

Genesis, Part 31

Jacob has crossed the Jordan into Canaan and camped near Shechem. He intended to reside there for some period because he purchased land for a hundred kesitahs, which was translated as “pieces of money” in Genesis 33:19 (ESV, NKJV). The value of this unit of money is unknown. He also set up an altar there.

Once Jacob settled in the land, the threat from the Canaanites became a problem. The story is a tangle of good and evil, as are all the patriarchal narratives. To Israel, this would certainly be a warning against the defiling effect of interrelations with Canaanites.

There are two things that God focuses on in Genesis. First of all is heredity. God was very much concerned that a believer marries a believer and not an unbeliever. This was important for protecting the line from Eve (the seed of the woman) to Christ. The second thing was concern for the environment of the believer. The surrounding people and culture can have a negative impact on the believer. We have already seen that with Jacob and his family in Paddan-aram and now here in Canaan. This is especially true for Jacob. He has a large family. Not only were there 12 sons but there were some unknown number of daughters, only one of which is mentioned in the text, Dinah, because she plays a role in this very sad chapter.

Another thing to notice is there was trouble in these families. There was strife and trouble in the family of Abraham, and strife and trouble in the family of Isaac. Now we see there is great trouble in the family of Jacob. Jacob's stopping is going to cause a great deal of sorrow to him. What we will see in this chapter must have brought heartbreak to Jacob.

A lesson we can learn from Jacob is that just because you have become a Christian don't expect that you will become a mature one overnight. God adopts us as full-grown sons which means we can understand divine truth because we are born again and the Holy Spirit is our teacher. It means we have all the privileges and responsibilities of full-grown sons, but it does not mean we are mature and will not make bad decisions. The believer must

go through a period of growth, and that progress may be very slow. Let us not expect too much of others but expect much of ourselves.

God wanted to get Jacob and his family out of the atmosphere that characterized the relationship with Laban because that very atmosphere gave the background for the awful sins that are mentioned here.

Israel was not supposed to intermarry with Canaan or make treaties with them. The events of Genesis 34:1 and what follows also serve as a warning against even going to visit the daughters of the land.

Genesis 34:1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. ² And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her. ³ And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this girl for my wife.”

Dinah, Jacob’s teenage daughter, rebelled against her parents. She went out to visit the pagan women of the land. Shechem, son of the Hivite ruler of the city, raped Dinah. The passage makes it sound like these events all took place in a matter of maybe an hour or even less, but I suspect it involved more time than that, possibly days or even longer. Whatever the amount of time, the results were the same, poor Dinah was raped. After a woman was debased in this way, she had no expectancy of ever having a valid marriage.

Hamor the Hivite, a “prince of the land,” was someone of wealth, stature, and political authority in the area, perhaps a local chief. Hivites were the 6th generation of descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham, who were living in northern Canaan near Mount Hermon. Hamor’s son Shechem was the offending party.

One reason I think this event covered a longer period is verse 3, “And his soul (Shechem’s) was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her.” That doesn’t sound like Shechem simply saw her, fell madly in love at first sight, and immediately raped her. I

suspect they had some history before the event. Dinah's visits to the local women likely brought her in contact with the males, and in particular Shechem. Among the Canaanite tribes in that day, unattached females were considered fair game. That excuses nothing for Shechem, however, but he does attempt to "do right" by Dinah and proposes to his father that he arrange a marriage for him with the young woman.

Gen 34:5 Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. ⁶ And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. ⁷ The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done.

Jacob did not initially tell his sons who were in the fields tending to the livestock. Hamor went to Jacob to speak to him about a marriage between Dinah and Shechem. Meanwhile, as soon as the boys heard of the incident, they came in from the fields—and they were incensed, “for a disgraceful thing (lit., “folly,” *nebālâh*) had been done in Israel”. (This is the first mention of the nation by this name.) Such a sexual evil was infamous and incriminated a whole community.

