



BEGINNINGS

A Study of the Book of Genesis

Sanctuary Bible Studies – Woodbury Lutheran Church

Session 28: Jacob Comes Home to Bethel (Genesis 35-36)

1. JACOB RETURNS TO BETHEL (35:1-15)

- Vs. 1: It was at Bethel that Jacob had made vow to God 20 years earlier (28:1-22). Now God comes with a word for Jacob to leave Shechem and return to Bethel.
 - Bethel was a spiritual home for Jacob, a place where his worship would have roots deep into his soul.
 - In a spiritual vacuum at Shechem, God steps in with a sending message.
 - Bethel was only 15 miles S of Shechem, but, spiritually speaking, it was a great distance.
 - Jacob's willingness to go expresses not only perhaps a fear of reprisal following the massacre at Shechem but also a desire for spiritual renewal.
- Vss 2-5: At Jacob's command, his family gives up the household gods (Heb., *teraphim*) Rachel had stolen from her father, Laban (31:19). Along with these they give up their clothing, their earrings associated with the gods (Hosea 2:13), and purify themselves. There at Shechem they bury it all near the large oak tree (121:6) as they prepare to meet the true God at Bethel. As they travel, they are protected by God from the revenging neighbors around Shechem.
- Vss. 6-8: At Bethel Jacob builds an altar, recalling how God had appeared to him there 20 years earlier. Building an altar involved setting a stone or several stones in place and there worshipping God. The altar at the time of the patriarchs marked a place where God had made Himself known. Jacob names that place *El Bethel*, meaning the God of Bethel.
 - At Bethel Jacob's mother's nurse, Deborah, dies. Rebekah probably sent her to Jacob or she came to Jacob after Rebekah had died. Jacob and his mother never saw each other after she sent him away "for a while" 20+ years earlier (27:44).
- Vss. 9-14: At Bethel God renews His covenant promises with Jacob. The covenant here at Bethel includes the following:
 - Confirmation that his name is now Israel (as in Gen 32)
 - Renewed creation covenant, "Be fruitful and multiply."
 - Renewed promise of a nation and many nations as descendents
 - New promise of "kings" as descendents
 - Renewed promise of the land of Canaan

Jacob marks that place of blessing with a stone pillar. He marks it as a place of blessing with oil and with a drink offering. This is the first record of a drink offering in the Old Testament. It involved pouring out a liquid as a sacrifice (Exodus 29:40).

2. THE DEATHS OF RACHEL AND ISAAC

- Vss. 16-20: As Jacob's entourage moves south, nearing Ephrath (the old name for Bethlehem), Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin. As she dies, she names her second son (Joseph was her first) *Ben-Omi*, son of my sorrow. Jacob renames him *Benjamin*, son of the right hand. Jacob, in deep sorrow (Gen 49: 7), buries the love of his life near Bethlehem marking the place with a stone. Moses, the writer of Genesis, comments that the place was known in his day. See 1 Samuel 10:2.
- Vss. 21-22: At Shechem Jacob's sons disgraced him. Now near *Migdal Eder* ("Tower of the Flock") Reuben sleeps with his father's concubine, Bilhah. Jacob knew it, and many years later would take the rights of the firstborn away from Reuben and give them to Joseph. See Genesis 49:4, 26. Bilhah was the mother of two of Reuben's half-brothers, Dan and Naphtali. She was seen as a secondary wife of Jacob. What's more, Reuben's sexual sin also saw him usurping early the role of his father.
- Vss. 23-29: Finally at Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had both stayed, Jacob sees his father again. At the ripe old age of 180 Isaac dies. Both Jacob and Esau are there to bury him. We have no record that the two sons ever see each other again.

3. ESAU'S DESCENDENTS (36:1-43)

- Note the following from this chapter's genealogy of Esau's descendents:
 - Vs. 1: Edom and Esau are synonymous. Both have the word for "red" at their root.
 - Vss. 2-8: Jacob and Esau settle many miles apart since the land could not support all their wealth and herds (vs. 7). Seir (vs. 8) and Edom are synonymous. Seir, like Esau, is related to the Hebrew word for hair.
 - The list of names in vss. 10-14 is repeated in 15-19 as a list of tribal chiefs.
 - Vs. 11: Note "Eliphaz" and "Teman." See Job 2:11. One of Job's counselors was Eliphaz the Temanite. Job probably lived in this period of time in Edom.
 - The list of Seir's descendents in vss. 20-28 is repeated in short form in vss. 29-30 as a list of tribal chief.
 - Vss. 31-39 lists the kings of Edom.
 - Note vs. 31, "...before any Israelite king reigned" may be an editorial comment written long after Moses writes Genesis. See Genesis 14:14 for a similar case, "Dan" before there was a Dan.
 - Vss. 40-43 provides a summary list of tribal, regional chiefs.

BEGINNINGS

1. Most of us have a spiritual "home," where God's first, clear voice was heard. It's good at times to go "home," especially when we're spiritually dry.
2. Life in covenant begins when we surrender our gods and their accessories.
3. The consequences of our rash sins may not be felt for decades.
4. It's good to mark the spiritual landmarks of our lives.
5. Only when our focus is on God can we truly receive spiritual blessings.