



Lesson 21

Jacob and his family in Canaan

In our last lesson we saw how Jacob returned to the land of Canaan, the land promised to him by God. He met Esau and made his peace with him. Esau travelled south and lived outside the Promised Land whilst Jacob settled at Shechem with his family. He built an altar there. His name had been changed by God to 'Israel' and later in the Bible the land where he lived would be called 'the land of Israel' and his descendants 'the Children of Israel'.

Dinah and Shechem

After Leah had born six sons to Jacob, she finally had a daughter called Dinah. We read of her:

"Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land.

And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her. And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her." Genesis 34:1-3

Dinah was probably a young teenager (she was old enough to have sexual relationships) and this means that the family had been back in the land for at least ten years. How foolish her parents were! Abraham would not let his son marry a Canaanite. Jacob had been sent away to Laban to find a wife from his own tribe. The Hivites were descendants of Canaan, they were Canaanites! It was spiritually dangerous for Dinah to be allowed to go and mix with these people who shared neither her beliefs nor her moral values and she was raped by one of them.

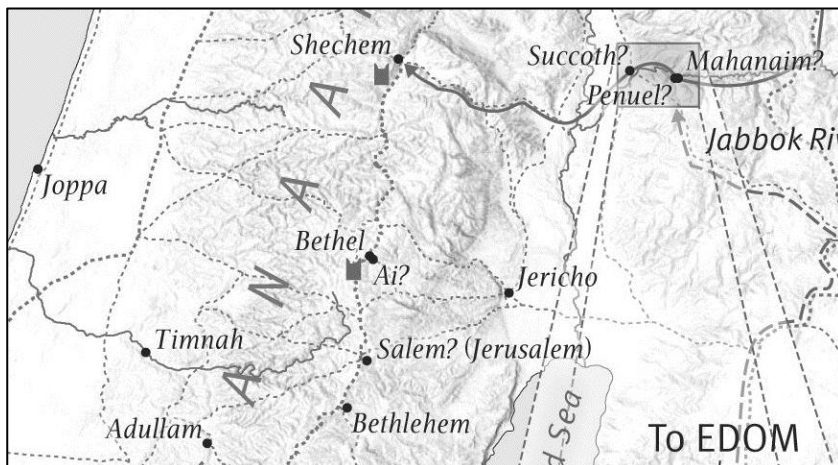
Hamor and Jacob met to discuss the matter. Jacob agreed that Shechem could marry his daughter, but on one condition – all the men of Hamor's tribe must be circumcised. They agreed to this because Hamor said:

"Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people- when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us." Genesis 34:22-23

However, while the Hivites were still sore after being circumcised, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, went to their village and killed them all. Jacob was very angry with them.

"You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household." Genesis 34:30

This is an unpleasant story in the Bible about people who knew God's promises and who should have behaved better. Jacob and Leah should have taught their daughter not to mix with Godless people who would lead her astray. Jacob should never have agreed to her marriage with a man who did not believe in God and the brothers should never have committed murder.



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Jacob goes to Bethel

This episode was a warning to Jacob, he and his family had become too close to the Canaanites; they had traded together and some of his





household had become interested in the idols the Canaanites worshipped.

God told him to move away from the area. He was told to travel about 40 km south to Bethel. This was where his grandfather, Abraham, settled when he first came into the land. He was told to build an altar there (just like Abraham did). He instructed his household.

“So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments.” Genesis 35:2

Keeping ourselves true to the Lord Jesus Christ is a constant struggle. The things of the world are very attractive and there are always people who will invite us to put aside what we believe and join them

Life was hard for Jacob when he worked for Laban and he was comforted by the memory of God’s promises and his intention to return to God’s land. However, when he returned life eventually became easier. It seems that both he and his household forgot that they were to be separate from their neighbours, people who were more interested in the fulfilment of God’s promises than getting rich in this life.

The trouble with the Hivites was a warning to Jacob and he separated from them. At Bethel, after he had obeyed God in these things, the angel appeared to him again and repeated the promise first made to Abraham that the land would eventually belong to his family. Because of this, Jacob called the place ‘Bethel’ which means ‘the house of God’.

Rachel dies

Jacob continued to travel south, Rachel was pregnant and the time to give birth arrived. Her labour was difficult and she died giving birth to a son called Benjamin. He was Jacob’s 12th and youngest son and was very special to his father.

In her married life Rachel had been desperate for sons to compete with her sister, Leah, for Jacob’s favour. Now she dies in childbirth.

After this Isaac died aged 180, Esau and Jacob met to bury him, this was the last time they saw each other.

Chapter 36 tells us of the descendants of Esau, he had many offspring and became very rich. However, we have seen that he was not interested in the Promised Land but only in becoming wealthy. His descendants mentioned in this chapter became enemies of the nation of Israel when it returned from Egypt; they never forgot the quarrel between Esau and Jacob. Chapters 35 and 36 show us once again the contrast between Jacob and Esau. Although Jacob made many mistakes in his life, he never forgot God’s promises about the kingdom of God. Esau was only interested in this life and the power he could gain for himself and his family.

SUMMARY

In this lesson we have learned:

- It is easy to become more attracted to the things of this world than to the promises of God.
- These things can bring us great spiritual danger if we turn aside from God’s ways.
- When this happens we need to turn to God in prayer as Jacob did.
- The Bible contrasts Jacob and Esau to show us the difference between the right way and the wrong way in our lives.