

## Genesis 35

### Limits of the Text

At first glance, this chapter appears to contain four unrelated sections: Jacob's covenant renewal (1-15), the birth of Benjamin (16-20), the rebellion of Reuben (21-26), and the reunion of Jacob with his father Isaac (27-29). But Moses has clearly related these events by organizing them around the itinerary of Jacob's travels from Shechem to Bethel to Ephrath to Eder to Hebron. These events conclude the *toledeth*<sup>1</sup> of Isaac; the next chapter is the *toledeth* of Esau.

### Interpretation

The events of this chapter are bound together geographically and chronologically as Jacob and his recently-expanded household move from Shechem to Hebron. They are also bound together thematically. The primary theme is the idea of completion, which gives the diverse units of this chapter cohesion.<sup>2</sup> Jacob completed his vow, the birth of Benjamin completed the family, and God completed his promise to bring Jacob. There is also a secondary theme in this chapter, which is leadership. After his failure at Shechem, Jacob renewed his leadership of the family, which was seen in the command to put away the foreign gods and by his naming of his son. There was also a change in leadership, as the previous generation was dying off, and a new generation was coming to the foreground. And finally there was a question of who would lead the family in the future.

The events of this chapter are also related to the previous chapter. God used the sins committed at Shechem as motivation to push Jacob to be obedient (finally) and fulfill his vow.

The first event in this chapter is the covenant renewal at Bethel. This event demonstrates God's faithfulness to help Jacob complete his vow to worship God at Bethel.

35:1 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Toledeths* are the literary devices that Moses used to divide up the book of Genesis; there are twelve of them. They are often translated as "these are the generations of" and precede a genealogy.

<sup>2</sup> Mathews, 610.

<sup>3</sup> All quotes from ESV unless specified otherwise.

“The book of Genesis is largely about God establishing his kingdom through his covenant people...In this scene God again takes the initiative (35:1-2) to effect his plan...There is only one real obstacle to its fulfillment: the depravity of his covenant people...As Abraham failed in Egypt (12:10-20) and Isaac in Philistia, so Jacob fails at Shechem. These failures, however, became stepping stones in their faith.”<sup>4</sup> That failure can be a stepping stone is a testament to God’s faithfulness.

God demonstrated his faithfulness to Jacob by reiterating his command to go to Bethel and make an altar. When fleeing Esau, Jacob had vowed to return to Bethel and worship God again (28:20-22), and while serving Laban, God had commanded him to return (31:3, 13). Although Jacob had left Paddan-aram quickly, he had wasted approximately ten years in Succoth and Shechem. After his failure at Shechem, Jacob was finally ready to obey God once again; although God did not orchestrate the rape and massacre, he certainly used them to jolt Jacob out of his spiritual lethargy. “The divine covenant partner takes the initiative to renew the covenant with his flawed human partner.”<sup>5</sup> Note that it was God who was initiating, and Jacob who was responding; God continued to work on behalf of his covenant people.

Why does God remind Jacob about his flight from Esau? God subtly reminded Jacob that as he had helped him in the past, so he would help him now.

35:2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments.

Because of the manner in which he obeyed God, it is evident that Jacob responded to God’s command with humility and repentance. As preparation to obey God, he gave three commands to this household and to all who were with him (“all who were with him” was probably a reference to the women and children from Shechem). First, Jacob told them to put away their gods. This was a command for the people to rededicate themselves to the Lord and to prepare for the proper worship of God (1 Sa 7:3-4). “Repentance entails renouncing whatever hinders or tarnishes worship of God.”<sup>6</sup> The covenant people were to worship God alone, and they were to have no carved images (Ex 20:3-4). When did they acquire these gods? They were probably part of the plunder of

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<sup>4</sup> Waltke, 474.

<sup>5</sup> Waltke, 471.

<sup>6</sup> Waltke, 472.

Shechem (34:28-29), though Jacob's family may have acquired some while living in Succoth and Shechem.

