

Problems in Jacob's Family (Genesis 33-35)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

I. Background, from Prior Lessons (Genesis 29-32)

- a. Jacob journeys back to his homeland in Canaan after 20+ years in Haran, in Mesopotamia. He has a large family, including 11 sons, and much wealth (flocks and herds).
- b. Jacob has escaped his deceitful uncle Laban, but is afraid of an upcoming encounter with Esau, his brother. In the past, Esau had been very angry with Jacob, and even wanted to kill him, because Jacob had cheated Esau out of his father's blessing.

II. Jacob Meets His Brother Esau, after 20 Years Apart (Read Genesis 33)

- a. Elements of the story
 - i. After over 20 years apart, Jacob finally meets his twin brother, Esau, again.
 - ii. Jacob humbles himself before Esau, bowing down seven times.
 - iii. The brothers kiss each other and weep when they meet. It appears that Esau has gotten over the anger he once had for his brother.
 - iv. Esau is amazed at the wealth of Jacob. Jacob offers Esau a gift from his flocks and herds. Esau first declines, saying "I have enough, my brother" (**Genesis 33:9**). Then Jacob insists, and Esau accepts the gift.
 - v. Esau wants Jacob to go on with him to Seir. Jacob insists that Esau go on ahead, saying that the women and children with him are very slow.
 - vi. Jacob and Esau part ways. Esau returns south to his new homeland in Seir (in Edom, a land south of the Dead Sea, between Judah and Arabia). Jacob continues west toward Canaan.
 - vii. Before Jacob reaches Hebron, where he will meet his father Isaac, he stops in "Salem, a city of Shechem, in the land of Canaan" (**Genesis 33:18**). He purchases land from Hamor (pronounced HAY-more), the father of a young man named Shechem (pronounced SHEK-um), and pitches his tent there.

III. Dinah is Violated, and Her Brothers Seek Vengeance (Read Genesis 34)

- a. This is a very disturbing story (and another one follows in the next chapter). The more I think about it, the more disturbing it is! I was strongly inclined to skip over this or to just quickly summarize it.
 - i. Someone recently asked Adam, who is in this class, how he liked the lessons here on Sunday. His response: "In the past I was in a church where they skipped over the violent, unpleasant parts of the Old Testament stories. I like it that we don't skip anything."
 - ii. However, this disturbing story, and another one in the next chapter, hold the keys to a significant prophecy about Jesus that Jacob would utter on his deathbed, in **Genesis 49**. More on that later.
- b. Elements of the story:
 - i. Shechem, the most esteemed son of a Hivite ruler that Jacob had bought his land from, is attracted to Jacob's daughter Dinah.
 - ii. Shechem takes Dinah and sexually violates her.
 - iii. Hamor, the young man's father, approaches Jacob and tells him that his son loves Dinah, and asks if his son can have her for his wife!
 - 1. Hamor 'sweetens the deal' by offering that the two peoples can intermarry and dwell in the land together.
 - 2. Shechem tells Jacob and her brothers that he is willing to pay any dowry they request, if he can have Dinah for his wife.
 - iv. Simeon and Levi (full brothers of Dinah, also having Leah as their mother) deceitfully pretend to go along with the request.
 - 1. They tell Shechem and Hamor that they will agree to the marriage, and to unite as one people, IF all their men will be circumcised, as they are.
 - 2. Simeon and Levi tell them that if they decline to get circumcised, they will take their sister and depart.
 - v. Hamor and Shechem are pleased with the offer, and persuade all the men of the city to get circumcised.
 - vi. On the third day following all the men of the city getting circumcised, Simeon and Levi attack the city, and:
 - 1. Put to death all the men of the city (still hurting and unable to defend themselves), with the sword;

2. Take Dinah out of Shechem's house;
 3. Plunder the city and the houses, taking the flocks, herds and wealth; and
 4. Take captive all their wives, children and servants!
- vii. Jacob, their father, hears about what Simeon and Levi have done. He is upset and concerned that the people of that land, who vastly outnumber his household, will now hate Jacob's family and kill them.
1. Simeon and Levi defend themselves to their father saying, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?" (**Genesis 34:31**)
- c. Any lessons from this story, for us?
- i. A few lessons: Fathers need to teach their sons self-control regarding their sexual drive (Hamor failed to train his son Shechem in this area), and unbridled sexual passion can lead to *enormous* destruction.
 1. In the lessons on wisdom in **Proverbs** from Solomon to young men, perhaps the two hardest hitting teachings address the dangers of sexual immorality and laziness.
 2. In **Proverbs chapters 5-7** it speaks of the importance of having self-control in this area of life. Lacking that (whether going after a prostitute, a married woman or an unmarried woman) will lead to horrific destruction, shame, vengeance upon us, spiritual death and endless regret.
 - a. "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He ponders all his paths. His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin. He shall die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray." (**Proverbs 5:15-23**, NKJV)
 - b. "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul.

Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away. For jealousy is a husband's fury; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will accept no recompense, nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts." (**Proverbs 6:32-35**, NKJV)

- c. "Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know it would cost his life. Now therefore, listen to me, my children; pay attention to the words of my mouth: do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths; for she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death." (**Proverbs 7:22-27**, NKJV)
3. Paul reminds us in **1 Corinthians 10** that 23,000 died in the Wilderness in one day, due to sexual immorality. He refers to the story recorded in **Numbers 25**.
 - a. Paul first explains in **1 Corinthians 10:1-4** that all the people in the Wilderness (paralleling all the Christians he was writing to) were "baptized...in the cloud and the sea" (reminiscent of being reborn of 'water and spirit'), "all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink" (similar to us sharing the Lord's supper in common), and "drank of that spiritual Rock" (referring to Christ). Yet many of *them* fell, just as many of *us could* fall if we are not diligent to the end!
 - b. "Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." (**1 Corinthians 10:6**, NKJV)
 - c. "Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;" (**1 Corinthians 10:8**, NKJV)
 - d. "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will

also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:11–13, NKJV)

- ii. Get a better appreciation for an important word in the New Testament: ‘*agape*’ (= love)
 1. In **Genesis 34:3** in the LXX it says Shechem’s “soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob and he loved her”. The word translated ‘love’ here is the Greek word ‘*agape*’.
 2. Similarly, in the LXX in **Judges 16:4** where it says that Samson “came to love a woman...Delilah”, the word used there is ‘*agape*’.
 3. This shows us clearly, from context, that the Greek word ‘*agape*’ is not restricted to some special, holy, spiritual love! The word ‘*agape*’ has a similar range of meanings as our English word ‘love’. It can refer to a spiritual attraction (as one would have toward God) but doesn’t always. It also can refer to an extremely worldly, ungodly attraction/passion (as one would have in a sexually immoral relationship).
- iii. Was justice done here by Simeon and Levi in response to Shechem’s sin against Dinah?
 1. Think about it. Did Simeon and Levi exact justice (a punishment appropriate for the crime)? Perhaps if they had done something to Shechem only (maybe even killing him) that might have been considered justice. However, the vengeance they exacted strikes me as cruel and excessive (killing all the men, capturing all their wives, children and servants, etc.)
 2. The standard for justice from the Law of Moses would later be:
 - a. “Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” (Deuteronomy 19:21, NKJV)
 - b. “Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal. ‘If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him. And whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death. You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own

country; for I am the LORD your God.” (**Leviticus 24:17–22**, NKJV)

- c. In the Law of Moses God was concerned that his people be just, but not excessive, in punishing offenses.
- 3. Of course, Jesus would much later teach a different, higher, more difficult standard.
 - a. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (**Matthew 5:38–45**, NKJV)
- 4. Also, it has been made clear that God will take care of vengeance; that is not our job.
 - a. Paul said, “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (**Romans 12:17–21**, NKJV)
- iv. There is a connection between this story and the prophecy that Jacob gave on his deathbed, in **Genesis 49**. More on that later.

IV. Jacob Returns to Bethel (Read **Genesis 35:1-15**)

- a. The Lord tells Jacob to return to Bethel (where Jacob had been previously, the place of his dream of the ladder or stairway to heaven, with the angels ascending and descending, in **Genesis 28**, on his trip to Haran).

- b. In anticipation of that, he tells all with him to put away their foreign gods and idols.
 - i. Perhaps Jacob recalled the vow he had made there 20+ years earlier, that the Lord would be his God if He brought him back safely (therefore need to clean out all the other gods from his household).
 - ii. "If the Lord God will be with me, and keep me in this way I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, and bring me back in safety to my father's house, then the Lord shall be my God." (**Genesis 28:20-22**, LXX, OSB)
 - iii. Idols or foreign God in Jacob's party could include the ones Rachel stole from her father (**Genesis 31**), as well as any picked up from the women and children who had been taken from the city of Shechem.
- c. God makes it clear that the blessing given to Abraham, which then applied to Isaac (many descendants, nations proceeding from him, kings from him...*foreshadowing the kingdom*, land promised) would be fulfilled through Jacob/Israel and his offspring. (**Genesis 35:11-12**)
- d. Jacob sets up a pillar of stone; pours drink offering and anoints it with oil. While going through **Genesis 28:18** in a previous lesson, we discussed the significance of stone connection with 'the Anointed One' (= Messiah = Christ). In that lesson, we spoke about several other significant 'stone' references in the Old Testament that point to Christ, mentioned by Jesus, Peter and Paul.

V. Death of Rachel (Read **Genesis 35:16-20**)

- a. Summary of the details of the story:
 - i. Rachel goes into hard labor just before reaching Ephrath, or Bethlehem.
 - ii. She dies in childbirth there, right after giving birth to a son (Jacob's 12th and last son).
 - 1. She calls him "Son of my suffering".
 - 2. His father renames him "Benjamin".
 - iii. Rachel is buried on the way to Bethlehem.
 - iv. Jacob erects a pillar on her grave as an enduring monument to her.
- b. Is there any other significance to us in this story?
 - i. This is the first place that 'Bethlehem' shows up in the Scripture narrative; later, this would become a very important town.

