



## The Book of Genesis

Verses 35:1-29

June 23, 2019

Chapter 35 of Genesis is a hodge podge collection of random items, some important and some not seemingly so. Like as with last week's lesson, it is almost like reading through the daily entries in someone's journal as we read through this chapter.

**Genesis 35:1-3** – *Then God said to Jacob, "Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau."*

<sup>2</sup> *So Jacob told everyone in his household, "Get rid of all your pagan idols, purify yourselves, and put on clean clothing." <sup>3</sup> We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone."*

The first item that we come across in this chapter is where God finally commands Jacob to move to Bethel. If you'll remember, it was many years ago that God told Jacob the land at Bethel belongs to him. We can see God's patience on display here. It was 42 years ago by one account since Jacob made a vow on his journey to Padan-aram. Jacob's obviously been in no haste to fulfil that vow, but God had decided it was now time for Jacob to move back and claim his inheritance.

Not only do we see evidence of God's patience here, but we also see God's requirement that we fulfil our vows to Him. We need to be mindful of this as we make promises to Him for He does not take them lightly and neither should we.

Have you ever broken a vow you've made to God? How did that work out for you?

**Genesis 35:4** – *<sup>4</sup> So they gave Jacob all their pagan idols and earrings, and he buried them under the great tree near Shechem. <sup>5</sup> As they set out, a terror from God spread over the people in all the towns of that area, so no one attacked Jacob's family.*

One commentator has remarked that earrings seem to have been worn back then not so much for ornament as for superstitious purposes, being regarded as talismans or amulets. Hence, it was from earrings that Aaron made the golden calf (Exodus 32).

Jacob and his family were protected from attack by God striking terror into the hearts of those that lived in the area. God only knows how many times He has stricken terror into the hearts of our enemies or put favor in the hearts of those with which we've come in contact in order to bless us. When things go better for you in a situation than you expected, be sure to give thanks to God for He surely had a hand in it!

**Genesis 35:6-7** – *<sup>6</sup> Eventually, Jacob and his household arrived at Luz (also called Bethel) in Canaan. <sup>7</sup> Jacob built an altar there and named the place El-bethel (which means "God of Bethel"), because God had appeared to him there when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau.*

So often, we forget about the wonderful promises that God has made us as we become focused on this world in which we live. Jacob built altars to remember the places where God appeared to him.

How do you commemorate when God makes an appearance in your life? Do you ever build altars in your heart to commemorate and give God glory for when He has appeared in your life?

We should pass on the stories of these times to our children and grandchildren so that they have evidence of God's presence in our lives and can be encouraged.

**Genesis 35:8** – <sup>8</sup> *Soon after this, Rebekah's old nurse, Deborah, died. She was buried beneath the oak tree in the valley below Bethel. Ever since, the tree has been called Allon-bacuth (which means "oak of weeping").*

Here we have a simple mention of the death of Rebekah's old nurse. It's nothing but a brief mention of her and where she was buried. However, her death has been forever memorialized in the Bible. What an awesome tribute to have done for her!

The fact that the tree was known afterward as the "oak of weeping" shows how special Deborah must have been to the family.

**Genesis 35:9-10** – <sup>9</sup> *Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him, <sup>10</sup> saying, "Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel." So, God renamed him Israel.*

Once again, God appears to Jacob. As He does so, he renames Jacob (meaning "holder of the heel" or "supplanter") to Israel (meaning "He retains God" or "God is upright"). Now, the angel that wrestled with Jacob had previously told him his name was being changed, but God confirms the fact now.

**Genesis 35:11-13** – <sup>11</sup> *Then God said, "I am El-Shaddai—"God Almighty." Be fruitful and multiply. You will become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants! <sup>12</sup> And I will give you the land I once gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants after you." <sup>13</sup> Then God went up from the place where he had spoken to Jacob.*

Never let it be said that God exaggerates! He told Jacob that he would "become a great nation, even many nations." At this time, Jacob had eleven sons and at least one daughter. In time, he added one more son and these twelve would eventually become the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. Each tribe would be considered a nation.

Apparently, they took the "be fruitful and multiply" part seriously because in twenty-six years he'll go down to Egypt with 70 souls. In just 210 years after that when they leave Egypt, they would number at around 1.8 MILLION souls. Be fruitful indeed! The kings mentioned in his lineage would come after that which included, of course, the King of Kings, Jesus Christ!

**Genesis 35:14-15** – <sup>14</sup> *Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where God had spoken to him. Then he poured wine over it as an offering to God and anointed the pillar with olive oil. <sup>15</sup> And Jacob named the place Bethel (which means "house of God"), because God had spoken to him there.*

Jacob builds yet another altar to God. You'll note that he does that a lot! But, that's actually a very good thing. He creates a remembrance of God in those places where God has spoken to him. These places are remembered and revered to this day. This should be a lesson to us to commemorate those times when God has greatly blessed us or answered our prayers and brought us through a tough time of trial. We should leave

a “marker” of some sort as a reminder to us that God is always with us as an anchor for our soul that we can use in those troubling times when we’re tempted to think God has abandoned us or won’t bring us through a particular trial. It can also be an encouragement for our children and their children as Jacob’s monuments have been.

