOT a repeat and reiteration of what God told Abraham, and then Isaac. This is progressive revelation at work.

I know this is new, and probably a little confusing, to many of you. Part of that is because in biblical scholarly writings published before about 1990, you won't find much, if anything, that discusses Ephraim. Therefore, you certainly haven't heard sermons about it in the mainstream denominations. Yet, Ephraim is made so very central in the prophetic scriptures of Isaiah and Ezekiel concerning the latter days. How have our Christian and Jewish scholars overlooked this, when the role of Ephraim.....even if not fully Defined..... has become so important and apparent today? Because it wasn't yet time, and because it took several other events to lead us to even see the importance of Ephraim in scripture. So, those of us who HAVE caught the vision need to be thankful that God has blessed us with it..... and to be patient with the 99% of the Church who knows nothing of it. It wasn't that long ago we were in that same boat.³¹

Genesis 35:12

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.

[the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac] See Genesis 12:7; Genesis 13:14-17; Genesis 15:18-21; Genesis 17:8; Genesis 24:7; Genesis 26:3; Genesis 28:4,15; Genesis 31:3; Genesis 32:9; Genesis 35:12; Genesis 48:4.

Genesis 35:13

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

³¹ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

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). 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. 35:6-7, 14-15; 28:16-19). And both times God promised Jacob many descendants in the land (28:13-14; 35:11-12). But here He added that *kings would be included in Jacob's offspring*.³²

[God went up from him] This may show a bodily presence. See Genesis 17:22.

And God went up from him—This was not a vision, nor a strong mental impression, but a real manifestation of God. Jacob saw and heard him speak, and before his eyes he went up—ascended to heaven. This was no doubt the future Savior, the Angel of the covenant.

These verses are characterized by the vocabulary of P. Vv. 9-10 are the Priestly version of the change of Jacob's name that J reports in 32:28-29.³³

Genesis 35:14

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.

[set up a pillar] Jacob renewed the memorial of his faith, as God renewed His promise. See Genesis 28:11-22.

[drink offering] First occurrence of "drink offering," which later became a part of the law (Leviticus 23).

[A drink-offering] *nesech* a libation. These were afterwards very common in all countries. At first they consisted probably of water only, afterwards wine was used; see on Leviticus 7:1 (note), etc. The pillar which Jacob set up was to commemorate the appearance of God to him; the drink-offering and the oil were intended to express his gratitude and devotion to his preserver. It was probably the same pillar which he had set up before, which had since been thrown down, and which he had consecrated afresh to God.³⁴

anointed pillar. Just as Jacob had set up a stone at Bethel and anointed it in Genesis 28:18, so now another is set up and a libation (liquid offering) performed to commemorate the theophany (God's appearance). It would not be unusual to have several standing stones erected in the same vicinity.

³² Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

³³ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

³⁴ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

Genesis 35:15

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

[Beth-el] Hebrew: for house of God, called Luz (Genesis 28:19; Joshua 18:13), a town twelve miles north of Jerusalem. It became a religious center (1 Samuel 7:16; 1 Samuel 10:3; 1 Kings 12:29-33; 1 Kings 13:1-32; 2 Kings 2:2-23; 2 Kings 10:29; 2 Kings 17:28; Amos 3:14).

Barnes: God appears to Jacob again at Bethel, and renews the promise made to him there Gen. 28:13-14. Again. The writer here refers to the former meeting of God with Jacob at Bethel, and thereby proves himself cognizant of the fact, and of the record already made of it. "When he went out of Padan-aram." This corroborates the explanation of the clause, Gen. 35:6, "which is in the land of Kenaan." Bethel was the last point in this land that was noticed in his flight from Esau. His arrival at the same point indicates that he has now returned from Padan-aram to the land of Kenaan. "He called his name Israel." At Bethel he renews the change of name, to indicate that the meetings here were of equal moment in Jacob's spiritual life with that at Peniel. It implies also that this life had been declining in the interval between Peniel and Bethel, and had now been revived by the call of God to go to Bethel, and by the interview.

The renewal of the naming aptly expresses this renewal of spiritual life. "I am God Almighty." So he proclaimed himself before to Abraham Gen. 17:1. "Be fruitful, and multiply." Abraham and Isaac had each only one son of promise. But now the time of increase is come. Jacob has been blessed with eleven sons, and at least one daughter. And now he receives the long-promised blessing, "be fruitful and multiply." From this time forth the multiplication of Israel is rapid. In twenty-six years after this time he goes down into Egypt with seventy souls, besides the wives of his married descendants, and two hundred and ten years after that Israel goes out of Egypt numbering about one million eight hundred thousand. "A nation and a congregation of nations," such as were then known in the world, had at the last date come of him, and "kings" were to follow in due time. The land, as well as the seed, is again promised.

Jacob now, according to his wont, perpetuates the scene of divine manifestation with a monumental stone. "God went up;" as he went up from Abraham Gen. 17:22 after a similar conference with him. He had now spoken to Jacob face to face, as he communed with Abraham. "A pillar" in the place where he talked with him, a consecrated monument of this second interview, not in a dream as before, but in a waking vision. On this he pours a drink-offering of wine, and then anoints it with oil. Here, for the first time, we meet with the libation. It is possible there was such an offering when Melkizedec brought forth bread and wine, though it is not recorded. The drink-offering is the complement of the meat-offering, and both are accompaniments of the sacrifice which is offered on the altar. They are in themselves expressive of gratitude and devotion. Wine and oil are used to denote the quickening and sanctifying power of the Spirit of God. "Bethel." We are now familiar with the repetition of the naming of persons and places. This place was already called Bethel by Jacob himself; it is most likely that Abraham applied this name

to it: and for aught we know, some servant of the true God, under the Noachic covenant, may have originated the name.³⁵

Genesis 35:16

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

There was but a little way to come to Ephrath The word *kebrath*, translated here a little way, has greatly perplexed commentators. It occurs only here, in Genesis 48:7, and 2 Kings 5:19; and it seems to have been some sort of measure applied to land, as we say a mile, an acre, a rood, a perch; but what the exact quantity of the *kibrath* was cannot be ascertained. Ephrath, called also Bethlehem, and Bethlehem Ephrata, was the birthplace of our blessed Redeemer.³⁶

Genesis 35:17

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.