Second, Jacob told them to purify themselves. This was also preparation for the proper worship of God, and it involved the ritual washing of themselves and their clothes. This may have been required because Jacob's sons had come into contact with the dead bodies of the men of Shechem (34:27)<sup>7</sup> and their idols.

Third, Jacob told them to change their garments, which symbolized a breaking away from sin. Paul used this same language when he wrote "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:22-24; see also Co 3:10-11) and "all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Ga 3:27, NASB95).

35:3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."

Jacob announced the reason for the three previous commands: He was ready to go and obey God. In revealing his plans, Jacob revealed his understanding of the character of God: God is a God who answers prayer during the difficult times and never, ever abandons his people (Dt 31:6; Hb 13:5). God is reliable and dependable and faithful, even in the most difficult situations, situations like his confrontations with Laban (31) and Esau (33). This was exactly what God had proclaimed about himself: "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Ge 28:15). This is still the character of God today.

35:4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

In the narrative of the rape of Dinah, it is evident that Jacob was passive, and his sons assumed the responsibility for leading the family through that crisis. In this

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<sup>7</sup> Mathews, 617.

narrative, it is equally evident that Jacob has reassumed the responsibility of leading his family. He gave orders, and the family responded in obedience.

Moses particularly noted they were careful to put away the foreign gods. What is the significance of the earrings in this context? “The earrings were not everyday jewelry but amulets and talismans engraved with pagan symbols.”<sup>8</sup> Why does Jacob hide them instead of destroy them? The verb here can mean to hide or to bury, and Waltke suggests that the idea here is they were buried ignominiously; that is, Jacob dumped them under the tree. It’s as if they symbolically put the idols in their grave.<sup>9</sup> Why did Moses focus on putting away the gods? When Moses wrote the Pentateuch, the children of Israel were on the brink of entering the Promised Land. They had dealt with the problem of idolatry while in the wilderness (e.g., the golden calf), and they would deal with it again shortly when they encountered the Canaanites.

“By abandoning their gods and rings at Shechem, Jacob closed the chapter at Shechem and looked ahead to the realization of the Bethel promise and vow.”<sup>10</sup>

[35:5 And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.](#)

Jacob’s fear in 34:30, though born out of a lack of faith, was justified. When word got out about the deception and the murders at Shechem, Jacob’s clan suddenly had a reputation it didn’t want. They were no longer a peaceful clan (34:21) but an aggressive, violent one. Neither the clans near Shechem nor those along route to Bethel would welcome Jacob’s clan; they would join together, pursue them, and destroy them.

But as Jacob rightly perceived, his God is the God who answers in the day of distress and is with his people wherever they go. “The Lord’s purposes for Jacob’s clan superseded any retaliatory plans made by the Canaanites.”<sup>11</sup> The fear of God fell upon the cities, so they left Jacob’s clan alone. “This protective measure of the Lord ensured his pilgrims a safe journey.”<sup>12</sup> God was again working behind the scenes on Jacob’s behalf. Rahab would give evidence that this same fear struck the Canaanites in Joshua’s day (Jos 2:9).

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<sup>8</sup> Hughes, 421.

<sup>9</sup> Waltke, 473.

