

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 35

35:1 Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." (NIV)

Going to Bethel

God now tells Jacob to move because of the trouble that was brewing among the neighboring Canaanite tribes due to the slaughter of Shechem by Simeon and Levi.

35:2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes." (NIV)

Preparing Jacob

God had sufficiently prepared Jacob, making him ready to cut the covenant. The covenant required Jacob and his household to "*walk before Me and be blameless*"—which must include no other gods. Some idols were no doubt worshipped in Laban's household, but others were probably obtained when the sons of Jacob spoiled the city of Shechem.

In the same way that Jacob instructed his household to purify themselves, God instructed Moses to command the children of Israel to be pure and wash their clothes before He made the covenant and delivered the commandments (EXO 19:10,14).

35:3 Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." (NIV)

Remaining Faithful

Jacob's life had been one of constant distress since the day he stole the blessing from Esau, yet God remained faithful to the promise He made with Jacob at Bethel.

35:4 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak [NKJ, REB: "terebinth tree"] at [REB, TAN: "near"] Shechem. (NIV)

Burying the Idols

The earrings and the spoils of Shechem may have had some idolatrous design, or may have been devoted to idol worship. They had brought their idols from Laban's household, where the entire household was expected to worship the patriarch's god.

35:5 Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them. (NIV)

Terror of God

God prevented any retribution against Jacob's family by some supernatural means. He may have simply put a spirit of fear in their minds. This fear, coupled with the knowledge that the sons of Israel had completely destroyed all of the men of Shechem, would cause all the people of the land to avoid interfering with the movement of Jacob's family. Another possibility is that the company of angels he met shortly after entering Canaan (32:1) may have accompanied his family at this time.

35:6 Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. (NIV)

Luz

The Canaanites called the area Luz, although Jacob had renamed it before going to Haran.

35:7-8 There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel ["God of the House of God"], because it was there that God revealed Himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother. Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth ["oak of weeping"]. (NIV)

Deborah

Moses probably added this editorial comment, since there is no indication that Deborah ever left Rebekah to join Jacob's family. It is likely she died while Jacob was away in Haran, and since she was buried at Bethel, this was a good place to insert the information. It is interesting that the death of Rebekah's nurse is recorded, but no mention is made of Rebekah's death.

35:9-10 After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel. So he named him Israel. (NIV)

Jacob's Renaming

This appears to be an editorial comment about the events at Peniel just after Jacob returned from Haran.

35:11 And God said to him, "I am God Almighty ["El Shaddai"]; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community [NKJ,NRS:"company"] of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. (NIV)

El Shaddai

God now tells Jacob He is El Shaddai. Although Isaac had referred to El Shaddai while blessing Jacob, this is the first time God appears to Jacob by that name.

Separating the Promise

This is also the first time God separates the promise of national greatness into a nation and a company of nations.

35:12-13 The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." Then God went up from him [shows that this was an actual event, not a dream or vision] at the place where He had talked with him. (NIV)

Speaking with Jacob

This is the last recorded time God speaks with Jacob until He tells him to go down into Egypt in a vision over 25 years later.

35:14-20 Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. Jacob called the place where God had talked with

him Bethel. Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath [REB: "Ephrathah"], Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son." As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni ["son of my trouble"]. But his father named him Benjamin ["son of my right hand"]. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb. (NIV)

Rachel's Tomb

The site of her tomb was still known during Samuel's time (1SA 10:2). The other wives of the patriarchs—Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah—were all buried in the cave at the field of Machpelah.

35:22 Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder ["tower of the flock"]. While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it. Jacob had twelve sons: (NIV)

Birthright Disqualification

Two of the older sons of Jacob—Simeon and Levi—had disqualified themselves from any birthright by acting on Jacob's behalf without his permission in destroying the men of Shechem, and now Reuben does the same. This left Judah next in line.

35:23-26 The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. The sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram. (NIV)

Benjamin's Inclusion

Benjamin was clearly not born in the area of Haran, which is the normal meaning of Paddan Aram. However, the word "paddan" is closely linked to the Akkadian word "paddanu" which means "road" or "highway". Even though Benjamin was born in Canaan, his birth took place on the highway leading from Aram.

35:27 Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. (NIV)

Time Frame

This probably occurred sometime between 1716 B.C. and 1708 B.C. God has now fulfilled His promise to Jacob of returning him to his father's house (28:15,21).

35:28-29 Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him. (NIV)

Isaac died in 1696 B.C., 12 years after Joseph was sold by his brothers. It was not necessary to specify that Isaac was buried in the cave of Machpelah since he died in the area of Hebron where the cave was located.