[**midwife**] First occurrence of midwife (Genesis 35:17; Genesis 38:28; Exodus 1:15-21).

midwifing Midwives, who were generally older women, served as resources to teach young women about sexual activity and to aid in the birth of children. They were also a part of the naming ritual and may have helped teach new mothers about nursing and child care.

Genesis 35:18

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.

Missler: Benoni = 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 out of the land in Paddan Aram, 29:31-30:24.)³⁷

[**soul was in departing**] The soul leaves the body at death (James 2:26). Souls of the righteous go to heaven (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-24; Hebrews 12:23; Rev. 6:9) and those of the wicked go to hell (Luke 16:19-31; Isaiah 14:9; Rev. 20:11-15). The body returns to dust (Genesis 3:19) until the resurrection (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29). There is an immortal spirit in man, which can exist separate from and independent of the body.

³⁵ Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament

³⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

³⁷ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

In the going away of her soul; her body did not go away, therefore her soul and body must have been distinct. If her breath only had been intended, *neshamah* or *ruach* would have rather been used, as the first means breath, the latter breath or spirit indifferently.

According to 1 Sam. 10:2, the tomb of Rachel was in the territory of Benjamin, as benefits this account of her death, and not near Bethlehem, which is in Judah. Similarly, in Jer. 31:15, Rachel is depicted as weeping for her children in Ramah, a Benjaminite city (Josh. 18:21-28). Ephrathah / Bethlehem and Judah, however, attained high status because of their later association with David (e.g., Ruth 4:11-12, 18-22), and this may have contributed to the identification of Rachel's tomb with the site mentioned in this verse.³⁸

McGee: What a wonderful thing this is—not the death of Rachel, but the way this took place. She says, “Call him ‘son of my sorrow,’” but Jacob looked down at him and said, “I’ve lost my lovely Rachel, and this little fellow looks like her, so I’ll just call him Benjamin, ‘son of my right hand.’” Jacob was partial to the sons of Rachel.

Jacob's love for Rachel was perhaps the only fine thing in his life during those years in Padan-aram when there was so much evidence of the flesh and of self-seeking. He loved Rachel—there is no question about that. He was totally devoted to her. He was willing to do almost anything for her, such as permitting her to keep the images she had taken from her father. I don't think that Leah would have gotten by with it—or anyone else for that matter. But he was indulgent with Rachel. She had given Jacob his son Joseph, and now she gives birth to Benjamin. And it was at the birth of her second son that she died. His life meant her death. It was a great heartbreak to Jacob.

The other ten boys were no joy to him at all. God reminded him, I think, every day for twenty-four hours of the day that it was sinful to have more than one wife. He didn't need all of them. However, God will overrule, of course. (And He overrules in your life and mine. We can thank Him for that!) But the facts reveal that God did not approve of this plural marriage. This is especially obvious in the treatment which Joseph received from his half brothers.

Jacob loved Joseph and Benjamin and, very frankly, the other boys were jealous of that. He should not have shown such partiality to Joseph because he had experienced the results of partiality in his own home—he had been the one whom his father had more or less pushed aside. He knew the trouble it had caused. Although I don't try to defend Jacob, we can sympathize with him. He had lost his lovely Rachel, but he had Benjamin. While it was true that the boy was the son of Rachel's sorrow, Jacob could not call him Benoni. He was not the son of *his* sorrow; he was the son of his right hand, his walking stick, his staff, the one he would lean on in his old age. It is important to recognize this because it will help us understand the great sorrow Jacob will go through later on. All of it will have its roots in Jacob's sin. God does not approve of the wrong in our lives, my friend. We think we can get by with it, but we will not get by with it—any more than Jacob got by with it.³⁹

³⁸ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

³⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:144). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Genesis 35:19

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

[**Beth-lehem**] Hebrew: house of bread, where Christ was born (Micah 5:1-2; Matthew 2:1-18).

Genesis 35:20

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

[**pillar upon her grave**] First record of a tomb marker or stone. Both Jews and Arabs still honor her grave. It is now marked by a small building with a white dome, one mile from Bethlehem and three miles from Jerusalem.⁴⁰

Jacob set a pillar upon her grave—Was not this the origin of funeral monuments? In ancient times, and among rude nations, a heap of stones designated the burial place of the chief; many of these still remain in different countries. Afterwards a rude stone, with a simple inscription, was used, containing only the name of the deceased, and that of his father. But where arts and sciences flourished, superb monuments were erected highly decorated, and pompously inscribed. It is very likely from the circumstances of Jacob that a single stone constituted the pillar in this case, on which, if writing did then exist, the name, or rather some hieroglyphical device, was probably inscribed. That which is now called Rachel's pillar is allowed, by those who have examined it, to be a comparatively modern structure.⁴¹

Rachel's tomb. Rachel's death in childbirth is placed on the way to Ephrath, north of Bethlehem, on the border of the later tribal territories of Judah and Benjamin (see 1 Samuel 10:2), some twelve miles north of Bethlehem. Another example of raising a memorial pillar for the dead is found in 2 Samuel 18:18. The late mention of Rachel's tomb in Jeremiah 31 suggests that it was a well-known pilgrimage site down to the end of the monarchy period. More recent traditions demonstrate some confusion between a site for Rachel's tomb in Bethlehem and another north of Jerusalem.

Genesis 35:21

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

⁴⁰ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁴¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

Tower of Eder—Literally, the tower of the flock, and so translated Micah 4:8. It is supposed that this tower was about a mile from Bethlehem, and to have been the place where the angels appeared to the shepherds. The Targum of Jonathan expressly says: “It is the place in which the King Messiah shall be manifested in the end of days.” By the tower of the flock we may understand a place built by the shepherds near to some well, for the convenience of watering their flocks, and keeping watch over them by night.

