

## Jacob Goes to Paddan-Aram

**28.1** Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, saying: “You must not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. **2** Arise, go to Paddan-Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father, and take a wife for yourself from there, from the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.<sup>1</sup> **3** May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, so that you may become a community of peoples. **4** And may He give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham.”<sup>2</sup> **5** So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.<sup>3</sup>

**6** (Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-Aram to take a wife for himself from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, “You must not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan”; **7** and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-Aram. **8** Esau also saw that the daughters of Canaan were not acceptable to Isaac his father, **9** so Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth,<sup>4</sup> to be his wife, besides the wives he had.)

**10** So Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran.<sup>5</sup> **11** And he came to a certain place, and there he spent the night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place, and put it at his head, and lay down in that place. **12** And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and indeed, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.<sup>6</sup> **13** And behold, Jehovah stood above it and said, “I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac;<sup>7</sup> I will give the land on which you lie to you and your descendants. **14** And your descendants will be as the dust of the earth; and you will spread out to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendant<sup>8</sup> all the families of the earth will be blessed. **15** And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” **16** Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I did not know it”. **17** And he was afraid<sup>9</sup> and said, “How fearsome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; and this is the gate of heaven.”<sup>10</sup>

**18** Then Jacob rose early in the morning, took the stone that he had placed at his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Evidently, they were not yet aware of the dangers of inbreeding, and it was a tradition within the family. This may be why Sarai and Rebekah were barren, as was Rachel. With Jacob things began to change, since two of his four wives were from outside the family. As for Jacob’s sons, none of them married within the family.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac passed Abraham’s blessing on to Jacob. He understood that God had used Rebekah’s ‘trick’ to circumvent his own rebellion.

<sup>3</sup> Esau married when he was forty (26:34), and Isaac was a hundred. Now Isaac was 137, and so the twins were 77, and Esau probably had grown children. Therefore he would have had his own little compound, some distance from Isaac’s. Jacob probably left while it was dark, and it was some time before Esau learned what had happened.

<sup>4</sup> Mahalath was the sister of Nebaioth. 25:13 says that Nebaioth was the firstborn of Ishmael.

<sup>5</sup> It appears that Paddan-Aram was located in the area dominated by the city of Haran, where Terah died. Bethuel must have moved there from Ur. In 24:10 Abraham’s servant went to Mesopotamia, the area where Haran was located. (Mesopotamia means ‘between rivers’, the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates.)

<sup>6</sup> The text states that they were angels. It was certainly the first time, and perhaps the last, that Jacob saw an angel.

<sup>7</sup> Jehovah introduced himself and identified himself. But why did God appear to Jacob at this moment? Jacob was fleeing, carrying only what he had on his back. At the age of 77, it was the most depressing moment of his life. It was a strategic moment for God. The promise was detailed, and it was one-sided.

<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew text has ‘seed’ both here and at the beginning of the verse, and can be understood as singular or plural. It is through the Savior that all the families of the earth are blessed.

<sup>9</sup> When God appears, it usually causes fear. But it is also true that Jacob had not been relating to Him, which we can understand from verse 21.

<sup>10</sup> There was even a ladder to climb up!

<sup>11</sup> He was travelling ‘light’, but he had some ‘oil’, presumably vegetable. Why would he be carrying oil?

19 And he called the name of that place Bethel,<sup>1</sup> although the name of that city at first was Luz. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothes to wear,<sup>2</sup> 21 so that I return to my father's house in peace, then Jehovah will be my God.<sup>3</sup> 22 And this stone that I have set up as a pillar will become God's house;<sup>4</sup> and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."<sup>5</sup>

### Jacob arrives and marries

**29.1** Then Jacob continued his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. 2 And he looked, and there was a well in the field, and furthermore, three flocks of sheep were lying by it! —for they watered the flocks from that well; and there was a large stone on the well's mouth. 3 (For all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone away from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and then put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth.) 4 And Jacob said to them, "My brethren, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran". 5 And he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him". 6 And he said to them, "Is he well?" And they said, "He is well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep." 7 Then he said, "Look, the sun is still high; it is not the time to gather the cattle; water the sheep, and go and feed them." 8 But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered and they roll the stone away from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep."<sup>6</sup>

9 While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. 10 It happened, when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the sheep of Laban his mother's brother.<sup>7</sup> 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel and lifted up his voice and wept.<sup>8</sup> 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, the son of Rebecca. So she ran and told her father.<sup>9</sup>

13 So when Laban heard the news about Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, embraced him and kissed him, and brought him into his house. And he told Laban all these things.<sup>10</sup> 14 Then Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh". And he stayed with him a full month. 15 Then Laban said to Jacob, "Should you serve me for nothing because you are my brother? Tell me, what should your wages be?" 16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah's eyes were dull, but Rachel was beautiful in body and appearance. 18 Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter".<sup>11</sup> 19 And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I

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<sup>1</sup> Bethel means 'the house of God'. From Beersheba to Bethel was about 100 km, in a straight line. Jacob walked a long way that day. He was running away; it was still dark when he left, and he walked as fast as he could all day, stopping when there was no more light for walking.

<sup>2</sup> Wow, he only asked for food and clothes, the basics to survive. Did he not even have money to buy food?

<sup>3</sup> He repeated some of what Jehovah had said. Jehovah introduced Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac, and here Jacob wants to be added to that list.

<sup>4</sup> How so, 'house of God'? Can a stone be a house of God? Or did he want it to be a place where he could always meet with God?

<sup>5</sup> Dear me, Jacob thought that he could negotiate with God! Since he knew Abraham personally, he must have learned the idea of tithing from him, when he met Melchizedek. But, how could he give that tithe to God? In fact, that tithe is never mentioned again. Up to the last clause, Jacob addressed God indirectly, but then switched to direct address.

<sup>6</sup> This is curious; in verse 10 Jacob removes the stone alone. It seems that this was an arbitrary rule among them.

<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew text repeats the phrase.

<sup>8</sup> He wept in shame and bitterness. Abraham's servant had come with ten camels, gold and silver; Jacob came with nothing. He had come looking for a wife, but he had nothing with which to pay (and he was 77 years old). In 32:10 he himself said, "I crossed this Jordan with my staff". Everything we do has consequences. Jacob obtained Abraham's blessing in a dubious way, but he paid dearly for it.

<sup>9</sup> She left the sheep with Jacob.

<sup>10</sup> He must have told enough of the story to explain his presence there, under those circumstances.

<sup>11</sup> Why did Jacob offer seven years? I believe Laban would have accepted less. His daughters were stranded.

should give her to another man; stay with me." **20** So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him only a few days,<sup>1</sup> because of the love he had for her.

