

Genesis Chapter 35 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 35 Overview:

More details on the life of Jacob. (1) Jacob returns to Bethel in verses 1-15. (2) The birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel are recorded in verses 16-26. And, (3) the death of Isaac is recorded in verses 27-29.

Genesis 35 : 1-5 – 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. 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: 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. 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. 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.

- God to Jacob and instructed him to return to Bethel and dwell there.
- The hand of God in Jacob's life is once again seen here.
- God knew the danger in which Jacob and his family were in from the backlash of what His sons had done.
- So, He not only told Jacob to leave, but He caused other Canaanite peoples to fear them.
- Jacob took steps to put his house in order spiritually.
- He ordered his household to (1) "***put away the strange gods that are among you,*** (2) and ***be ye clean,*** and (3) ***change your garments.***"
- Apparently, the influence of the Canaanites had brought idolatry into Jacob's family.
- That is not surprising - Remember Rachel and the theft of her father's gold coins?
- The reference to being clean probably means getting clean before the Lord and not just putting on clean clothes
- Remember - **Bethel** meant – **house of God** – so he wanted them spiritually and physically clean before returning.
- Jacob also indicated that he intended to make an altar to God there.
- Interestingly, as his family gave him their various strange gods and pagan jewelry, "Jacob hid them under the oak which *was* by Shechem."
- As they journeyed southward to Bethel, "***the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.***"
- The word translated as **terror** (htx *chittah*) has the sense of fear.
- In other words, God put the fear of the Lord in the heart of those who otherwise may have sought to retaliate against Jacob.

Genesis 35 : 6-7 - 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. 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.

- Jacob and his family came to **Luz** which was the Canaanite name for the place Jacob called *Bethel*.
- There, he built an “**altar and called the place Elbethel**” harkening back to when God appeared to him when he fled from Esau years earlier.
- The term *Elbethel* literally means the ‘**God of Bethel**’ or ‘**the God of the house of God.**’

Genesis 35 : 8 - 8 But Deborah Rebekah’s nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allonbachuth.

- Deborah, who was Rebekah’s nurse died.
- Though not noted by name, this likely is the nurse sent with Rebekah when she went to be Isaac’s wife. (See Genesis 24:59)
- She was buried there at Bethel.
- The oak under which she was buried was called Allonbachuth which means ‘**the oak of weeping.**’

Genesis 35 : 9-15 - 9 And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. 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. 11 And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; 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. 13 And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. 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. 15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel.

- God appeared to Jacob *again* like when he had departed from Laban.
- Once again, God confirmed that his name would be changed to Israel as he already had been informed in Genesis 32:28.
- God reiterated, reconfirmed, and added details to His covenant with Jacob through Abraham.
- The charge to be fruitful may have been an injunction for Jacob to have his final son which he soon did.
- The reference to his seed becoming a “*company of nations*” may well refer to the twelve tribes which would come from his sons.
- It may also have a greater spiritual reference in the gentile nations which would someday in Christ be part of Abraham’s seed.
- Kings came from his loins not only in Saul and the David dynasty, but most importantly in Christ.
- God again confirmed His covenant promise to give the land he had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob and his seed.
- Again, that promise has never been taken back.
- It never will.
- It is an eternal promise.

- After God “*went up from him in the place where he talked with him,*”
- Jacob then set up a stone pillar.
- He offered a drink-offering and poured (olive) oil on the pillar.
- These offerings are not further described, but may have been similar to drink offerings later prescribed by the law of Moses.
- Either way, they were a means of worshiping God.
- He also, “*called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel.*”

Genesis 35 : 16-20 - 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. 17 And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. 18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. 19 And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. 20 And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel’s grave unto this day.

- After leaving Bethel, Jacob journeyed to Ephrath (also known as Bethlehem) and there Rachel had hard labor.
- While giving birth to her second son (Jacob’s twelfth son), she died.
- Before dying, she named him *Benoni* which literally means ‘son of my sorrow.’
- Jacob renamed him *Benjamin* which means ‘son of my right hand.’
- He was Joseph’s only full brother and no doubt especially close to Jacob in his older years after losing his favorite wife, Rachel.
- Benjamin was born after his father had turned to God with all his heart in 32:9- 11.
- He along with his brother Joseph were not party to the wickedness of their other ten brothers.
- When a father truly gets right with God, it will have a profound influence in how his children turn out.
- Jacob therefore buried Rachel at Bethlehem and set up a memorial marker there for her.
- The name *Bethlehem* literally means house of bread.

Genesis 35 : 21-22 - 21 And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar. 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.

- The mentioned journey to **Edar** was a short journey.
- It was a shepherd’s watchtower close by Bethlehem.
- Some hold that it was where the shepherds were watching their flocks by night when Jesus was born.
- While living in the vicinity of Bethlehem, Reuben was intimate with Bilhah.
- She was Rachel’s maid who had born several children to Jacob.
- Sin of such a nature is never covered for long.
- It always surfaces as noted, “**and Israel heard it.**”
- No record is made of any confrontation he may have had with Reuben over the affair.

- However, I Chronicles 5:1 states that Reuben thereby lost his birthright through this incident.
- In addition, his father on his death bed noted Reuben as being “*unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father’s bed; then defiledst thou it*” (Genesis 49:4).

Genesis 35 : 23-26 - 23 The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun: 24 The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin: 25 And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali: 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.

- A summary of Jacob’s sons is noted.
- From Leah were born Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.
- From Rachel were born Joseph and Benjamin.
- From Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid were born Dan and Naphtali.
- From Zilpah, Leah’s handmaid were born Gad and Asher.
- All but Benjamin were born in Padanaram.

Genesis 35 : 27-29 - 27 And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. 28 And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years. 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.

- Record is made that Jacob came to see his father in his final days.
- It is likely he visited him on occasion while back in the land, but is only noted here.
- His final days were in Hebron which also was known as Mamre, and Kirjath-Arbah.
- There, Isaac died at the age of 180.
- He “*gathered up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days.*”
- Clearly, Esau had been notified of his father’s final days for he joined with Jacob in burying their father.
- No mention is made of the death of Rebekah who evidently had already died.