

Genesis 35-36 – Jacob’s trouble

Introduction: As soon as Esau had turned his back and started home, Jacob took his family down to Shalem. It is a tragic move. Jacob was still depending upon his own cleverness. Dinah was raped, and Simeon and Levi, her full brothers, went into the city of Shalem to the prince who was responsible. Although he wanted to marry her, they murdered him, and the sons of Jacob conducted a slaughter that would make a gang shooting in Chicago look pretty tame. When they came home, Jacob said, “You have made my name to smell among the people of my land.”

Many expositors say that it was a tragic thing for Jacob to stop in Shalem, and I must say that I have to go along with that partially. But I have one question to ask: Was Jacob ready for Bethel? Was he ready for the experiences that God was going to give him? No, I think that the tragic things that took place in chapter 34 were the result of a man who had been walking in the energy of the flesh. There had been a deflation of self, but there was no discernible faith in God. Because he did not have faith to go on to Bethel, he stopped at Shalem. These tragic things which took place in his life reveal that this man was not a leader in his own family. He was not taking the proper place that he should have. He was no spiritual giant, by any means. And to have those eleven boys to herd was really a job for which this man Jacob was not prepared. After this tragic event, Jacob now is beginning to see the hand of God in his life, and now he makes the decision that he probably should have made beforehand. - McGee

God Blesses and Renames Jacob

Gen 35:1-3 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother." And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. 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 has been with me in the way which I have gone."

We need to recognize that the years we spend in living a shoddy, shabby Christian life are a waste of time, absolutely a waste of time. God called the children of Israel to get out of Egypt and into the land of promise. God appeared to them and told them to go into the land, but they didn't go in. Forty years they wandered around, and then God appeared to Joshua and said, “Go into the land.” He picked up right where He had left off. They had wasted forty years. How many people are wasting their lives as Christians? My, the tremendous spiritual lessons that are here for us! I don't know about you, but some of us are just like Jacob, and that's the reason this is so applicable to us today. Thank God that He says He is the God of Jacob. I love that! If He'll be the God of Jacob, He'll be the God of J. Vernon McGee also—that's wonderful! This chapter is a great encouragement to us – McGee

Have you put away your other gods? What and who do you worship? If you are curious, look at your bank account and your free time to see if you are worshipping other gods?

Gen 35:4-8 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother. Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.

Chapter 35 opens with God's command to Jacob to fulfill the vow made about thirty years earlier (Gen_28:20-22). The Lord used the tragic events of the previous chapter to prepare the patriarch to do it. Notice that God is referred to about twenty times in this chapter, in contrast to no references in chapter 34. Before obeying God's command to return to Bethel, Jacob first ordered his family to put away the foreign household gods and to put on clean clothes. As soon as they

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did this, they became a terror to their heathen neighbors. It was appropriate that Jacob should build an altar at "El Bethel" and worship the God who had protected him from his brother, Esau. – Believers Bible Commentary

Since Deborah was with Jacob at this time, we assume that Rebekah had already died, and Scripture does not tell us when her death took place. Poor Jacob never saw his mother again. That part is not as tragic as the fact that she never saw him again—she had just sent him away for a little while, you know. The nurse apparently had brought a message of Rebekah's death and had come to stay with Jacob—and now she dies. - McGee

Gen 35:9-12 Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

All those years God had been trying to deal with Jacob. Now he picks up right where He had met him when he came to Bethel as a young man. Those years he spent down there with Uncle Laban, in many ways, were wasted years.

The Lord considers that pretty important property, by the way. This now is the third time He has promised them the land—first to Abraham, then to Isaac, and now to Jacob. The Lord had to tell each one of these men about it two or three times; in fact, He told Abraham many times. - McGee

Gen 35:13-15 Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him. So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.

Here is the first mention of a drink offering. In the Book of Leviticus, five offerings are given, but not a drink offering. In fact, no instruction is given about it at all, but it is mentioned. Evidently this is one of the oldest offerings, and it has a very wonderful meaning to the believer today. The drink offering was just poured on the other offerings, and it went up in the steam. Paul told the Philippians that that is the way he wanted his life to be—just poured out like a drink offering. - McGee

The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

Gen 35:16-18 Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor. Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also." And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin.

What a wonderful thing this is—not the death of Rachel, but the way this took place. She says, "Call him 'son of my sorrow,'" but Jacob looked down at him and said, "I've lost my lovely Rachel, and this little fellow looks like her, so I'll just call him Benjamin, 'son of my right hand.'" Jacob was partial to the sons of Rachel.

