

Week 31, Wed Sept 30, 2026 Gen 35 Jacob's Returns to Bethel-Gods House

Genesis 35:1-7 Jacob's Returns to Bethel

Gen 35:1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up (**move at once, Bethel is elevated so it is literal go up**) to Bethel and dwell there (**live, take residence**); and make (**build**) an altar there to God, who appeared to you (**distinct manifestation**) when you fled (**years ago**) from the face of Esau your brother."

Quote from David Guzik Commentary on Blue Letter Bible

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| a. Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there : The whole Shechem incident (ch. 34) happened because Jacob went to Shechem instead of Bethel, where he was supposed to be. Now at last he went where God told him to go (Genesis 31:13). |
| i. "The only cure for worldliness is to separate from it" (Barnhouse). Jacob had to leave Shechem and go to Bethel. There had to be a departure from one and a new direction and destination set. There was a new place for Jacob and his family to dwell . |
| ii. Genesis 34 does not mention God once, and is one of the most sordid chapters in Israel's history (Sordid means morally ugly, shameful, dishonorable, or deeply unpleasant, especially because of wicked or corrupt behavior). Genesis 35 mentions God over and over again, more than 10 times, plus 11 more times in names such as Bethel and Israel . |

Genesis ch 34 one of the darkest and most morally disturbing chapters in Israel's history.

- Shechem sexually violates Dinah (vv. 1–2).
- Hamor and Shechem attempt to arrange a marriage.
- Jacob's sons deceitfully make an agreement with the men of Shechem.
- Simeon and Levi murder the males of the city (vv. 25–26).
- The other sons plunder the city and take the women and children captive (vv. 27–29).
- Jacob condemns Simeon and Levi's actions because they have put the entire family in danger (v. 30).

Bethel: the place where God for the first time confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob (28:10–19).

This time God commanded Jacob to build an altar

Gen 35:2 And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him (**everyone within his family and everyone associated with him**), "Put away (**get rid of**) the foreign gods (**pagan idols and images**) that are among you, purify yourselves (**spiritual purification**), and change your garments (**put on fresh, clean clothing**).

Jacob's household and all who were with him prepared for an encounter with the true and living God. They must rid themselves of all foreign gods from the Ten Commandments: Exo 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

Zec 3:3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel (of the Lord).

Zec 3:4 Then He(Angel of the Lord) answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He(Angel of the Lord) said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

Zec 3:5 And I(Zechariah) said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the (clean) clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.

Jde 1:22 And on some have compassion, making a distinction;

Jde 1:23 but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

Gen 35:3 "Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and (God) has been with me in the way (everywhere), which, I have gone.

It had been more than 8 years since his return to Canaan. Possession of idols, symbols such as figurines, amulets, or cultic charms were now unacceptable, time to clean house and hearts.

Gen 35:4 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods (household deities/idols and images) which were in (or on) their hands (in their possession), and the earrings which were in their ears (get rid of anything of superstitious significance, cultic objects, purify yourselves); and Jacob hid them under the terebinth (or large oak) tree (Jacob's burying of these objects shows an act of renunciation-rejection and abandonment of something that is contrary to God) which was by Shechem.

Remember earlier Rachel had stolen the household gods that belonged to her father (Gen 31:19). Jacob's children kept foreign gods because their mother did. Rachel most likely still had the household idols of her father.

Hos 2:13 I will punish her For the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, And went after her lovers; But Me she forgot," says the LORD.

The principle throughout Scripture is that God's people aren't supposed to incorporate idols into Yahweh worship (mix it up or do both). They are to destroy/remove objects associated with their pagan practices and turn to the true God.

A striking parallel between Genesis 35 and Joshua 24: God's people must put away foreign gods and exclusively worship the LORD.

Jos 24:14 "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!

Jos 24:15 "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

1Thes 1:9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

Gen 35:5 And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them (**supernatural fear and protection came from God**), and (**for that reason**) they(**Canaanites**) did not pursue (**or try to attack**) the sons of Jacob (**or Jacob's family and those with him**).

It was dangerous for Jacob to take his family and loved ones and set out to Bethel, but it was more dangerous for him to disobey God. The safest thing to do is the will of God.

Jacob's fear of their retaliation was a real possibility, because of Simeon and Levi's excessive evil wicked revenge but because of Gods intervention he will be safe. Remember Gods promise:

Gen 28:15 "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go (**includes guard, watch over, protect and preserve**), and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Genesis 35:5 God demonstrates His faithfulness to that promise.

Gen 35:6 So (**eventually**) Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him.

Gen 28:19 And he(**Jacob**) called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.

Gen 35:7 And he(**Jacob**) built an altar there (**to worship the LORD**) and called the place El Bethel (**God of Bethel or God of the House of God**), because there God appeared to him(**Jacob**) when he fled from the face of his brother (**Esau**).

Jacob reconfirmed his worship to God, also God affirmed His commitment to Jacob by re-appearing to him, and repeating the change of name and His Abrahamic promises.

Have you have left your first love, from the message to the seven churches

Rev 2:4 "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Rev 2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent.

