



Joy and Sorrow Genesis 33-34

Introduction

After confronting and making a covenant with Laban, Jacob's next worry was his impending meeting with his brother, Esau. Jacob was fearful that Esau still harbored bitterness and hatred toward him, so he had prepared a substantial gift for Esau, sent his family ahead and went apart to spend a night in prayer. During the night a "Man", identified as the pre-incarnate Christ, appeared and wrestled with him. Although the Lord allowed Jacob to prevail, He touched his hip socket, forcing it out of joint, leaving Jacob with a lasting limp by which to remember his remarkable encounter with God.

OUTLINE of GENESIS 33-34

- I. Reunion With Esau - Genesis 33:1-20
- II. Defilement of Dinah - Genesis 34:1-31

I. Reunion With Esau - Genesis 33:1-16

After wrestling with the Lord, Jacob was ready to meet his brother.

A. Fear of Esau - Genesis 33:1-3

Jacob returned to his family and flocks just in time to see Esau approaching with four hundred men. Fearing that Esau was coming in anger and with revenge in his heart, Jacob quickly divided his family, placing the children with their respective mothers. He placed the two maids, Bilhah and Zilpah, in front with their children, Leah and her children second and Rachel and Joseph in the rear where they would be most protected. The manner in which Jacob divided his family certainly gives a clear picture of whom he favored. Do you ever inadvertently show partiality in your family?

B. Change in Esau - Genesis 33:4-7

Jacob slowly limped forward to greet Esau as a servant would greet his master. He bowed seven times as he approached his brother, exhibiting deep humility, respect and courtesy. Esau threw restraint to the wind as he ran forward to meet Jacob. He "embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him". All vengeance and rancor were forgotten as the two brothers "wept" in joyous reconciliation. Their response seems to indicate that their hearts were healed of the painful past as all hurtful memories and threats were washed away.

God had worked a transformation in Esau who showed thoughtfulness and consideration in asking Jacob about the group of women and children in his company. Jacob, with a heart full of thankfulness and relief, replied that they were all gifts of God's grace.

C. Peace With Esau - Genesis 33:8-15

Esau seems to have been very impressed with Jacob's humility and kindness. He asked about the assemblage of animals Jacob had sent ahead. Jacob replied that it was a gift, offered with the intention of finding favor with his brother. Although Esau politely resisted, Jacob pressed the gift upon him. His next words show that he fully realized God's sovereign hand had determined the outcome of his reunion with his brother: "I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me". Esau graciously accepted Jacob's gift, the surest sign of reconciliation being complete.

It had been a long and emotional journey for Jacob, and an exhausting one for his family, flocks and herds. Although Esau offered to accompany him on the final leg of his trip, Jacob pointed out his need to travel on at an easy pace. Esau offered to loan some of his servants to help Jacob on his way, but his offer was refused. Jacob was content to have peacefully reunited with his brother. Now, with an unencumbered heart, he could complete his journey home.

D. Departure for Canaan - Genesis 33:16-20

Esau returned home to Mt. Seir and Jacob journeyed on to the land of Canaan. Jacob stopped first at Succoth which is just east of the Jordan River, apparently to give his family and livestock a much needed rest. They then traveled on to Shechem, located about sixty-five miles north of Jerusalem, between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim. There Jacob bought a parcel of land from the children of Hamor and pitched his tent outside the city.

Jacob had returned home safely. Before leaving Canaan, he had made a vow to God, "If God will be with me and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God" (Genesis 28:20-21). God had certainly done all this, with many blessings besides. Jacob built an altar outside Shechem, just as his grandfather, Abraham, had done (Genesis 12:6-7). He named the altar "El Eloe Israel",

meaning “God, the God of Israel”. Jacob’s weak faith had been taken to a higher level of trust and belief. As Dr. Constable writes, “Jacob seems to have had a genuine experience of coming to grips with himself and yielding his life to God” (Notes on Genesis).

Application

Is God your God, just as He is Jacob’s (Israel’s) God? Place your own name in the place of Israel -- “God, the God of _____.” Will you pause now and thank Him for the special ways He leads you, cares for you, blesses you and shows you that He is your God?

II. Defilement of Dinah - Genesis 34:1-34

This chapter recounts the repugnant details of the rape of Dinah and the revenge taken by her brothers, led by Simeon and Levi. How quickly Jacob’s joy in being home was turned to sorrow. The contrast between Jacob’s worship in Chapter 33 and the depraved behavior of Chapter 34 is striking!

A. Shechem’s Outrageous Act - Genesis 34:1-4

Dinah, the teenaged daughter of Jacob and Leah, innocently left the security of her home and “*went out to see the daughters of the land*”. Little did she guess that her youthful curiosity would lead to such horrific acts of violence. Surely she was not aware that the Canaanites of the land regarded unmarried, unattended women as a legitimate prey for seduction. So, when Shechem, Hamor’s son, saw her he exercised what he considered to be his right of forcefully raping her. This is shocking and deplorable to us but it reveals the very low standard of morality that existed among the Canaanites.