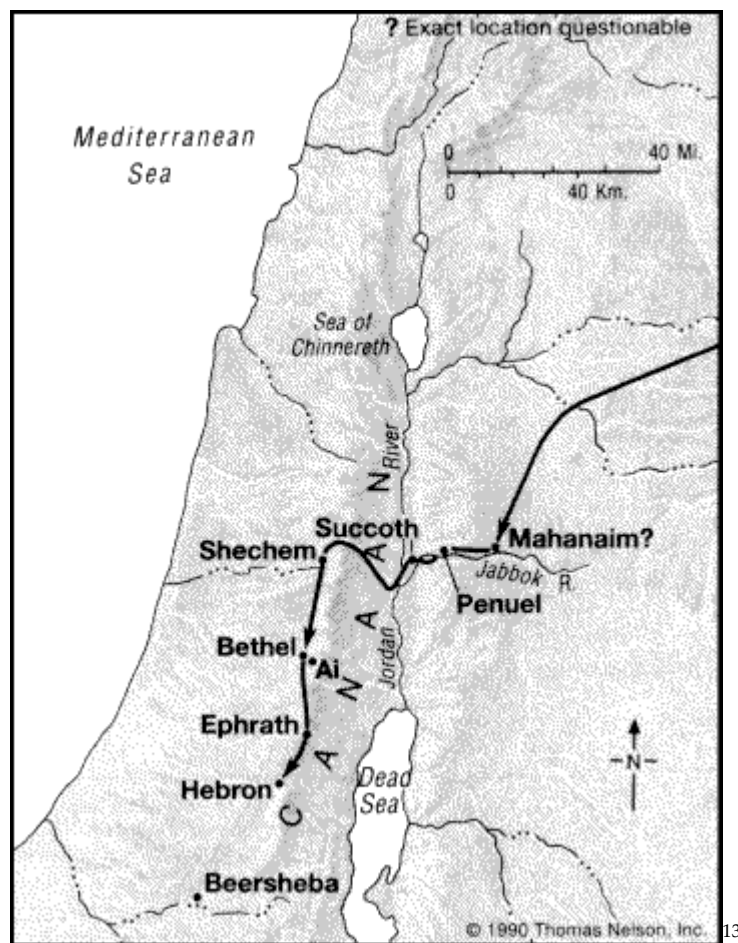
<sup>10</sup> Mathews, 618.

<sup>11</sup> Mathews, 619.

<sup>12</sup> Ross, 580.

35:6 And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him,  
35:7 and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.

Jacob finally arrived at Bethel and fulfilled his vow to God. He didn't have far to go, as Bethel was only about 20 miles south of Shechem, about a one day journey. Bethel was where God had met Jacob the first time, when he was fleeing from Esau (28:11-22).



When he arrived, he built an altar and worshipped God, much like his father (12:7; 13:18) and grandfather (26:25) had done. "By their worship, the covenant family retains their separation from the Canaanites, their witness to them, and

<sup>13</sup> Nelson's.

symbolically their claim to the land based on God's promises."<sup>14</sup> The focus of this text is not Jacob, but God. When Jacob worshipped God, it demonstrated the faithfulness of God, the God who was with Jacob and brought him back to Bethel, despite his many distresses (35:3).

What does El-bethel mean? It means The God of Bethel, that is, the God of the House of God. The name Bethel focuses upon the location, the place where God appeared Jacob (and would again, 35:9). The name El-bethel focuses upon the person, the God who met Jacob at Bethel. "When Jacob reiterates the connection of the theophany with his flight from Esau...he recalls the defining moment in his life that eventually led full circle to his return to Bethel."<sup>15</sup>

[35:8 And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth.](#)

The insertion of the death of Deborah at this point in the narrative is rather puzzling and raises many questions.

Why did Moses mention Deborah? Wasn't she with Rebekah? When Abraham's servant took Rebekah from Nahor to be Isaac's bride, Deborah went with her (24:59). As Deborah was Rebekah's nurse, not Rachel's or Leah's nurse, she is not expected in a narrative about Jacob. There are two possibilities: Either Deborah was with Jacob at this point in time, or she wasn't. Waltke believes that she was not, and that Moses inserted her death here simply because this is when it happened chronologically.<sup>16</sup> Thus those who mourned her would have been Isaac's household, not Jacob's. Others, however, believe that somewhere along the way Deborah joined Jacob.<sup>17</sup> In particular, Mathews believes Rebekah sent Deborah to Jacob in Paddan-Aram in fulfillment of her promise to send word when Esau was no longer angry (27:45).<sup>18</sup> I find it difficult to agree with Mathews' exact position, because previous narratives make it clear that Jacob expected his brother to still be angry (32:3-21; 33:1-3). But the general idea is certainly possible; Rebekah may have sent Deborah to Jacob with some other message. Given that this narrative is about Jacob, I think it more likely that Deborah was with Jacob; however, I concede there is no textual evidence for this idea.

