

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 26 (34:1-35:29): Some Summary Thoughts:

Chapters 34-35 depict Jacob and his children “safely” back in the land of promise, with the one exception of the vignette regarding Jacob’s only daughter, Dinah. Interestingly, the entire remainder of Genesis will focus only upon Jacob’s sons and the events in their lives. In chapter 34, Shechem, the royal son of the man who sold Jacob his property (33:18-20), violates Dinah, falls in love with his victim, and then seeks the hand of Dinah through his father, Hamor, who extends a totally open hand to Jacob and his entourage, asks Jacob to “*settle among us,*” “*live in the land and trade in it*” and “*acquire property in it.*” (v. 10). The narrative shows:

- 34:13-17: Jacob’s sons have other ideas as they assume the negotiations on behalf of their sister, deceitfully assenting to giving Dinah to Shechem if he and his people will agree to circumcision.
- 34:18-24: Shechem and the townspeople agree to the condition hoping to take advantage of the “blessings” of Jacob. By allowing the Israelites to settle among them, they think, “*Won’t their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours?*”
- 34:24-29: But it is not to happen. After the males are circumcised, Simeon and Levi slaughter the males; the rest of the sons plunder the city taking their *livestock, women and children*. As we saw with Jacob, again there is a reversal of expectations. The livestock and property that the Canaanites anticipated would soon belong to them is not to be. Instead, their own livestock and possessions are seized by Jacob’s sons.
- 34:30-31: Jacob chides his sons about their actions, showing fear at possible reprisal. But the sons are unrepentant – actions setting the stage for future conflict within the land of Canaan.

In chapter 35, God resolves Jacob’s fears and continues to fulfill His Promises. God instructs Jacob to move to Bethel and build an altar to God there. Bethel, the place of Jacob’s vision, is his earlier point of departure as he left the Promised Land to journey to Haran in search of a wife (28:10-21). Closure now ensues.

- Previously at Bethel, Jacob accepted God as his own personal God, albeit under 5 conditions (28:20-21). Now, upon his return, Jacob has lost his arrogance. He is a contrite, humbled full believer in the Person and Power of *El Shaddai* “God Almighty” (35:11) – the name used by God when He revealed Himself to Abraham as He established His covenant with Abraham and changed Abram’s name to Abraham (17:1-8).
- In preparation for his return to Bethel, Jacob requires that all foreign gods be removed prior to the journey (35:2-4).
- God’s continued promised protection (28:15) is manifested upon Jacob & his entourage as they depart Shechem for Bethel and the “*terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.*” (35:5).
- Jacob builds an altar at Bethel and names the place: *El Bethel* (God of Bethel) in remembrance of his prior encounter with God there (35:6).
- At Bethel, God reappears to Jacob, blessing him, and reiterating the Abrahamic promises! (35:9-14).
- The chapter closes with several death reports, including the peaceful death of Isaac and the death of Rachel in childbirth (the birth of Benjamin).

Lessons Learned: “*Bethel*” (the House of God), which once served as the launching pad of Jacob’s hasty exit from God’s “promised land” has now become the focal point for Jacob and *all his household* to enter into a deeper, much more important relationship with each other and with God. Jacob rightly understands the momentous nature of his return. He calls his entire household to scrap foreign idols, images and rings in their ears (once a sign of slavery) and buries them at Shechem. Enroute to Bethel, God protects the household. At Bethel, God renews His promises first to Abraham, then Isaac, and finally to Jacob. Perhaps, just as God sometimes fights against us before He fights for us (32:22-32), God may also have to bring us once again to some starting point so we can see our own complete transformation? Think about it.