GENESIS

Chapter 35

*Jacob Returns to Bethel*

**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.” 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. 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.” 4 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. 5 Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them. 6 Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. 7 There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother. 8 Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth.9 After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. 10 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. 11 And God said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. 12 The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.” 13 Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him14 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. 15 Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.**

**35:1** *God said* … *to the God who appeared to you*. He wanted Jacob to see distinctly that the God addressing him now in Canaan is the same God who appeared to him on the other side of the Jordan, though the manifestation may be different. God spoke to Jacob in this way not because a different god had appeared to him then (28:13) but because of the distinction of persons in the one, undivided Godhead. (TLSB)

 *God … appeared to you when you were fleeing.* See v. 7; 28:13. (CSB)

**35:2** *foreign gods you have with you.* See note on 31:19 (see also Jos 24:23). (CSB)

Plunder from Shechem (34:28–29) likely included statues of false gods.

 *purify yourselves*. Possibly included bathing and sexual abstinence, as well as repentance and faith in the promised Messiah. (TLSB)

**35:3** *God … who has been with me.* See 28:15; see also note on 26:3. (CSB)

**35:4** *rings.* Worn as amulets or charms; a pagan religious custom (cf. Hos 2:13). (CSB)

 *the oak at Shechem.* Obviously a well-known tree, perhaps the “great tree” mentioned in 12:6 (see Jos 24:26). (CSB)

**35:5** *the terror of God.* God protected his servant. (CSB)

God used this to protect Jacob’s family. The cities would have wanted to kill Jacob and his family for what his sons did at Shechem (34:25–30). (TLSB)

**35:7** *built an altar.* See note on 12:7. (CSB)

 *called the place El-bethel*. God twice revealed Himself here to Jacob; hence the name, which means “God of the house of God.” (TLSB)

**35:8** *Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died.* After long years of faithful service (see 24:59). (CSB)

 *the oak.* Again probably a well-known tree (see note on v. 4), perhaps the “great tree” mentioned in 1Sa 10:3. (CSB)

 *below.* Either “lower than” or “to the south of.” (CSB)

**35:9** *Jacob returned.* See map of “Jacob’s Journeys”. (CSB)

 *Paddan Aram.* Means “plain of Aram,” another name for Aram Naharaim (see note on 24:10). (CSB)

**35:10** *Jacob … Israel.* The previous assignment of an additional name (see 32:28) is here confirmed. For similar examples compare 21:31 with 26:33, and 28:19 with 35:15.

**35:11–12** This event climaxes the Isaac-Jacob cycle (see Introduction: Literary Features). Now that Jacob was at last back at Bethel, where God had begun his direct relationship with him, God confirmed to this chosen son of Isaac the covenant promises made to Abraham (17:1–8; see 28:3). His words echo his original benediction pronounced on man in the beginning (1:28) and renewed after the flood (9:1, 7). God’s blessing on mankind would be fulfilled in and through Jacob and his offspring. See also 47:27; Ex 1:7. (CSB)

God confirmed the name He gave Jacob previously. Luther: “God is speaking about the chief name, concerning the promises.… He has to be Israel … on account of these promises. But he was also called Jacob [i.e., deceiver] … on account of his works” (AE 6:263). (TLSB)

**35:11** *be fruitful and multiply*. The man Israel was already the father of many children; this command was meant also for his descendants. (TLSB)

**35:12** *Abraham and Isaac*. The Lord confirmed His promise to the fathers. (TLSB)

**35:13** See note on 17:22. (CSB)

**35:14** See 28:18 and note. (CSB)

 *pillar*. Jacob had built the previous pillar into an altar (v 7). Here, he set up another pillar. (TLSB)

 *drink offering.* A liquid poured out as a sacrifice, here mentioned for the first time; see Ex 29:40.