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<sup>14</sup> Waltke, 473.

<sup>15</sup> Mathews, 620.

<sup>16</sup> Waltke, 473.

<sup>17</sup> Ross, 580.

<sup>18</sup> Mathews, 621.

Why did Moses bring up Deborah at all, especially given that he never told the story of Rebekah's death? Waltke suggests that Moses memorialized Deborah instead of Rebekah as a rebuke for Rebekah's part in the deception of Isaac (27:5-17).<sup>19</sup> The implication is that if Rebekah had trusted God and been honest, then Moses would have memorialized her when she died.

What is the significance of the oak tree? "An oak tree was regarded as sacred in the ancient world...It was common to designate oaks as shrines, landmarks, or dwelling places."<sup>20</sup>

What does Allon-bacuth mean? It means oak of weeping, because the passing of Deborah was greatly mourned. This name would have distinguished this oak from other oaks in the area.

Why did Moses inserted this little tidbit about Deborah *here* in the narrative? There are probably two reasons. The first reason, as Waltke suggests, is chronological. Whether Deborah was with Isaac or with Jacob, she died just after Jacob built the altar to God. The second reason is distinction; that is, it helps the reader to understand that Jacob's building of the altar in 35:7 was a distinct event from God's appearing to Jacob in 35:9.

[35:9 God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him.](#)

Some time after Jacob built the altar, God appeared to Jacob at Bethel, the second such appearing. The first appearance was when Jacob was fleeing from Esau (35:1); this appearance was when he came from Paddan-aram. Naming these locations serve as a reminder that God has fulfilled his promise to bring Jacob back and never leave him (32:15).

The similarities between God's appearance to Abram in 17 and his appearance to Jacob here are so striking that Hughes calls this event "a divinely orchestrated parallel."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Waltke, 473.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, 581.

<sup>21</sup> Hughes, 422.

<b>The LORD appeared to Abram (17:1)</b>	<b>God appeared to Jacob (35:9)</b>
The LORD said, "I am God Almighty" (17:1)	God said, "I am God Almighty" (35:11)
Name changed from Abram to Abraham (17:5)	Name changed from Jacob to Israel (35:10)
"I will make you exceedingly fruitful" (17:6).	"Be fruitful and multiply" (35:11).
"I will make you into nations" (17:6).	"A company of nations shall come from you" (35:11).
"Kings shall come from you" (17:6).	"Kings shall come from your own body" (35:11).
"I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings" (17:8).	"The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land your offspring after you" (35:12)
"God went up from Abraham" (17:22)	"God went up from him" (35:13)

35:10 And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel.

If this verse seems familiar, it's because God had already changed Jacob's name at Peniel. "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed" (32:28).

What's the difference between this name change and the previous one? This is a reaffirmation of the previous name change, though there are differences. One, Peniel was not in the Promised Land; Bethel was. Two, at Peniel he wrestled; at Bethel he only spoke. Three, his encounter at Peniel was with an angel of God; at Bethel it was God. The major difference, however, is one of emphasis. At Peniel, the emphasis was on the change in Jacob's character from one who schemes and manipulates to one who lets God fight for him; at Bethel, the emphasis is upon the covenant and its blessings, as seen in the following verses.<sup>22</sup>

35:11 And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body.

35:12 The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you."

<sup>22</sup> Mathews, 621.

God identifies himself as El-Shaddai, God Almighty. This title focuses on God's power and sovereignty; the emphasis in this context is that this is the God who has the ability to fulfill his covenantal promises of blessing and prosperity.<sup>23</sup> First, God gave a command to be fruitful and multiply. At this point in Jacob's life, it was unlikely that he would personally be able to be fruitful and multiply, thus the command was probably for his twelve sons, who would start a nation.