Jacob's love for Rachel was perhaps the only fine thing in his life during those years in Padan-aram when there was so much evidence of the flesh and of self-seeking. He loved Rachel—there is no question about that. He was totally devoted to her. He was willing to do almost anything for her, such as permitting her to keep the images she had taken from her father. I don't think that Leah would have gotten by with it—or anyone else for that matter. But he was indulgent with Rachel. She had given Jacob his son Joseph, and now she gives birth to Benjamin. And it was at the birth of her second son that she died. His life meant her death. It was a great heartbreak to Jacob.

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The other ten boys were no joy to him at all. God reminded him, I think, every day for twenty–four hours of the day that it was sinful to have more than one wife. He didn't need all of them. However, God will overrule, of course. (And He overrules in your life and mine. We can thank Him for that!) But the facts reveal that God did not approve of this plural marriage. This is especially obvious in the treatment which Joseph received from his half–brothers.

Jacob loved Joseph and Benjamin and, very frankly, the other boys were jealous of that. He should not have shown such partiality to Joseph because he had experienced the results of partiality in his own home—he had been the one whom his father had more or less pushed aside. He knew the trouble it had caused. Although I don't try to defend Jacob, we can sympathize with him. He had lost his lovely Rachel, but he had Benjamin. While it was true that the boy was the son of Rachel's sorrow, Jacob could not call him Benoni. He was not the reason of his sorrow; he was the son of his right hand, his walking stick, his staff, the one he would lean on in his old age. It is important to recognize this because it will help us understand the great sorrow Jacob will go through later on. All of it will have its roots in Jacob's sin. God does not approve of the wrong in our lives, my friend. We think we can get by with it, but we will not get by with it—any more than Jacob got by with it. - McGee

Gen 35:19-20 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

She is buried there today. I have several pictures that I have taken of her tomb that is there. That is, it was there until the time Moses wrote this, but it is also there to this very day. - McGee

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

In verses Gen_34:22-26 we have a listing of the sons of Jacob by his different wives. Actually, Joseph and Benjamin were the two boys that were outstanding. The others just didn't turn out well. Again, this proves the fact that God does not bless a plurality of wives. The family of Jacob ought to illustrate that fact to us. Although Uncle Laban was responsible, of course, Jacob went along with it. - McGee

Gen 35:22-27 And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram. Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt.

I suspect that the death of their father Isaac was the only occasion which brought these two boys together in the years following Jacob's return to the land.

Have you noticed that this chapter is made prominent by death? First there is the death of Deborah, the maid of Rebekah. In this there is the suggestion of the death of Rebekah herself. Then there is the death of lovely Rachel. Finally, the chapter closes with the death of Isaac. - McGee

Gen 35:28-29 Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

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Esau's Descendants

Gen 36:1-5 *Now this is the genealogy of Esau, who is Edom. Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite; Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite; and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth. Now Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel. And Aholibamah bore Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah. These were the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.*

Chapter 36 is devoted to the descendants of Esau, who dwelt in the land of Edom, southeast of the Dead Sea. The genealogy represents the fulfillment of the promise that Esau would be the head of a nation (Gen_25:23). Esau had three or possibly four wives, depending on whether some of the women had two names (compare Gen_26:34; Gen_28:9; 36:2-3). – Believers Bible Commentary

Again we are told that Esau is Edom. Esau, you recall, had married two Canaanite women and also an Ishmaelite woman. - McGee

Gen 36:6-7 *Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock.*

Remember that Abraham and Lot had had that same problem. There was not enough grazing land for them. Each one had too many cattle. They had separated and now Esau leaves the Promised Land, leaves it on his own, due to economic circumstances. – McGee

Gen 36:8-11 *So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom. And this is the genealogy of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir. These were the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, and Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz.*

Now Esau moves from “the land of Seir” in Canaan, where he lived when Jacob returned from Padan–aram (Gen_32:3), to Mount Seir, which I have already described. Now Esau moves from “the land of Seir” in Canaan, where he lived when Jacob returned from Padan–aram (Gen_32:3), to Mount Seir, which I have already described. - McGee

Gen 36:12 *Now Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These were the sons of Adah, Esau's wife.*

This is the beginning of the Amalekites. Down through the centuries those tribes which were there in the desert pushed out in many directions. Many of them pushed across North Africa. All the Arab tribes came from Abraham—through Hagar, the Egyptian, and through Keturah, whom he married after the death of Sarah. And there has been intermarriage between the tribes. They belong to the same family that Israelites belong to.

In the Mideast I met an Arab who expressed hostility to a statement I had made about the nation Israel in a message I had given to our tour group. Although he was a Christian Arab, he told me how he hated the nation Israel. I said to him, “But he is your brother.” Believe me, that did antagonize him! He said, “I have no relationship with him at all.” I insisted that he did. I said, “You are both Semitic people. You are a Semite as much as they are.” Well, he had to admit that was true.