**21** Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, so that I may go in to her".<sup>2</sup> **22** So Laban gathered all the men of the place together and made a feast. **23** But in the evening, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. **24** (Laban also gave his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah, as her maidservant.) **25** When morning came, oh no, it was Leah!<sup>3</sup> Then he said to Laban, "How is it that you have done this to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you tricked me?" **26** And Laban said, "To give the younger before the older is not done here. **27** Complete the week of this one,<sup>4</sup> and then we will give you the other also,<sup>5</sup> in return for the service of yet another seven years that you will serve me."<sup>6</sup>

**28** And Jacob did so, and fulfilled Leah's week. So *Laban* gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also. **29** (Laban also gave his maidservant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel, as her maidservant.) **30** Then *Jacob* went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he worked for *Laban* another seven years.<sup>7</sup> **31** And Jehovah saw that Leah was disregarded, and He opened her womb;<sup>8</sup> but Rachel was barren.

### The sons kept coming<sup>9</sup>

**29.32** Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben;<sup>10</sup> for she said, "Surely

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase, "seemed to him only a few days", requires that the "seven years" be understood literally. Jacob married Leah and Rachel after the seven years. The problem of Dinah's age has a different solution, as I explain below.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase 'go in to her' is used in the OT in the sense of 'have sex with her', or 'marry her'.

<sup>3</sup> It seems that it was customary at that time to place the bride on a bed in a dark room. When the groom entered, he could not see who it was. Leah certainly kept quiet, so as not to be betrayed by the voice (and she obviously participated in the trick willingly). That is why Jacob only discovered the betrayal with the light of day.

<sup>4</sup> Here it is a week of seven days, Leah's bridal week.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob received Rachel after Leah's seven days, not after another seven years.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob was not the more clever; in that 'discipline' Laban was a graduate professor. Jacob was completely vulnerable, and Laban knew very well how to take advantage of this weakness. Laban and Rebekah were siblings, and Rebekah only had children after twenty years of marriage, and Laban did not sit still during all that time. If Jacob was already 84 years old, then Leah was certainly at least 60, and probably more—she was stranded, no one wanted her. However, she had a relationship with Jehovah, and verbally acknowledged Him when the children were born. And verse 31 makes clear that God recognized that relationship.

Returning to Laban, he suddenly saw a great opportunity to get rid of Leah, and he did not miss the chance. Still and all, just as God used Rebekah's deceit to circumvent Isaac's rebellion, God used Laban's cleverness to further the Plan. If Jacob had married Rachel first, he would have been satisfied and would not have thought about Leah. But the Messiah would come through Leah, not Rachel. Further, Rachel's barrenness led to the inclusion of the two handmaids as concubines; the four women produced the twelve sons, half of them being Leah's!

<sup>7</sup> This makes clear that "Leah's week" was seven solar days.

<sup>8</sup> Repeatedly, it is stated that Jehovah controls conception.

<sup>9</sup> The passage from 29:32 through 30:24 deals with the birth of Jacob's sons; it is the topic of the passage. The Hebrew discourse structure usually deals topic by topic, without regard to the chronological sequence of events; and it can treat the same topic from different perspectives. Failure to take this factor into account has led commentators to misinterpret "when Rachel had given birth to Joseph" in 30:25. That saying is chronological, and the context makes it clear that it refers to the end of Jacob's 14 years of service for both wives. But Jacob did not receive Leah until after seven years of service (and Rachel seven solar days after Leah). It is clear that Reuben could not have been born before the eighth year of this service. Although the record mentions only one daughter, Dinah, 37:35 makes it clear that Jacob had other daughters (which would be normal), for it mentions "all his daughters". The difficulty is that the second seven-year period simply does not accommodate so many births, a difficulty that results from the mistake of assuming that 30:25 applies to the previous section.

It is necessary to understand that the account of the births is independent of the time of Joseph's birth. Certainly a good number of the births occurred during the following six years. The text makes it clear that when Jacob left Paddan-Aram (after twenty years) he had eleven sons, and certainly Dinah as well. The birth of Joseph is included in the previous passage because it is part of the topic.

<sup>10</sup> The name means: look, a son.

Jehovah has noticed my affliction;<sup>1</sup> therefore now my husband will love me". **33** And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Surely Jehovah has heard that I am disregarded, and He has given me this one also". And she called his name Simeon.<sup>2</sup> **34** And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons". So his name was called Levi.<sup>3</sup> **35** And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise Jehovah". So she called his name Judah;<sup>4</sup> and she stopped bearing.

**30:1** Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I will die". **2** Then Jacob was angry with Rachel and said, "Am I in God's place, who has withheld the fruit of the womb from you?" **3** So she said, "Here is my maidservant Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear children for me, that I also may be built up through her."<sup>5</sup> **4** And she gave him Bilhah her maidservant as a wife; and Jacob went in to her. **5** And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. **6** Then Rachel said, "God has judged, and has also heard my voice and given me a son". Therefore she called his name Dan.<sup>6</sup> **7** And Bilhah Rachel's maidservant conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. **8** Then Rachel said, "With the wrestlings 'of gods' I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed!" So she called his name Naphtali.<sup>7</sup>

**9** When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she also took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. **10** And Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, bore Jacob a son. **11** Then Leah said, "A troop is coming!"<sup>8</sup> And she called his name Gad. **12** Then Leah's maidservant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. **13** Then Leah said, "How happy I am! For the daughters will call me happy." And she named him Asher.<sup>9</sup> **14** In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went out and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes". **15** But she said to her, "Was it a small thing that you took my husband?<sup>10</sup> Would you also take my son's mandrakes?" Then Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes". **16** When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes". And he lay with her that night. **17** And God listened to Leah,<sup>11</sup> and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. **18** Then Leah said, "God has given me my wages, for I have given my maidservant to my husband".<sup>12</sup> So she called his name Issachar.<sup>13</sup> **19** Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. **20** And Leah said, "God has given me a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons". And she called his name Zebulun.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Laban had the family idols, but Leah acknowledged Jehovah, which she did with her second son as well (verse 31 says that it was Jehovah who opened her womb). With the fourth, she praised Jehovah, and the fourth was Judah, through whom the Messiah came.

<sup>2</sup> The name means: hearing.

<sup>3</sup> The name means: attached.

<sup>4</sup> The name means: praise.

<sup>5</sup> According to the norms of Hebrew discourse, Rachel probably did not wait until the birth of Leah's fourth son, not necessarily. Rachel did the same thing with Bilhah that Rebekah did with Hagar, but the outcome was quite different.

<sup>6</sup> The name means: judgment.

<sup>7</sup> The name means: wrestling.

<sup>8</sup> The interpretation of the Hebrew here is in doubt.

<sup>9</sup> The name means: happy.

<sup>10</sup> Just as Esau did not 'remember' that he had sold the birthright, Leah did not 'remember' that it was she who stole Jacob from Rachel in the beginning.

<sup>11</sup> It wasn't the mandrakes, it was God. But why was this episode included in the historical record? It seems that Jacob was no longer going to Leah, preferring younger women. But God still had work for Leah to do, and He used the mandrakes to take Jacob back to her.

<sup>12</sup> How so; what did one thing have to do with the other?

<sup>13</sup> The name means: salary.

<sup>14</sup> The name means: dwelling place.