**Genesis 35:16-18** – <sup>16</sup> *Leaving Bethel, Jacob and his clan moved on toward Ephrath. But Rachel went into labor while they were still some distance away. Her labor pains were intense.* <sup>17</sup> *After a very hard delivery, the midwife finally exclaimed, “Don’t be afraid—you have another son!”* <sup>18</sup> *Rachel was about to die, but with her last breath she named the baby Ben-oni (which means “son of my sorrow”). The baby’s father, however, called him Benjamin (which means “son of my right hand”).*

If you’ll remember, Rachel said to Jacob back in Genesis 30:1, “Give me children, or I’ll die!” It is with bitter irony now that at the point when she finally does have children, she dies!

Rachel, literally with her dying breath, names her son, Ben-oni. But then Jacob inexplicably changes the baby’s name to Benjamin. Why exactly would he do this?

Some might say that Jacob dishonored Rachel by not keeping the name she gave, with her dying breath, to the son for whom she surrendered her life to birth. However, there is another side to it. Jacob refused to live in the past and the sorrow associated with this tragic event by saddling his son with a name that would remind them of that sorrowful event every time his name was spoken. Instead, he gave his son a name that would honor what had been gained, not what had been lost. There’s a good lesson for us here.

When bad things happen in our lives, when people do things that offend or hurt us, we should not grab hold of them and refuse to let them go. Learn any life lessons that can be learned and move forward. This life is hard enough without dragging along all that extra baggage!

**Genesis 35:19-20** – <sup>19</sup> *So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).* <sup>20</sup> *Jacob set up a stone monument over Rachel’s grave, and it can be seen there to this day.*

Jacob then did what Jacob always did. He set up a stone monument over Rachel’s grave. He did love to build his monuments!

The current location known as Rachel’s Tomb was originally located about a half mile from Bethlehem and is considered the 3<sup>rd</sup> holiest site in Judaism. However, as with many Old Testament monuments there is considerable debate as to whether this is the actual location of Rachel’s tomb or not.

Oddly enough, this tomb is considered holy not only by Jews and Christians but also by Muslims, as well. In fact, there is a long history of conflict between the Jews and Muslims over the site. As has occurred with the Temple Mount, the Muslims have attempted to make this site their own. They assert that the site is a place of Muslim prayer and is an integral part of the Muslim cemetery within which it was situated (although, that cemetery didn’t exist until after 1948).

From the Byzantine period until the 1800’s Rachel’s Tomb consisted of a tiny domed structure. Sir Moses Montefiori renovated the tomb in 1841 and enclosed the dome over the grave marker so pilgrims could find shelter from the elements. He also added an antechamber, including a mihrab for Muslim prayer, to ease Muslim fears.

Today, the tomb stands in the center of town with one of the main streets passing right next to it. It has been surrounded by reinforced concrete walls 13-feet tall with 2 guard towers. This simple monument has evolved into a fortress at the center of great conflict.

As we consider that which started here as a simple monument, let's discuss the monuments we build in our own lives.

- First off, does a monument have to be physical in nature?
- What are some examples of "monuments" that people build in their lives?
- What are some examples of good points about monuments?
- Are these monuments always a good thing or can they also be bad?
- If so, what are examples of some bad points?
- Do our children "inherit" our personal monuments? What can be good or bad about that?

**Genesis 35:21-22** – <sup>21</sup> Then Jacob traveled on and camped beyond Migdal-eder. <sup>22</sup> While he was living there, Reuben had intercourse with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Jacob soon heard about it.

Nothing like having your most embarrassing and grievous sin immortalized in the Bible, huh! It just goes to show us that we're no more evil or corrupt today than our ancestors were way back when. I would imagine this event would have made family dinners awkward for quite a while!

**Genesis 35:23-26** – *These are the names of the twelve sons of Jacob:*

<sup>23</sup> The sons of Leah were Reuben (Jacob's oldest son), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

<sup>24</sup> The sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin.

<sup>25</sup> The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant, were Dan and Naphtali.

<sup>26</sup> The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant, were Gad and Asher.

*These are the names of the sons who were born to Jacob at Paddan-aram.*

Here we have a recap of the 12 sons of Jacob. Of course, they would later become the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Genesis 35:27-29** – <sup>27</sup> So Jacob returned to his father, Isaac, in Mamre, which is near Kiriath-arba (now called Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had both lived as foreigners. <sup>28</sup> Isaac lived for 180 years. <sup>29</sup> Then he breathed his last and died at a ripe old age, joining his ancestors in death. And his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him.

Jacob finally returns home to his father. And, just like the estranged brothers Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father Abraham, Esau and Jacob came together to bury their father. Death is a tragic but inevitable event for us all. However, there can be some good to come out of it. It can allow estranged family members a time to come together and heal old wounds. The shared grief of those who have lost loved ones gives them a common thread they can use to reconcile. As we face more and more losses in our families as we get older, we should use that time to rebuild broken connections to our loved ones while we still have time.