

Osaka International Church
Date: August 24th, 2008
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Series: Patriarchs
Title: The Sons of Jacob
Scripture: Genesis 34-36
Key Verse: Genesis 35:2

I. Introduction

Good morning! As Christians, we are commanded by Jesus to spread the Good News of salvation, and we are also compelled by love to tell the lost about Jesus. And, I am sure that most Christians really want to tell others about God's love. But still, we often struggle with sharing our faith. Today we will see that Jacob also had a difficult time in passing on his faith, even to his own sons. And we will learn from him some steps we can take to do better.



In Genesis 32, we saw how Jacob wrestled with the Lord at Peniel. At that time, the Lord gave Jacob a new name, "Israel." In the eyes of the Lord, the old Jacob was gone, a new man, Israel, had come. This new man would be the father of the people and nation of Israel. But the battle to say goodbye to the old man and to the old ways is often long. In fact, in the case of Israel, this battle of faith has been going on for 4,000 years.



Some people say that we should think of modern Israel as completely separate and different from Israel in the Old Testament, but that seems impossible to me. Modern Israel is connected directly back to Genesis in an unbroken chain of people and events.



Rather than seeing modern Israel as separate from ancient Israel, I think we would do better to recognize that modern Israel is just like Jacob, still wrestling with God, wavering back and forth between the old life and the life of faith. Many Christians, have a similar experience, wavering between faith and unbelief. Like the father of the boy who had the evil spirit in Mark 9:24, we cry out to Jesus. **Mark 9:24b, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"**

In Genesis 33, after meeting Esau, Jacob said that he would follow Esau back to Seir, where Esau was living. This photo shows the area of Mount Seir and some ruins that are being excavated. This area, which is south of the Dead Sea, was later renamed after Esau and called Edom. Genesis 36 lists Esau's descendants and the first kings of Edom.



Jacob said he would follow Esau to Seir, but he did not. Instead, Jacob went to Shechem and purchased some land there. The place where Jacob was living near Shechem is still known today, because while he was there Jacob dug a well that is mentioned often in history. If you go to the modern city of Nablus in Israel, you can visit Jacob's well, near ancient Shechem.



In Jesus' time this was also the location of Sychar, where the Samaritan woman met Jesus. **John 4:5-6, "So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour."** We don't want to get too sidetracked, but I thought you might want to notice the connection.

Jacob and his sons settled near Shechem. For a while things seemed to have gone smoothly. But in Genesis 34, terrible trouble comes. Dinah, the daughter of Jacob and Leah, was violated by the son of Hamor, the ruler of the city. Jacob's sons were outraged and they plotted revenge against the men of the town. They promised peace if the men accepted circumcision, but after the men of the city were circumcised and while

they were still helpless from the pain, two of Jacob's sons attacked the town and killed all the men. Let's pick the story up in Genesis 34:30 and then see what happens next. We will read Genesis 34:30-35:7.

II. Scripture Genesis 34:30-35:7 (NIV)

[34:30] Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." [31] But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?" [35:1] Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." [2] So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. [3] Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." [4] So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. [5] Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them. [6] Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. [7] There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

III. Teaching

At the end of Genesis 34, Jacob and his family are in deep trouble. The wicked and vengeful actions of two of his sons have made many enemies for them. They were in danger of being attacked and wiped out by the people of the land. The sons argued that their sister was violated. But their treachery and violence was against the whole town of Shechem, not just against the man who was guilty. Their sinfulness in taking revenge against the whole town is obvious. This is often the way of revenge. Justice would demand an appropriate punishment for the guilty, but sinful revenge destroys the entire town.



Jacob must have been heartbroken. Before this Jacob had sinned through deception and dishonesty, but he had not been a man of violence. Now, just a short time after he was peacefully reconciled to Esau, Jacob's family is stained with terrible bloodshed. Jacob's faith was sometimes weak, but it seems that at this time Jacob's sons had no faith in God at all. The Scripture does not tell us, but I think that Jacob must have been in prayer, asking the Lord what to do, when God spoke to him again. **Genesis 35:1, "Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.""**

Go to Bethel. Or, perhaps we could say, go back to the place of your first love, where you first encountered God. Bethel was the place where God first appeared to Jacob, and where Jacob made a vow that the Lord would be his God and that he would worship God and give his tithes. We do not know for sure, but it seems that Jacob had never fulfilled his vow, and that the Lord is now calling on him to do so. But first Jacob needed to lead his family in repentance. Jacob had failed to teach his sons to worship the Lord. Jacob had allowed idols into his household, and his family was caught in the sin of false religions and idolatry.