21 And afterward she bore a daughter, and she called her name Dinah.<sup>1</sup> 22 And God remembered Rachel; God listened to her, and opened her womb. 23 And she conceived, and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach".<sup>2</sup> 24 So she called his name Joseph, saying, "May Jehovah add to me another son".<sup>3</sup>

### God enriches Jacob

30.25 Now it happened, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. 26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, and let me go, for you know my service that I have done for you." 27 Then Laban said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your eyes; I have observed the signs, and Jehovah has blessed me for your sake". 28 And he said, "Tell me the payment you want, and I will give it". 29 So Jacob said to him, "You know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. 30 For the little that you had before I came has increased abundantly,<sup>4</sup> and Jehovah has blessed you at my foot.<sup>5</sup> And now, when shall I provide for my own house also?" 31 So he said, "What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again feed and keep your flock. 32 I will go through all your flock today, taking from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb; and the spotted and speckled goats—they shall be my wages. 33 So my righteousness will testify for me in time to come, when you come to me about my wages; every goat that is not speckled and spotted and every lamb that is not black that is with me will be considered stolen."<sup>6</sup> 34 Then Laban said, "Yes, let it be according to your word!"<sup>7</sup> 35 That same day Laban took the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, each one with white spots, and each black lamb, and gave them into the hand of his sons.<sup>8</sup> 36 Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob,<sup>9</sup> and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

37 Then Jacob took green poplar, almond and chestnut<sup>10</sup> rods, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the whiteness that was in the rods. 38 And he placed the rods that he had peeled beside the containers, the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, across from them; and they conceived when they came to drink. 39 So the flocks conceived in front of the rods, and brought forth young streaked, speckled and spotted; 40 and Jacob set the young apart.<sup>11</sup> Also, he put the *females* of the flock with the streaked and black *males* among Laban's flock.<sup>12</sup> He set his

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<sup>1</sup> Why is Dinah mentioned? Didn't Jacob have other daughters? In 31:28 Laban speaks of "kissing my sons and my daughters," and since "my sons" certainly refers to his grandsons, it is likely that "my daughters" refers to granddaughters. In fact, 37:35 mentions "all his daughters." Dinah would play an important role later.

<sup>2</sup> At that time, a married woman without children was looked down on.

<sup>3</sup> The name means: to add.

<sup>4</sup> Laban recognized the truth that Jacob declared (v. 27), and he did not want to lose the blessing.

<sup>5</sup> This is what the Text says: "at my foot". Perhaps it refers to his work, or his initiatives.

<sup>6</sup> How did Jacob know that all of the future offspring of the animals would have those characteristics?

<sup>7</sup> Laban was devious, he didn't even respect his own word; he changed the 'wages' ten times within six years (31:41)! But going against God doesn't work very well (31:42) [and not for our enemies either].

<sup>8</sup> Laban's sons were brothers of Leah and Rachel, and therefore adults, some perhaps of middle age. Jacob's sons were still children; the oldest was six years old. Since Jacob continued to tend Laban's flock, and since it was a three-day journey between the two flocks (verse 36), Jacob had no way of keeping an eye on what was happening to his own flock (but his wives were probably there to keep an eye on things).

<sup>9</sup> Well now, it seems that Laban was worried, or perhaps he was putting Jacob at a disadvantage. Three days' travel would be a respectable distance, and the text does not say in which direction, but 31:21 says that he "crossed the river", which would be the Euphrates. So the two flocks were on the same side.

<sup>10</sup> There is doubt as to the species of this tree.

<sup>11</sup> It was God who made Jacob's ruse work, apparently, as he himself acknowledged in 31:42. Even though Laban changed the 'wages' ten times, 31:41. Obviously Laban was watching everything the whole time, and tried desperately to get around God's blessing on Jacob.

<sup>12</sup> Since Laban changed the wages every six months, or so, there would soon be a variety of males in Laban's flock, in spite of the separation at the beginning.

own flock by itself, and did not put them with Laban's flock. **41** And it came to pass, whenever the stronger of the flock conceived, that Jacob would place the rods before the eyes of the flock, beside the troughs, that they might conceive in front of the rods. **42** But whenever the flock was weak, he did not place them. So the weaker ones were Laban's, and the stronger ones were Jacob's. **43** Thus the man became extremely prosperous; he had large flocks, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys.<sup>1</sup>

### Jacob returns to Canaan

**31.1** Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth".<sup>2</sup> **2** And Jacob also saw that Laban's countenance was not *favorable* toward him as before. **3** Then Jehovah said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you".<sup>3</sup> **4** So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock. **5** And he said to them, "I see that your father's countenance is not *favorable* toward me as before, but the God of my father has been with me. **6** And you yourselves know that I have served your father with all my might. **7** Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to do me harm. **8** If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages', then all the flocks would bear speckled. And if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages', then all the flocks would bear streaked. **9** So God took away your father's livestock and gave them to me. **10** And it happened, at the time when the flock conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats that mated with the flock were streaked, speckled, or spotted. **11** And the Angel of God said to me in the dream,<sup>4</sup> 'Jacob', and I said, 'Here I am'. **12** And He said, 'Lift your eyes and see: all the male goats that mate with the flock are streaked, speckled, or spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. **13** I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar, where you made a vow to me.'<sup>5</sup> Now arise, get out of this land, and return to your native land'.<sup>6</sup>

**14** Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? **15** Does he not regard us as strangers? For he sold us and has 'devoured' all our money.<sup>7</sup> **16** For all the wealth that God took from our father<sup>8</sup> belongs to us and our children. So then, do everything that God has said to you." **17** Then Jacob went into action and put his sons and his wives on camels. **18** He took away all his livestock and all the possessions that he had acquired—the livestock that he had accumulated in Paddan-Aram—to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.<sup>9</sup> **19** Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen her father's household idols.<sup>10</sup> **20** And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he

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<sup>1</sup> 32:14-15 tells us that the half that Jacob gave to Esau was: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats; two hundred ewes and twenty rams; thirty milk camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls; twenty female donkeys and ten foals (if he had camels and donkeys with young, he inevitably had males too). So, he had double that when he left Paddan-Aram; around a thousand animals! And he gained all that in six years!! Now then, to have pasture for a thousand animals requires an area of respectable size. The Text says that he had slaves. Jacob certainly exchanged animals for slaves, as much as possible, precisely to get rid of Laban's sons to take care of his flocks.

Donkeys are beasts of burden, and camels are too, and they would be used on the journey back to Canaan.

<sup>2</sup> The second half of their complaint was true.

<sup>3</sup> It was God who sent him back, because it was time to do so.

<sup>4</sup> What was the point of the dream? God was claiming direct responsibility for Jacob's prosperity.

<sup>5</sup> God mentions the vow! God had blessed him, but now He had to get him back to the land.

<sup>6</sup> Strictly speaking, his native land would be south of Hebron, but probably included Hebron, since both Abraham and Isaac spent time there; and God told him to go there.