1. Naomi and her family were from there. (**Ruth 1:1-2**)
2. Ruth the Moabite goes back there with Naomi, meets Boaz and marries him there. (**Ruth 4**)
3. Line of Boaz and Ruth continues through David, who was born in Bethlehem. (**Ruth 4, 1 Samuel 16**)
4. "And you, O Bethlehem, House of Ephrathah, though you are fewest in number among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to me the One to be ruler of Israel. His goings forth were from the beginning, even from everlasting." (**Micah 5:1, LXX, OSB**)
 - a. When Herod wanted to know where the Christ was to be born, he asked the chief priests and scribes. They cited the **Micah 5** prophecy and told him that He would be born in Bethlehem. (**Matthew 2:3-6**)
 - b. Some of the people who were aware of the **Micah 5** prophecy objected that Jesus *could not* be the Christ, since he grew up in Nazareth, in the north (they were not aware that He was born in Bethlehem, in the south).
 - i. "But some said, 'Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?'" (**John 7:41-42, NKJV**)
 - ii. Special significance that this town was *where Rachel died*, and where her monument was.
 1. "Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'" (**Matthew 2:16-18, NKJV**) Also note: Matthew here is quoting **Jeremiah 38:15** regarding "Rachel weeping for her children because they are no more".
 2. **Question:** Why, of all people, is Rachel the one weeping here in this prophecy?

- a. **Answer:** Because she was nearby, having died and been buried in Bethlehem, the town where her monument was!
- b. Therefore **Genesis 35** (death of Rachel in Bethlehem) and **Jeremiah 38** (mourning over the slaughter of the innocent children), taken together, point us back to the slaughter that would take place in Bethlehem, from which Jesus would escape just in time.
- c. The death of the innocent infant boys, while the savior of the people escapes, is recorded by Matthew in **Matthew 2**, and prophesied in **Jeremiah 38**. It also is foreshadowed by the life of Moses, in **Exodus 1 & 2**. There another evil king (Pharaoh) gives an edict that all the male Hebrew babies are to be killed, yet the one who was destined to save his people (Moses) escapes that fate.
 - i. Recall that God told Moses that the great prophet yet to come would be *like Moses*!
 - ii. Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear." (**Deuteronomy 18:15**, LXX, OSB)
 - iii. The life of Moses provides a detailed pattern for the life of Christ, in dozens of ways. (*The life of Moses does not foreshadow the life of Mohammad!*) Both stories begin with an evil king, feeling his power threatened, killing all the Jewish baby boys in an area; but the infant who is destined to be savior of God's people escapes.

VI. Reuben's Sin, and the Death of Isaac (Read **Genesis 35:21-29**)

- a. Elements of the story
 - i. Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, sleeps with his father's concubine Bilhah.
 - ii. Israel (Jacob) hears of what his son Reuben did and considers it evil.
 - iii. The twelve sons of Jacob are recounted (with the birth of Benjamin, the full set of twelve sons is now complete).
 - iv. Isaac dies at the age of 180, and is buried by his sons Jacob and Esau.

b. Observations and lessons for us from this story:

- i. This is the second very disturbing thing in this lesson from Jacob's family: first the rape of his daughter Dinah followed by mass-murderous vengeance bordering on genocide by sons Simeon and Levi; and now incest, with Reuben having relations with his father's wife.
 1. Jacob, held up as a hero of faith, nevertheless had a very flawed family, with some very serious character problems that come out in the character of three of his twelve sons.
- ii. Bilhah is described as the *concubine* of Jacob. This is a term appears several times in the Old Testament. What does it mean?
 1. Note that Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, is described as Jacob's "concubine" in **Genesis 35:22**; however
 2. She is described and as his "wife" in **Genesis 30:4**.
 3. The term "*concubine*" generally refers to a wife of lower status, who has fewer rights than a primary wife. Sometimes concubines also were slaves.
- iii. Why does it mention Reuben's sin at all? It is mentioned in one verse (**Genesis 35:22**) and then it seems that there is nothing more about it. Or is there more significance to this one line?
 1. Many years later, on his deathbed in Egypt, Jacob would gather his sons around him and, as a prophet, speak of days past as well as the days to come. (Read **Genesis 49:1-7**).
 - a. Jacob addresses his 12 sons, beginning with the oldest.
 - b. Reuben, the oldest, is rebuked for being hard-hearted, self-willed and unstable; and for the sin he committed with Jacob's wife Bilhah. Although the firstborn, he is disqualified from receiving the great blessing.
 - c. Simeon and Levi, the second and third sons, are addressed next. They were unjust, cruel and murderous (demonstrated in how they treated the people of the city of Shechem). They also are disqualified from the great blessing.
 - d. With his first three sons disqualified, Jacob must turn to his fourth son, Judah. The great leader, described as a lion, must come from his offspring, instead (**Revelation 5:5**) but more on that when we get to **Genesis 49** in this series!