Migdal Eder. The name of this place means “herding tower,” a installation used by pastoralists to protect their animals from predators. Based on Jacob’s itinerary, journeying south after burying Rachel, Migdal Eder would be near Jerusalem. This identification may be strengthened by mention in Micah 4:8 of “watchtower of the flock.” Later traditions, however, place it closer to Bethlehem.

Genesis 35:22

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 prematurely by this pagan procedure. But in so doing, he *lost* his inheritance (his birthright; cf. 49:3-4; 1 Chr 5:1-2).

(Genesis 49:3-4 ³Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: ⁴Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father’s bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.

(1 Chronicles 5:1-2) ¹Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. ²For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph’s:)

[went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine] For this sin he was deprived of his birthright (Genesis 49:3-4; cp. 1 Cor. 5).

[twelve] First mention of twelve sons of Jacob (Genesis 29:31-30:25; Genesis 35:18; Genesis 49:1-29).

Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine—Jonathan, in his Targum, says that Reuben only overthrew the bed of Bilhah, which was set up opposite to the bed of his mother Leah, and that this was reputed to him as if he had lain with her. The

colouring given to the passage by the Targumist is, that Reuben was incensed, because he found Bilhah preferred after the death of Rachel to his own mother Leah; and therefore in his anger he overthrew her couch. The same sentiment is repeated by Jonathan, and glanced at by the Jerusalem Targum, Genesis 49:4. Could this view of the subject be proved to be correct, both piety and candour would rejoice.⁴²

And Israel heard it—Not one word is added farther in the Hebrew text; but a break is left in the verse, opposite to which there is a Masoretic note, which simply states that there is a hiatus in the verse. This hiatus the Septuagint has thus supplied, “and it appeared evil in his sight”.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve—Called afterwards the twelve patriarchs, because they became heads or chiefs of numerous families or tribes, Acts 7:8; and the people that descended from them are called the twelve tribes, Acts 26:7; James 1:1. Twelve princes came from Ishmael, Genesis 25:16, who were heads of families and tribes. And in reference to the twelve patriarchs, our Lord chose twelve apostles. Strictly speaking, there were thirteen tribes among the Hebrews, as Ephraim and Manasses were counted for tribes, Genesis 48:5, 6; but the Scripture in naming them, says Mr. Ainsworth, usually sets down but twelve, omitting the name now of one, then of another, as may in sundry places be observed, Deuteronomy 33; Ezekiel 48; Revelation 12, etc.⁴³

son with father’s concubine. Concubines are women without dowry who include among their duties providing children to the family. Childbearing was an important function in the ancient world, where survival of the family, and often survival at all, was tenuous at best. Since a concubine has been a sexual partner, a son who used his father’s concubine was seen not only as incestuous but as attempting to usurp the authority of the family patriarch.⁴⁴

Reuben’s sin was costly, although not right away. As the oldest son, he stood to receive a double portion of the family inheritance and a place of leadership among his people. Reuben may have thought he got away with his sin. No more is mentioned of it until Jacob, on his deathbed, assembled his family for the final blessing. Suddenly Jacob took away Reuben’s double portion and gave it to someone else. The reason? “You went up onto your father’s bed, onto my couch and defiled it” (Genesis 49:4).

Sin’s consequences can plague us long after the sin is committed. When we do something wrong, we may think we can escape unnoticed, only to discover later that the sin has been quietly breeding serious consequences.⁴⁵

The details are missing, and the text breaks off abruptly mid-verse (49:4 seems to allude to the same episode), suggesting that some material has been lost, or that there is more to say about this episode. A son’s having intercourse with his father’s concubine was a declaration of rebellion (2 Sam. 16:20-22; 1 Kings 2:13-25). Eager to protect the good

⁴² Aam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴³ Aam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴⁴ Bible Background Commentary

⁴⁵ Life Application Notes

names of all involved, a Midrash denies that the report of Rueben's sin is to be taken literally (e.g., b. Shab. 53b).⁴⁶

Barnes: On the journey, Rachel dies at the birth of her second son. "A stretch." It was probably a few furlongs. "Fear not." The cause for encouragement was that the child was born, and that it was a son. Rachel's desire and hope expressed at the birth of Joseph were therefore, fulfilled Gen. 30:24. "When her soul was departing." This phrase expresses not annihilation, but merely change of place. It presupposes the perpetual existence of the soul. "Ben-oni," son of my pain, is the natural expression of the departing Rachel. "Benjamin." The right hand is the seat of power. The son of the right hand is therefore, the child of power. He gave power to his father, as he was his twelfth son, and so completed the number of the holy family. "Ephrath and Beth-lehem" are names the origin of which is not recorded. "The pillar of Rachel's grave." Jacob loves the monumental stone. "Unto this day." This might have been written ten or twenty years after the event, and therefore, before Jacob left Kenaan (see on Gen. 19:37). The grave of Rachel was well known in the time of Samuel 1 Sam. 10:2, and the Kubbet Rahil, dome or tomb of Rachel, stands perhaps on the identical spot, about an English mile north of Bethlehem.⁴⁷

Genesis 35:23

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

The sons of Leah—The children are arranged under their respective mothers, and not in order of their birth.

Genesis 35:24

The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin:

Genesis 35:25

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

Genesis 35:26

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

⁴⁶ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁴⁷ Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament

[**sons of Jacob**] Except Benjamin (Genesis 35:18-19).