While Jacob's sons were filled with grief and fury, Jacob was passive and seemed unconcerned about Dinah's fate. Was the fact that she was only Leah's daughter, thus her children did not count in his eyes? Perhaps if Dinah were his daughter by Rachel rather than by Leah, he would have acted differently. Jacob may have appeared indifferent, but Dinah's brothers were appalled, not simply at her plight but also by their father's unconcern. “If our father will not stick up for his daughter, we must” was their reaction.

Gen 34:8 But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife. ⁹ Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.” ¹¹ Shechem also said to her father and her brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes,

and whatever you say to me I will give. ¹² Ask me for as great a bride-price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife.”

Old Hamor, Shechem’s father, made a diplomatic speech: great advantages would be gained by both sides from an agreement to intermarry. He poignantly offered Israel the land (v. 10), but God, not the Canaanites, would give it. Hamor’s later appeal to his fellow citizens showed that he was being deceptive all along, hoping only to take over Jacob’s possessions (v. 23). No good would come to Israel from trusting the defiling Canaanites.

However, Shechem must love the girl, for he joins in the negotiating for her hand and offers to pay any bride-price they should ask. He was probably not expecting what they would demand.

Gen 34:13 The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully because he had defiled their sister Dinah. ¹⁴ They said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. ¹⁵ Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. ¹⁶ Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people. ¹⁷ But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone.”

“The sons of Jacob answered ... deceitfully.” They never intended to keep the deal they were about to offer Hamor. They said they could not agree with such a marriage because Shechem was uncircumcised; such would be disgraceful for them. They offered intermarriage on one condition: If Shechem and every male with them would submit to circumcision, they would give their daughters to them in marriage. If not, they said, “Then we are gone, and we will take our daughters with us.”

The act of circumcision carried with it being identified with those who are Israelites. But more importantly, like water baptism for a Christian that identifies that person with faith in Christ, circumcision carried a spiritual

connotation. A baptism without a profession of faith was an empty gesture. Likewise, the circumcision of an Israelite in itself would also be no more than an empty gesture unless it included the worship of the one true God. This was a serious mistake made by the Roman church when Rome began conquering the heathen tribes of Europe and demanding the tribal chiefs along with the entire tribe be baptized whether there was a real profession of faith or not. This practice forced many into the Roman church who were not true believers and ended up introducing idolatry into the church.

Gen 34:18 Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem.
¹⁹ And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his father's house.

Shechem must have been seriously in love with Dinah because he "did not delay to do the thing". AND, he became the "most honored of all his father's house". He won the "man-prize". I'm thinking his brothers were saying, "You first!" and Shechem said, "Here, hold my beer." That shut them up.

Gen 34:20 So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, ²¹ "These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters. ²² Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people—when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³ Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us." ²⁴ And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

The real reason comes out why Hamor agreed with this circumcision. Hamor and Shechem went to the gate of the city to make the sale to the rest of the community. The city gate was where all serious business was transacted. Hamon tells them that there is much profit to be made off these newcomers. They are wealthy, and if we can intermarry with them we can gain access to their wealth. There is just one "minor" condition to this intermarrying: That is that every male among us must become circumcised

like they are. (Strangely, the Scriptures record no collective groan here.) Hamon adds, “Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours?” I would have thought this would have been a hard sell for the rest of the men in the village, but evidently, money trumps pain. Verse 24 records, “And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.”

Gen 34:25 On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males. ²⁶ They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem’s house and went away. ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. ²⁸ They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. ²⁹ All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.

The passage begins with “on the third day when they were sore”. The word for “sore” is *ka’ab /kaw-ab/* and it means to be in pain, be sore, to be sorrowful. The circumcision had left the Canaanites “sore” and, as a result, in a weakened condition. I wonder how much of that “sorrowful” part of the meaning is applicable here? Did they regret their actions? If not then, they soon would.

