

GENESIS Week 32, chapter 35

Chapter 35 is rich in information BUT largely hidden to our view due to the Greek and English translations. So, we're going to sort of detour around a bit, and connect some dots that have been obscured over the centuries, as we go through this chapter. We'll also use this as an opportunity to review some of the more difficult to decipher.....yet critically important..... matters and principles that lay the foundation here in Chapter 35 for all that will come later.

READ GEN 35 all

In verse 1, God orders Jacob, Israel, to pack up and move to Beit-el, Bethel, the place where so many years earlier Jacob had stopped on his journey *out of* Canaan, on his way to Mesopotamia, and saw the vision of the angels ascending and descending on the ladder between Earth and Heaven.

In turn Jacob orders his entire household to get rid of all their idols and idolatrous symbols. The sacking of Shechem by Israel's sons and their taking of many of Shechem's people, had introduced many newcomers into Israel's clan; and these newcomers, in particular, worshipped other gods. Even more, Jacob's sons would have stolen the god-idols of Shechem because this, by their way of thinking, would have stolen power away from Shechem. It was the norm for an invader or conqueror to steal his enemy's gods, because it in a very tangible way weakened his enemy in addition to humiliating them.

The phrasing of God's instruction to Jacob points out the mindset of that time; and to me, it demonstrates the supreme patience of Yehoveh in developing and maturing his infant nation of Israel. So, I want to dwell on this for a couple of minutes.

Notice that the proper translation of verse 1 has God telling Jacob to build an altar at Beit-el "to *the* God" who appeared to you..... He didn't say, build an altar to Me. This is kind of an odd way for Yehoveh to refer to Himself as "the God" who appeared to you, because it has kind of a built-in implication that there are other gods, but He is the particular god that appeared to Jacob at Beit-el. According to the traditional ways of that era, it was thought that gods were many, and they were territorial, in addition to having specific job descriptions. And gods from different territories would fight against gods from other territories. Or, perhaps better, one god was more powerful than another. So in Mesopotamia, for example, the god of rain was ONLY the god of rain for Mesopotamia. He wasn't responsible for rain somewhere else, because there were other gods of rain in other places. Everybody believed this way.....everybody. And, we really don't find Yehoveh hammering away, making a point, that He is the ONLY God that exists. Rather, He characterizes Himself as Jacob's God. We have no record of Yehoveh telling Jacob, while up in Mesopotamia, to build an altar to Him up there, and I doubt that it happened. Because Yehoveh was a God that was associated with the land of Canaan, not Mesopotamia. But, now that Jacob was back in Canaan, the God of the Promised Land,

Yehoveh, tells Jacob to build him an altar. Made perfect sense to Jacob, and probably to most of his tribe (even the newcomers), although they had NO idea what reality actually was.

I tell you this, because as we read through the Torah, understand that just who Yehoveh is, and how He operated, and where His sphere of influence began and ended, was just as fuzzy to the minds of the Israelites as was the concept of what happened to somebody after they died. Certainly, after the Exodus, Yehoveh defined Himself much more extensively. But, people don't just forget centuries of traditions. Rather, Israel tended to understand Yehoveh within the context of all their long-held beliefs and traditions....He was just added to the mix.

Yehoveh was THEIR God....Jacob's god, Israel's god..... but what happened when THEIR God matched wits and powers with a god for another people of another land? Who knew? This was constantly on their minds. So, here we are 200 years after Abraham got the call, and STILL Jacob doesn't quite get who God is, and his wives and the others who have made themselves part of his family certainly don't get it, either. So, as part of an ongoing education process by Yehoveh, we see Jacob saying: OK, we're now under the sphere of influence of my God, and we're going to build an altar to Him; so I don't want your gods upsetting my God, and besides your gods are useless here in a territory that is outside their primary area of influence, anyway. So, give them to me, and I'm going to bury them under a tree. Why bury them? Why not smash them, or burn them? Because, this was more a repudiation of their gods than an absolute belief that those gods didn't exist.

Towards the end of this chapter, I'm going to show you another statement that very much points to Jacob and the Israelites still following traditions and customs that they held dear, yet were quite in error.

The part in verse 4 about getting rid of the earrings has nothing to do with God condemning ear-jewelry; these rings were worn in honor of foreign gods....they were amulets..... so they too had to be removed from their midst and buried. As part of this process, they were also instructed to change clothes, and to purify themselves. Changing their clothes simply means washing their clothes or changing into clean ones. The changing of clothes was a rather usual part of the purification procedures.

