

Genesis 35 – Bethel and Bethlehem

Review

Last time, we suffered together through the heart wrenching story of the rape of Jacob's daughter Dinah by Shechem son of Hamor, the prince of the city of Shechem where Jacob's family settled upon their return to Canaan from Paddan-aram. The rape of Dinah was bad enough, but the murderous vengeance perpetrated upon the men of Shechem by Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi was much worse. Even worse than that was the plunder of the city of Shechem by Jacob's sons.

Jacob Returns to Bethel

Biblical narratives in both the Old and New Testaments can be troublesome to the modern mind. We are accustomed to stories that follow a chronological timeline for the most part. We can tolerate “flashbacks” provided they are clearly demarked (e.g. when a character in the story dreams of something that happened in the past). But for the most part, we expect the narrative to stick with a chronological order. However, the stories we find in God's Word are often out of time order – particularly in the Old Testament. Instead, Biblical stories are often ordered by concept or theme, focusing on the lessons they teach rather than strictly adhering to the time order of the events they relate. This is particularly troublesome here in the first section of Genesis 35 which contains a mixture of “review” and new material. It's important for us to keep that in mind as we examine this passage.

Our story continues with God's calling Jacob to leave Shechem and return to Bethel (formerly Luz) where Jacob had dreamed of the stairway leading up to Heaven more than twenty years before. This was just as well, considering the recent unpleasant events in Shechem.

¹God 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.” Genesis 35:1 (ESV)

Bethel (Luz) was most likely located near the modern Arab village of Beitin in the Samaritan mountains in the northeastern outskirts of Ramallah about 10 miles north of Jerusalem and about halfway between Shechem (modern-day Nablus) and Bethlehem. We don't know how long Jacob remained in Bethel on his journey from Paddan-aram. God directed Jacob to “***dwell there***” and to build an altar there to Him. So, Jacob must have stayed longer than just a few days. After all, an altar takes time to build and isn't very practical unless it is then used for worship. But exactly how long Jacob dwelt in Bethel remains a mystery.

²So 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. ³Then 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.” ⁴So 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. Genesis 35:2-4 (ESV)

We've mentioned before that Jacob actually “got it” now and again. Jacob clearly remembered his dream of the stairway even until the very end of his life, recounting on his death bed the story to his son Joseph and his two grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim.

³And Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty ^[אל שדי 'el šaday] appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, ⁴and said to me, ‘Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.’ Genesis 48:3-4 (ESV)

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But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Jacob clearly recognized that Bethel was holy ground. Recall that after his dream there, Jacob had renamed Luz (as the place was formerly called) to Bethel (בֵּית־אֵל *bêt-'ēl* – **house of God**). Consequently, Jacob commanded his family to purify themselves before approaching the holy place.

Our only Biblical record of idolatrous religious practice in Jacob's family is the story of Rachel stealing her father's "household idols" (תְּרָפִים *t'rāpîm*) when the family departed from Paddan-aram (Genesis 31:19). However, the Canaanite women and children that Jacob's sons had taken captive from Shechem after murdering all the men of the town were certainly idol worshipers. It's easy for us to understand why Jacob commanded his family and entourage to remove the idols from their midst. But what about the earrings?

In our culture, earrings are just an adornment that doesn't carry any special spiritual or religious significance. But in ancient middle eastern culture, earrings could be a symbol of devotion - often to other gods than אֱלֹהֵי שָׂדַי *'ēl šaday* – the one true and living God. Jacob knew that these symbols could become a temptation for his people to stray from worshiping God alone. Such was the case with Gideon many years later following his victories over the Midianites.

²²Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian."

²³Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you." ²⁴And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

²⁵And they answered, "We will willingly give them." And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. ²⁶And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels. ²⁷And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family. Judges 8:22-27 (ESV)

Perhaps a more famous and even worse example of the misuse of earrings came while the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness of Sinai following their departure from captivity in Egypt. Recall that a so-called "mixed multitude" of Egyptians and other foreign people had followed Moses out of Egypt alongside the Israelites. The earrings worn by this multitude (and the Israelites themselves) became a snare which resulted in turning the Israelites away from worshiping the true God to worshiping the golden calf that Aaron made from them.