Verse 25 tells us, “Two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males.” The text names only two people with no mention of others from Jacob’s family or camp that were involved, but some commentators believe others must have participated. Were the Canaanites so weakened by the circumcisions that they were unable to put up even a minimal fight, or were they simply overwhelmed by greater numbers? Probably both, but the text seems to emphasize the lingering effects of their circumcisions.

Consider what has happened here: The boys must surely have had this in mind all along, to get the Canaanites in a weakened condition through circumcision and then killing them all. An act of revenge.

Verses 27-29 say that the “sons of Jacob came upon the slain” and they immediately plundered the city taking animals and whatever was “in the fields” (crops). This included taking anything of value along with the women and children. This constituted all the wealth of those Canaanites living there.

Gen 34:30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.”

Jacob did nothing in the way of punishing Simeon and Levi other than deliver a mild rebuke. His real concern was not the sins of his sons, but the possibility that the Canaanites would unite against him. Jacob was concerned their actions would surely make him and his family detested among those living in the land. He feared they would seek revenge for their actions and destroy him and his entire household. That was not likely, as, despite their sinful actions, they were under divine protection.

Gen 34:31 But they said, “Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?”

The sons argued that what the Canaanites had done was unacceptable and that they deserved what they had gotten. In the end, they were right. The Canaanites were conspiring against them, and much later God ordered the Israelites to eliminate all of them from the land.

For Christians today, Romans 12 is the policy we should follow. When we attempt to take revenge or get vengeance, it means that we are no longer walking by faith. We are saying we cannot trust God to work it out and defend us.

Yet despite their deplorable behavior, Jacob and his family were greatly enriched. The assault on the Shechemites foreshadowed the conquest. The Canaanites were doomed because of their sexual immorality (Lv. 18:24–25), but does that imply Israel deserved the land they conquered? No, according to Deuteronomy, “It is not because of your righteousness or

your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations ... to accomplish what he [the Lord] swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deut. 9:5). The sins of God’s chosen people may delay, but they do not ultimately frustrate, the fulfillment of his promises.

God Blesses and Renames Jacob

Two themes run through Chapter 35: completion and correction. It is a story of completion because Jacob was back home in the land of promise, with all his family and all his wealth; victory was won, the goal achieved, and the promise fulfilled. But it is also a story of correction, for the family had not completely held to the walk of faith.

Gen 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.”

The first 15 verses record Jacob’s return to Bethel, about 15 miles south of Shechem, as the completion of his vows. Those vows, made earlier at Bethel, included:

- Making Yahweh his God
- Making Bethel God’s house
- And pledging to tithe to God (28:20–22)

God called Jacob to return to the land (28:13–15; 31:3), but his pilgrimage took a long time. God had to remind Jacob of his forgotten vows. It was his indifference to those vows that provided the occasion for Dinah’s defilement by Shechem. Jacob should have traveled on to Beersheba, his parents’ home, without stopping at Shechem. God intervened at this point to direct Jacob to move his family to Bethel. He was to build an altar to the God who had appeared to him there so many years before.

Gen 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. 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.” ⁴ So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were

