

Genesis 35 – God’s Promises and Call (Again)

I. Jacob Returns to God’s Purpose (1-7)

A. Jacob is Again Called By God (1)

1. This command renews the one given to him in Laban’s house (ch. 31)
 - a. God said I am the God of Bethel, and called him to return
 - b. Remember Jacob vowed to erect an altar and worship at Bethel in (28:20-22) “this stone shall be God’s house”
2. This command is for Jacob to fulfill his vow and return to the path God set for him
 - a. Jacob has been doing things his own way long enough
 - b. Jacob has been living apart from God’s will in Shechem
 - c. Jacob is called to return to Bethel and build an altar

B. Jacob Leads His Family Toward God (2-4)

1. Jacob Declares Repentance To His Family (2-3)

- a. Put Away the Foreign gods (2a)
 - i. Where did “foreign gods” come from?
 - Likely they came from the plunder in Shechem
 - also remember Rachel stole Laban’s “god”
 - an effect of Jacob’s passive leadership – family idolatry
 - obviously this had been going on for a while
 - ii. Jacob calls his family to lay down their idolatry
- b. Purify Yourself (2b)
 - i. Specifically, this could be from the uncleanness of killing the people of Shechem – i.e. ritual washings, etc.
 - ii. More generally, this is a call to turn from their sin and rebellion

c. Return To Bethel (3)

- i. Jacob resolves to return to Bethel and build his altar
- ii. Jacob knows that God has kept His word
 - He calls God - the God who answers me in the day of my distress – God has delivered Jacob from both Laban and Esau
 - He calls God – the God who has been with me wherever I have gone. – Just as God promised in Bethel

2. Jacob Buries The Family’s idols (4)

- a. The family turn over their “teraphim” and their gold earrings
 - i. Jacob’s family follows his leadership and turn over their idols
 - ii. Earrings – there are not just regular jewelry
 - possible they had to do with the worship of their idols
 - archaeology has found crescent shaped rings and talismans in Palestine celebrating the moon god
 - possible that these earrings are simply part of the spoils from Shechem
- b. Jacob buries the gods and the plunder

- i. This is a decided break from the family's past
- ii. They are not just promising to do better, they are removing all the idols from their midst

C. Jacob is Again Protected By God (5)

- 1. Even after the plunder and murder of the city of Shechem, the Canaanites did not seek retribution
- 2. God places a terror on the Canaanites so they did not pursue Jacob
 - a. God is still keeping his promise to protect Jacob and be with him wherever he goes
 - b. Even in his shame and after his failure, God is with him

D. Jacob Again Comes To Bethel (6-7)

- 1. Finally he is where he is supposed to be
- 2. He worships by building an altar, and also declares the name of his God
 - a. He calls the place El Bethel (God, house of God)
 - b. Last time Jacob marveled at the place itself ("surely God is in this place")
 - c. Now Jacob is more focused on the God of Bethel
- 3. Jacob has come full circle – he is allowed to return to Bethel after failing so miserably – he now has a greater appreciation for the God of Bethel

II. The Passing of The Older Generation (8, 27-29)

A. Deborah Dies and is Buried (8)

- 1. Notice that this is Rebecca's nurse – not Rachel's
 - a. How did she come into the picture?
 - b. Remember her – Gen. 24:59 - So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men.
 - c. Rebecca may have sent her to Jacob – Gen. 27:45 - until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"
- 2. Strange that Rebecca's Death is Not Mentioned in Genesis
 - a. It is noted in Gen. 49:31
 - b. The deaths of Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah are also not reported
- 3. This is the woman who nursed Jacob. She is a mother figure to him
- 4. Jacob mourns her death –
 - a. She is buried under an oak named Allon-bacuth. – (Oak of weeping)
 - b. Jacob hadn't mourned the defilement of his daughter or the sin of his sons – but her death brings forth weeping

B. Isaac Dies and is Buried (27-29)

- 1. This, along with Deborah's death shows the passing of the older generation
- 2. This chapter is a transition from Jacob to focus on his sons