Second, God gave the covenantal promises that he would fulfill. As 35:10 reaffirmed God's change of Jacob's name, these verses reaffirmed God's covenant promises that he gave to Jacob at Bethel (28:13-15) with one addition, the mention of kings. The promise of fruitfulness would be fulfilled while in Egypt; the promise of the land would be fulfilled initially by Joshua and most fully by Solomon; and the promise of royalty would be fulfilled by the Davidic dynasty, culminating in King Jesus. These three big themes can all be traced back to creation and the fall; through the covenant, God is working to reverse the Fall. The meta-narrative of God's redemptive plan can be seen clearly in these promises.

35:13 Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him.  
35:14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it.

As he had done previously, Jacob set up a pillar (28:18-19). He poured oil on it, which consecrated it to the Lord, and he also poured out a drink offering. A drink offering, also known as a libation, was a form of worshipping God; Jacob's act is the first such recorded in the Bible. It was a consecration offering, representing an act of personal commitment; in the Mosaic Law it typically followed offerings of repentance and preceded offerings of fellowship.<sup>24</sup> In the New Testament Paul used this imagery, stating he was being poured out as a drink offering (Php 2:17; 2 Ti 4:6), referring to the sacrifice of his own body for the sake of the gospel.

35:15 So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

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<sup>23</sup> Swanson, DBLH 8724.

<sup>24</sup> Elwell, 972.

If this verse also seems familiar, it's because Jacob had called this place Bethel once before, when he was running from Esau. "He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first" (Ge 28:19). Jacob acknowledged once again that God had spoken to him in this place.

The second event in this chapter is the birth of Benjamin on the way to Ephrath. This event demonstrates God's faithfulness to complete Jacob's family, which fulfills the covenant promise of having offspring who will possess the land.

35:16 Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor.

35:17 And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son."

Jacob continued heading south, apparently intending to reunite with his father, which was part of his vow (28:21). Ephrath was the next location on the journey, somewhere south of where Jerusalem would one day be but north of Ephrath. The family didn't quite get there before Rachel unexpectedly went into labor, one with complications. She had prayed for another son previously (30:24), and the midwife tried to console with the news that God had answered her prayers.

With the birth of Benjamin, the final of Jacob's twelve sons had arrived; the patriarch's family was complete. God had been faithful to Jacob.

35:18 And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.

What does Ben-oni mean? Ben-oni means son of my sorrow. Apparently Rachel knew she was dying, and even the birth of another son was of no comfort to her.

What does Benjamin mean? Benjamin means son of my right hand and has the idea of a being a favored son or one in a position of authority. He certainly held a special place in his father's heart after Joseph was "killed" (42:38).

Why did Jacob make this change? Mathews believes that a name like "sorrow" would have been "a sad reminder of Rachel's adversity at the child's birth,"<sup>25</sup> thus he changed it to something more positive. Jacob's other children had been

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<sup>25</sup> Mathews, 625.

named by his wives; thus Jacob's changing of the names suggests his renewed leadership of the family.<sup>26</sup>

35:19 So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem),

Rachel had been Jacob's favored wife, and he must have grieved greatly for her, because he recalled his sorrow of losing her years later on his deathbed in Egypt (48:7).

Why was it important for Moses to associated Ephrath with Bethlehem? Sailhammer connects Jer 31:15 ("Rachel is weeping for her children.") to Mic 5:2 ("But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.") and concludes: "It appears that Rachel's agony in the birth of Benjamin had later become a picture of the painful waiting of the sons of Israel for the promised Messiah."<sup>27</sup>

35:20 and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day.

This must have been a significant pillar, because it was still around in Moses' day and even in Samuel's day (1 Sa 10:2).

The third event in this chapter is the rebellion of Rueben near Eder. This event demonstrates that God's promises are completed despite the sin of his people, even people in positions of leadership.

35:21 Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

The exact location of Eder is not currently known, but it was somewhere south of Bethlehem and north of Hebron.

35:22 While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve.

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<sup>26</sup> Waltke, 477.

<sup>27</sup> Sailhammer, 219.