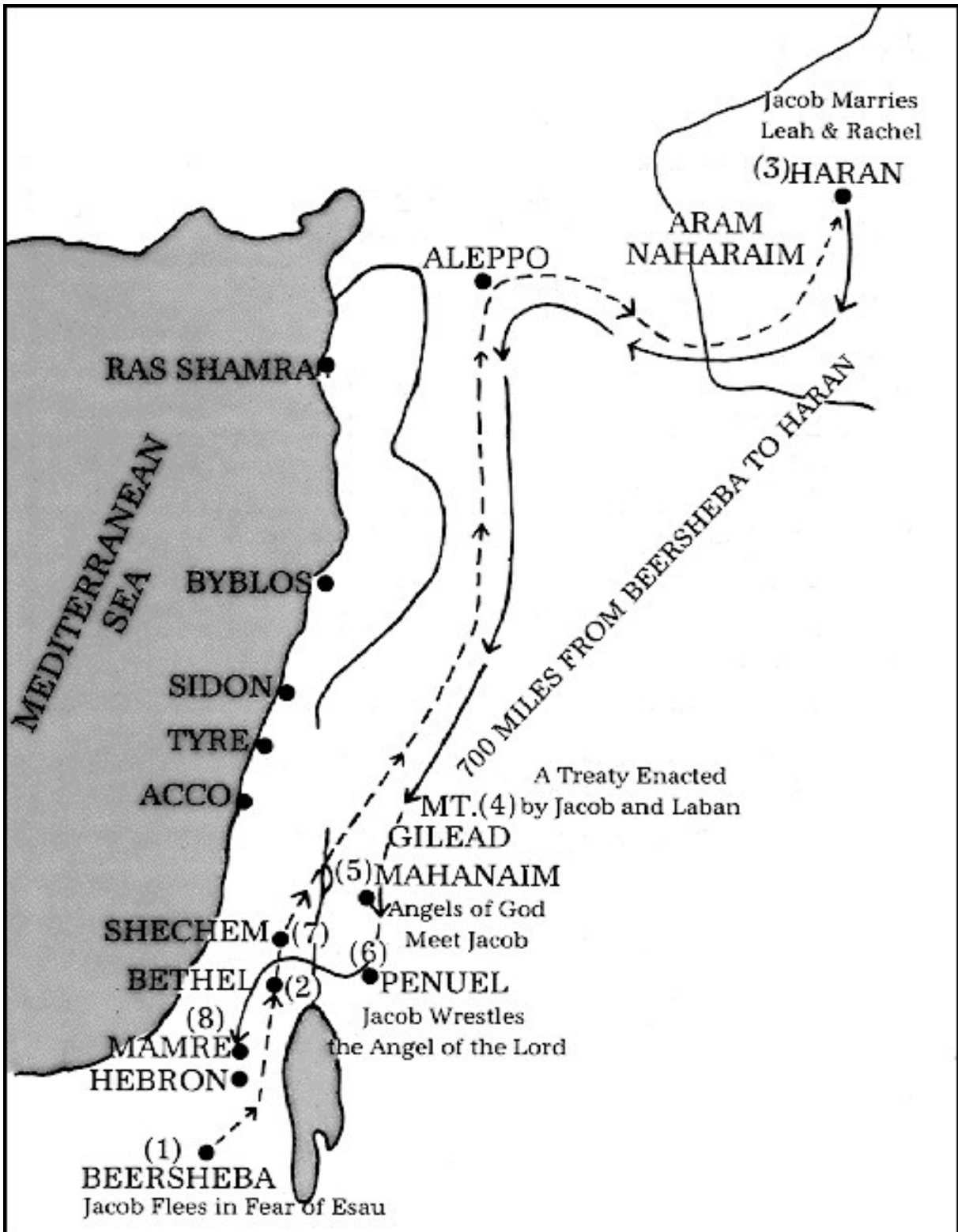
in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

To complete his vows, there had to be a sanctification process. Jacob's family had to remove all their idols, the foreign gods. God permits no rivals; He allows only single loyalty and no magical charms. All this purification (getting rid of idols, washing themselves, and changing their clothes) was instructive for Israel, who later would need such a consecration when they entered the land of promise (Josh. 5:1–9). After burying the idols (and earrings, apparently associated with the idols in some way, possibly as fetishes) at Shechem, Jacob and his family set out for Bethel.

Gen 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. 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, 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. ⁸ And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name *Allon-bacuth*.

God kept his word to bring Jacob safely back to Bethel, for his terror fell upon the Canaanites and they were afraid to attack Jacob (35:2–5). Yet again the promise “I am with you and will watch over you” (28:15) had been fulfilled.

Arriving back in Bethel (which used to be called Luz), Jacob built an altar there as God had told him to do which he called *'el beth'el*, “God of Bethel.” Meanwhile, Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, Jacob's mother, died. This death seemed to indicate that another stage in the patriarchal narratives was ending. The name Allon Bacuth (“oak of weeping”) commemorated the weeping over this old nurse, buried under an oak tree. Interestingly Jacob's wives' idols were also buried under an oak, back in Shechem.