¹When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." ²So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" Exodus 32:1-4 (ESV)

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Small wonder then that Jacob commanded his people to remove their earrings and then buried them at Shechem before leaving for Bethel. Note that Jacob wisely cast these symbols away rather than putting them to some other use as Gideon and Aaron did hundreds of years later.

Earrings are not inherently evil. Earrings sometimes symbolized devotion to another person. For example, Abraham's servant gave an earring to Rebekah as a symbol of her devotion to her new prospective husband Isaac. Under the Law of Moses, the piercing of the ear of a slave (and presumably the filling of the piercing with an earring) symbolized that a slave had forsaken his right to be freed in the seventh year and agreed to remain devoted to his master for the remainder of his life (Exodus 21:5-6). Hundreds of years after Jacob died, the earrings of the Israelites were donated to build the ornaments and implements of the tabernacle (Exodus 35:22).

So, what's the take-away for us from all this earring talk? We must not allow the trappings of this world (symbolized in God's Word by the seemingly innocuous earring) to distract us from worshipping God alone wholeheartedly. God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel about His people who had become so enamored of their own earthly riches that they forsook their covenant with Him.

8b...[God speaking through Ezekiel to apostate Israel] ***I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD*** [אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה 'ăḏōnāy y'hōvâ], ***and you became mine. 9Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. 10I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. 11And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. 12And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. 13Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. 14And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord GOD.***

15***"But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his. 16You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. 17You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men [idols], and with them played the whore. Ezekiel 16:8b-17 (ESV)***

ASIDE – Notice that in the phrase **Lord GOD** found in Ezekiel 16:8, the word **GOD** is printed in all uppercase letters, but the word **Lord** is not. Ordinarily, when we find the covenant name of God – יהוה y'hōvâ in our printed English Bibles, the Name is printed as LORD either in all upper case or in a SMALLCAPS font. Here in this verse, we find a rare exception. In the phrase **Lord GOD** we see that **Lord** represents אֲדֹנָי 'ăḏōnāy while **GOD** represents the Hebrew יהוה y'hōvâ.

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. 6And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, 7and there he built an altar and called the place***

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El-bethel [אל בית־אל – God of the house of God], ***because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.*** Genesis 35:5-7 (ESV)

Small wonder that a terror fell upon the cities along the way as Jacob's clan journeyed from Shechem to Bethel. The news of the horrible murders and looting at Shechem no doubt spread like lightning along their path. Of course, this healthy fear of Jacob was truly a manifestation of the provision and protection God had lavished upon Jacob ever since he left his family in Beersheba to go to Paddan-aram. After all, it was that very divine provision and protection that the altar Jacob named El-bethel was built to commemorate and honor.

⁸And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth. [אלון בכות 'allôn bākût - oak of weeping]
Genesis 35:8 (ESV)

Here's our first example of what we mentioned earlier about the narrative in this passage skipping around. Moses (the presumed writer of Genesis) inserts this little snippet of information about Deborah's death right in the middle of his narrative about Jacob's return to Bethel and his continued journey toward his father's house at Mamre. Recall that Rebekah's nurse accompanied her mistress Rebekah and Abraham's servant on the return journey from her home at Haran in Paddan-aram to Isaac's home at Beersheba in the Negev where they were married (Genesis 24:59). Here in Genesis 35:8, we finally learn Deborah's name. But these two verses are the only places in God's Word where Rebekah's nurse is mentioned.

Carefully take note that we are not told in Genesis 35:8 *when* Deborah died or *who* buried her under the oak tree named Allon-bacuth. The juxtaposition of this verse with the rest of the narrative might lead us to conclude that Deborah was traveling with Jacob's family when they came to Bethel, but that assumption isn't necessarily supported by the text itself, only the placement of this news about Deborah's death. All we know with certainty is that Deborah died at some time and was buried by some man under an oak tree near Bethel that he called Allon-bacuth. We should be careful not to add any of our own presuppositions to the plain sense of the text.