Jacob repented by getting rid of all the idols, and he did the first works by building an altar and worshipping God as before.

Some only want a comfortable life, not a godly life. They want an easy life, not the life of Jesus and the cross.

Luk 9:23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

Luk 9:24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

Genesis 35:8-15 Deborah, Rebekah's Nurse Dies, Jacob Is Named Israel Again

Gen 35:8 Now Deborah, (**who once was**) Rebekah's nurse, died (**or had died and was now commemorated by family**), and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree (**or large oak tree**). So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth (**which means oak or terebinth of weeping, we know very little about her but she must have been a beloved member of the family**).

Gen 35:9 Then God appeared (**another direct divine revelation/personal appearance**) to Jacob again, when he(**Jacob**) came from Padan Aram, and (**God**) blessed him(**Jacob**).

Gen 35:10 And God said to him(**Jacob**), "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob (**heel catcher and deceiver**) anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel (**Prince of God or He who strives or struggles with God or God fights**).

Gen 32:28 And He (**Man-Pre-incarnate Jesus**) said, "**Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel**; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Jacob remains his personal name, while Israel becomes his covenant name and eventually the name of his descendants/nation. And there's a parallel passage with Abram and Abraham: once God changes a person's name, Scripture can continue using the former name in certain contexts, but the new name carries covenantal significance.

Gen 35:11 Also God said to him (**Jacob**): "I am God Almighty (**Hebrew El Shaddai, meaning all sufficient and powerful One**). Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body (**your loins, from your descendants**).

Gen 35:12 "The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you, I give this land."

God's statement emphasizes that Jacob is now heir to the divine promises given to Abraham and Isaac. This theme will reappear in Joseph's dreams (Gen 37:5–10), showing that the ultimate fulfillment of the promise will come through Jacob's descendants. The land that I gave. The divine promise of the land is renewed to include Jacob and his descendants.

Gen 37:5 Now Joseph (**Jacobs's son**) had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more.

Gen 37:6 So he(**Joseph**) said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed:

Gen 37:7 "There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."

Gen 37:8 And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Gen 37:9 Then he(**Joseph**) dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."

Gen 37:10 So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him(**Joseph**) and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?"

Gen 35:13 Then God went up (**ascended**) from him(**Jacob**) in the place where He(**God**) talked with him(**Jacob**).

The presence of God was there with Jacob in some visible form.

The text presents a real divine encounter in which God appears, speaks, blesses, and then departs and ascends.

The Bible does contain other instances where God's presence is associated with ascending/going up.

Gen 17:22 Then He(**God**) finished talking with him(**Abraham**), and God went up from Abraham.

Act 1:9 Now when He(**Jesus**) had spoken these things, while they watched, He(**Jesus**) was taken up, and a cloud received Him(**Jesus**) out of their sight.

Gen 35:14 So Jacob set up a pillar (**memorial marker as Jacobs encounters God**) in the place where He(**God**) talked with him(**Jacob**), a pillar of stone; and he(**Jacob**) poured a drink offering (**later identified in Scripture with wine**) on it, and he poured oil (**most likely olive oil**) on it (**apparently as a sacred ceremonial act**).

Gen 35:15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel (**meaning house of God**).

Genesis 35:16-20 Death of Rachel

Gen 35:16 Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath (**ancient and alternate name for Bethlehem**), Rachel labored in childbirth (**began to give birth**), and she had hard labor (**intense labor pain and suffering severely**).

The Messiah the King of Glory would one day be born in Bethlehem

Mic 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."

Mat 2:1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

Gen 35:17 Now it came to pass, when she(**Rachel**) was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her(**Rachel**), "Do not fear; you will have this son also (**another son**)."

Her prayer or Word from the Lord at the birth of her firstborn was answered

Gen 30:24 So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."

Gen 35:18 And so it was, as her(**Rachel**) soul was departing (**for she was dying**), that she called his name Ben-Oni (**meaning the son of my sorrow**); but his father called him Benjamin (**giving a positive meaning: a son of the right hand, one in a position of importance and honor**).

This is one place in the OT where the Hebrew word translated “soul” (soul departs) refers to what has life in the body.

Jacobs’s new son Benjamin his youngest son has a special place in the family—at Jacob’s right hand. Benjamin would commemorate his beloved wife.

Many scriptures talk about blessings from the right hand (Ps 16:8, 63:8, 110:1, 138:7).

Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, the position of strength and honor, and we sit there with Him

Col 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Eph 2:6 He has raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

- **Mark 16:19** — Jesus “was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.”
- **Acts 2:33** — Jesus is “exalted to the right hand of God.”
- **Hebrews 1:3** — He “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”
- **Hebrews 10:12** — He “sat down at the right hand of God.”

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

Gen 35:20 And Jacob set a pillar (**stone memorial, monument, approx. about one mile north of Bethlehem.**) on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day

The phrase 'to this day' indicates that Rachel's grave marker was still identifiable in the author's time, traditionally understood as the time of Moses.

Monument still seen at Samuels's time

1Sam 10:2 is significant because it shows that Rachel's tomb remained a recognized landmark generations later at Samuels time.

