

## **Genesis, Session 20: Jacob's Daughter and Return to Bethel (Genesis 34:1–37:1)**

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### **Keywords**

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### **Abstract**

This session covers the final chapters of the Jacob narrative (Genesis 34:1–37:1), highlighting the moral decline of Jacob's sons through the violent Shechem incident and Reuben's transgression. It contrasts this human depravity with God's enduring covenant faithfulness as Jacob returns to Bethel, purifies his household of idols, and receives a renewal of the Abrahamic promises. The transition from the patriarchal past to the future of Israel is marked by four symbolic burials and the genealogy of Esau, setting the stage for the Joseph narrative.

### **Outline**

#### **I. Introduction and Overview of Genesis 34:1–37:1**

- A. Focus of Session 20: Last chapters of the Jacob narrative and transition to his descendants.
- B. Major themes:
  - 1. Geographical transition: Southern movement from Jordan River to Shechem, Bethel, and Hebron.
  - 2. Generational transition: Four symbolic burials marking the end of the patriarchal era.
    - a. Burial of household gods under the oak at Shechem.
    - b. Death and burial of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse.
    - c. Death and burial of Rachel.
    - d. Death and burial of Isaac, Jacob's father, by Jacob and Esau.
  - 3. Moral decline of Jacob's sons.
  - 4. God's faithfulness and covenant promises overcoming human depravity.
  - 5. The ongoing motif of deceit in the patriarchal lineage.
- C. Preparation for the Joseph narrative (Chapters 37–50).

#### **II. The Defilement of Dinah and the Crisis at Shechem (Genesis 34:1–12)**

A. Background: Jacob's arrival in Shechem from Paddan Aram, purchasing land, and building an altar to El Elohei (the God of Israel).

B. The Incident:

1. Dinah, daughter of Leah and Jacob, goes to visit the women of the land.
2. Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite (a prince of the region), sees and forcibly violates/humiliates Dinah.
3. Shechem's emotional attraction to Dinah and request to his father to negotiate marriage.

C. Initial Reactions:

1. Jacob learns of the violation but remains quiet and passive until his sons return, showing a spiritual and moral setback.
2. Jacob's sons return from the fields, grieved and furious at the "disgraceful thing" committed against Israel.

### **III. Deceitful Negotiations and the Slaughter of the Shechemites (Genesis 34:13–31)**

A. Hamor's Proposal:

1. Offers intermarriage, settlement, trade, and property acquisition to the Jacob clan.
2. The threat of intermarriage: Historical link to idolatry and apostasy in Israel's future.

B. The Deception of Jacob's Sons:

1. Simeon and Levi lead a deceitful response, demanding that all Shechemite males be circumcised.
2. Abuse of the sacred: Exploiting the holy covenant sign of circumcision (Genesis 17) for murderous purposes.

C. The Execution and Plunder:

1. Hamor and Shechem convince the townspeople using economic and wealth incentives.
2. The adult males undergo circumcision.
3. On the third day, while the Shechemites are in pain and defenseless, Simeon and Levi attack the city, killing every male (including Hamor and Shechem).
4. The brothers plunder the city, taking livestock, wealth, women, and children.

D. Confrontation and Lack of Repentance:

1. Jacob scolds Simeon and Levi, but only out of self-interest and fear of retaliation from local Canaanites and Perizzites.
2. Simeon and Levi justify their actions, showing no repentance: "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

### **IV. The Return to Bethel and Purification of the Household (Genesis 35:1–15)**

A. Divine Command: God instructs Jacob to move to Bethel, settle there, and build an altar.

#### B. Purification Rituals:

1. Jacob commands his household to rid themselves of foreign/household gods (first burial: Rachel's stolen gods buried under the oak at Shechem).
2. Household members purify themselves and change their clothes to signal a departure from past contamination.

C. Divine Protection: God imposes a "terror" upon the surrounding towns so they do not pursue the Jacobites, reversing Jacob's fear of retaliation.

#### D. Covenant Renewal at Bethel:

1. God visually appears to Jacob and blesses him.
2. Reaffirmation of Jacob's new name, "Israel" (one who struggled with God and learned dependence).
3. Revelation of God as El Shaddai (God Almighty).
4. Reiteration of Abrahamic covenant promises: fruitful multiplication, community of nations/kings, and inheritance of the land.
5. Jacob sets up a stone pillar as a personal memorial of communion with God.

### V. The Deaths and Transgressions of the Family (Genesis 35:16–29)

#### A. The Birth of Benjamin and Death of Rachel:

1. Birth of Jacob's twelfth and youngest son, Benjamin, near Bethlehem.
2. Rachel's painful struggle in childbirth and subsequent death.
3. Favoritism of Jacob toward Rachel's children (Joseph and Benjamin) sets up future narratives.

#### B. Reuben's Calamity:

1. Reuben, the firstborn, commits incest with Bilhah (Rachel's maidservant and Jacob's concubine).
2. Reuben's actions disqualify him from his birthright privileges.
3. Shift of birthright blessing to Joseph's sons (Ephraim and Manasseh).

#### C. Death of Isaac:

1. Jacob returns to his father Isaac at Hebron.
2. Isaac dies and is buried by his sons, Jacob and Esau (fourth burial).

### VI. The Descendants of Esau and the Genealogy of Edom (Genesis 36:1–37:1)

A. Scope: Focus on Esau's wives, chieftains, and the nation of Edom.

B. Historical Insight: Mention of kings reigning in Edom before any Israelite king (Genesis 36:31).

#### C. Covenant Context:

1. Edom's development into a nation does not exclude Israel's greater promise.
2. Future prophecy of a coming king through Judah (Davidic lineage leading to Jesus Christ).

3. Anticipation of global reconciliation where the gospel is extended to all nations.

## **VII. Theological Reflections on Human Sin and Divine Grace**

A. The Faithfulness of God: God continues to work with a flawed, deceitful people not by merit, but out of love for the fathers.

B. The Necessity of Repentance: God's discipline guides the brothers toward eventual repentance in the Joseph narrative.

C. Connection to Psalm 130: Theme of crying out of the depths, seeking mercy, and finding forgiveness and full redemption in the Lord.