Although we are informed here of Deborah's death, The Bible never mentions the death of Rebekah. We don't know whether Deborah was still in Rebekah's service when she died or not. Rebekah may have died before Deborah, after which Deborah returned to Paddan-aram where Jacob took her in and later brought her back to Canaan. Deborah might also have moved to Bethel following Rebekah's death. Rebekah might also have still been alive when Deborah died. Possibly the "he" who named her burial place Allon-bacuth was Isaac or some other man, and not Jacob at all despite the news of her death being placed inside the story of Jacob's return to Canaan. We simply don't know.

ASIDE – Rebekah's death is mentioned in the [Book of Jubilees](#) – an extra-Biblical Hebrew text purportedly given by angels to Moses on Mt Sinai at the same time that God gave him the Law we find recorded in the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The Book of Jubilees is considered canonical by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and by some Jewish sects. The earliest known manuscripts are fragments found among the Dead Sea Scrolls dating from around 100BC. The earliest complete manuscripts date to the 15th and 16th centuries AD, although the book was known to early Christians of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and mentioned by Josephus and some of the early church fathers in their writings. In addition to mentioning her death, the Book of Jubilees also records Jacob and Rebekah reuniting after his return from Paddan-Aram. That would then seem to indicate that Rebekah outlived Isaac.

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Obviously, the details of Rebekah's death were not relevant enough to the Gospel of Jesus Christ which God reveals to us by His Word for Him to deem it necessary to include them. We simply have to trust that if we needed to know more about the deaths of Deborah and Rebekah, God would have told us.

⁹God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: [אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי 'ēl šaday] be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. ¹²The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” Genesis 35:9-12 (ESV)

Compare God's words when He appeared to Jacob this second time at Bethel to those of the “man” with whom Jacob wrestled at Peniel.

²⁸Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel [יִשְׂרָאֵל yisrā'ēl – God prevails], for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Genesis 32:28 (ESV)

Next compare the Words of God when He appeared to Jacob in his dream at Bethel as he was journeying to Paddan-aram with those God spoke here when He appeared to Jacob at Bethel twenty years later.

¹³And behold, the LORD stood above it [the stairway to Heaven Jacob dreamt about] and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.” Genesis 28:13 (ESV)

The words are not identical, but surely the concepts are. God repeated His renaming of Jacob here at Bethel, but did not explain the meaning of the name Israel as He did at Peniel. Also, when Jacob asked God's Name at Peniel, the “man” who wrestled with Jacob sidestepped the question. Here in His second appearance to Jacob at Bethel, God identified Himself as אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי 'ēl šaday just as we might expect. This is consistent with what God told Moses when He spoke to him in Egypt to reiterate this promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

²God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, [אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי 'ēl šaday] but by my name the LORD [יְהוָה Y'hōvâ] I did not make myself known to them. ⁴I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners.” Exodus 6:2-3 (ESV)

But in Genesis 28:13, God is quoted introducing Himself to Jacob as ***the LORD*** (יְהוָה Y'hōvâ). Does that imply that God wasn't being truthful with Moses in Exodus 6:3? Certainly not! God is *always* truthful. He can't help it. Indeed, God is Truth. In fact, this is one of the reasons we assume that Moses first wrote down the Genesis narrative. Although Jacob only knew God as אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי 'ēl šaday, clearly Moses knew Him as יְהוָה Y'hōvâ because God introduced Himself to Moses that way in Egypt. Then Moses made use of that knowledge throughout the texts he wrote down. We rest assured that God is the true author of Genesis and indeed of His entire Word. But it seems quite evident that Moses was the storyteller God used to commit the story and the concepts we find in Genesis to written text.

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Looking at these connected passages, should we assume that God renamed Jacob twice – once at Peniel and once at Bethel? Possibly, but not necessarily.