These idols and symbols were buried under what some Bibles call an oak trees, and others a pistachio tree. Actually, it was a Terebinth tree, that is of the pistachio family.....but it is NOT an oak tree. I'm not quite sure where that notion ever came from.

After purifying themselves and burying the foreign god symbols, the clan moves to Luz and there Israel builds the altar. Don't let the name Luz confuse you: Luz was simply the name the Canaanite peoples called the place; Hebrews called it Beit-el. We'll see a lot of this double naming in the Bible, often using both the Canaanite and the Hebrew names.

Suddenly we get this interesting little aside in the Scriptures. You'll recall that when Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, brought Riva (Rebecca) back from Mesopotamia as a wife for Isaac, that her nurse, or nanny, accompanied her back to Canaan. Well, now the much beloved nurse Deborah dies, and there is much grieving in the camp. But, why does the Torah even mention Deborah, a seemingly minor role player in the grand scope of things; after all, the deaths of the matriarchs Rivka and Leah.....prominent female figures in the creation and formation of Israel.....are not even recorded. While the explanation is not universally accepted among Jewish scholars, it is generally thought that Deborah represents a link between Israel and Mesopotamiaa link that God is in the process of dissolving. We have examined in an earlier lesson that for Abraham and Isaac, and up to this point Jacob, Mesopotamia was, as far as they were concerned, more their homeland than Canaan. But, Canaan was the land God set apart and promised to Abraham and his descendants, and so God wanted to erase any notion of ties between Israel and a "foreign" land....Mesopotamia. So, the death of Deborah is almost a metaphor for the death of any family ties or relationship between Israel and the land of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.

God appears, once again, to Jacob. Part of what is communicated by God is His reassurance and reiteration of stuff that Jacob has already been told; for instance, that his new name...and therefore new nature..... is Israel. Like all of us, Jacob needed God to constantly remind him of the truth....especially if it brought with it a new reality.....and of His commands, and of His direction for us. Yet, there is another reason for God to repeat this command for a name change: Jacob had His name changed to Israel.....**by divine oracle**.....on the OTHER side of the Jordan River, OUTSIDE of the promised land. Now that Jacob is INSIDE the Promised Land, it needs to be reaffirmed. Why? Because in Jacob's mind....just like in the minds of all the peoples of the world in that era.....gods were numerous, and they were territorial. When Jacob's name was first changed to Israel, he was still in the province of the Mesopotamian gods, and therefore under their sphere of influence. Now that Jacob is in Canaan, he is in the province of El Shaddai, Yehoveh, the god whose territory is Canaan, and so he needs El Shaddai to affirm that what he was told before still stands. Did Jacob believe there were other gods? Yes. That Jacob mistakenly thought this is true we, of course, know his thinking was false. Yet, God showed grace and mercy and played along, and didn't insist that all at once, Jacob was to understand all the truths about God....that He is one, that He is the God of everything, that there are no such things as other gods. Don't think for a minute that God doesn't play along with each of us on many matters that may prove, in the course of time, to be error. For reasons I can't fathom, He allowed the Church to go unchallenged for centuries in our belief that we had replaced Israel....something that was manmade doctrine and the Holy Scripture completely refutes. Somehow, He used that blind spot in the Church for good, to spread the Gospel to the gentiles of the world. But, over the last 50 years, He has begun to correct us, showing us that He NEVER replaced Israel with us, nor did He ever decide He was finished with His people. That time when the Church will make the Jewish people jealous for our faith.....and the stony hearts of His people will be softened so that they can accept their own Messiah.....is upon us.

Now, there is another part of this conversation from God that on the surface seems redundant, but a little closer look throws a little different light on the matter. And, this is important stuff so I want to take one of those little detours I told you at the outset of this week's lesson that we would go on.

One of the best descriptions I've heard of the way that God operates through the Bible, is that He ***progressively*** reveals truths to us using the Word, Holy Scripture, in concert with the Holy Spirit. That somehow, someway, men go along for decades and centuries utterly blind to a great Scriptural truth, and then suddenly they...hopefully WE... see it. That Yehoveh reveals progressively really shouldn't be so tough to accept. If you pick up ANY piece of literature, a novel, an essay, whatever, about which you have no prior knowledge, and begin to read it, page after page you get more information as the characters are developed, the plot is unfolded, details are added, and then the conclusion is arrived at. This is an example of the simplest sense of progressive revelation.

