

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study – Genesis 33:18 – 36:43

Read Genesis 33:18 – 34:31

-Who was Shechem, what did he do with Jacob's daughter Dinah, and why did he want to marry her? (v.1-4)

- Shechem was the son of Hamor the Hivite, who was the ruler of the area in which Jacob's family was living
- he had violated (likely raped) Dinah, but became attracted to her/drawn to her and therefore wanted to marry her

-How did Jacob and his sons respond to Shechem and Hamor's proposal for marriage, and why did they respond as they did? (v.5-17)

- Jacob doesn't seem to have said much; left the talking to his sons
 - seems to reflect his rather passive approach towards family matters (cf. Gen. 29-30 when Leah & Rachel were feuding)
 - he seems to have been afraid of the Canaanites (v.30), and to some extent may have desired the prosperity that might have come from settling among them and trading freely/acquiring property among them
- Jacob's sons "replied deceitfully" (v.13) – like father, like sons!
 - hid behind an appearance of righteousness – said they could not allow Dinah to marry into an uncircumcised people → likely a reference back to God's covenant of circumcision with Abraham
 - answered deceitfully because they were enraged by what Shechem had done to Dinah (v.7); felt he had treated her like a prostitute (v.31)
 - wanted to incapacitate the men of the city so they could kill them (v.25-27)

-What was the danger of accepting Shechem's marriage proposal? (v.16-24) (cf. Deuteronomy 7:1-6)

- danger that Jacob's family would end up intermarrying and becoming 'one people' with them (v.16,22)
 - would run the risk of becoming absorbed into the people and particularly into their customs, resulting in them being drawn away from God and thus in His judgment
 - the people of Shechem also had their eyes on Jacob's possessions, which they wanted to become their own (v.23)
- this was the same danger that led Abraham to get a wife for Isaac from Paddan Aram, and for Isaac also to send Jacob there to get his wife
- example of the lives of Lot & his daughters are illustrative of this danger (Gen 19)

-Were Simeon and Levi right to kill all the men of the city? Why or why not? (v.25-29) (cf. Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:22-29)

- no, they were not right to do so
- Shechem ended up doing the right thing by proposing to marry Dinah and pay whatever bride-price Jacob demanded (see cross-references)
- in the worst case scenario, if Dinah were betrothed or married, only Shechem could arguably be put to death

-What do we learn about Jacob by his response to his sons' actions? (v.30-31)

- did not rebuke them because what they did was wrong, but because they put his household in danger of being attacked
- though he had been renamed Israel, the old man seemed very much still alive in Jacob
- still does not seem to have trusted God to protect him despite his previous experiences of God's protection over him
 - perhaps in part because he knew he wasn't being completely obedient to God? (see below)

Read Genesis 35:1-15

Based on the chronology of events in Genesis 29-30, Dinah was no more than 5 or 6 years old when Jacob returned to Canaan, which suggests he had lived at Shechem for some years by the time the events of Genesis 34 occurred.

-Why did God command Jacob to return to Bethel and settle there? (v.1) (cf. Genesis 28:10-22, 31:13)

- Jacob had made a vow to God at Bethel, that if God would bring him safely back from his journey, then the LORD would be his God, he would set up an altar (house of God) at Bethel, and that of all he had, he would give God a tenth (Gen. 28:20-22)
- God had called on Jacob to return and fulfill this vow while Jacob was in Paddan Aram (Gen. 31:31), and now calls on him again to do so

-Having traveled hundreds of miles from Paddan Aram, why do you think Jacob settled at Shechem, instead of continuing on immediately to Bethel, which was only about 30 km from Shechem? What does this say about God's command in v.1, and about the events of Genesis 34? (cf. Ecclesiastes 5:4-6)

- in settling at Shechem, Jacob was not being completely obedient to God; was failing (or delaying) to fulfill the vow he had made
- seems that in spite of all that God had done for him, Jacob was reluctant to fulfill the vow, possibly because he knew some in his household were still worshipping foreign gods (v.2)
- perhaps land at Shechem/Succoth was good for livestock (cf. 33:17)
- Jacob's disobedience set in motion the events of Gen. 34, but the events ultimately likely reflect God's displeasure no Jacob's failure to fulfill his vow (cf. Eccl. 5:4-6)
 - God in His mercy commands Jacob to return to Bethel – a rebuke in a sense, but also merciful in that it brings him back to obedience and blessing

-What did Jacob do in response to God's command? What were the results? (v.2-15)