It is well known that Padan-aram is the same as Mesopotamia, and hence the Septuagint translate, Mesopotamia of Syria. The word signifies between the two rivers, from “the midst”, and, “a river”. It is situated between the Euphrates and Tigris, having Assyria on the east, Arabia Deserta, with Babylonia, on the south, Syria on the west, and Armenia on the north. It is now the province of Diarbek, in Asiatic Turkey, and is sometimes called Maverannahar, the country beyond the river; and Aram Naharaim, Aram or Syria of the two rivers.⁴⁸

Genesis 35:27

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

[**Jacob came unto Isaac**] Jacob evidently saw Isaac many times during the years after coming back from Haran, but here he returned at the time of his death (Genesis 35:27-29).⁴⁹

The city of Arbah, (which is Hebron)—See Genesis 23:2. It has been conjectured that Jacob must have paid a visit to his father before this time, as previously to this he had been some years in Canaan; but now, as he was approaching to his end, Jacob is supposed to have gone to live with and comfort him in his declining days.

Genesis 35:28

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

[**days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years**] Isaac lived five years more than Abraham (Genesis 35:28; Genesis 25:7), forty-three more than Ishmael (Genesis 35:28; Genesis 25:17), and thirty-three more than Jacob. Esau's age at death is not given.

Abraham's life span of 175 years (25:7) and Isaac's of 180 suggest a pattern: $175 = 7 \times 5$ squared and $180 = 5 \times 6$ squared. Following that progression, Jacob should live 147 years ($= 3 \times 7$ squared), and so he does (47:28)!⁵⁰

Genesis 35:29

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.

⁴⁸ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴⁹ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁵⁰ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

[gave up the ghost] This is one of 11 times the phrase occurs in the Old Testament (Genesis 25:8,17; Genesis 35:29; Genesis 49:33; Job 3:11; Job 10:18; Job 11:20; Job 13:19; Job 14:10; Jeremiah 15:9; Lament. 1:19) and 8 times in the New Testament (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37-39; Luke 23:46; John 19:30; Acts 5:5,10; Acts 12:23). The Hebrew *gawa'* (HSN-1478), to breathe out, expire, and die, is used in the above Old Testament scriptures except in Job 11:20 and Jeremiah 15:9 where *nephesh* (HSN-5315), "soul," is used. The Greek word for ghost in Matthew 27:50 and John 19:30 is *pneuma* (GSN-4151), "spirit." In the other passages the words are *ekpneo* (GSN-1606) and *ekpsucho* (GSN-1634), "to expire." The English word "ghost" is from the Anglo-Saxon *gast*, "an inhabitant, or guest." The word "spirit" is now the restricted meaning and always refers to the immortal soul and spirit of man, the guest or indweller of the body. At physical death the inner man leaves the outer man and only the body is lifeless (James 2:26).

[old man] Five men called "old man"

1. Abraham (Genesis 25:8)
2. Jacob (Genesis 43:27; Genesis 44:20)
3. An unnamed man (Judges 19:16-22)
4. Eli (1 Samuel 4:18)
5. Zacharias (Luke 1:18)

[gathered to his people] An expression used only in the early ages and means gathered with the other departed spirits. It is used eleven times in the writings of Moses (Genesis 15:8,17; Genesis 35:29; Genesis 49:29,33; Numbers 20:24-26; Numbers 27:13; Numbers 31:2; Deut. 32:50) and once in Judges 2:10. It could not mean that all people referred to were buried together. All spirits went to Sheol-Hades before the resurrection of Christ, but were in two separate compartments.

[old and full of days] He was old forty-two years before (Genesis 27:2).

[sons Esau and Jacob buried him] Jacob and Esau were 120 years old when they buried Isaac (Genesis 25:26; Genesis 35:28). This was about 23 years after Jacob had come back from Haran and 10 years before going down into Egypt (Genesis 47:9). Here and in 1 Chron. 1:34 Esau is put before Jacob, but elsewhere Jacob is first (Joshua 24:4; Hebrews 11:20).

[buried him] They buried Isaac in the cave of Machpelah. In time, all of these were buried in this cave: Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebekah; Jacob and Leah (Genesis 49:29-33).

Esau and Jacob buried him—See Genesis 25:9. Esau, as we have seen Genesis 33, was thoroughly reconciled to his brother Jacob, and now they both join in fraternal and filial affection to do the last kind office to their amiable father. It is generally allowed that the death of Isaac is mentioned here out of its chronological order, as several of the transactions mentioned in the succeeding chapters, especially 37 and 38, must have happened during his life; but that the history of Joseph might not be disturbed, his death

is anticipated in this place. It is supposed that he lived at least twelve years after Joseph was sold into Egypt.⁵¹

Chumash; Classic Questions: “Did Isaac actually pass away at this point?”

Rashi: The torah is not in chronological order. The sale of Joseph actually preceded Isaac’s passing by 12 years:

- When Jacob was born Isaac was 60 years old (25:26).
- Isaac died in Jacob’s 120th year, [because] the verse states, Isaac was 60 years old [when she gave birth to them]” and if you subtract 60 from 180 [Isaac’s age at his death – you have 120 left.
- Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold, and Jacob was 108 years old. How is this so? [Jacob] was blessed by Isaac at the age of 63. For 14 years he hid in the academy of Aiver, until he was 77. He worked 14 years for a wife, at the end of which time Joseph was born – as the verse states: “Then, when Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away!” totaling 91. Add to this the 17 years until Joseph was sold and it totals 108.⁵²

Torah Class: From Beit-el, the clan now moved on to a place called Efrat..... a long time later, Efrat would come to be known as Beit-lechem...Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ. Jacob’s beloved Rachel dies giving birth to his last son, the 12th and final tribe of Israel. During childbirth, suspecting that she was not going to survive, Rachel named this baby Ben-oni, “son of my sorrow”. But, later, presumably after Rachel passed, Jacob re-named him Benyamin.....which means, “son of old age”, or “son of happiness”. We call him Benjamin.

Rachel was buried, and Israel moved again, a short distance, this time near a place called Migdal-Eder, which means “the watchtower of the flock”. 1800 years later, this will be the tower from which the Shepherds watching over the flocks in the field at night will see and hear angels announce and rejoice at the birth of the Savior of the World. The site of Rachel’s tomb was well known hundreds of years later, and the books of Samuel speak of the stone marker set upon her grave as a famous landmark. That site exists today, about 1 mile north of Bethlehem.