In the case of scripture, so much of what is told in the Word is prophetic. Most often, the prophecy is BOTH literal AND symbolic, and it was happening then, and would happen again. The difficulty for us in dealing with prophecy comes in that the literal truth about what is going to happen in the future is told by scripture within the context of the ancient culture and language of the people and time in which it was written. So, although we can look forward in space and time by studying Bible prophecy, and fairly clearly see the major prophetic milestones, the details can be pretty shadowy. Yet, as the time for a particular prophecy to be fulfilled draws closer, the final pieces of the puzzle start to fall into place and the formerly shadowy details start to come into focus.

As an example: we learn in Genesis 3 that the seed of the woman will strike, or bruise, the head of the serpent. I got news for you: Adam and Eve were nearly clueless as to what that meant, let alone how it would happen. And, if we read no further, we too would be in the dark. But, progressively, page-by-page, through scripture we learn more details about how it will all happen. From Adam to Seth, details are added. From Seth to Noah, more details are added. From Noah to Shem, then to Abraham, then to Isaac, then to Jacob, and now to the birth of the tribes of Israel, the puzzle pieces keep appearing, new information gets added, and the picture starts getting clearer. We're at a point, right now in our study, in which the exact tribe Judah has now been created from which that "seed of the woman" will come, who will defeat Satan and restore Man's relationship with God. However, Jacob didn't know that. We only know that Jacob's son Judah is going to be that special tribe because we have the benefit of hindsight; of studying the recorded history of prophecy as it is being revealed to us at a breathtaking rate in modern times. We know every important detail, the order it happened, generally ***how*** it happened, and what it all meant: Yeshua, our Savior, paid for our sins and conquered death. The seed of women struck the head of the serpent and defeated him at the Cross.

Most of the prophecies of the Bible have already been fulfilled. Yet, there are a few that have yet to happen. As each prophecy is fulfilled, and we can see how it happened, we get a better picture of how the unfulfilled prophecies might happen. For instance, in many of our lifetimes, we have seen Israel re-born as a nation, and Jerusalem taken back from

the gentiles. This information, and the way it all happened, now gives us insight into the next round of prophecies to be fulfilled.....information that the generations just before us didn't have. Yet, we still don't have all the details.

Add to this that the Holy Spirit, which is our true teacher and revealer of God's mysteries, supernaturally quickens men's minds and spirits at the proper moment in history, in order that we might see and understand things in the scripture that for some reason mankind had been blind to. In our time, this recent understanding of a spiritual connection between the Church and the Jewish people, and the more recent yearning by many Believers to knock down the wall of partition between Christian and Jew, and this VERY recent love of Israel that we find exploding within the gentile Church is a fine example of this mysterious progressive revelation at work.

So, as we go through the OT, don't be surprised that we will see some things differently that scholars a mere 50 years ago.....in some cases even 15 or 20 years ago..... COULD NOT see, because the details were just too shadowy, but now some are clearer. And, what I'm about to show you is a case in point.

God says to Jacob in V11, "A nation, indeed a company of nations, will come from you". A better translation is "A nation AND a company of nations will come from you". In other words, God is not saying "A nation (singular).....oh, check that.....make that a whole bunch of nations..." rather He is saying there will be a particular nation, and in addition a group of nations, that will come from Jacob. See the difference?

Well, it gets more complex. We saw that in Genesis 28:3, God promised to Jacob a company of nations. But, when we looked up the Hebrew, the words "kahal ammim" were used for company of nations AS OPPOSED to what Abraham was told when God said Abraham would be a father of a nation, and later the father of many nations. The word used for nation in that instance with Abraham was "goy". God told Abraham you will be the father of "goy", a nation at large, an unspecific nation. On the other hand, God told Jacob that he would produce a "kahal ammim" "a convocation of fellow countrymen". Abraham would produce a variety of nations and peoples; Jacob would produce a certain kind of homogenous and holy people, united in purpose..... this would be the congregation of Israel. Quite a difference.

Well, some time has now passed since Gen 28. Here in Chapter 35, V11, things once again have evolved. God now tells Jacob basically the same thing He told Abraham, employing the Hebrew word "goy" in V11, meaning nations at large. But, there is an important different from what was said to Abraham, God says that Jacob will produce a "holy convocation of goy".

Let me review with you, that by Jacob's day, God had divided the world into two kinds of people: Hebrews, and everybody else. Goy is the name for everybody else.