The significance of this event is better understood by remembering that Bilhah had been the maidservant of Rachel (29:29) before she became the concubine of Jacob (30:3). Although Leah was the “senior” wife, Rachel was the favored wife; after the death of Rachel, it was apparently possible, perhaps even likely, that the position of favored wife would go to Bilhah.

Given this situation in the patriarchal family, it’s easier to see that Reuben’s incest was not an action of passion but of power. Sleeping with a father’s concubine was forbidden, and it left the wife defiled.<sup>28</sup> If Reuben defiled Bilhah, then that would clear the way for his mother, Leah, to become the favored wife. Reuben and his brothers were undoubtedly tired of Jacob’s favoritism to Rachel’s side of the family; now he hoped the favoritism would come their way.

Furthermore, it was a custom in near-eastern cultures that when a son slept with his father’s concubine, it was a sign that he had succeeded him in authority.<sup>29</sup> Reuben was in effect declaring his father dead and announcing that he had taken over the family leadership and had claimed his father’s inheritance.

Note that although Jacob heard about this, he apparently didn’t do anything about. It seems that Reuben rightly perceived that Jacob’s authority over the family was once again waning. Perhaps Reuben also counted on Jacob’s passivity, the same passivity which Jacob displayed the last time sexual sin occurred within the family (34:5).

What’s the significance of this verse? It’s about future leadership and the fulfillment of promises. In the short term Reuben might have gained some authority, but in the long run he lost; this sinful act cost Reuben his birthright. When Jacob blessed his sons, he said Reuben would not have the preeminence because he had defiled his father’s bed (49:3-4). Although his sin ruined Reuben’s inheritance, it did not destroy God’s covenant with Jacob and his family. The promises of a nation, a king, and the land (35:11-12) were not conditioned upon Reuben’s obedience, but upon God’s own faithfulness to keep his word. And God would fulfill his promises despite Reuben’s failure.

Reuben’s power play prompted Moses to list the twelve sons of Jacob.

[35:23 The sons of Leah: Reuben \(Jacob’s firstborn\), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar,](#)

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<sup>28</sup> Absalom did this to his father’s concubines, see 2 Sam 16:20-23.

<sup>29</sup> Mathews, 424.

and Zebulun.

35:24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

35:25 The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant: Dan and Naphtali.

35:26 The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

The way in which Moses listed the sons made it clear that this list was all about leadership and promises. The list was not based upon birth order but upon the rights of primogeniture, the basis for the birthright. Leah's sons were first (and they by age), then Rachel's, and then those of the concubines. Who would receive the birthright? Reuben had disqualified himself by sleeping with Bilhah. Simeon and Levi had disqualified themselves by the massacre at Shechem. That means Judah should have been the one to receive the birthright. On the other hand, Rachel was the favored wife, and Joseph was the favored son. And don't forget that the birthright had passed by the firstborn twice before (Ishmael was passed over in favor of Isaac; Esau was passed over in favor of Jacob). Would Judah be passed over in favor of Joseph? But there's more to this than just the birthright. God had promised Jacob that kings would come from his body (35:11). So there were two unanswered questions about the family succession: Who would get the birthright? And who would be the father of kings?

These questions are not answered in this text, but they are in future texts. Let's take a sneak peak at what's to come. When Jacob blessed his sons, he passed the birthright over Reuben (49:4) (and over Simeon and Levi as well (49:7)). To Judah he said,

"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk." (Ge 49:8-12)

This is the language of royalty; Judah would be the father of kings. From him would come the Davidic dynasty, the southern kingdom, and eventually the Messiah, King Jesus. The substitutionary death of the Messiah was foreshadowed by Judah's actions in Egypt. Although he proposed selling his

brother to the Ishmaelites (37:26-27), he later repented and volunteered to take the punishment in place of his brother Benjamin (44:33). In these actions, Judah emerged as the leader of the eleven brothers; from him would come the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Re 5:5).