If you are the head of your household, then you are responsible for more than just your own faith. You also have a measure of responsibility for your household. Jacob knew this, but Jacob had failed in his responsibilities. Jacob had not kept his home pure, and he had not passed his faith on to his sons. Now Jacob repents and does right. **Genesis 35:2-3, "So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.""**

Jacob tells his sons and his whole household to get rid of all of their idols and false gods and to purify themselves and to put on clean clothes. Jacob also includes a testimony about how God has answered his

prayers and protected him everywhere he has gone. As the head of the household, Jacob has the responsibility and the authority to cleanse his home of idols. But Jacob does not rely on just his authority; he also gives a testimony to persuade his sons of the goodness and power of the living God.

So they dug a hole and buried all of the idols, and also their gold ear rings, which must have somehow been connected to idol worship at that time. They buried all of their worthless false gods. This must have included the household idols which Rachel stole from Laban in Genesis 31 and idols they had taken from Schechem when they plundered that town. So some of the idols had probably been in the family for generations, and others were probably recently acquired. But that didn't matter; wherever the idols and false gods came from, they were now counted as worthless and buried like household garbage.



As long as Jacob allowed false gods in his household, he could not successfully pass his faith in the true God on to his sons. But when Jacob cleansed his home of idols, then he started on a path which would eventually lead his sons to faith. It took a long time, and there was a lot of backsliding along the way, but his family was finally on the right path. And God protected them, causing the people to fear them so that no one tried to attack them, and Jacob and his family went to Bethel and worshipped there. And then, the Lord renewed His promises to Jacob and called him, "Israel," again.

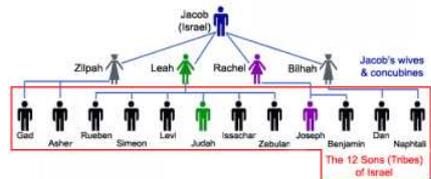


We have only read a portion of Genesis 35, but actually, there are three deaths and four burials in this chapter. The first burial is the burial of the idols. After this, there are the deaths and burials of Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, was buried near Bethel. And Isaac was buried in the Cave of Machpelah, which we discussed a few weeks ago. But Rachel was buried near Bethlehem in the region called Ramah. The Gospel of Matthew alludes to this after Herod ordered the babies of Bethlehem killed. **Matthew 2:18, "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."**



The place of Rachel's burial is well-known; here is a photo of Rachel's Tomb, as it looked a few years ago. Now, I think the exterior has been remodeled. In any case, Rachel died in childbirth, when she gave birth to Jacob's twelfth son.

These twelve sons of Jacob will become the twelve tribes of Israel. And from this point on, the number twelve acquires a symbolic meaning in Scripture, said by some to represent the idea of perfect government or administration. The symbolism of this number appears in nature, with twelve months making a complete year, and continues through Scripture with the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve apostles, and the twelve gates and twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21.



Let's take a closer look at Rachel's death for a moment. **Genesis 35:18, "As she breathed her last--for she was dying--she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin."** This is a fascinating verse, because, "Ben-Oni," means, "son of sorrow." But, "Benjamin," means, "blessed son," or more literally, "son of my right hand."

Here I am reminded of another child who was born at Bethlehem two thousand years later. After Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary took Him to the temple in Jerusalem, and there they met a prophet named Simeon. **Luke 2:34-35, "Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.""** Jesus came as the Savior of the World, but He was also (Isaiah 53:3), "a man of sorrows." And to Mary, he was a, "son of sorrow." When Jesus was crucified, Mary must have truly felt like a sword had pierced her soul. But, Jesus is also the Blessed Savior of the whole world; and He is, even now, "seated at the right hand of the Father," in heaven. **Hebrews 1:3 tells us, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."**

IV. Conclusion

Jacob met with God, wrestled with God, and obtained the blessing. But he also allowed his household to fall into idol worship and sin. Finally, in Genesis 35, he repented and did his best to cleanse his household of idols and to pass his faith on to his sons.

What about us? Have we repented of our sins and gotten rid of the false gods and idols in our lives? If we want to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, then we should get rid of everything that hinders our worship. And, if we want to be successful in passing our faith on to our family, friends, and neighbors, then we must set the example, cleansing our household and discarding all worthless idols and false gods. Like Jacob, we have many problems and struggles along the way, but the Lord's grace and mercy is sufficient for us. And if we rely wholly on Him, then He will cleanse us of all sin and make our witness to our family and friends effective.



V. Let's Pray