

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 35:16-29

“Rachel and Isaac Die”

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Genesis 35:16-29

Verses 16-20

¹⁶ Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. ¹⁷ And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, “Don’t despair, for you have another son.” ¹⁸ As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

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

²⁰ Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel’s tomb.

- Jacob/Israel (see Genesis 15:9-10) had been instructed by YHWH to go and settle at Bethel (see Genesis 15:1). Jacob/Israel went to Bethel as God commanded him but then decided to move on from there toward Ephrath, the ancient name for Bethlehem. It may be that God’s intention was for Jacob/Israel to remain at Bethel and that he disregarded or misunderstood what God had commanded him to do and so moved on. However, the Hebrew word translated “settle” in Genesis 35:1 can be translated “to reside temporarily” or “to stay until God’s purposes are fulfilled.”
- Before reaching Ephrath, Rachel, Jacob/Israel’s second wife, went into labor. The labor was especially difficult, and she eventually died in it.
- As she was dying, Rachel named the baby Ben-Oni which means “son of trouble.” But Jacob/Israel renamed the child Benjamin which means “son of my right hand” after Rachel died. The change of name declared the child to be received with honor rather than despair.
- Rachel was buried at the place where she died. Jacob/Israel set up a pillar as a gravestone to mark the place of her burial.

Verses 21-22

²¹ Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. ²² While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.

- Again, Jacob/Israel moved on. He pitched his tent near Migdal Eder, a place between Bethlehem and Hebron. Reuben, Jacob/Israel's oldest son, slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah, at this place. This was an insult to his father. Israel/Jacob knew what his son had done but apparently ignored it.

Verses 23-26

Jacob had twelve sons:

²³ The sons of Leah:

***Reuben the firstborn of Jacob,
Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.***

²⁴ The sons of Rachel:

Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁵ The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah:

Dan and Naphtali.

²⁶ The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah:

Gad and Asher.

These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.

- Jacob/Israel had twelve sons by four women. This is a list of his sons and a record of to which woman they were born.

Verses 27-29

²⁷ Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. ²⁸ Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. ²⁹ Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

- Jacob/Israel then came home to his father, Isaac, at Mamre near Hebron.
- Isaac lived 180 years. When he died, Esau and Jacob/Israel, his sons, buried him with honor.

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