- Jacob obeyed
 - first got rid of foreign gods and purified his household, then returned to Bethel
- resulted in God's protection – whereas Jacob had feared attack (34:30), now the terror of God fell on the surrounding towns so they did not attack or pursue Jacob
- resulted in God appearing to Jacob again to bless him (v.9)
 - reaffirmed Jacob's new name and new identity (v.10)
 - confirmed His covenant with Abraham to Jacob (v.11-12)

-What do we learn in this passage about God, and about the effects of sin among God's people? (you might also consider a similar account, in Joshua 7:1-13)

- God disciplines His children for their good
 - Jacob's sin put his family in danger
 - God used severe circumstances to separate Israel & his family from the people around them
- God is merciful in the midst of discipline – speaks to Jacob to set him back on the right course, and so receive God's blessing
- God takes sin among His people seriously; results in discipline
- sin among God's people (and not just by leaders)
 - can have a wide impact on others
 - can result in God withdrawing His favor, so that His people are beset by fear & discouragement and are unable to stand against those opposing them → because of a lack of God's power and presence in their midst
- repentance is key; throughout Scripture, God calls His people to repentance, then returns to His people as they return to Him
 - we need to be careful to get rid of 'foreign gods' among us (the idols of the world) if we are to experience His power

Read Genesis 35:16-29

-Why did Rachel name her son *Ben-Oni*, and why did Jacob rename him as Benjamin?

- Ben-Oni means 'son of my sorrow', reflecting the fact that Rachel died as a result of giving birth to him
- Benjamin means 'son of my right hand' – raises him to a position of honor, despite being the youngest
 - also perhaps a more fitting way to honor and remember his mother, together with setting up the pillar
 - could also mean 'son of the south' – in those days, people reckoned directions while facing east, so south would have been to the right hand. Jacob was journeying south, so the name may have been a commemoration of the journey
- Benjamin is the only son which Jacob is recorded as naming; the others were all named either by Leah or Rachel

Read Genesis 36:1-43

Esau (that is, Edom), settled in the hill country of Seir, to the south of Canaan, where his descendants (the Edomites) ultimately displaced and destroyed the Horites who were inhabiting the land at the time (Deuteronomy 2:12). Though the Edomites were not God's chosen covenant people, they did as kinsmen of Israel occupy a special place in the Old Testament (Deut. 23:7), and God set aside a land for them (Deut. 2:4-6, 22). However, ultimately, they were judged by God and destroyed for their pride and hostility towards Israel, particularly at a time when Israel was being devastated by her enemies (see the book of Obadiah).

-Why do you think Esau had so many descendants and such great possessions even though he didn't receive Isaac's blessing and was (according to Hebrews 12:16) a godless man? What does this teach us about God? (cf. Gen. 26:24; Matthew 5:45; Acts 17:24-27)

- Esau prospered because God was faithful to His promises to Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 26:24)
- God's common grace – gives good things to all, even to those who are opposed to Him (Matt. 5:45)
 - God does this so that men might seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him
 - Esau had the opportunity, but he and his descendants turned away, in spite of God's goodness to them

Aliens and strangers in the world

Though God had explicitly reminded Jacob of the vow he had made to God at Bethel when instructing Jacob to return to the land of Canaan (Gen. 31:13), Jacob did not fulfill this vow upon his return, but chose instead to settle at Shechem, just a short distance from Bethel. His disobedience had devastating consequences both for his family and for the people of Shechem, and also exposed him and his household to serious danger. In His grace, God visited Jacob in his time of need, calling him to repentance and to renewed obedience. As Jacob and his family repented, purified themselves, and separated themselves from the gods of the surrounding nations, God visited them in power, protecting Jacob's household by striking the surrounding people with fear. When Jacob finally returned to Bethel, God once again blessed him, appearing to him, reaffirming his new name (Israel), and confirming to him the blessings of God's covenant with Abraham.

The account of Jacob in Genesis 34-35 is one of many reminders in Scripture that sin in the midst of God's people can have grave consequences that reach far beyond the lives of those committing the sin. Sin also ultimately deprives us, both individually and corporately, of God's special presence and power in our lives, leaving us vulnerable to the attacks of the world, the flesh and the devil. In contrast, when we confess our sins and return wholeheartedly to God in repentance and obedience, He is faithful to forgive, to protect, to restore, to comfort, to bless. Are you cherishing sinful thoughts or acts in your life? Confess, repent, and return to the Lord. Are you putting off fulfilling promises you made to God, especially your pledge when you first invited Jesus Christ into your life as Savior and Lord, to let Him have full reign in your life? Delay no longer.