It was also near here that (in one simple statement) we are told that Jacob’s firstborn son Rueben slept with Jacob’s concubine, Bilah; and Jacob was aware of it. Bilah had been Rachel’s servant-girl. Nothing else is said about this transgression, for now. But, in time, it will prove to have an enormous bearing on the future of Israel.

Let’s take another one of our little detours here, and examine the situation between Rueben and Bilah, because it says much about the culture of that time, and has bearing on the future of Israel.

It is no coincidence that Rachel’s death and then Rueben’s taking of Bilah are spoken of one after the other, because they are directly linked. Bilah was Rachel’s handmaiden. But, Bilah was also a concubine/wife of Jacob. Bilah bore Dan and Naphtali. Rueben did a very calculating thing in having sex with Bilah; his intent was that as a result, Jacob would NOT do something that was quite common in that day: elevate a concubine/wife to the position of a full/legal wife, when a full/legal wife died. Rueben was Leah’s son.

⁵¹ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

⁵² Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

And, as we think back to the story of the Mandrakes that Rueben gathered for his mother, Rueben was acutely aware of his mother's status in the eyes of his father, Jacob: Rachel was first, and Leah a distant second. As far as Rueben and his mother Leah were concerned, Rachel's death afforded them an opportunity; an opportunity for Leah to gain in status as Jacob's one and only wife, and therefore, his most beloved. HOWEVER..... Rueben was worried that Jacob might decide to comfort himself with Rachel's handmaiden, Bilah, rather than with Leah.

This was more than simple jealousy or emotion: the status of being the son of Jacob's favorite brought with it tangible benefits.....and after all these years of playing second fiddle to Joseph and Joseph's mother Rachel, he wasn't about to allow Bilah to interfere. By taking Bilah, he ruined her. No way could Jacob now legally marry Bilah, for by having sex with Rueben, she was made undesirable. It would have been shameful beyond imagination for Jacob to marry a woman who had slept with another man, let alone the son of her husband.

Therefore, Rueben WANTED this act to be known. It was NECESSARY that what he did with Bilah be known, so that Jacob would not accept Bilah, and therefore, Leah became queen-bee.

This is why those 4 little words at the end of verse 22..... "and Israel found ut".....are so key. Jacob HAD to find out, if Rueben's plan was to succeed. In the Talmud is a statement about this matter that sums it all up rather well; and it says this: " He (Rueben) said, 'If my mother's sister was a rival to my mother, must the MAID of my mother's sister be a rival to my mother?'"

Now, let me put the cherry on top: during this era, it was customary that a leader who vanquished another leader.....or a son who took over leadership from his father (presumably because of the father's death)..... also took possession of that leader's concubines. The possession of the former leader's concubines by the new leader was an affirmation and validation of that new leader's status and authority.

This entire episode between Rueben and Bilah represented a clearly understood challenge to Jacob's authority as leader of Israel. Rueben's act was cunning and political.....having sex with Bilah had nothing to do with a few moments of pleasure; it was a blatant coup attempt. Rueben wanted to be the leader of Israel.

This is why, sometime later, Jacob would remove Rueben from the office of the firstborn, and give it to Judah. Listen to Jacob as he nears the end of his life, and he gathers his sons together to pronounce the blessing upon them; we find this in Genesis 49. **NAS Genesis 49:1** *Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come. 2 "Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father. 3 "Reuben, you are my first-born; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. 4"Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it-- he went up to my couch.*

Rueben's attempt to replace his father prematurely not only didn't happen, it backfired so completely that Rueben lost the rights of the Firstborn.

After a concise listing of Jacob's sons, we are given the interesting piece of information that Jacob, Israel, "came home to his father Yitz'chak' at Mamre". In other words, Isaac lived to meet ALL of his grandchildren through Jacob, and then Isaac

eventually died at the age of 180 years. Esau came, and together with Jacob, they buried Isaac in Hebron. Notice the statement in vs. 29, that Isaac died “and was gathered to his kinspeople”. Here are words that continue to express both a cloudy view of what occurs to someone after death, and reflects a continuation of ancestor worship to some degree. Did they really think that Isaac was now living on the other side of death with his ancestors? Probably, in some undefined way. But, by now, the expression primarily indicated a peaceful death after a long life span. Such a thing would not have been said about Isaac had he been murdered, or died young, or was executed for breaking a law.⁵³

Barnes: Jacob’s return and his father’s death. The family of Jacob is now enumerated, because it has been completed by the birth of Benjamin. “In Padan-aram.” This applies to all of them but Benjamin; an exception which the reader of the context can make for himself. Jacob at length arrives with his whole establishment at Hebron, the third notable station occupied by Abraham in the land Gen. 13:1. Here also his father sojourns. The life of Isaac is now closed. Joseph must have been, at the time of Jacob’s return, in his thirteenth year, and therefore, his father in his hundred and fourth. Isaac was consequently in his hundred and sixty-third year. He survived the return of Jacob to Hebron about seventeen years, and the sale of Joseph his grandson about thirteen. “Esau and Jacob his sons buried him.” Hence, we learn that Esau and Jacob continued to be on brotherly terms from the day of their meeting at the ford of Jabbok.

This chapter closes the ninth of the pieces or documents marked off by the phrase “these are the generations.” Its opening event was the birth of Isaac Gen. 25:19, which took place in the hundredth year of Abraham, and therefore, seventy-five years before his death recorded in the seventh document. As the seventh purports to be the generations of Terah Gen. 11:27 and relates to Abraham who was his offspring, so the present document, containing the generations of Isaac, refers chiefly to the sons of Isaac, and especially to Jacob, as the heir of promise. Isaac as a son learned obedience to his father in that great typical event of his life, in which he was laid on the altar, and figuratively sacrificed in the ram which was his substitute. This was the great significant passage in his life, after which he retires into comparative tranquility.⁵⁴

Adam Clarke’s Summary:

THIS chapter contains several subjects which are well worthy of the reader’s most serious attention.