III. Jacob Returns To God's Presence (9-15) – God appears to Jacob Again

A. God Reaffirms His Promises To Jacob (9-12)

- 1. God reaffirms Jacob's new name (9-10)
 - a. God is reaffirming the promises to His seed

- i. We saw the same thing with Abraham
 - the promise was made to him and his name was changed from Abram to Abraham
 - Then Abraham is tested and afterward the promise was reaffirmed
 - ii. Jacob is different because he failed his test miserably
 - He failed in every way you can imagine
 - Though he was God's promise bearer and his name was changed to Israel, he continued to act like a Jacob
 - iii. God's promise to his seed is never revoked
 - Though there has been (and will continue to be) consequences, God is faithful to his promise
 - God does not throw Jacob away because he has failed
 - God says in v. 1 – Get up from there and go back to Bethel
 - b. God still sees Jacob as Israel - But how can He?
2. God again promises a seed (11)
- a. He is God Almighty – The first use of El Shaddai in the Bible
 - i. He is all powerful – nothing can thwart His word
 - ii. Even the sinfulness of His people cannot nullify His promise
 - b. He passes the promise of Adam and Abraham to Jacob
 - i. Be fruitful and Multiply – this was the initial command to Adam and Eve in the garden
 - God's purpose has been to spread His image over all creation
 - Adam failed, now He will raise up a nation from which the promised seed will come
 - ii. He promises that a host of descendants (i.e. seed) will come from Israel
3. God again promises the land (12)
- a. God also passes the promise of the land (made to Abraham) to Israel
 - b. We have already seen that the writers of the New Testament find the fulfillment of the land promise is the perfected creation to come
 - i. Though the land was truly given to the descendants of Israel in the days of Joshua
 - ii. *Joshua 21:43-45 - Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.*
 - iii. *Joshua 23:14-15 - And, behold, this day I [Joshua] am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, **that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which***

the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the Lord your God promised you; so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you.

B. Jacob Offers Worship At Bethel (13-15)

1. Jacob doesn't just set a marker like he did the last time at Bethel
2. Jacob worships with an offering on the altar
3. God departs again from Bethel

IV. Jacob Still Faces Sin and Sorrow (16-21) –

A. Jacob's Favored Wife Dies (16-20)

1. Rachel Goes Into Labor (16)
2. Rachel Gives Birth To Benjamin (17-18)
 - a. Benjamin is born in the promised land
 - b. He is called Ben-oni by Rachel (who is suffering)
 - i. Ben-oni means either "son of my sorrow" or "son of my strength"
 - ii. However, Jacob names Him Benjamin – "son of the right hand"
 - the "right hand" is always seen as the favored one
 - Benjamin will be the favored son in Genesis

3. Rachel Dies and Is Buried (19-20)

- a. Jacob's sorrow is not over
- b. His favorite and loved wife passes away in child birth
- c. Jacob is heartbroken because of her death
 - i. As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." – Gen. 48:7

B. Jacob's Firstborn Son Tries To Seize Power (21)

1. Jacob clearly favors Rachel's sons – now that Rachel dies, perhaps Reuben (Leah's son) finds that he is being passed over for Rachel's sons
2. Reuben lays with Bilhah (Rachel's servant)
 - a. This is not about lust or sex – Bilhah is an old woman now
 - b. Reuben is laying with his father's concubine asserting his right to be head of the family
 - c. We see the same ploy made by Absalom to take over David's house (See 2 Sam. 16:20-23)
3. Reuben Does Not Get What He wants
 - a. He loses his rights as firstborn – 2 Chron. 5:1 - The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel, so that he could not be enrolled as the oldest son;

b. Jacob will say this when he give the blessings to his sons – Gen. 49:3-4 -
Reuben, you are my firstborn,
my might, and the firstfruits of my strength,
preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.
Unstable 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!

4. So who is now the line of the seed?

- a. Reuben, the first born, has lost his preeminence
- b. The next two – Levi and Simeon – have defiled themselves by murder and deceit
- c. The next in line is Judah

C. Jacob's Sons Listed (21b-26)

- 1. Although we have digressed into the story of Jacob, Genesis returns to the genealogical list