

The Plan from the Beginning
Daily Bible Reading Plan
Class Notes for Week 8: Genesis Chapters 31-35

Maybe a few lessons can be learned from our study:

1. Although Jacob could be found just by worldly standards in leaving Laban without confronting him, there is no value in deceit where honesty will work. Is it ever acceptable to lie?
2. Forgiveness is a powerful blessing to the one being forgiven and the one bestowing forgiveness. Many a family have been torn apart by disputes over inheritances, money and possessions. Which of these are worth sacrificing family bonds?
3. There is no real value in vengeance. It can be surmised that Dinah could have been freed without the carnage and looting of Simeon and Levi.

I. Genesis 31: Jacob parts ways with Laban

- The relationship between Jacob and Laban continues to deteriorate. Upon God's instruction, Jacob decides to pull up stakes and leave. Rachel and Leah are in agreement.
- Jacob slips off without telling Laban. After three days, Laban realizes what has happened and pursues Jacob. It takes seven days for Laban's forces to overtake Jacob. God warns Laban in a dream not to mess with Jacob.
- Laban seems to be concerned that Jacob has betrayed him by taking his daughters and grandchildren away without allowing Laban to "kiss them good-bye". It is more likely that Laban thinks that Jacob has made off with more livestock than he was supposed to. Laban also accuses (we learn that he is right) Jacob's people of making off with their gods.
- Jacob, after making a foolish vow that the thief, if found, will be killed (by whose hand?). Laban's search eventually comes to Rachel, who does in fact, have her father's gods. She hides them under a pillow and lies about her menstrual condition to keep them hidden under her.
- Unable to produce the culprit, Laban stirs up Jacob's anger. Jacob reminds Laban of the 20 years that he faithfully worked for him and how Laban's flocks grew under his care. Jacob reminds Laban about the 14 years he worked for his daughter's hands in marriage and that Laban changed his wages ten times.
- Laban and Jacob make peace and a pact that they will not cross over into each other's land. Laban departs after saying goodbye to his daughters and grandchildren.

II. Genesis 32 & 33: Jacob reunites with Esau

- Jacob does not have the same bravado when it comes to the next obstacle he will face: reuniting with Esau. Jacob sends out his messengers ahead to see Esau. They return with grim news. Esau is coming to meet Jacob with 400 men. Jacob, fearing the worst, divides his people into two camps, hoping one will survive if Esau attacks the others.
- Jacob calls out to God in prayer for deliverance from Esau's wrath. It is an interesting cry, ending with a "reminder" to God about the promise of many descendants.
- Not having complete faith that God will answer his prayer, he aids in the plan of his own salvation by sending out several waves of gifts to Esau.
- Verses 24-32 contain one of the most mysterious passages in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jacob spends the night wrestling with a "man", prevailing over his opponent until the adversary cripples Jacob's hip joint. The man is still unable to break free from Jacob's grip until he places a name change on Jacob. His new name is Israel. The meaning of this Hebrew term is debated, but most think it to mean "God contends" or "God prevails". The language is unclear as to who the man is that wrestles with Jacob. Is it an angel (see Hosea 12:3, 4) or God? Either way, Jacob is a skilled wrestler!!! Jacob names the site "Peni-El", meaning "face of God".
- Here comes Esau. Jacob divides the children by their mothers and arranges them to face the expected wrath in order, it seems, of importance to him. The concubines, Leah, and lastly, Rachel. This makes no strategic sense, since Rachel has the least number of children with her. Jacob goes out before them, bowing low before Esau seven times, showing complete fear and reverence for his brother.
- Contrary to Jacob's fears, verses 4 and 5 show that the past 20 years have softened Esau's anger towards his brother.

- Esau tries to refuse Jacob's offerings of livestock, but Jacob insists that he take them. Esau asks Jacob to go back with his people, but Jacob makes an excuse not to go, or have Esau's people remain with him. Eventually, Esau departs and returns to Seir. Jacob makes his home in a land named Succoth (dwelling in tents). He buys the land he dwells in from the sons of Hamor. This relationship quickly turns south as well.

III. **Genesis 34: The rape of Dinah**

- Hamor's son, Shechem, sees Jacob's daughter Dinah and has a strong desire for her. Unable to contain his lust for her, he takes her captive and rapes her. The Bible says he loved her.
- Jacob learns of the defilement of Dinah with little to no reaction. The same cannot be said of his other sons. Hamor and Shechem, with no apology about what happened to Dinah, come and request that Jacob allow Dinah to marry Shechem and even further, that his sons intermarry with Hamor's people.
- Jacob does not consent, but his sons conceive a deceitful plan. They insist that all the people of Hamor's city be circumcised before they allow their sister to marry Shechem.
- Smitten with love, Shechem wastes no time in being circumcised and Hamor convinces the other men of the town to do the same. He is convincing with the lure that this intermarrying will allow them access to Jacob's wealth.
- Three days after the men circumcise themselves; Simeon and Levi take advantage of their infirmity and kill all the males in the city. They in turn, loot the unprotected town. In the process, they retrieve their sister from her captivity.
- Jacob is not pleased and condemns their behavior (see also Genesis 49:5-7). He is worried that it will bring trouble on him. The sons question whether they should stand by while their sister is treated like a harlot.

IV. **Genesis 35: The covenant with Jacob and death of Rachel**

- God tells Jacob to relocate to Bethel and live there. Jacob commands his people to put away their foreign gods and get cleaned up. Jacob took the idols and pagan jewelry and hid them under an oak tree. They were protected on their journey as God placed a great fear of them in the inhabitants of the cities they passed.
- God places a blessing on Jacob and formally changes his name to Israel. Jacob erects an alter and calls the place Bethel, which means "house of God".
- Jacob (for some reason) begins travel towards Ephrath (future Bethlehem). Rachel gives birth on the way and dies from the intense and difficult labor. The child is named Benjamin. She is buried by Jacob and a pillar erected in her honor.
- When Jacob next settles, we see a brief mention that his son, Reuben, sleeps with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine (also Rachel's maidservant and mother of his half-brothers Dan and Naphtali). We know that Israel hears of it, but do not see any reaction (until Genesis 49:3, 4).
- The last interaction of the two estranged brothers, Jacob and Esau is reminiscent of Isaac and Ishmael. They come together to bury their father Isaac. Jacob knows that this is when Esau has vowed to take his revenge, but obviously the reconciliation was real and no harm comes to Jacob from Esau.