So, allow me to paraphrase that part of V11 that I'm talking about, because I think this is the meaning: "Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, and in addition a holy convocation of

BOTH Hebrew AND NON-Hebrew nations will come from you". That may sound confusing and even like double-talk until we realize this: ALL of these conditions promised to Jacob would eventually prove to be true.

See, technically, Jacob was the first person to produce only Hebrew children: the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob's father, Isaac, produced Hebrews (Jacob) and non-Hebrews (Esau). Isaac's father, Abraham, also produced both Hebrews (Isaac) and non-Hebrews (Ishmael and several others). Later, in an event that we'll cover towards the end of Genesis, Jacob adopts his son Joseph's two Egyptian children away from him, with one of them, Ephraim, taking over the authority that would have been Joseph's. Even later, hundreds of years after that event, Ephraim, an Israelite tribe that had Egyptian blood mixed in, would be scattered by the conquering Assyrians, and the genes of the bulk of their population would become fused with the gentile world. Then, in a prophetic event that has yet to occur, as recounted in Ezekiel, Ephraim will somehow be reunited with the remnants of the tribe of Judah, the modern-day Jews.

Why am I spending so much time with this prophecy of Genesis 35:11? Because it's manifestation has begun. You see, this prophecy also connects seamlessly with the prophecy of Ezekiel 37 that explains that in the end-times Ephraim and Judah are going to supernaturally be brought back together.

Now, with Gen 35:11 in mind, listen as I read to you Ezekiel 37, beginning with verse 15. What I want you to listen for is this: first God is going to state that He IS going to somehow bring this lost and scattered and absorbed Hebrew people group home (a large portion of which became non-Hebrew) and rejoin it with the group that has steadfastly retained it's Hebrew identity, Judah, the Jews. Then, I want you to listen to just how God is going to do it. Then think about the "holy convocation" that would eventually come from Jacob, and watch as that holy convocation is miraculously brought to fruition.

READ EZEKIEL 37:12-end

God has brought the holy convocation to its fullest. He is dwelling with His holy convocation. A member of the house of David will be eternally Israel's.....OUR...king. Who is that King? Jesus! All of the holy convocation will have one shepherd. Who is our shepherd? Yeshua, of the house of David.

How is this going to happen? It's still too shadowy to know entirely. But, I can tell you with absolute certainty that the process of bringing Ephraim back together with Judah is currently underway. Just this year, the government of Israel has recognized that the 10 lost tribes that make up Ephraim weren't so lost after all, and that they still exist, and that they have retained a memory of their Hebrew heritage for over 2500 years. These people are now being allowed to migrate to Israel.....not as Jews, but as Israelites, as Ephraim. And, the first hint of this event is what we have just read, in Genesis 35 V11. This is decidedly NOT a repeat and reiteration of what God told Abraham, and then Isaac. This is progressive revelation at work.

I know this is new, and probably a little confusing, to many of you. Part of that is because in biblical scholarly writings published before about 1990, you won't find much, if anything, that discusses Ephraim. Therefore, you certainly haven't heard sermons about it in the mainstream denominations. Yet, Ephraim is made so very central in the prophetic scriptures of Isaiah and Ezekiel concerning the latter days. How have our Christian and Jewish scholars overlooked this, when the role of Ephraim.....even if not fully defined..... has become so important and apparent today? Because it wasn't yet time, and because it took several other events to lead us to even see the importance of Ephraim in scripture. So, those of us who HAVE caught the vision need to be thankful that God has blessed us with it..... and to be patient with the 99% of the Church who knows nothing of it. It wasn't that long ago we were in that same boat.

Well, Jacob is about to move on, so let's move on with him.

From Beit-el, the clan now moved on to a place called Efrat.....a long time later, Efrat would come to be known as Beit-lechem...Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ. Jacob's beloved Rachel dies giving birth to his last son, the 12th and final tribe of Israel. During childbirth, suspecting that she was not going to survive, Rachel named this baby Ben-oni, "son of my sorrow". But, later, presumably after Rachel passed, Jacob re-named him Benyamin.....which means, "son of old age", or "son of happiness". We call him Benjamin.

Rachel was buried, and Israel moved again, a short distance, this time near a place called Migdal-Eder, which means "the watchtower of the flock". 1800 years later, this will be the tower from which the Shepherds watching over the flocks in the field at night will see and hear angels announce and rejoice at the birth of the Savior of the World.