<sup>7</sup> It has often been assumed that the reference is to the price that Jacob paid for them. But that was seven year's work for each of them. Since God prospered Laban during those fourteen years, could the reference be to that prosperity? But during the following six years God Himself transferred that prosperity to Jacob. Could the reference be to what they might have inherited from their father? That seems to be the point of the next verse.

<sup>8</sup> They recognized the hand of God.

<sup>9</sup> Isaac was living at Hebron, but Jacob took his time getting there, as I explain below.

<sup>10</sup> That was why Laban pursued them.

was going to run away.<sup>1</sup> **21** So he departed with all that he had; he arose and crossed the River,<sup>2</sup> and headed toward Mount Gilead.

### *Jacob and Laban*

**22** On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. **23** So he took his brothers<sup>3</sup> with him and followed him for seven days, and overtook him in Mount Gilead. **24** (But God had come to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, “Be careful not to speak to Jacob either good or bad!”) **25** So Laban caught up with Jacob, who had pitched his tent in that mountain; Laban and his brothers also pitched their tent in Mount Gilead. **26** Then Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done, that you have deceived me and carried my daughters away like captives of the sword? **27** Why did you run away secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me? For I would have sent you away with joy and songs, with tambourine and harp. **28** Nor did you allow me to kiss my sons and daughters. You have acted foolishly! **29** There is power in my hand to harm you, but the God of your father<sup>4</sup> spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Take heed that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad.’ **30** So now you have really left, because you long for your father’s house; but why did you steal my family idols?”<sup>5</sup>

**31** Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, “Because I was afraid; for I thought that you might take your daughters from me by force. **32** With whomever you find your idols, let him not live. In the presence of our brothers, search for yourself whether I have anything of yours with me, and take it.” For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. **33** So Laban went into Jacob’s tent, and into Leah’s tent, and into the tent of the two maidservants, but did not find anything. Then he left Leah’s tent and went into Rachel’s tent. **34** Now Rachel had taken the idols and put them in the saddle of her camel, and sat on them. And Laban felt all over the tent, but did not find anything. **35** And she said to her father, “Do not be angry, my lord, that I cannot get up before you; for I am in the manner of women.”<sup>6</sup> So he searched but did not find the idols.

**36** Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban; Jacob answered and said to Laban, “What is my transgression? What is my sin, that you have so furiously pursued me? **37** Although you have felt around all my belongings, what have you found of all the things in your house? Set it here before my brothers and your brothers, and let them judge between us both. **38** These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your she-goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. **39** I did not bring you what was torn to pieces; I replaced it. You required at my hand both what was stolen by day and what was stolen by night. **40** My case was like this: the heat consumed me by day, and the cold by night; and my sleep fled from my eyes. **41** Thus I have been in your house twenty years; fourteen years I served you for your two daughters, and six years for your flock; and you have changed my wages ten times! **42** If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac had not been with me, surely you would now have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the work of my hands, and He rebuked you last night.”

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<sup>1</sup> Why ‘run away’? He was still responsible for Laban’s flock, and he was going to leave him ‘in the lurch’. Apparently, the care did not include the shearing.

<sup>2</sup> The Euphrates River.

<sup>3</sup> The Text actually says ‘brothers’, not ‘sons’.

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew text has ‘your (plural) father’, but the literal meaning is impossible. Since ‘your’ in English is ambiguous as to number, our versions ‘hide’ the problem. Perhaps it is the honorific form for ‘your (singular)’ (Rebekah was Laban’s sister). In the Septuagint it is ‘your (singular)’.

<sup>5</sup> That was the problem, the reason for the costly expedition: the family idols. If it were not for the disappearance of those idols, Laban would have celebrated Jacob’s departure, as he himself said. At that time and in that region, the possession of such idols by a son-in-law gave him the right of the firstborn son in the inheritance left by his father-in-law, to the detriment of his father-in-law’s own children. That was why Laban went after them. Naturally, Jacob did not appreciate being accused of such a crime.

<sup>6</sup> She claimed to be menstruating.

**43** Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, and the sons are my sons, and the flocks are my flocks; everything you see is mine.<sup>1</sup> But what can I do today for these daughters of mine, or for their children whom they have borne? **44** Now therefore come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be for a witness between you and me.” **45** Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. **46** And Jacob said to his brothers, “Gather stones”. So they took stones and made a heap of them; and they ate there beside the heap. **47** Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed.<sup>2</sup> **48** Then Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today”. Therefore it was called Galeed, **49** and also Mizpah,<sup>3</sup> because he said, “May Jehovah watch between you and me when we are separated from each other. **50** If you harm my daughters or take wives besides my daughters, while no one is with us<sup>4</sup>—remember, God is a witness between you and me.” **51** Laban also said to Jacob, “Look at this heap and the pillar that I have set up between you and me. **52** This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap toward you, and that you will not go past this heap and this pillar toward me, for harm.<sup>5</sup> **53** May the God of Abraham, the God of Nahor and the God of their father,<sup>6</sup> judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. **54** Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain and invited his brothers to eat bread; and they ate bread and spent the night on the mountain. **55** Laban got up early in the morning and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

#### *Jacob and God*

**32.1** Then Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. **2** When Jacob saw them, he said, “This camp is God’s”. And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.<sup>7</sup> **3** Then Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to Esau his brother, to the land of Seir, the territory of Edom. **4** And he commanded them, saying, “Thus shall you say to my lord Esau: ‘Thus says your servant Jacob: “I have sojourned with Laban and remained until now. **5** I have oxen, donkeys, and flocks, and male and female slaves; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.”’” **6** The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau; and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men with him!” **7** Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; so he divided the people who were with him into two companies, as also the flocks, the herds and the camels. **8** And he said, “If Esau comes to one company and attacks it, the other company will escape”.

**9** Then Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, Jehovah, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will do you good’. **10** I am not worthy of all the mercies and all the faithfulness that you have bestowed on your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. **11** Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me,<sup>8</sup> and the mother with the children. **12** You yourself said, ‘I will surely do you good, and I will make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’” **13** He stayed there

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<sup>1</sup> Laban lied; Jacob had bought everything.

<sup>2</sup> Both names mean: heap of witness.

<sup>3</sup> The name means: watchtower.

<sup>4</sup> The reference may be to a mediator, or a go-between.

<sup>5</sup> Laban was still suspicious. The unavoidable fact was that his idols were no longer in their place in his house. And they disappeared exactly when Jacob left. 2 + 2 = 4. Jacob could have buried the idols, to use them later. The whole procedure was to ensure that Jacob would not use the idols against Laban's sons.

<sup>6</sup> Why did Laban appeal to the God of their grandfathers, and even their great-grandfather? In verse 49 he appealed directly to Jehovah. It seems that they knew who Jehovah was, even if they did not associate with Him much. But since Jehovah was Jacob's God, Laban was trying to constrain him with this appeal.

<sup>7</sup> The name means: two bands—there was the physical band, which was Jacob's, and the spiritual band, which was God's.

