

# Genesis – Lesson 25

## Jacob at Shechem, Bethel, and Hebron

### Read Genesis 34.

- (a) Using a Bible map, locate *Shechem* and *Hebron*. According to Genesis 35:27, *where* was Isaac? Had Jacob *completed* his journey back to the dwelling place of Isaac?

Shechem is located about 10 mi. W of the Jordan in Canaan, at about the midway point of the river itself. Hebron is located about 15 mi. W of the center of the Dead Sea, about 50 mi. S of Shechem. The (eventual) city of Jerusalem is located about 15 mi. N of Hebron, with Bethel another 5 mi. N on the same road. Isaac is at Hebron, so Jacob *has not* completed his journey back to Isaac's home; he is still well N of where Isaac is at, even though he is back in Canaan itself.

- (b) How could the events of this chapter been *avoided*? How does 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 *relate*?

The events of this chapter, occurring at Shechem, probably would have been avoided had Jacob continued S to Hebron. In that case, he would not have had to dwell amongst the people of that area, and subject his family to what happened there. In 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 (a quote from Isaiah 52), Paul connects temptation for believers to being *unusually close* to those who are not Christ-followers, and commands that believers *separate* themselves from those who might cause them to sin. In the case of Jacob, had he continued to Hebron, and not stopped at Shechem, he would have been *separated* from these evil people and the events of this chapter would not likely have occurred.

- (a) Did Shechem show any sense of *wrongdoing* or *remorse*? How did he *excuse* his behavior?

No, Shechem shows *no* sense of wrongdoing or remorse. He is drawn to Dinah, rapes her, then *justifies* his behavior by claiming to love her (which he might genuinely had). Instead of controlling himself and asking for her to become his wife, he takes matters into his own hands *first*, and only *then* seeks to marry Dinah.

- (b) What was the *danger* of the proposals of vv. 9-10, 23? What had God *commanded* (see 28:1)?

When Shechem seeks to get Dinah as his wife, he asks his father Hamor to work it out with Jacob. Hamor suggests to Jacob that his family remain in Shechem and that his sons (and daughter) marry those from the area. Such an arrangement would give Shechem what he wants (Dinah) and would put an agreement in force between Jacob and Hamor. But, such a proposal was inherently dangerous because it would cause Jacob's sons to marry *outside* of the lineage that had been so carefully protected for both Isaac and Jacob themselves. It would also create an arrangement between the people of God (through Jacob) with the pagans of the land (through Hamor). God had *specifically* declared to Isaac that Jacob was not to marry any Canaanite, and the same command is *still in effect* for the sons of Jacob; there is no reason to believe that God has changed his mind regarding this.

3. (a) How did Jacob's sons get *revenge* for their sister's defilement? Were they *justified* in doing so? What *excuse* did they give for it?

The sons of Jacob (Simeon and Levi specifically) deceitfully agreed with this plan proposed by Hamor, but insisted that the agreement must be consummated with the family of Hamor (and the surrounding men) being circumcised. When this had been done, and the men were still healing from the ritual, Simeon and Levi came against them with their swords and killed Hamor, Shechem, and the rest. They *believed* that they were justified in doing this, given that their sister Dinah had been defiled, and they excused their behavior thusly. However, no such command was ever given to them by Jacob, and Jacob notes the danger that is now posed against them (see 3b below). Ironically, this behavior is somewhat similar to how Jacob himself often acted in the past, using deceit to get his way; his sons now pick up where their father left off.

(b) What possible *trouble* did Dinah's brothers bring on their entire family in their revenge? How did God *prevent* it from coming against the family (see 35:5)?

Jacob was concerned that his sons had now placed his family in danger from the surrounding peoples. Jacob had few protections, and the people of this territory were numerous. If they decided to take revenge for this, Jacob was afraid of what might happen. However, God protected Jacob and his family as he continued to travel S; God placed a dread upon the people, and no one attacked him or his family.

(c) Why does Jacob rename Luz to *Bethel*? What *happened* there that made it so significant?

Jacob had met God at this place, back in 28:19, just after leaving his father's home as he headed E to Ur. This is where God had first passed on to Jacob the promises that he had made previously to Abraham and Isaac. Thus, it became for Jacob the "house of God."

### Read Genesis 35-36.

4. (a) What previous *vow* of Jacob was he now fulfilling (see Genesis 28)?

Jacob had promised God that he would return to the house of his father, back in 28:21. Jacob had now found his way back, two decades later, and with a household full of wealth and family.

(b) Give three *commands* that Jacob gave to his household for their consecration to God. Find a New Testament verse for each which gives the same commands to *Christians*.

Jacob ordered his family to 1) put away any foreign gods that they had brought with them or found along the way, 2) purify themselves (ritually), and 3) change their garments (putting on fresh, ritually clean clothes). Each of these are commanded in the N.T. in a spiritual sense: 1) the command to put away foreign idols is found in 1 John 5:21, 2) the command to purify ourselves is found in 2 Corinthians 7:1, and 3) the command to wash out our spiritual garments is found in Revelation 22:14.

(c) Compare Genesis 34:25 and 35:22. How do these events help explain the relationship of the first three sons of Jacob to the promised *Messiah*?

The messiah is *eventually* promised to come specifically through the tribe of Judah, the *fourth* son of Jacob. It is *reasonable* that Reuben, Simeon, and Levi all *forfeited* this blessing because of their evil behavior: Reuben sleeping with Bilhah (the handmaiden of Rachel and the concubine of Jacob), and Simeon and Levi attacking the men of Hamor without permission. This is what Jacob himself pronounces against Reuben in 49:4, and against Simeon and Levi in 49:5-7. Again, however, note the irony: the blessing of God *does not* automatically fall to the eldest son. Ishmael and Esau were both passed over, and (again) God passes over some to bring this blessing to who *he* has chosen.

5. (a) From 36:7-8, *why* do Jacob and Esau separate? *Where* does Esau go? What does 35:29 tell you about their *relationship* at the end?

**The two brothers separate because the need for land to support their individual flocks was too great for them to remain close together. Esau heads E, across the Jordan to the hill country of Seir, which would eventually become the nation of Edom. Based on the fact that Esau and Jacob had a reconciliation, and that they buried their father Isaac together, it would appear that their relationship at the end was amiable. Obviously, that changes over time, as the Israelites and Edomites grow estranged, but (at this point) they seem to be in harmony. Note how this is consistent with the burial of Abraham by Isaac and Ishmael, two sons who come together for this final act of respect.**

- (b) *Why* does Moses include such a lengthy account of Esau's descendants (compare 35:22-26)?

**The story of Esau comes to an end at this point, and the narrative moves specifically to the future of Jacob's sons, the chosen people of God. Moses gives a lengthy account of Esau's descendants because they are *related* to the Israelites, and the Israelites will encounter them shortly as they approach the Promised Land. It seems reasonable, then, that this account would serve to explain to the Israelites who these people are, and to suggest that the animosity that the Edomites will bring against them is something that *cannot* be traced to the original brothers. Additionally, the people of Edom, although rejected by God, are still his creation, and valuable in his sight. Although they will lose sight of God (as the Israelites do), they are still created in God's image, thus the story is told of who they are to remind us of that fact.**