When I was in the technical training business, one of my fellow instructors liked to say, “Three times for the common mind.” In fact, when I was being trained as a technical instructor, my trainers drilled this same concept into us saying, “Tell ‘em what you’re gonna tell ‘em. Tell ‘em. Tell ‘em what you told ‘em.” Moses (or whoever wrote the Genesis text) certainly understood this concept – as indeed God Himself does.

Possibly, Moses repeats these stories of Jacob’s renaming, and God’s promises to him for the benefit of his readers’ “common minds.” But it’s equally possible that God repeated the renaming and reiterated His promises for the benefit of *Jacob’s* “common mind” and Moses simply wrote down what God told him had happened. At the end of the day, it doesn’t really matter why we find the repetitions in the Bible, nor are the slight differences in the accounts cause for doubting the veracity of God’s Word.

ASIDE – Many people question why God gave us four slightly different written accounts of Jesus’ ministry rather than just one. We have already covered this topic in other studies, but it’s worthy of a quick review (for the sake of our common minds). The writers whom God chose to put His Gospel down in writing each brought their own backgrounds and preconceptions to the work. Perhaps more importantly, they each had their own intended audience and specific themes that they wanted to emphasize in their writing. God chose a variety of scribes for His Gospel for these very reasons. God knew that each of His chosen Gospel writers would have a different “take” on the events they recorded, and He knew that each of their readers would find one of these Gospel accounts more accessible and appealing than the others. Thus, God was “hedging His bets” to ensure His Gospel message would reach the maximum possible number of people in a form that would best lead them to believe the Gospel unto salvation in Christ.

¹³Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him.

¹⁴And 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.

¹⁵So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel. Genesis 35:13-15 (ESV)

Recall the Genesis 28 account of the morning after Jacob dreamt of a stairway leading up to Heaven with God speaking to him from its top.

¹⁸So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Genesis 28:18-19 (ESV)

The wording of these two passages is so similar, it is difficult to believe they refer to separate events. One possibility is that Jacob’s dream as he stayed overnight at Luz on his journey to Paddan-aram was a foreshadowing of this appearance of God to him at Bethel twenty years later which he then commemorated by erecting a stone pillar.

Remember too that Moses recorded these events hundreds of years later. He very likely based his narrative on oral testimony from Israelites who in turn had heard the story from their forefathers. Without doubt, some of the details became muddled in the retelling over the centuries. It seems virtually impossible that everyone who shared the story with Moses gave him identical details. Moses would then have been left with the unenviable task of trying to discern the common facts from these

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oral traditions and write them down. In some cases, Moses may have simply decided to include multiple versions which each conformed largely to the more common versions he had heard of the story.

Indeed, the fact that the story we find in God's Word today is as consistent as it is, testifies to the faithfulness of the Israelite people and the painstaking diligence of the Hebrew scribes who meticulously copied and passed down to us the ancient texts.

The Death of Rachel and Birth of Benjamin

¹⁶Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath [אֶפְרַת 'eprāt - ash-heap or place of fruitfulness], Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for you have another son.” ¹⁸And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni [בֶּן־אוֹנִי – son of my sorrow]; but his father called him Benjamin [בִּנְיָמִין binyāmīn – son of the right hand]. ¹⁹So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem [בֵּית לֶחֶם bêt lehem – house of bread]), ²⁰and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. Genesis 35:16-20 (ESV)

Jacob's reaction to the birth of his youngest son and the death of his favorite wife is noteworthy. His name for Benjamin is a stark contrast to Rachel's Ben-oni. The right hand symbolizes strength throughout God's Word. So Benjamin might rightly be said to mean “son of my strength.” As we shall see, Benjamin became Jacob's favorite son – even surpassing his second youngest son Joseph. The history of the tribe of Benjamin is particularly scandalous, but we'll refrain from discussing it apart from mentioning that eventually the tribe of Benjamin fomented an Israelite civil war (Judges 20).