The site of Rachel's tomb was well known hundreds of years later, and the books of Samuel speak of the stone marker set upon her grave as a famous landmark. That site exists today, about 1 mile north of Bethlehem.

It was also near here that (in one simple statement) we are told that Jacob's firstborn son Rueben slept with Jacob's concubine, Bilah; and Jacob was aware of it. Bilah had been Rachel's servant-girl. Nothing else is said about this transgression, for now. But, in time, it will prove to have an enormous bearing on the future of Israel.

Let's take another one of our little detours here, and examine the situation between Rueben and Bilah, because it says much about the culture of that time, and has bearing on the future of Israel.

It is no coincidence that Rachel's death and then Rueben's taking of Bilah are spoken of one after the other, because they are directly linked. Bilah was Rachel's handmaiden. But, Bilah was also a concubine/wife of Jacob. Bilah bore Dan and Naphtali. Rueben did a very calculating thing in having sex with Bilah; his intent was that as a result, Jacob would NOT do something that was quite common in that day: elevate a concubine/wife to the position of a full/legal wife, when a full/legal wife died. Rueben was Leah's son.

And, as we think back to the story of the Mandrakes that Rueben gathered for his mother, Rueben was acutely aware of his mother's status in the eyes of his father, Jacob: Rachel was first, and Leah a distant second. As far as Rueben and his mother Leah were concerned, Rachel's death afforded them an opportunity; an opportunity for Leah to gain in status as Jacob's one and only wife, and therefore, his most beloved. HOWEVER..... Rueben was worried that Jacob might decide to comfort himself with Rachel's handmaiden, Bilah, rather than with Leah.

This was more than simple jealousy or emotion: the status of being the son of Jacob's favorite brought with it tangible benefits.....and after all these years of playing second fiddle to Joseph and Joseph's mother Rachel, he wasn't about to allow Bilah to interfere.

By taking Bilah, he ruined her. No way could Jacob now legally marry Bilah, for by having sex with Rueben, she was made undesirable. It would have been shameful beyond imagination for Jacob to marry a woman who had slept with another man, let alone the son of her husband.

Therefore, Rueben WANTED this act to be known. It was NECESSARY that what he did with Bilah be known, so that Jacob would not accept Bilah, and therefore, Leah became queen-bee.

This is why those 4 little words at the end of verse 22..... "and Israel found out".....are so key. Jacob HAD to find out, if Rueben's plan was to succeed.

In the Talmud is a statement about this matter that sums it all up rather well; and it says this: "He (Rueben) said, 'If my mother's sister was a rival to my mother, must the MAID of my mother's sister be a rival to my mother?'"

Now, let me put the cherry on top: during this era, it was customary that a leader who vanquished another leader.....or a son who took over leadership from his father (presumably because of the father's death)..... also took possession of that leader's concubines. The possession of the former leader's concubines by the new leader was an affirmation and validation of that new leader's status and authority.

This entire episode between Rueben and Bilah represented a clearly understood challenge to Jacob's authority as leader of Israel. Rueben's act was cunning and political.....having sex with Bilah had nothing to do with a few moments of pleasure; it was a blatant coup attempt. Rueben wanted to be the leader of Israel.

This is why, sometime later, Jacob would remove Rueben from the office of the firstborn, and give it to Judah. Listen to Jacob as he nears the end of his life, and he gathers his sons together to pronounce the blessing upon them; we find this in Genesis 49. ^{NAS} **Genesis 49:1** *Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come."² "Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father."³ "Reuben, you are my first-born; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power."⁴*

"Uncontrolled 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.

Rueben's attempt to replace his father prematurely not only didn't happen, it backfired so completely that Rueben lost the rights of the Firstborn.

After a concise listing of Jacob's sons, we are given the interesting piece of information that Jacob, Israel, "came home to his father Yitz'chak' at Mamre". In other words, Isaac lived to meet ALL of his grandchildren through Jacob, and then Isaac eventually died at the age of 180 years. Esau came, and together with Jacob, they buried Isaac in Hebron.

Notice the statement in vs. 29, that Isaac died "and was gathered to his kinspeople". Here are words that continue to express both a cloudy view of what occurs to someone after death, and reflects a continuation of ancestor worship to some degree. Did they really think that Isaac was now living on the other side of death with his ancestors? Probably, in some undefined way. But, by now, the expression primarily indicated a peaceful death after a long life span. Such a thing would not have been said about Isaac had he been murdered, or died young, or was executed for breaking a law.

Next week, chapter 36.