1Sam 10:2 "When you have departed from me today, you will find two men by Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, 'The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. And now your father has ceased caring about the donkeys and is worrying about you, saying, "What shall I do about my son?" ' "

There is another important biblical principle concerning memorial stones. After Israel crossed the Jordan, God commanded Joshua to take twelve stones:

Jos 4:4 Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe;

Jos 4:5 and Joshua said to them: "Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel,

Jos 4:6 "that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?'

Jos 4:7 "Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever."

The purpose was to preserve a physical reminder of what God had done so that future generations would ask about them:

Genesis 35:21-29 Jacob's / Israel Twelve Sons, Reuben Lays with Bilhah, Death of Isaac

Gen 35:21 Then Israel (see note below, Jacob**) journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder (**Hebrew Migdal-eder or flock**) (**A lookout point used by shepherds**).**

(Here in Hebrew Israel; but the names "Jacob" and "Israel" are often interchanged throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch or covenant name and sometimes to the nation).

Gen 35:22 And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben (Jacobs oldest son**) went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine (**secondary wife, see note below**); and Israel (**his father**) heard about it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:**

Bilhah was Rachel's maidservant. Rachel had given Bilhah to her husband Jacob as a wife/concubine because Rachel was initially unable to have children. Bilhah bore Jacob two sons, Dan and Naphtali (**Gen 30:3–8**).

Reuben committed incestuous/forbidden sexual relations with his father's concubine (**secondary wife**) Bilhah. The Bible presents it as a grave violation that contributed to Reuben losing and forfeiting the privileges of the firstborn which normally carried substantial privileges: leadership within the family and a special inheritance. By sleeping with his father's concubine, he could have been asserting that he would succeed his father or worse challenged Jacob's position as head of the household. How sad this very action caused him to lose the blessing he desired. Jacob says to Reuben at the end of his life, you will not excel because of this sinful act and denies Reuben the inheritance due him as the firstborn (**Gen 49 below**).

Gen 49:3–4 says "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity (honor) and the excellency of power). Unstable (**uncontrollable**) as water, you shall not excel (**have preeminence of the first born**), because you went up to your father's bed (**with Bilhah**); then you defiled it--He went up to my couch (**my marriage couch and Reuben you defiled it**).

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Gal 6:8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Gen 35:23 the sons of Leah (**first wife via switch by Laban**) were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn (**oldest son**), and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun;

Gen 35:24 the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin;

Gen 35:25 the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant (**secondary wife**), were Dan and Naphtali;

Gen 35:26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant (**secondary wife**), were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

Gen 35:27 Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt (**lived temporarily as sojourners, foreigners**).

Jacob, back in the land before his father's death, fulfilled yet another part of his Bethel vow.

Gen 28:20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on,

Gen 28:21 "so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.

Gen 28:22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

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

Gen 35:29 So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people (**those who had preceded him in death**), being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him (**in the cave of Machpelah with his parents Abraham and Sarah**).

This expression: "gathered to his people" is a reference to the Old Testament belief in a life after death and to the expectation of a reunion with loved ones.

In spite of hinting that he would soon die Jacob lived an additional 43 years

Gen 27:1 Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, "My son." And he answered him, "Here I am."

Gen 27:2 Then he said, "Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death (He was a 137 years old and lived to be 180 years old that means he lived another 43 years).

In the future Leah and Jacob would be buried here also (49:29–33; 50:12, 13).

Charts

Important biblical locations:

- **Abraham** first entered Canaan and came to Shechem (Genesis 12:6–7).
- On his way to Paddan-aram, **Jacob** stopped at Bethel (then called Luz). There he dreamed of a stairway reaching heaven, with angels ascending and descending. God reaffirmed to Jacob the covenant promises given to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob named the place Bethel ("House of God") (Genesis 28:10–22).
- **Jacob** settled there after returning from Paddan-aram (Genesis 33:18–20).
- **Dinah's story** takes place there (Genesis 34).
- After **Jacob** returned from Paddan-aram, God specifically told him to go back to Bethel. Jacob went there to Bethel and obeyed God's command (Gen 35:5–7) with his household, built an altar (called the place El-bethel ("God of Bethel), and God appeared to him again. God reaffirmed his new name, Israel, and the covenant promises, Jacob set up a pillar of stone and poured a drink offering and oil over. Jacob named the place Bethel (Genesis 35:1–15).
- Genesis 35:8 records Deborah's death (Rebekah's nurse) at Bethel. Rebekah was Isaac's wife and Jacob's mother. So Deborah had apparently been part of Rebekah's household for a very long time (Genesis 24:59), and eventually she became associated with Jacob's household.
- After leaving Bethel, Jacob traveled toward Ephrath (Bethlehem), where Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin (Genesis 35:16–20).
- So, chronologically, Jacob's movements include Bethel → Paddan-aram → Shechem → Bethel again → then toward Bethlehem. And Bethel is geographically south of Shechem, in the hill country, rather than being the same location as Shechem.
- **Joseph** was associated with the area of Shechem (Genesis 37:12–14).