Here in Genesis 35:16, we find the first mention of Ephrath which is commonly accepted as another name for Bethlehem. Perhaps the most noteworthy mention of Ephrath is in the messianic prophecy of Micah 5:2.

²But 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, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2 (ESV)

This prophecy was (perhaps unwittingly) fulfilled when Caesar Augustus commanded a census of all in his empire. Joseph and Mary were residents of Nazareth, but the census decree required them to travel to Bethlehem when Mary was about to give birth to her son Jesus. Thus Jesus was born in Bethlehem – not Nazareth – in fulfillment of the prophecy.

Long before Jesus' birth, the wheels for His advent in Bethlehem were set in motion by the Moabite Ruth who returned with her mother-in-law Naomi to her hometown of Bethlehem. There Ruth met and married Boaz – the great-grandfather of King David. Thus, Bethlehem became known as the City of David where Jesus was eventually born.

Years afterward, on his deathbed Jacob recounted Rachel's death to his son Joseph and his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh.

⁷As 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 [for about 2 hours

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distance] *to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).*” Genesis 48:7 (ESV)

Notice that Jacob says he buried Rachel “*...on the way to Ephrath*” not at or in Ephrath. The exact location of Rachel’s tomb remains the subject of debate. The medieval shrine constructed near the checkpoint north of Bethlehem where people pass from Israel into the area administered by the Palestinian Authority has traditionally been held to be the site of Rachel’s tomb. However, some scholars have proposed that [Qubur Bene Isra'in](#) (Arabic - Tombs of the Mothers of the Sons of Israel) about 3.5 miles north of Jerusalem along the way from Bethel to Bethlehem is a more likely location. Excavation of this site in 1997 revealed five large structures that had been used as burial chambers by nomadic shepherds during the Bronze Age. This would match the time of Jacob’s sojourn in the area albeit with only two millennia of precision. The location would seem to better agree with Jacob’s story told to Joseph and his sons than the medieval shrine in the city of Bethlehem.

Jacob’s Homecoming

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

²²While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine. And Israel heard of it. Genesis 35:21-22 (ESV)

Here’s yet another little non sequitur inserted in the middle of Jacob’s homecoming narrative. Jacob knew about Reuben and Bilhah’s tryst, but didn’t do anything about it at the time apparently. Many years later as he lay dying, Jacob brought the subject up again.

*³“Reuben, you are my firstborn,
my might, and the firstfruits of my strength,
preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.*

*⁴Unstable 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!”* Genesis 49:3-4 (ESV)

Of course, the Law of Moses had not yet been given at the time of Reuben and Bilhah’s sexual encounter. But under the Law, the punishment for such an act was death!