Gen 35:9 God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. 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. 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. 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.”

At Bethel God confirmed the promise He had made there earlier (32:28). Jacob’s name-change to Israel was proof of the promised blessing. God’s reference to Himself as God Almighty (*’ēl šadday*) was also an assurance that His promise would be fulfilled. Now that the patriarch was back in the land of promise, the promise of the nation (“seed”), and the land was once again confirmed. But here He added that kings would be included in Jacob’s offspring. Only the promise of God’s presence with him is not repeated, for that had been fulfilled by his safe arrival in Bethel.

Gen 35:13 Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. 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. ¹⁵ So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

Jacob renewed the stone monument there, pouring out upon it a libation (probably of wine) and oil as he had done years before. The patriarch also renewed the name of that place. He publicly named the spot Bethel, “the house of God”.

The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

Gen 35:16 Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷ And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for you have another son.” ¹⁸ And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. ¹⁹ So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), ²⁰ and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the

pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. ²¹ Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

And here is the sad passing of Rachel with the birth of her second son, Benjamin. The name she gave the child, *Ben-Oni* ("son of my sorrow") would not do for the lad. Jacob renamed him Benjamin ("son of my right hand"). Jacob turned this occasion of sorrow into triumph and victorious prospects. In addition, he wanted to give a good name to the child who was the answer to Rachel's prayer (in 30:24) for a second son, "And she called his name Joseph, saying, 'May the Lord add to me another son!' " The name Joseph, *yôśēp*, is from *yāsap*, which means "to add".

This section also signifies that Israel, once in the land, would continue to flourish under God's blessing. Jacob set up a stone pillar over her grave between Bethel and Bethlehem. Ephrath was an older name for Bethlehem.

Gen 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. ²³ The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. ²⁴ The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁵ The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant: Dan and Naphtali. 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 account of Isaac draws to a close in verses 21–29 with several short reports. The first describes Reuben's breach of Jacob's family by incest with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine and Rachel's servant by whom he had two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Reuben's transgression took place near Migdal Eder between Bethlehem and Hebron. It is possible that Reuben, Jacob's eldest, was trying to replace his father as patriarch prematurely by this pagan procedure.

Gen 49:3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. ⁴ Unstable 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!

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

This act was noted by Jacob who in Genesis 35:21–22 was twice called Israel. Israel (Jacob) heard of the incident but exercised no immediate discipline in the matter. But by defiling his father's marriage bed, Reuben's rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph so he could not be listed in the genealogical record by his birthright.

The life of Reuben can be summed up in four greats:

- Great expectation (29:32)
- Great privileges (49:3)
- Great sin (35:22)
- Great loss (1 Chr 5:1).

A second report lists the 12 sons who became heads of the 12 original tribes. This was another assurance that the promises of God are good. The list provides firstfruits, as it were, of the tribes that would become the great nation.

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

Jacob eventually was reunited with his father who was then living at Mamre near Hebron which was farther south in Beersheba. According to the chronological notices in the book, the two would have spent at least twelve years together. Isaac was 180 when he was gathered to his people. Jacob and Esau united to bury him. Perhaps this was the first time the two brothers met since their departure. Jacob and Esau were 120 at the time.

Summation

In the events of chapter 35, Jacob learned that while his return to Canaan was a completion of promises, he could not be complacent, for it was also a new beginning. Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac all died, marking the end of an era. Reuben relinquished his right to inherit a blessing (cf. 49:3–4); sin was dealt with. Idols had to be buried and everyone had to be consecrated for Jacob's vow at Bethel to be completed. The nation had to be complete with 12 sons (tribes) in the land. During this great transition faith in God had to be revitalized so that His covenant could be carried forward. For this reason, this chapter emphasizes Jacob's vows and God's promise.