

A Study in Genesis: After Shechem - A Need for Gracious Purification & Sanctification

Scripture Focus: Genesis 35:1-29

Before diving into the chapters which focus on the the life of Joseph, it seems important to notice what happens with Jacob and family in Genesis 35.

--After the horrific events occurring in Shechem, including the defilement of Jacob's daughter Dinah and the brutal retribution carried out by her brothers, Jacob followed God's direction (35:1) and led his family towards Bethel, approximately 15 miles south of Shechem. Before they traveled, Jacob ordered his household to, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves..." (35:2). The stolen idols from Shechem were collected and buried.

--Jacob then returns to Bethel to once again build an altar to honor the God who keeps his promises and graciously provides safety for Jacob and his family, despite their many failings. God once again reminds Jacob at Bethel of the great promise (vv. 9-15), and in response Jacob sets up "a pillar of stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it." (v. 14b)

--After this time of purification and sanctification, Jacob would experience additional blessings and loss. Heading toward Ephrath (Bethlehem) Rachel bore him a son, whom Jacob called Benjamin, but he lost his beloved wife in the process (vv. 17-10). Jacob buried Rachel in Bethlehem. (Also see Micah 5:2-5a as a foretelling of the birth of the Messiah, "the one of peace," occurring in this same geographic location. "Bethlehem of Ephrathah.")

--In verses 23-26, all the sons of Jacob are listed and from them will come the twelve tribes of Israel. Even though Rueben is the oldest, because of what he did with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine, (v. 22) Rueben will lose the preferred status of the firstborn son (Genesis 49:3-4).

--The chapter concludes with announcing the death of Jacob's father, Isaac, who died "old and full of days" at the age of 180 (vv. 27-29). Issac's sons reunited to bury him at Hebron. No sooner did Jacob and Esau reunite, but then parted ways once again. (See Genesis 36:6-8.)