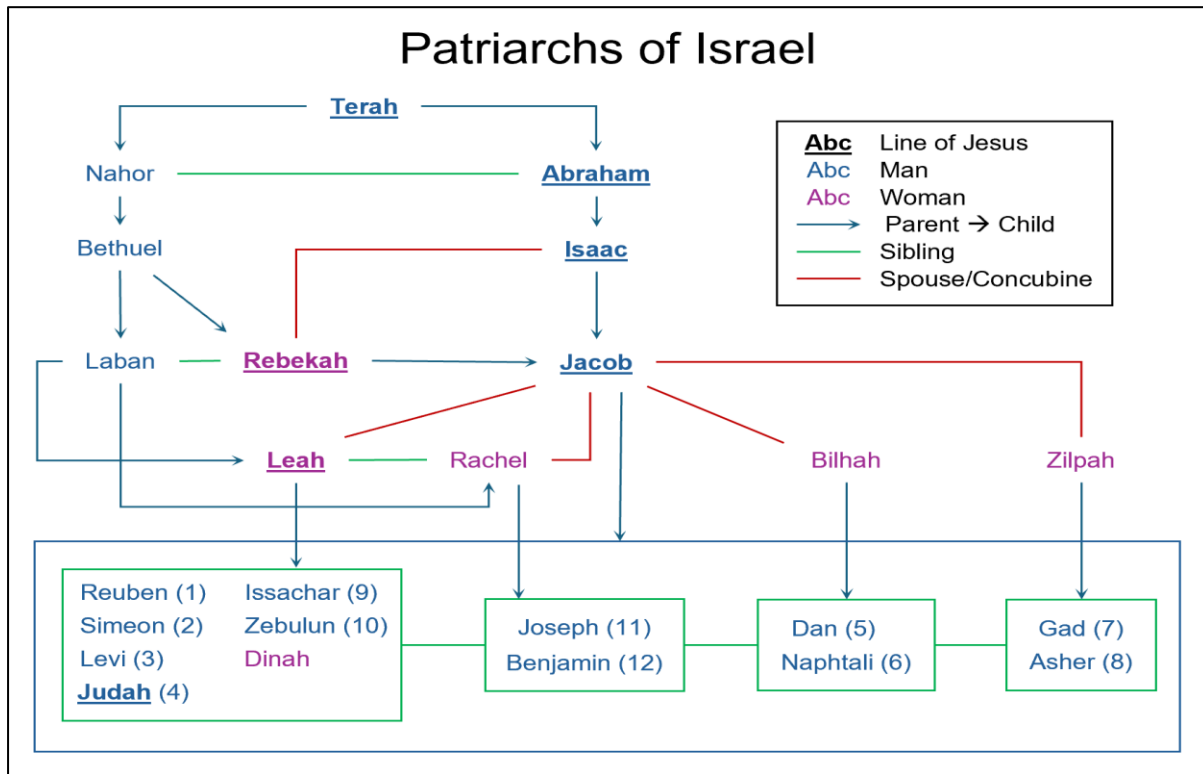
¹¹If a man lies with his father’s wife, he has uncovered his father’s nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. Leviticus 20:11 (ESV)

It is not clear whether Bilhah was Jacob’s wife or only a concubine. The Law specifically speaks of the father’s wife but it’s unclear whether this provision also applies to concubines. Of course, even if the death penalty didn’t apply, the sexual relations between them were forbidden. At the least they were to be cast out of the family. But since the Law had not yet been given, Jacob simply gave them a pass.

NOTE – Genesis 35:21 is a rare instance where the Word refers to Jacob by his new name Israel.

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Look at the Patriarchs of Israel chart.



22b...Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. 23The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. 24The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant: Dan and Naphtali. 26The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram. Genesis 35:22b-26 (ESV)

With Benjamin's birth, the group of Jacob's twelve sons who became the founders of the tribes of Israel was complete. Notice that Genesis 35:26 says that Jacob's twelve sons were born to him in Paddan-aram, but of course, Benjamin wasn't born until after Jacob returned to Canaan.

The Death of Isaac

27And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. 28Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. 29And 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. Genesis 35:27-29 (ESV)

So at last, Jacob and his family returned to his family in Canaan. As we previously noted, the Bible is silent about whether Rebekah was still alive when Jacob returned. However, the extra-biblical Book of Jubilees mentions the reunion of Jacob with his mother. Recall that Isaac was already nearly blind when Jacob left for Paddan-aram some twenty years prior, so he may not have even recognized Jacob when he returned. Recall that Abraham had separated from his nephew Lot and pitched his tent by the oak trees of Mamre the Amorite when he arrived back in Canaan after sojourning in Egypt during a famine (Genesis 13). But when Jacob left for Paddan-aram, Isaac and Rebekah were living in

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Beersheba in the Negev. Apparently, sometime during the twenty years Jacob was in Paddan-aram, Isaac and Rebekah had returned to Kiriath-arba (a.k.a. Hebron).

Jacob and Esau buried Isaac in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron which Abraham had purchased from Ephron the Hittite as a family burial place (Genesis 23). Many years later, Jacob himself was buried there by his sons who brought his body up from Egypt for burial (Genesis 50:13).

Looking Ahead

Next time, we'll closely examine the genealogy of Esau.