

January 20

Scriptures: Read Genesis 34 & 35

Key Verse: “And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments’.” (Genesis 35:2)

Overview

The first recorded incident of rape in the Bible was with Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob. This is a tragic story of sin. Dinah was probably about 15 years old when she was violated by Shechem, the son of the ruler in that area. A shameful scandal had come upon the family of faith. Hamor tried to make the situation end for good by having them marry, which Shechem desired, then the two groups could live together like one family. The sons of Jacob dealt deceitfully with them and said they would agree if all the males among them would become circumcised. Shechem was happy to do this if he could then have Dinah for his wife, and his father agreed and convinced his people to do this also.

Three days after the men were circumcised and in much pain, Dinah’s two older full brothers, Simeon and Levi, took matters into their own hands and slaughtered not only the guilty, but all the men in that town. They stole their goods, and took away the women and children. They deceived those who had made peace with Jacob, thus upsetting their father and causing him to be hated by the peoples of the land. Jacob was afraid of what might befall him and his household because of his sons’ wickedness. Although he is included with the men of faith listed by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 11:21), here he was lacking in faith, for God had promised him many times to preserve him. Although Jacob’s group were but “few in numbers” (34:30), all the surrounding cities had “the terror of God” upon them and so they were afraid to pursue the sons of Jacob.

The way God dealt with the Levites shows His mercy and forgiveness. The same is true for us today: if we are paying the consequences of sin, we can turn and be obedient to the Lord and ask for forgiveness, and He will forgive us, as He has promised (1 John 1:9; Isaiah 43:25), and turn the consequences of sin into a blessing.

Jacob was told by God to go to his father (who was in the southern part of Canaan, in Hebron), but he stopped short and set up camp in a place he should not have been. Sin always follows if one, in disobedience to God, is in the wrong place. God told Jacob to “go up” to Bethel. Although Bethel is south of where they were, it is located on a hill and to get there one must ascend about 305 meters. Bethel was where Jacob had seen the heavenly ladder, about 20 years before, and where God first spoke to him and made the personal covenant with him. Now, in returning there, Jacob ordered a family purification so they may go up to the “house of God” and have spiritual renewal and a time of revival. They had to be purified and told to “put away the foreign gods that are among you” (35:2). All things that hinder a close relationship with God must be buried and forgotten (35:4), then God will speak to us. God blessed Jacob and reconfirmed that his name would now be “Israel” and reaffirmed the covenant and promises which He had given to Abraham.

We are told of three deaths in chapter 35: the first was Deborah, Jacob's mother's nurse; then his beloved wife Rachel, died in giving birth to his 12th son whom she called "Ben Ony" (meaning "the son of my sadness") just before she died, but Jacob renamed him Benjamin (meaning "son of my right hand"). Finally, upon reaching Hebron, Jacob went to his father as God had commanded him. Isaac, at 180 years old, was dying. Esau also came to see his dying father. It must have made Isaac's heart glad to see his blessed son return to the land of promise, and to see Esau and Jacob reconciled. God honored Isaac and may have let him live that long so that he could witness all this with his own eyes. With his heart at peace, Isaac died.

Prayer

O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us grace to put away anything that would displease You. Change and purify us we pray.