1. That such a family as that of Jacob should have had false gods in it, is a matter not less astonishing than real: and suppose that we allow, as is very probable, that their

⁵³ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

⁵⁴ Barnes’ Notes on the Old Testament

images and rings were got from strangers, the Syrians and the Shechemites, yet their being tolerated in the family, though it is probable this was for a very short time, cannot be easily accounted for. It is true the LAW was not then given, and the unity of God not so particularly taught as it was afterwards. Besides, we have already seen that certain superstitions were compatible in those early times with general sincerity and attachment to the truth; those times and acts of ignorance were winked at, till superior light shone upon the world. Between many of the practices of Laban's family and those of the surrounding heathenish tribes, there might have been but little difference; and this was probably the reason why Dinah could so readily mix with the daughters of the land, Genesis 34:1, which led to the fatal consequences already reviewed. Sin is like the letting out of water—when once a breach is made in the dyke, the stream becomes determined to a wrong course, and its progress is soon irresistible. Had not Jacob put away these strange gods, the whole family might have been infected with idolatry. This saying of one of the ancients is good, — SENECA. “He who is indulgent to present offenses, transmits sin to posterity.” The first motions of it should be firmly resisted; after struggles are too often fruitless.

2. The doctrine of a particular and especial providence has another proof in this chapter. After the sanguinary conduct of Jacob's sons, is it not surprising that the neighboring tribes did not join together and extirpate the whole family? And so they certainly would, had not the terror of God fallen upon them, Genesis 35:5. Jacob and the major part of his family were innocent of this great transgression; and on the preservation of their lives, the accomplishment of great events depended: therefore God watches over them, and shields them from the hands of their enemies.
3. The impatience and fate of the amiable Rachel, who can read of without deploring? Give me children, said she, or else I die, Genesis 30:1. Her desire was granted, and her death was the consequence! God's way is ever best. We know not what we ask, nor what we ought to ask, and therefore often ask amiss when we petition for such secular things as belong to the dispensations of God's providence. For things of this kind we have no revealed directory; and when we ask for them, it should be with the deepest submission to the Divine will, as God alone knows what is best for us. With respect to the soul, every thing is clearly revealed, so that we may ask and receive, and have a fullness of joy; but as to our bodies, there is much reason to fear that the answer of our petitions would be, in numerous cases, our inevitable destruction. How many prayers does God in mercy shut out!
4. The transgression of Reuben, of whatsoever kind, was marked, not only by the displeasure of his father, but by that of God also; see Genesis 49:4. It brought a curse upon him, and he forfeited thereby the right of primogeniture and the priesthood: the first was given to Judah, the second to Levi. Is it not in reference to this that our Lord addresses these solemn words to the angel of the Church of Philadelphia: Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that NO MAN TAKE THY CROWN? A man, by sowing a grain of forbidden sweets, may reap an abundant harvest of eternal wretchedness. Reader, let not sin rob thee of the kingdom of God.

5. Here we have the death of Isaac recorded: most that can be said of his character has been already anticipated, see Genesis 22, etc. He appears to have been generally pious, deeply submissive and obedient. He was rather an amiable and good, than a great and useful, man. If compared with his son Jacob, in the early part of their lives, he appears to great advantage, as possessing more sincerity and more personal piety. But if compared with his father Abraham, O, what a falling off is here! Abraham is the most perfect character under the Old Testament, and even under the New he has no parallel but St. Paul. Isaac, though falling far short of his father's excellences, will ever remain a pattern of piety and filial obedience.⁵⁵

Gleanings in Genesis – Arthur Pink **Chapter 35 - JACOB AT BETHEL AGAIN**

In our last article we closed with Jacob parting from Esau and failing to keep his word and rejoin his brother at Seir. We pass over the sad record of the intervening chapter, asking our readers to turn to it for themselves. After passing through the grievous experiences narrated in Genesis 34, we might well have supposed that Jacob had been in a hurry to leave Shechem—yet, *whither* would he flee! Laban he had no desire to meet again. Esau he wished to avoid. And now from the Shechemites also he was anxious to get away. But whither should he go? Poor Jacob! He must have been in a grand quandary. Ah, but man's extremities are God's opportunities, and so it was shown to be here. Once more God appeared to him, and said, "Arise, *go up* to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fledest from the face of Esau thy brother." (Genesis 35:1)

In studying the above passage we have arrived at the conclusion that God's word to Jacob on this occasion was one of admonition. The reference to him "fleeing" from the face of Esau, takes us back, of course, to the time when Jacob first fled from home fearful of his brother's anger at the deception practiced on him in winning from their father the coveted blessing. On the first night out the Lord had appeared to our patriarch in a dream in which He promised to keep him in all places whither he went, and to bring him again into the land and unto his kindred. When Jacob awoke he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place" (28:16), and rising up early in the morning he took the stone on which his head had rested during the night and set it up for a pillar, pouring oil on the top of it, and calling the name of the place Bethel, which means "House of God." And there, we are told, "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house." (Genesis 28:20–22.)

Probably thirty years at least had passed since Jacob had had that vision of the "ladder," and now God *reminds* him of the pledge which our patriarch had failed to redeem. God here addressed Himself to Jacob's conscience, with respect to his neglect in performing his vow. God had performed *His* part, but Jacob had failed. God had preserved him whithersoever he had journeyed, and *had* brought him back safely to the land of Canaan; but now that Jacob had been in the land at least seven years (for in less

⁵⁵ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

time than this Simeon and Levi could not have reached man's estate—34:25), yet, he had *slot* gone up to Bethel.