Reuben's birthright, however, passed over Judah and went to the younger brother, Joseph. The writer of Chronicles, perhaps Ezra, wrote,

"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; though Judah became strong among his brothers and a chief came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph)..." (1 Ch 5:1-2)

This explains why the *toledeth* of Jacob primarily concerns Joseph, not Judah. Additionally, the birthright actually went to Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, whom Jacob adopted as his own and blessed (48; where, perhaps not surprisingly, the older was once again passed over in favor of the younger). Ephraim became the largest of the northern tribes, so much so that the kingdom of Israel was sometimes referred to as Ephraim (Is 7:8-9; Ho 4:17).

Despite Reuben's sin, God would keep the covenant, form the nation, and bring about the Messiah.

The fourth event in this chapter is the reunion of Jacob with his father at Hebron. This event demonstrates God's faithfulness to help Jacob complete God's command and return to his father's house.

35:27 And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.

35:28 Now the days of Isaac were 180 years.

35:29 And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Thirty years previous Jacob had fled the wrath of his brother Esau (27:43-45). On the way he unexpectedly met God at Bethel (28:13), where he vowed to make God his God if God would be with him so that he returned to his father's house (28:21). Furthermore, while in Paddan-Aram God commanded Jacob to return to his family (31:3). God had been with him and had helped him to return home before the death of his father.

Moses placed the death of Isaac here topically, as it completed the *toledeth* of Isaac. Chronologically, however, Isaac lived twelve years beyond the sale of Joseph.<sup>30</sup> The final verse was formulaic and nearly identical to the final verse on his grandfather, Abraham (25:8). Esau and Jacob, having been reconciled (33:4), buried Isaac and Rebekah in the cave that was in the field at Machpelah, east of Memre, which Abraham had bought, where Abraham and Sarah were already buried (49:30-31). Thus ended the *toledeth* of Isaac.

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<sup>30</sup> Mathews, 630.

## Three Levels of Narrative

1. Personal History – This is a story about Jacob’s travels from Shechem to Hebron and the events that happened along the way.
2. National History – This is a story about the formation of Israel, the transition from the founding fathers to the twelve tribes. God had fulfilled his promises to the last of the patriarchs; it remains to be seen how things will work out with his children.
3. Redemptive History – This is a story about the God who is faithful to complete what he starts; in particular, he was faithful to the promises he made to Jacob. The covenant he made with Abraham and Isaac he also renewed with Jacob. God is working to reverse the Fall and bring about the King through which all the world will be blessed.

## The Gospel

1. What does this text teach us about ourselves? What need or deficiency in our lives does it expose? We tend to get detoured, sidetracked, and distracted from keeping our promises to God and from obeying God’s commands. We need a God who will help us finish what we start and obey what we know we should do.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God’s grace to meet our need? God can use any situation in our life, even the worst tragedy and sin, to remind us of his grace and motivate and propel on towards action and obedience.
3. How does this text stand in relation to the gospel? This text reflects a key aspect of our need for redemption through the gospel. We need a gracious Savior who faithfully works through all events in our lives, even our sin.

## Textual Outline

1. God renewed his covenant with Jacob at Bethel (1-15).
  - a. Jacob prepared his family for worship (1-4).
  - b. Jacob worshipped God as he had vowed (5-8).
  - c. God renewed his covenant with Jacob (9-15).
2. Benjamin was born on the way to Ephrath (16-20).
3. Rueben rebelled in the land of Eder (21-26).
4. Jacob was reunited with his father at Hebron (27-29).

## **Central Truth of the Text**

Moses wrote Gen 35 in order to teach the Israelites that God was faithful to finish what he started and to help Jacob do the same.

## **Teaching Outline**

God's people know that God is faithful to finish what he starts and to help them do the same. God wants this church to understand that he finishes what he starts because he is faithful, and he wants us to rely upon him. From this text in Gen 35, we are going to see four truths about finishing what is started.

1. Because God is faithful, we rely upon his help to keep our promises to him.
2. Because God is faithful, we trust him to keep his promises.
3. Because God is faithful, we know our sin will not prevent God from keeping his promises.
4. Because God is faithful, we rely upon his help to keep his commands.

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