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Gen 36:13-16 *These were the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. These were the sons of Aholibamah, Esau's wife, the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon. And she bore to Esau: Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah. These were the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz, the firstborn son of Esau, were Chief Teman, Chief Omar, Chief Zepho, Chief Kenaz, Chief Korah, Chief Gatam, and Chief Amalek. These were the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. They were the sons of Adah.*

Gen 36:17-19 *These were the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: Chief Nahath, Chief Zerah, Chief Shammah, and Chief Mizzah. These were the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom. These were the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. And these were the sons of Aholibamah, Esau's wife: Chief Jeush, Chief Jaalam, and Chief Korah. These were the chiefs who descended from Aholibamah, Esau's wife, the daughter of Anah. These were the sons of Esau, who is Edom, and these were their chiefs.*

Where in the world did they get these dukes? Well, here is the beginning of nobility—they just assumed these titles. Each one of them became a duke. It is not just a nickname—they mean business by it. The beginning of nobility is in the family of Esau.

They have dukes in the family now. A great many people in my country can trace their ancestry back to royalty. It makes me wonder if anybody who came from Europe were folk who worked in vineyards, made pottery, and ran shoe shops. Everybody seems to have come from royalty. Well, Esau turned out quite a few of them. In fact, he went further than producing dukes—

Gen 36:20-24 *These were the sons of Seir the Horite who inhabited the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These were the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir, in the land of Edom. And the sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam. Lotan's sister was Timna. These were the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. These were the sons of Zibeon: both Ajah and Anah. This was the Anah who found the water in the wilderness as he pastured the donkeys of his father Zibeon.*

This was that Anah that found the mules in the wilderness—The word “mules” is, in several ancient versions, rendered “water springs”; and this discovery of some remarkable fountain was sufficient, among a wandering or pastoral people, to entitle him to such a distinguishing notice.

Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 38.

Gen 36:25-30 *These were the children of Anah: Dishon and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah. These were the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. These were the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. These were the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. These were the chiefs of the Horites: Chief Lotan, Chief Shobal, Chief Zibeon, Chief Anah, Chief Dishon, Chief Ezer, and Chief Dishan. These were the chiefs of the Horites, according to their chiefs in the land of Seir.*

Gen 36:31-34 *Now these were the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel: Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. And when Bela died, Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place. When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place.*

This business of having kings was not God's plan for His people. But this was the lifestyle of Edom. They had dukes and kings over them. If you had belonged to the family of Esau, you would have needed a title, because that is the type of

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folk they were. It is interesting to note that the people of Esau had kings long before the people of Israel had kings. In fact, later on the people of Israel will say to Samuel, “... make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1Sa_8:5). They could have said, “Our brothers down south, the Edomites, have kings. We would like to have kings like they do.” - McGee

Gen 36:35-39 And when Husham died, Hadad the son of Bedad, who attacked Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place. And the name of his city was Avith. When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place. And when Samlah died, Saul of Rehoboth-by-the-River reigned in his place. When Saul died, Baal-Hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place. And when Baal-Hanan the son of Achbor died, Hadar reigned in his place; and the name of his city was Pau. His wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab.

This business of having kings was not God's plan for His people. But this was the lifestyle of Edom. They had dukes and kings over them. If you had belonged to the family of Esau, you would have needed a title, because that is the type of folk they were. It is interesting to note that the people of Esau had kings long before the people of Israel had kings. In fact, later on the people of Israel will say to Samuel, “... make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1Sa_8:5). They could have said, “Our brothers down south, the Edomites, have kings. We would like to have kings like they do.” - McGee

Gen 36:40-43 And these were the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their families and their places, by their names: Chief Timnah, Chief Alvah, Chief Jetheth, Chief Aholibamah, Chief Elah, Chief Pinon, Chief Kenaz, Chief Teman, Chief Mibzar, Chief Magdiel, and Chief Iram. These were the chiefs of Edom, according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession. Esau was the father of the Edomites.

This is the family history of the rejected line. When the chapter gives the final resumé, it lists again the dukes that came from the line of Esau. There must have been a lot of bowing and scraping to each other when they got together. “I want you to meet my brother here. He is Duke Alvah” and “I want you to meet my friend. He is Duke Timnah.” And the kings—I doubt if you could even get in to see them!

This is a very interesting chapter for anyone who is interested in the study of anthropology or ethnology. A chapter like this gives a family history which probably extends farther back than any other source could go.

So the chapter closes with a list of the dukes and mentions again that their habitation is in the land of their possession which is Edom. “He is Esau the father of the Edomites.” We see the working out of this in the prophecies of Obadiah and in Malachi. This is quite remarkable, friend, and something we cannot just pass by. - McGee