

Back To Bethel (Gen. 35:1)

Then God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.”

- Here’s our first transition: Jacob will return to Bethel. He is finally going to perform the vow he made with God. In Genesis 28, he had said, *“And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house...”*
- God is apparently reminding him that there were things left undone. Scripture tells us to fulfill our promises to the Lord.
- God was also gracious to rescue Jacob from the threat of the Hivites and others who might come after him because of the slaughter at Shechem.
- All our success must begin where God wants to meet us. In that respect, Jacob’s transition back into the Land was done poorly, and he needed to rectify that.

Purification (Gen. 35:2-4)

2 And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. 3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.” 4 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

- Jacob has been somewhat passive but on this matter he is more forceful. He seems to have tolerated some idolatry until now.
 - He tells them to purify themselves, eliminate moral corruption.
 - Garments stand for your identity, and whether you are suitable or not to appear before God. Are you clean before Him?
 - The people comply and they go beyond what was asked. They gave Jacob their gods, and their earrings as well.
- Jacob hid these items under a tree. I suspect he didn't have the means to melt everything down, so it made it hard for them to find these objects again.
- Anything that is connected to the occult or the worship of false gods needs to go!

Traveling Under The Terror Of God (Gen. 35:5-7)

5 And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. 6 So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. 7 And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.

- God was gracious to Jacob and the fear of God was upon the nearby Canaanites.
- Luz, or Bethel, is a pun because Luz is connected to the word for almond, or almond tree. This is close to the word for someone watching over you.
- He knows that the God of Bethel is his God. In other words, He is honoring God for having watched over him.

Transitions Continue (Gen. 35:8)

Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.

- The first death in Jacob's inner circle. Deborah the nurse was one of the people who came with Rebekah when she left her home to go marry Isaac.
- They bury her there at a tree which is called the tree of weeping.
- This begs the question of when Rebekah died. Her death remains a mystery. -

The Lord Appears Again (Gen. 35:9-15)

9 Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. 10 And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. 11 Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. 12 The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land." 13 Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him. 14 So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. 15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.

- Here is another blessing by God, and a restatement of the covenant.
 - First, he is not to think of himself as Jacob anymore, but as Israel.
 - There is an interesting command to be fruitful and multiply.

- There is another promise to give him the land, to him and to his descendants.
- Jacob, for all his conniving and physical strength, was an insecure person. Can you believe you are an Israel and not a Jacob?
- Paul says in Romans 12 to renew our minds, and one of the things our minds need to be renewed in is we who really are in the Lord.
- To commemorate this event, Jacob sets up a pillar. These could be markers of the fact that a covenant had been made.
- These things are symbolic of Christ. He is the pillar of stone that holds up everything in our lives; He is the support and guarantee of all God's promises to us. They are sealed with His blood and with His Spirit, represented here by the wine and the oil.

The Death Of Rachel (Gen. 35:16-20)

16 Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor. 17 Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also." 18 And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

- We've said before that the 12 sons of Jacob and their names are a prophetic picture. Benjamin is what we call a **type** of Christ: an extended prophetic picture.

- The circumstances of Benjamin's birth make up an extended prophetic portrait that shows us Christ: His death, glory, and return in glory.
 - Benjamin's life begins in Ephrata, which is the region of Bethlehem. The family is traveling from where the Covenant was confirmed to where the Son would be born, just as the people of Israel will ultimately do.
 - There are three people we know of who came from Bethlehem: Benjamin, David, and Jesus. Bethlehem speaks of provision, because Bethlehem in Hebrew means house of bread or place of bread. All are connected with feeding and caring for people.
 - Rachel is a picture of the nation of Israel in its weakened condition, ready to die. Ben-Oni, which means son of my sorrow. This speaks to us of Israel's wrong or incomplete understanding of Messiah. ...*He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.* (Isa. 53:8)
 - Jacob is symbolic of God the Father here, and he calls him Benjamin. Benjamin means son of strength or son of the right hand.
 - Obviously there is a literal meaning to the story. Son of the right hand means the son on whom Jacob is expecting to lean in his old age.
 - As Jacob's strength is expiring, at the end of days, at the time of Jacob's trouble, the son of the right hand will indeed be the support of Israel, speaking of course of Jesus Christ.
 - There's another deep truth here in Benjamin's birth. Rachel is told by the midwife not to fear because she will have this son also. This speaks of the end of days when the people of Israel will indeed claim this son.

- As Jacob gets older, he becomes sour because of the reversals in his life.

Reuben’s Misdeed (Gen. 35:21-22a)

21 Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. 22 And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine; and Israel heard about it.

- This terrible deed would disqualify him for the headship of the family. Israel was passive about this and nothing is immediately done, as far as we know.
- At the end of his life, he will give Reuben a prophecy which reveals that he knows about this, and Israel limits Reuben, and says he will not excel.

One More Transition (Gen. 35:22b-28)

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: 23 the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; 24 the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; 25 the sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; 26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah’s maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

27 Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. 28 Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. 29 So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

- This genealogical recap is one of the *toledoth* passages, which are the real divisions Moses made in the Book of Genesis.
- We are transitioning now away from Jacob as the primary focus in the narrative.
- A final transition point that really cemented Jacob’s loneliness and sorrow, was the death of his father Isaac, finally, at the very ripe old age of 180.
- Jacob would live very long, but he would consider his own life span to be short.
- Jacob and Esau are reunited one last time in order to bury their father.
- Isaac’s death is another sad story, not just because they were sorry to lose him, but because of the spiritual passivity that we see in Isaac something we also see repeated in Jacob, as we’ve said.
- We don't read that Isaac did any more wonderful things, or spiritual exploits. How much better to be like Joshua and Caleb!

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