<sup>8</sup> The verb could have the meaning of kill, but Esau would have no reason to kill women and children, even if he killed Jacob. However, the next verse could imply the killing of the children.



that night. Then he took from what he had a present for his brother Esau: **14** two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats; two hundred ewes and twenty rams; **15** thirty milk camels with their young; forty cows and ten bulls; twenty female donkeys and ten colts. **16** He delivered them to his slaves, each drove by itself, and said to his slaves, "Pass on ahead of me and put some space between drove and drove". **17** He commanded the first one, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'Whose are you, and where are you going, and whose are these in front of you?' **18** Then you shall say, 'They are your servant Jacob's, who says, "I am sending a present to my lord Esau". And behold, he also is behind us.'" **19** So also he commanded the second and the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, "You shall speak this same word to Esau when you find him. **20** And you shall also say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me". **21** So the present went on ahead of him, but he spent that night in the camp.

**22** That same night<sup>1</sup> he arose and took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of the Jabbok.<sup>2</sup> **23** He took them and brought them across the stream—he had sent over that which he had.<sup>3</sup> **24** So Jacob was left alone;<sup>4</sup> and a Man wrestled with him until it began to dawn. **25** And when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh became out of joint as He wrestled with him. **26** And He said, "Let me go, for the dawn has come".<sup>5</sup> But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me".<sup>6</sup> **27** So He said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob". **28** Then He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,<sup>7</sup> for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed". **29** Then Jacob asked and said, "Please tell me your name". And He said, "Why do you ask my name?"<sup>8</sup> And He blessed him there. **30** And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel,<sup>9</sup> "Because I have seen God face to face, and I am still alive!" **31** And the sun rose on him as he went on from Peniel; and he limped because of his thigh. **32** Therefore the children of Israel do not eat the tendon that is on the hollow of the thigh to this day, because He struck the hollow of Jacob's thigh, the tendon.

### *Jacob and Esau*

**33.1** Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there was Esau, coming with four hundred men! Then he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants. **2** He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. **3** But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times until he came to his brother. **4** Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, falling on his neck and kissing him, and they wept.<sup>10</sup> **5** Then he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said,

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<sup>1</sup> It seems that Jacob made that crossing at night, which would have been a strange procedure. Perhaps God had already presented Himself to him, and he knew that he would have to face Him alone.

<sup>2</sup> The Jabbok is a small tributary of the Jordan River on the eastern side. The stream could have presented a small obstacle to Esau, who was coming from the south, but to placate Esau, Jacob could not use it.

<sup>3</sup> A good part of his possessions had already gone toward Esau.

<sup>4</sup> He must have helped the women and children across, but then returned to the north side of the stream alone.

<sup>5</sup> Evidently Jacob was hanging on to Him.

<sup>6</sup> Obviously God limited Himself to the strength of an ordinary man, or Jacob would not have been able to fight with Him. But the picture is curious; why would God do such a thing? God had a special interest in Jacob, and wanted to change his name. By wrestling, Jacob lived up to the name Israel.

<sup>7</sup> The name means: he who struggles with God.

<sup>8</sup> So why did Jacob ask for the name? Perhaps he wanted confirmation that it was God.

<sup>9</sup> The name means: the face of God.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob and Esau certainly spoke much more than is recorded in the text. Jacob certainly asked for news of his parents, and it is more than likely that Rebekah was already dead. Sarah died at the age of 127, and Rebekah was at least 120 when Jacob fled, and he had been away for twenty years. This explains why Jacob was in no hurry to see his father. It is possible that Jacob was bitter toward his father: if Isaac had recognized what God had told Rebekah, and the fact that Esau had sold the birthright, and had not tried to bless Esau anyway, Jacob would not have gone through the

"Who are these with you?" And he said, "The children with whom God has blessed your servant".  
**6** Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down. **7** And Leah also came near with her children and bowed down. Then Joseph and Rachel came near and bowed down.

**8** Then Esau said, "What do you mean by all these droves that I met?" And he said, "To find favor in the eyes of my lord". **9** But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; let what you have be yours". **10** Then Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favor in your eyes, accept my gift from my hand; since I have seen your face, as if I had seen the face of a god, and you are pleased with me. **11** Please, accept my blessing that has been brought to you, because God has favored me, and because I have enough." And he urged him until he accepted it. **12** Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way, and I will go before you". **13** But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are tender, and that I have ewes and cows that are nursing; and if they drive them hard just one day, they will all die. **14** Please let my lord go on ahead of his servant, and I will go by stages, little by little, according to the pace of the cattle that go before me, and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir."<sup>1</sup> **15** And Esau said, "Then let me leave some of those who are with me with you". But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the eyes of my lord." **16** So Esau returned that day to Seir by the same road. **17** And Jacob traveled to Succoth, built himself a house, and made shelters for his livestock; therefore he called the name of that place Succoth.<sup>2</sup>

**18** That was how Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan,<sup>3</sup> after he left Paddan-Aram; and he camped within sight of the city. **19** And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. **20** And he set up an altar there, and called it El Elohe Israel.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Dinah and Shechem*

**34.1** Dinah, Leah's daughter, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.<sup>5</sup> **2** When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her and violated her. **3** His soul became attached to Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. **4** So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get this young woman for me as a wife."<sup>6</sup> **5** When Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled

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distress and humiliation that he did. In fact, it seems that Isaac was in his last ten years when Jacob finally showed up.

<sup>1</sup> Jacob had no intention of going to Seir; he just wanted to be free from Esau.

<sup>2</sup> The name means: shelters. We do not know how long Jacob stayed in Succoth, but if he built a house for himself and made shelters for his livestock, he certainly stayed there for some time; perhaps several years. In fact, perhaps a good many years, considering Dinah's age. When they arrived in Succoth, Reuben, the firstborn, could not have been more than thirteen years old. 30:21 says that Dinah was born "after" Zebulun, Leah's sixth son; so Dinah may not have been even five years old. To attract Shechem's attention, she would have had to be a fully developed teenager, probably at least fifteen years old. Likewise, Simeon and Levi would not have been more than twelve and eleven when they arrived in Succoth, but to do what they did, 34:25, they would have had to be men in their prime. They stayed in Succoth for at least ten years, but I imagine it was between thirteen and fifteen. The time they spent near Shechem before sacking the city was probably not long.

<sup>3</sup> In 31:13 God had told Jacob to return to his native land, which was Canaan. The Text emphasizes that he finally got there.

<sup>4</sup> The name means: God, the God of Israel. Jacob took his new name, Israel, and claimed a relationship with God—for himself, but perhaps for his descendants as well.

<sup>5</sup> It appears that she went out alone, which was not a good idea, and perhaps not 'correct'. It would be natural for her to want to make friends with other girls, as long as it was done in the right way. However, she certainly did not expect to be the victim of an impetuous action and be taken captive.

<sup>6</sup> Verse 26 says that they took Dinah from Shechem's house, which means that he kept her, not letting her return home.

his daughter Dinah,<sup>1</sup> his sons were in the field with the livestock; Jacob kept quiet until they came. **6** Then Hamor, Shechem's father, went out to Jacob to speak with him. **7** And Jacob's sons came in from the field when they heard it.<sup>2</sup> The men were indignant and very angry, because he had brought shame on Israel<sup>3</sup> by sleeping with Jacob's daughter, a thing which should not be done in that way.<sup>4</sup>

**8** Then Hamor spoke with them,<sup>5</sup> saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him as a wife. **9** And intermarry with us by giving us your daughters and taking our daughters for yourselves. **10** And live with us, and the land will be before you; live and trade in it, and acquire property in it." **11** Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give whatever you say to me. **12** You may greatly increase the dowry and the gift that you require of me, and I will give whatever you say to me; only give me the young woman as a wife."<sup>6</sup> **13** Then Jacob's sons answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceit, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. **14** And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to an uncircumcised man; for that would be a disgrace to us. **15** Only on this condition will we consent to you: If you will become like us, having every male among you be circumcised, **16** then we will give you our daughters, and we will take your daughters for ourselves; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. **17** But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, we will take our daughter and leave."

**18** Now their words pleased Hamor and Shechem his son. **19** And the young man did not hesitate to do this, because he loved Jacob's daughter; and he was the most noble of all his father's household. **20** Then Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of the city, saying, **21** "These men are at peace with us; so let them dwell in this land and trade in it, for indeed the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives for ourselves, and let us give our daughters to them. **22** But the men will only consent to live with us, so that we may become one people, if every male among us is circumcised, as they are circumcised. **23** Will not their cattle, their goods, and all their beasts of burden be ours?<sup>7</sup> So let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us." **24** And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and his son Shechem; every male was circumcised, of all who went out of the gate of his city.<sup>8</sup>

**25** On the third day, while they were suffering, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and went into the city, which was unguarded, and killed every male. **26** They killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and left. **27** Jacob's sons came upon the dead and plundered the city,<sup>9</sup> because they had defiled their sister. **28** They took their flocks, their herds, and their donkeys, both in the city and in the field. **29** They took all the children and the women as captives.<sup>10</sup> They plundered all the goods

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<sup>1</sup> If Shechem had caught Dinah out in the open, there must have been witnesses. When Dinah did not return, her mother would have wanted to know why. Such a thing would certainly be talked about. Jacob would have heard about it before long.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob certainly sent someone running to call his sons.

<sup>3</sup> Here we have the first use of the name 'Israel' to refer to the community. Yes, because "daughter of Jacob" occurs in the next phrase.

<sup>4</sup> There was a correct way to get a wife, which Shechem did not follow.

<sup>5</sup> The sons arrived at the same time as Hamor, or perhaps a little earlier. Hamor was accompanied by his son.

<sup>6</sup> Shechem did not try to escape his responsibility; he had been overcome by passion, but he took full responsibility for the consequences.

<sup>7</sup> Obviously Hamor hoped to gain the upper hand. He thought he could impose himself on Jacob.

<sup>8</sup> Verse 29 makes it clear that this did not include the children. The expression seems to refer to those who were old enough to vote. It was necessary for them to be consulted, and for them to agree to the proposal.

<sup>9</sup> Although only two perpetrated the massacre, all participated in the looting.

<sup>10</sup> So what did they do with the women? They married them; where else would they find a wife for so many men? In Acts 7:15-16 Stephen states that Jacob's sons were buried in Shechem. Joshua 24:32 explicitly states that Joseph's

and everything in the houses. **30** Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have made trouble for me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, to the Canaanites and Perizzites. Since I am few in number, if they gather together against me and attack me, I will be destroyed, both I and my household." **31** But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

### **Jacob Goes to Bethel, Bethlehem and Hebron**

**35.1** Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there,<sup>1</sup> and build an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from Esau your brother." **2** Then 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 clothes. **3** Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will build an altar there to God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me on the way I have gone." **4** So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods<sup>2</sup> that were in their possession, along with the earrings that were in their ears;<sup>3</sup> and Jacob hid them under the oak tree that was near Shechem.<sup>4</sup> **5** Then they set out; and the terror of God fell on the surrounding cities, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. **6** And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), in the land of Canaan, he and all the people with him. **7** And he built an altar there, and called the place El-Bethel,<sup>5</sup> because God had revealed Himself to him there, when he fled from his brother. **8** Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse,<sup>6</sup> died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak tree; and he called its name Allon-bacuth.<sup>7</sup>

**9** Then God appeared to Jacob again, after he had come from Paddan-Aram,<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> **11** God also said to him, "I am Almighty God;<sup>10</sup> be fruitful and multiply; a nation, even a company of nations, shall come from you, and kings shall come from your loins. **12** And the land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and I will give the land to your descendants after you." **13** And 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; and he poured a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. **15** And Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.<sup>11</sup>

**16** Then they departed from Bethel.<sup>12</sup> When there was some distance to come to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth, and her labor was hard.<sup>13</sup> **17** And it came to pass, as she was having hard labor, that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also". **18** And as her soul was departing (for she died), she called his name Ben-oni;<sup>14</sup> but his father called him

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bones were buried there. Since that was where they got their wives and possessions, it would be appropriate for them to be buried there.

<sup>1</sup> Jacob went to Bethel, but did not 'dwell' there; he seems to have gone south without much delay.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel must have given up the family idols she had stolen from her father. Since Jacob had sworn to Laban back in Gilead that he would not use them, they were no longer important.

<sup>3</sup> Why are the earrings mentioned? Perhaps they had some religious significance.

<sup>4</sup> It must have been a special tree.

<sup>5</sup> The name means: the God of the house of God. It was Jacob himself who had given the name Bethel to the place when he was fleeing from Esau, and God had revealed Himself to him for the first time. Since then, God had spoken to him several times, and now Jacob knew Him better, and he added to the name.

<sup>6</sup> This is curious; Rebekah's own death is not mentioned, but that of her nurse is. I believe we may deduce that Rebekah had died, and probably a good while earlier. In any case, we know that Rebekah was buried at Machpelah (49:31).

<sup>7</sup> The name means: the oak of weeping.

<sup>8</sup> God had spoken to him in Shechem, 35:1, but here He appeared, as He had done once before, 28:13. He was visible. Succoth was on the east side of the Jordan; finally Jacob was within the land of Canaan.

<sup>9</sup> God had already done this at Peniel; why did He do it again?

<sup>10</sup> In Hebrew it is: El-Shaddai.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob had given that name to the place many years before, and it would be natural for him to repeat it here.

<sup>12</sup> We are not told how long he stayed there, but it probably was not very long.

<sup>13</sup> She was probably fifteen to twenty years older than when she had Joseph.

<sup>14</sup> The name means: son of my sorrow.

Benjamin.<sup>1</sup> **19** So Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). **20** And Jacob set up a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day. **21** Then Israel moved on<sup>2</sup> and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-eder.<sup>3</sup> **22** And it came to pass, while Israel dwelt in that land,<sup>4</sup> that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it.<sup>5</sup>

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 maidservant: Dan and Naphtali. **26** The sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan-Aram.<sup>6</sup> **27** And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. **28** Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. **29** And Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And Esau and Jacob, his sons, buried him.<sup>7</sup>

### The Generations of Esau

**36.1** These are the generations of Esau, who is Edom. **2** Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite, **3** and Basemath the daughter of Ishmael, sister of Nebaioth. **4** Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel. **5** And Aholibamah bore Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah. These are the sons of Esau, who were born to him in the land of Canaan. **6** Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle and all his beasts of burden, and all the goods that he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to a land far from Jacob his brother. **7** For their possessions were so great that they could not live together; the land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock.<sup>8</sup> **8** So Esau lived in Mount Seir; Esau is Edom.

**9** These are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir. **10** These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Esau's wife Adah, and Reuel the son of Esau's wife Basemath. **11** The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. **12** Timna was the concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. Those were the sons of Esau's wife Adah. **13** The sons of Reuel were Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. Those were the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. **14** These were the sons of Esau's wife Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah, the granddaughter of Zibeon. She bore to Esau: Jeush, Jaalam and Korah.

**15** These were the chiefs among the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz, Esau's firstborn: chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, **16** chief Korah, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. Those

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<sup>1</sup> The name means: son of my right hand.

<sup>2</sup> Here the name changes from Jacob to Israel.

<sup>3</sup> The name means: tower of the flock.

<sup>4</sup> It sounds like he stayed there for a while.

<sup>5</sup> He mentioned it when he gave his sons his final blessing, 49:4.

<sup>6</sup> Strictly speaking, there were eleven, since Benjamin was born in Canaan. The account gives a round number, although with Dinah there would be twelve.

<sup>7</sup> He was buried at Machpelah.

<sup>8</sup> Where in the family history can we place this account? Verses 2–5 give the 'hint', relating what happened "in the land of Canaan." Isaac was 60 years old when the twins were born (25:26). Esau married at 40 (26:34), and Isaac was 100. That Isaac was 137 when Jacob fled is an inference based on dates given for Joseph and Jacob; thus, the twins were 77 years old, and Esau had been married for 37 years, and certainly had grown children. 28:9 adds that Esau took a third wife, while he was still living near his parents, and therefore in Canaan. After the blessing, the family atmosphere was certainly difficult. Rebekah did not like Esau, and he liked her even less. Isaac had stated that his possible death was the reason he wanted to give the blessing (27:2). And Esau was waiting for that death in order to kill Jacob (27:41). Since Jacob had received the blessing of the firstborn, most of his father's estate would go to him, and Isaac was wealthy. No one imagined that Jacob would take 20 years to return; after the necessary interval, he could appear at any time. When Jacob returned, Esau was already in Seir. Since Isaac took a long time to die, at some point Esau had left with everything he had and settled in Seir; since Seir was located across the Jordan and south of the Dead Sea, it was not part of Canaan.

were the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. They were the sons of Adah. **17** These were the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah. Those were the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom. They were the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. **18** These were the sons of Aholibamah, Esau's wife: chief Jeush, chief Jaalam, chief Korah. They were the chiefs of Aholibamah, Esau's wife, the daughter of Anah. **19** Those were the sons of Esau (he is Edom), and those were their chiefs.

**20** These were the sons of Seir the Horite,<sup>1</sup> who lived in that land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, **21** Dishon, Ezer and Dishan. They were the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir, in the land of Edom. **22** The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; Lotan's sister was Timna. **23** The sons of Shobal were Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam. **24** The sons of Zibeon were Aiah and Anah. (This was the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness while he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon.) **25** The children of Anah were Dishon and Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah. **26** The sons of Dishon were Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran and Cheran. **27** The sons of Ezer were Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan. **28** The sons of Dishan were Uz and Aram. **29** These were the chiefs of the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, **30** chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. They were the chiefs of the Horites according to their chiefdoms in the land of Seir.

**31** These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites.<sup>2</sup> **32** Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. **33** Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place. **34** Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. **35** Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place; and the name of his city was Avith. **36** Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place. **37** Samlah died, and Saul of Rehoboth-by-the-River reigned in his place. **38** Saul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place. **39** Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his stead; and the name of his city was Pau—his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the granddaughter of Mezahab.

**40** These were the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their families, according to their places, by name:<sup>3</sup> chief Timnah, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, **41** chief Aholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon, **42** chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, **43** chief Magdiel, chief Iram. They were the chiefs of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession. Esau was the father of the Edomites.

### Joseph is introduced

**37.1** Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan.<sup>4</sup> **2** These are the generations of Jacob. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he was tending the flock with his brothers. The young man was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph gave a bad report about them to their father.<sup>5</sup> **3** Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age;<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Horites were a race that was spread throughout many regions. They were obviously already in Seir when Esau arrived there, for they were the ones who gave the place its name. Presumably, as time went on, the two peoples began to mix and together became the Edomites.

<sup>2</sup> Why was this information included in the Record? It was natural for the Edomites to organize themselves in this way, but the King of Israel was God, a theocracy. When the people asked for a king, like other peoples, Samuel was not pleased, and God stated that it was He whom the people rejected (1 Samuel 8:5-7).

<sup>3</sup> This list of chiefs is different from that in verses 15-19.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrew narratives follow a topical, not a chronological sequence. At the end of chapter 35, Jacob is already in the land. Chapter 36 gives the genealogy of Esau, that has nothing to do with Jacob. From verse 2 onward, the topic here is Joseph.

<sup>5</sup> This probably happened in Succoth, near the end of their stay there. Naturally, those four (Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher) would not like the 'tattletale'.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin had not yet been born, as Joseph's second dream makes clear.

and he made a special garment for him.<sup>1</sup> **4** His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all of them, so they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

#### *The Dreams*

**5** Joseph had a dream and told it to his brothers, so they hated him even more.<sup>2</sup> **6** He said to them, "Please listen to this dream that I have dreamed: **7** There we were, binding sheaves in the field; then, my sheaf rose up and stood upright, and your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf!" **8** So his brothers said to him, "Will you really reign over us? Will you actually rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. **9** Then Joseph had another dream and told it to his brothers. He said, "Listen, I have had another dream: indeed, the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me!" **10** And he told it to his father, as well as his brothers, and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What dream is this that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother<sup>3</sup> and your brothers really come and bow down to the ground before you?" **11** His brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

**12** His brothers went to Shechem to feed their father's flock.<sup>4</sup> **13** Then Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding the flock near Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." So he said to him, "Here I am." **14** He said to him, "Go now, see how your brothers and the flocks are doing, and bring me back a report".<sup>5</sup> So he sent him from the valley of Hebron,<sup>6</sup> and he went to Shechem. **15** There a man saw him wandering around in the field. So the man asked him, "What are you looking for?" **16** And he said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are feeding their flocks." **17** The man said, "They have gone from here; for I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan'." So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.<sup>7</sup>

#### *The Plot*

**18** Now when they saw him afar off, before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. **19** And they said to one another, "Here comes that lord of dreams! **20** Come on, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits! And we will say, 'A wild beast has devoured him'; and let us see what will become of his dreams!" **21** But Reuben heard it, and rescued him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not take his life". **22** Reuben said to them, "Do not shed blood; throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hands and return him to his father. **23** So it came to pass, when Joseph came to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his special garment, the garment that he was wearing. **24** And they took him and threw him into the pit; the pit was empty and had no water. **25** Then they sat down to eat bread;<sup>8</sup> and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and there was a caravan of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, that were carrying spices, balm and myrrh, taking them down to Egypt.

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<sup>1</sup> The versions translate the phrase in various ways, but the 'point' is that Israel did it only for Joseph, showing that he valued Joseph more than the others (which the others didn't like, of course).

<sup>2</sup> But why tell his brothers about his dream? It would have been better to keep quiet! Being a spoiled child doesn't necessarily give you good sense.

<sup>3</sup> For Jacob to express himself in this way, Rachel was still alive. In that event, Benjamin hadn't been born yet, but in Egypt, when they bowed down, there were eleven. However, in Egypt, Rachel was not there. I take the point to be that the whole family would be under his authority, as it indeed was.

<sup>4</sup> From Hebron to Shechem was close to 100 km, as the crow flies, but over accidented terrain. That was a long way to drive a flock of sheep! Had they run out of pasture around Hebron? They had sacked the town of Shechem, and left it destitute; did they want to see what it was like, or if other people had moved in? And why did they go on to Dothan? For some reason they were restless.

<sup>5</sup> His concern was natural; they had probably been gone for quite a while. That they went on to Dothan from Shechem indicates that they were not in any hurry to go home.

<sup>6</sup> After his father's death, Israel stayed on in Hebron.

<sup>7</sup> Dothan was another 30 some km to the north of Shechem.

<sup>8</sup> Their cruelty to Joseph didn't bother their appetite!

**26** Then Judah said to his brothers, "What good will it do us if we kill our brother and hide his blood? **27** Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let us not lay a hand on him, for he is our brother, our flesh." And his brothers agreed.<sup>1</sup> **28** So they lifted Joseph out of the pit, and as the Midianite<sup>2</sup> merchants were passing by, they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

**29** Then Reuben went back to the pit, but Joseph was not there! So he tore his clothes, **30** and went back to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone; and I, where can I go?"<sup>3</sup> **31** So they took Joseph's special garment, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the garment in the blood. **32** Then they took the garment and brought it to their father and said, "We have found this; see if it is your son's garment". **33** And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's garment! A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" **34** Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. **35** And all his sons and all his daughters<sup>4</sup> rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He said, "I will go down to Sheol<sup>5</sup> mourning for my son!" Thus his father wept for him.

**36** The Midianites<sup>6</sup> had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.

### **The Case of Judah**

**38.1** It happened about that time that Judah went away from his brothers and went to stay with a man of Adullam, whose name was Hirah. **2** And Judah saw there a daughter of a Canaanite named Shua; and he took her and went in to her. **3** And she conceived and bore a son, and his father called his name Er. **4** And she conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. **5** And she bore yet again another son, and she called his name Shelah; and Judah was at Chezib when she bore him.

**6** Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. **7** But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of Jehovah, so Jehovah killed him.<sup>7</sup> **8** Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and produce offspring for your brother". **9** But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; and it happened that whenever he went in to his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground, so that he would not give offspring to his brother. **10** Now what he did was wicked in the sight of Jehovah, so He killed him also.<sup>8</sup> **11** Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up". For he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers".<sup>9</sup> So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

**12** After a long time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died.<sup>10</sup> When Judah was comforted, he went to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. **13** And Tamar was told, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep". **14** So she took off her

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<sup>1</sup> God used Judah to save Joseph's life, but also to save all of theirs, in the future.

<sup>2</sup> Midian was the son of Abraham and Keturah, just as Ishmael was the son of Abraham and Hagar. It seems that in the region of Gilead the two peoples mixed, using the two names: Ishmaelites and Midianites.

<sup>3</sup> Obviously Ruben was not present when they sold Joseph.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob obviously had a variety of daughters, but only one, Dinah, is mentioned.

<sup>5</sup> Sheol in Hebrew, and Hades in Greek, is the name of the 'waiting room' where the spirits of the dead await the Final Judgment. The Lord Jesus described the place in Luke 16:19-31. For a more detailed explanation, see my article, 'Hades is not Hell'.

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew text has 'Medanites'; it turns out that Medan was another son of Keturah, a brother of Midian. Perhaps they also mixed with the Ishmaelites.

<sup>7</sup> This statement makes clear that Jehovah pays attention to what happens down here, and is prepared to intervene in human affairs. However, Er must have been unusually bad, but we are not told what he did.

<sup>8</sup> In Deuteronomy 25:7-10 the punishment for refusing to produce offspring for a brother who died childless was public humiliation, not death; and that was under the severity of the Mosaic Law. Genesis 9:6 states the crime that called for the death penalty, between the Flood and the Law.

<sup>9</sup> Apparently Judah figured that Tamar was responsible for the death of his sons, in some way.

<sup>10</sup> Judah was left without a wife, which helps to understand what he did next.



widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil, and disguised herself. And she sat at the entrance of Enaim, which is on the way to Timnah, for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife.<sup>1</sup> **15** And Judah saw her and thought she was a prostitute, because she had covered her face. **16** And he turned aside to her by the way and said, "Come now, let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me so that you may come in to me?" **17** And he said, "I will send a young goat from the flock". So she said, "Will you give me a pledge until you send it?" **18** And he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "Your signet with its cord, and your staff in your hand." So he gave them to her, and went in to her; and she conceived by him. **19** Then she got up and left, took off the veil from her face, and resumed her widow's clothes. **20** And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand; but he could not find her. **21** So he asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the prostitute who was at the entrance of Enaim by the way?" And they said, "There was no prostitute here". **22** Then he returned to Judah and said, "I did not find her; and also the men of that place said, 'There was no prostitute here'." **23** Then Judah said, "Let her have the pledge, that we not be put to shame. I did send this young goat, but you did not find her."

**24** About three months later, Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has committed adultery, and she is pregnant through prostitution". So Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!"<sup>2</sup> **25** As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, saying, "I am pregnant by the man to whom these things belong". And she said, "Please determine whose these things are: this signet with its cord, and this staff". **26** Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son". And he never knew her again. **27** And it came to pass at the time of her giving birth that twins were in her womb. **28** And as she was giving birth, one put out his hand; and the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first". **29** But then he drew back his hand, and it was his brother who came out! So she said, "How did you force your way out?" Therefore his name was called Perez.<sup>3</sup> **30** Then his brother came out, who had the scarlet thread on his hand; and his name was called Zerah.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to the culture of that time, this was a legitimate hope on her part, which Judah recognized in verse 26.

<sup>2</sup> How cruel!

<sup>3</sup> The name means: breakthrough. It was through Perez that the Messiah came, Matthew 1:3. Tamar is one of four women included in Christ's genealogy as given by Matthew. All four represented some violation, perhaps to emphasize the grace of God. He is always recycling.

<sup>4</sup> The name means: scarlet.