Luther: “It was the rite for initiating and anointing and was also taken up later by Moses, for he anoints the priests and their clothing, etc., just as Jacob anoints the stone that the place may be consecrated and dedicated to God and that the church might come together in this place to hear the Word of God, to pray, and to give thanks” (AE 6:266). (TLSB)

**35:15** See 28:19; see also note on v. 10. (CSB)

**35:1–15** There was little mention of God in ch 34. Now, He again takes center stage, and Jacob responds. Jacob gets rid of the false gods. He journeys to Bethel, the “house of God.” He again hears God’s promises. He worships. Where God’s people assemble around Word and Sacrament, God Himself is present to forgive those who repent. • “My soul, now praise your Maker! Let all within me bless His name Who makes you full partaker Of mercies more than you dare claim.” Amen. (*LSB* 820:1) (TLSB)

*The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac*

**16 Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. 17 And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, “Don’t be afraid, for you have another son.” 18 As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel’s tomb. 21 Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. 22 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: 23 The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. 24The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25The sons of Rachel’s maidservant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. 26The sons of Leah’s maidservant Zilpah: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram. 27 Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. 28 Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. 29 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.**

**35:16** *Ephrath.* The older name for Bethlehem (see v. 19) in Judah (see Ru 1:2; Mic 5:2). (CSB)

**35:17** *another son.* An echo of Rachel’s own plea at the time of Joseph’s birth (see 30:24). (CSB)

Benjamin. Joseph was Rachel’s firstborn. (TLSB)

**35:18** *soul*. Hbr *nephesh*. When the soul leaves the body, death occurs. (TLSB)

 *Benjamin.* See NIV text note. (CSB)

Jacob called his son Benjamin lest the name Ben-oni become a constant reminder of Rachel’s death. (TLSB)

**35:19** *Rachel died.* In childbirth (see note on 30:1). (CSB)

 *Bethlehem*. May refer to the whole region, not just the city. (TLSB)

**35:20** *Rachel’s tomb.* See 1Sa 10:2. The traditional, though not authentic, site is near Bethlehem. (CSB)

She was buried at Ramah, along the road running down to Bethlehem. (TLSB)

**35:21** *Migdal Eder.* Means “tower of the flock,” doubtless referring to a watchtower built to discourage thieves from stealing sheep and other animals (see, e.g., 2Ch 26:10). The same Hebrew phrase is used figuratively in Mic 4:8, where “flock” refers to the people of Judah (see Mic 4:6–7). (CSB)

Exact location unknown; near Edom. (TLSB)

**35:22** Reuben’s act was an arrogant and premature claim to the rights of the firstborn—here the right to inherit his father’s concubine. For this he would lose his legal status as firstborn (see 49:3–4; 1Ch 5:1; see also note on 37:21). (CSB)

Bilhah, Rachel’s maid, was also called Jacob’s wife (30:4). Reuben’s sin of incest caused him to lose the birthright. (TLSB)

**35:26** *sons of Jacob … born to him in Paddan Aram.* Obviously a summary statement since Benjamin was born in Canaan (see vv. 16–18). (CSB)

**35:27** *Isaac*. Jacob’s father was still living, though he was prepared to die many years earlier (27:4). (TLSB)

 *Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron).* See notes on 13:18; 23:2. (CSB)

**35:29** See note on 25:8. (CSB)

 *buried him.* In the family tomb, the cave of Machpelah (49:30–31). (CSB)

Isaac was buried near Mamre with his parents and wife, Rebekah. Mention of both Esau and Jacob shows that they were reconciled. Cf ch 33. (TLSB)

 **35:16–29** Sorrows surround Jacob. He learns of his son’s incest with his concubine and also the death of his wife and of his father. God-fearing people such as Jacob sometimes have children who fall into great sin and shame. And even those who receive God’s promises, such as Rachel and Isaac, are still subject to death. Mourning is a part of life in a sin-broken world. When sorrows surround you, call on the Lord in prayer. Remember and celebrate His promises, which are guaranteed to you in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Because Jesus conquered death and sin, we have comfort in the midst of all troubles. • O Lord, forgive our sins, and bring us to eternal life for Jesus’ sake. Amen. (TLSB)