That God's word to Jacob recorded in Genesis 35:1, was a *reproof* is further evidenced by the immediate effect which it had upon him. Not only had Jacob failed to go to Bethel, but, what was worse, while Jehovah had been his personal God, his household was defiled by *idols*. Rebekah's stolen "seraphim" had proven a snare to the family. At the time Laban overtook them Jacob seems to have known nothing about these gods; later, however, he was evidently aware of their presence, but not until aroused by the Lord appearing to him did he exert his parental authority and have them *put away*. It is striking to note that though God Himself said nothing, directly, about the "seraphim" yet, the immediate effect of His words was to stir Jacob's conscience about them—"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" (35:2.) These words show that Jacob was aware of the corrupt practices of his family, and had only too long connived at them.

There is good reason to believe that the troubles into which Jacob fell at Shechem were due immediately to his failure in this very particular, and had he gone directly to Bethel his household had been purged the more promptly of the "strange gods" that were in it, and his children had escaped the taint which these of necessity must impart. Furthermore, had he gone sooner to Bethel his children would have been kept out of the way of temptation (34:1), and then the impure and bloody conduct of which they were guilty had been prevented. Mark, too, how this second verse of Genesis 35 illustrates the awful spread of the leprosy of sin. At first the seraphim were hidden by Rachel, and none of the family except her seem to have known of them: but now Jacob had to command his "household" and "all that were with him" to "put away the strange gods" which were among them. The moral is evident: spiritual neglect and trifling with temptation can issue only in evil and disaster. Inlet us not neglect God's House, nor delay to keep His commandments.

"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 that I went" (35:3). Jacob not only commands his household to put away their idols, but seeks to impress them with his own sentiments, and urges them all to accompany him to Bethel. His reciting to them how that God had "answered him in the day of his distress" not only argued the propriety of the step he was urging upon them, but would excite a hope that God might disperse the cloud which *now* hung on them on account of the late lamentable transactions in Shechem.

"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" (35:4). It is pleasing to observe the readiness with which his family acceded to Jacob's command. They not only gave up their "gods" but their "*earrings*" also. These, too, were frequently converted to the use of idolatrous practices, as is evident not only from the example of Aaron who made the calf out of the "golden earrings" (Exodus 32:2), but from Hos. 2:13 as well—"And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her *earrings* and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forget Me, saith the Lord." That Jacob *buried* the seraphim and earrings, instead of attempting to convert them to a more honorable use,

teaches us that the things of Satan must not be employed in the service of God, and that we need to forsake even the appearance of evil. There can be no doubt that in the readiness with which the family acted in response to Jacob's command we are to see *the hand of the Lord*. In fact the power of God is evident at every point in this incident: the immediate effect of God's word to Jacob to go to Bethel (the effect on his conscience, evidenced by the prompt purging of his household); the unanimous response of his family; and further, what we read of in verse 5 all demonstrate this—"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."

In the scripture last quoted we find a striking illustration of the sovereign control which God exercises over and upon men, even upon those who are not His people. Evidently the Shechemites were so enraged against Jacob and his family that had not God put forth His power they had promptly avenged the wrong done them. But not a hand can be raised against any of the Lord's people without His direct permission, and even when our enemies are incensed against us, all God does is to put His "terror" upon them and they are impotent. How true it is that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever He will" (Proverbs 21:1). *And God is still the same*: living, ruling, almighty. There is no doubt in the writer's mind that in the authenticated reports of "the Angels at Mons" we see in the terror which caused the German cavalry to turn about and flee from the outnumbered English a modern example of what we read of in Genesis 35:5—"And the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, *and they did not pursue* after the sons of Jacob."

"So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. 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" (35:6, 7). It is significant that Bethel is here first called by its original name, "*Luz*" which means "departure." From God Jacob had departed for (as previously pointed out) Jacob built no "altar" during all the years he sojourned in Padan-Aram, and only now does he return to God, to the "house of God," to the altar of God, and in order to do this he must needs retrace his steps and return to the place from which he had "departed." So it was with Abraham before him, for after he left Egypt (whither he had gone in unbelief) we read, "And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been *at the beginning*, between Bethel and Ai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there *at the first*" (Genesis 13:3, 4). And so it has to be with us.

"But Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak, and the name of it was called Allon Bachuth. And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-Aram and blessed him" (35:8, 9). In principle these two verses are inseparably connected. No mention is made of Deborah in the sacred narrative from the time Jacob his father's house until the time when he had now returned to Bethel. The departure and the return of Jacob are thus linked together for us by the mention of Deborah "*Rebekah's nurse*." The same thing is seen again in the verse which follows. "And God appeared unto Jacob *again*, when he came out of Padan-Aram." God had appeared to him just before he entered Padan-Aram, and He now appeared "again" when he came out of Padan-Aram. All the years spent with Laban were lost, as were also those lived in Succoth and Shechem. The twenty years he served with his father-in-law were so much "wood, hay and stubble." We find another illustration of this same sad principle in

Hebrews 11:29–30, where we read, first, “by *faith* Israel passed through the Red Sea,” and the next thing we read is, “by *faith* the walls of Jericho fell down.” The forty years wandering in the wilderness in unbelief is passed over! Nothing of “faith” was to be found in *that* period of Israel’s history. The forty years was so much *lost time!* Ah, my reader, when our records are reviewed at the Judgment seat of Christ methinks there will be similar tragic *blanks* in most, possibly all, of our lives.

The sequel of Jacob’s return to Bethel is very beautiful, but we cannot here dwell much upon the details. God appeared unto Jacob again, reaffirmed that he should be called by his new name Israel, revealed Himself as the “Almighty” or “All-Sufficient One,” bade him to be “fruitful and multiply,” assuring him that “a nation and a company of nations should be of him, and kings should come out of his loins;” and, finally, ratifying the gift of the land unto his fathers, unto himself, and unto his sons (35:11, 12).

That Jacob was now fully restored to communion with God is seen from the fact that he now once more “set up a pillar” in the place where he had talked with God and poured oil thereon (35:14, and cf. 28:18).

