

Lesson: A Family Transformed and the Promise (Genesis 35:1-29)

God is ready to settle Jacob to make him Israel, sending him back to Canaan. This will lead towards the fulfillment of God’s promise to turn a barren old man into a nation who will bring a blessing to all the families of the earth.

Biblical Takeaways

1. ***Worship of the right God (Gen 35:1-4)***
 - a. God commanded Jacob to return to Bethel (“the house of God”). This is the place where he first encountered the Lord on the ladder as he fled from Esau.
 - b. This meeting spot demanded a change. All of the idols they had been carrying around this whole time had to go. Abraham’s family worshipped idols before they worshipped God. This was their way of life. Now, it was time for them to embrace a new way.
 - c. In going to Bethel, Jacob was acknowledging that only one God had been talking with him and answering him. One God had been there with him during his moments of crisis. The idols had no power to save; the only God who had delivered was the God of his fathers. It was time for his whole family to embrace this fact.
2. ***Protection follows proper worship (Gen 35:5-8):*** Jacob was extremely worried about the well-being of his family since his sons had destroyed Shechem. He feared their vengeance. But the purposes of God prevailed and Jacob and his family were protected. God ensured that the surrounding nations would not touch them. To honor God, Jacob built another altar in Luz (Bethel) and called it El-Bethel, the God of Bethel.
3. ***God reaffirms a transformed identity (Gen 35:9-15)***
 - a. God reminded Jacob that his name was no longer Jacob but now Israel. Jacob had been Jacob all of his life. It was necessary for God to remind him that he had made a change. God often has to remind us that we have been transformed, especially when it does not feel like it.
 - b. This transformation was essential for Israel to inherit the promises. He was to be the beginning of royalty. Transformation is necessary for an abundant future.
4. ***The death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin (Gen 35:16-21):*** Jacob’s beloved wife, Rachel, died at childbirth. She called her son’s name, Benoni (son of my sorrow) but Jacob called his name Benjamin (son of my right hand/strength). This was the last child of Israel.
5. ***The transformed family (Gen 35:22-29)***
 - a. Reuben committed an egregious act by sleeping with Bilhah, the mother of some of his brothers.
 - b. The text breaks down the family of Israel by their mothers, Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah. This is the division of the tribes for future generations. God would use these tribes to become a people to whom he would give his laws. And this people would become a nation. And this nation would revolutionize the concept of “nation” for the whole world. This nation was not defined by its military strength or land size but by its God.
 - c. After discussion of Jacob and his family’s settlement, we discover Isaac has died. Esau and Jacob gathered to bury their father.