In spite of his despicable, shameful deed, the Scriptures record that Shechem felt tenderly toward Dinah. “*He loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman*” and he wanted her for his wife. Certainly his expressions of love do not excuse his disgraceful actions and his lack of concern for Dinah’s feelings and the physical and emotional pain she suffered because of his lustful actions toward her.

B. Jacob’s Silence - Genesis 34:5

Upon hearing of what had happened, Jacob did not respond. He “*held his peace*” until his sons returned from working in the field. He was probably wise in waiting until he had more information and an opportunity to counsel with his sons. Jacob now found himself in a very precarious position.

C. Hamor’s Proposal - Genesis 34:6-12

Dinah’s brothers were grieved and angry when they heard about Shechem’s disgraceful act. It was “*a thing which ought not to be done*” in Israel! But Hamor pleaded that Dinah be given to his son as a wife. His offer included intermarriage, free use of the land, and open trade. Clearly, all these things would be advantageous to Hamor. But they would be an abomination to God’s people and to God Himself. Abraham had taken great care to see that his son, Isaac did not marry a Canaanite woman. Both Rebekah and Isaac made sure that Jacob did not take a wife from among the Canaanites (Genesis 24:3; 27:46; 28:1). Years later when the people of Israel entered the promised land, God gave stern warnings about intermarriage with its pagan peoples. See Deuteronomy 7:3 and Joshua 23:12-13.

Shechem offered to give whatever the family asked as a retribution and dowry for Dinah. In the minds of the Canaanites, Jacob’s people should have been honored at the proposition of a matrimonial alliance with Hamor’s princely line.

D, Dinah’s Brothers’ Demands - Genesis 34:13-23

Jacob recognized that mixing the chosen seed with the Canaanites’ was wrong in God’s sight. But his sons had concocted a plan. They wanted to avenge the outrageous thing which had been done to their sister. They demanded that the Canaanite men be circumcised, promising that then they could dwell together in unity. Hamor and Shechem persuaded all of their people that this was the right thing to do. It seems that the people of Shechem were motivated by their greed as Shechem promised: “*will not their (Jacob’s) livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs be ours?*”

C. Dinah’s Brothers’ Raging Revenge - Genesis 34:24-29

On the third day after all the men of Shechem had been circumcised, when they were in pain and incapacitated, Dinah’s brothers carried out their infamous plan. Simeon and Levi went boldly into the city, killed every male, and rescued their sister. Then the rest of the brothers plundered the city and took all of their wealth, wives, children and livestock. Simeon and Levi, two of the sons of Leah, the unloved wife of Jacob, were apparently the ring leaders. This was one of the most shameful, deceptive days in Biblical history.

“A massacre of all males and the wholesale plunder of the city went way beyond the reasonable, wise, and justly deserved punishment of one man; this was

a considerably more excessive vengeance than the the Mosaic law would later legislate (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)" (John MacArthur, The MacArthur Bible Commentary).

Furthermore, circumcision was the covenant sign which God had given to Abraham (Acts 7:8). It designated those who belonged to the family of Abraham physically, ethnically and by faith. This made the sign distinctive and sacred to the Hebrew people. Abuse of the sign of the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision was surely an abomination in God's sight.

As a result of their act of reckless revenge, Simeon and Levi, leaders of the onslaught, lost their permanent inheritance in the land of Israel. See Genesis 49:5-7.

D. Jacob's Dysfunctional Family - Genesis 34:30-31

Jacob was disgusted with Simeon and Levi because they had killed helpless people and stolen all their possessions. However, it was not the abuse of his daughter or the blot on his family which seem to have affected him most. His first thought was of himself - that he would be "*obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land*". He was afraid to stand up for righteousness and he doubted God's promise of protection. Jacob's passivity with his dysfunctional family is reflected in his sons' uncontrolled natures. Their hideous deeds indicate rare exposure to godliness and peaceful home life.

Application

This incident provides valuable insight into the importance of a family atmosphere of faith and trust in God. If the husband and wife (or single parent) establish a strong, genuine base of love and devotion in a home and lead the family in a godly lifestyle, the children will be influenced for good. They may experience a rebellious period for many years, but sooner or later they will return to the faith (Deuteronomy 30:2 and Proverbs 22:6).

Do you conduct yourself in a godly manner around your children? Do you pray with them and teach them the truths of God's true word, the Bible? Do you strive to live by those truths and confess and repent when you fail? In short, do you truly and longingly live for God in the sight of your children and all family members? If you have not done so in the past, will you begin today? How will you begin to show your children and other members of your family that you live for God? How will you help them to learn the truths of God's word?