Next, we are told “And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath.” How significant and how beautiful is the moral order here: Ephrath is Bethlehem (verse 19), and Bethlehem signifies “House of Bread.” Note carefully the words, “There is *but a little way* (*i.e.* from Bethel) to come to Ephrath.” Yes, it is but a short distance from the place where the soul *is restored* to communion with God to the place where nourishment and satisfaction of heart are to be found!

“And Rachael died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem” (35:19). Thus the leading link of Jacob’s life at Padan-Aram was now severed! The “Seraphim” had been “hid under the oak” (verse 4), Deborah (the link with his old unregenerate life) had also been “buried under an oak” (verse 8), and now Rachael is “buried.” Death is written large across this scene. And we too must have “the sentence of death” written on our members if we would walk in full communion with God and dwell in the house of bread. And is it not lovely to mark that from the dying Rachael there came forth *Benjamin*—“the Son of the right hand!”

Having considered some of the moral lessons which the 35th chapter of Genesis inculcates, we would in closing point out how that once again we have here another of those marvelous typical pictures in which this first book of Scripture abounds; this time a dispensational foreshadowment of the coming *restoration of Israel*.

1. Just as Jacob left the house of God (Bethel—Genesis 28) for the land of exile, so has the Nation which had descended from him.
2. Just as God said to Jacob “Arise, go up to Bethel,” return to the place of Divine communion and privilege, so will He yet call to Israel.
3. Just as the immediate effect upon Jacob of God’s “call” was to purge his house from idolatry and to issue in a change of his ways (emblemized by “changing of *garments*”—35:2), so the Nation will yet be purged from their final idolatry (in connection with Antichrist) and be changed in their ways and walk.
4. Just as Jacob acknowledged that God had “answered him in the day of his *distress*” (35:3), so will Israel when He responds to their cry in the great Tribulation.
5. Just as the “terror of God” fell upon the Shechemites (35:5), so will His terror fall once more upon the Gentiles when He resumes His dealings with His covenant people.
6. Just as when Jacob returned to Bethel he built another “altar,” so will Israel once more worship God acceptably when they are restored to His favor.
7. Just as now the link with Jacob’s past

was severed (the death of Rebekah—35:8), so will Israel die to their past life. 8. Just as God now appeared unto Jacob “again,” so will He, in the coming day manifest Himself to Israel as of old. 9. Just as God then said “Thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name” (35:10), so his descendants shall no more be called Jews, but as Israel shall they be known. 10. Just as God now for the first time discovered unto Jacob his name “Almighty,” so on Israel’s restoration will the Messiah be revealed as “the wonderful Counsellor, *the mighty God*.” 11. Just as national prosperity was here assured unto Jacob—“be fruitful and multiply, a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee” 35:11—so shall the prosperity and blessings promised through the prophets become theirs. 12. Just as God here said unto Jacob “the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee will I give it and to thy seed after thee” (35:12), so will He say to the restored nation. 13. Just as Jacob poured oil on the pillar he erected at Bethel, so will God pour the Holy Spirit upon Israel and upon all flesh. 14. Just as Jacob found Bethel to be but a little way from Bethlehem, so shall Israel at last find the Bread of Life once they have had their second Bethel. 15. Just as Benjamin now took his place in Jacob’s household, so will the true Benjamin—“Son of his mother’s sorrow, but also of his father’s right hand”—take His rightful place among redeemed Israel. There are other points in this typical picture which we leave for the reader to search out for himself. Surely as the Christian ponders the wondrous and blessed future which yet awaits the Israel of God he cannot do less than heed that earnest word—“Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, until He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isa. 62:6, 7)!⁵⁶

The book of Jasher Chapter 36

1 At that time the Lord appeared unto Jacob saying, Arise, go to Bethel and remain there, and make there an altar to the Lord who appeareth unto thee, who delivered thee and thy sons from affliction.

2 And Jacob rose up with his sons and all belonging to him, and they went and came to Bethel according to the word of the Lord.

3 And Jacob was ninety-nine years old when he went up to Bethel, and Jacob and his sons and all the people that were with him, remained in Bethel in Luz, and he there built an altar to the Lord who appeared unto him, and Jacob and his sons remained in Bethel six months.

4 At that time died Deborah the daughter of Uz, the nurse of Rebecca, who had been with Jacob; and Jacob buried her beneath Bethel under an oak that was there.

5 And Rebecca the daughter of Bethuel, the mother of Jacob, also died at that time in Hebron, the same is Kireath-arba, and she was buried in the cave of Machpelah which Abraham had bought from the children of Heth.

6 And the life of Rebecca was one hundred and thirty-three years, and she died and when Jacob heard that his mother Rebecca was dead he wept bitterly for his mother, and made

⁵⁶Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (302). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

a great mourning for her, and for Deborah her nurse beneath the oak, and he called the name of that place Allon-bachuth.

7 And Laban the Syrian died in those days, for God smote him because he transgressed the covenant that existed between him and Jacob.

8 And Jacob was a hundred years old when the Lord appeared unto him, and blessed him and called his name Israel, and Rachel the wife of Jacob conceived in those days.

9 And at that time Jacob and all belonging to him journeyed from Bethel to go to his father's house, to Hebron.

10 And whilst they were going on the road, and there was yet but a little way to come to Ephrath, Rachel bare a son and she had hard labor and she died.

11 And Jacob buried her in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem, and he set a pillar upon her grave, which is there unto this day; and the days of Rachel were forty-five years and she died.

12 And Jacob called the name of his son that was born to him, which Rachel bare unto him, Benjamin, for he was born to him in the land on the right hand.

13 And it was after the death of Rachel, that Jacob pitched his tent in the tent of her handmaid Bilhah.

14 And Reuben was jealous for his mother Leah on account of this, and he was filled with anger, and he rose up in his anger and went and entered the tent of Bilhah and he thence removed his father's bed.

15 At that time the portion of birthright, together with the kingly and priestly offices, was removed from the sons of Reuben, for he had profaned his father's bed, and the birthright was given unto Joseph, the kingly office to Judah, and the priesthood unto Levi, because Reuben had defiled his father's bed.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT