

Jacob negotiated a peaceful settlement. Before Laban parted Jacob offered a sacrifice and invited his relatives to a meal. Very likely this was a sacramental meal eaten as a consequence of the agreement Jacob and Laban had reached that neither should pass the heap of stones to change the conditions of their agreement. For Jacob this sacrifice may have been an offering of thanksgiving to God for a peaceful parting with Laban.

Arriving in Canaan Jacob built an altar to God at Shechem where Abraham had built his first altar (33:20; 12:7). By naming this altar El-Elohe Israel he publicly acknowledged that the mighty God is the God of Israel. By using the name Israel he very likely recounted his encounter with God at Peniel (32:22-32) when his name had been changed from Jacob to Israel. The erection and naming of this altar may well have expressed Jacob's personal concern about his relationship with God.

Jacob with his family and possessions settled in the Shechem area and apparently remained there for about a decade. The behavior pattern of Jacob's clan, especially Simeon and Levi, brought them into disfavor with the community of Shechemites. This caused Jacob to be apprehensive about their safety (Gen 34:1-31).

Through divine revelation Jacob was instructed to move to Bethel and there build an altar to God who had appeared to him more than three decades ago. Conscious of this meeting with God Jacob instructed his whole clan to get rid of all the idols before returning to Bethel. If the altar at Shechem had been significant for Jacob personally it evidently had not made much of an impact upon his family. With the "terror of God" falling upon the surrounding towns Jacob experienced divine protection as they moved on to Bethel to settle there. At Bethel Jacob erected an altar and called it El-Bethel marking the place of God's revelation to him en route to Haran (35:1-7).

This altar at Bethel built by Jacob is the only altar erected in response to an explicit command by God in the Genesis account. It marked the place where God had previously revealed himself to Jacob. It was there that Jacob had made his solemn vow to serve God (28:20-22). With the completion of this altar God once more revealed himself to Jacob (35:9-15). God's divine blessing was imparted to Jacob with the confirmation of the covenantal promise made to Abraham and Isaac in response Jacob erected a stone pillar on which he poured out a drink offering and oil. Bethel and Jacob signified the place of God's revelation, From Bethel he moved on to Hebron the home of his father Isaac.

Approximately three decades passed in the life of Jacob from the time of his settlement at Hebron (35, 27) and his migration to Egypt (17:9; cf. 37:2; 41:46, 53-54; 45:11). During these years of stress and strain while Jacob mourned the loss of his son Joseph, no mention was made of any altar or sacrifice. When he responded to Joseph's invitation to migrate to Egypt he stopped en route to Beersheba to offer "sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac" (46:1) very likely reflecting his concern about his relationship with God.

Jacob may have seriously pondered the divine revelation in which Abraham was informed that his descendants would leave the promised land of Canaan and after four generations would return to Canaan,