
Day 15 - January 15

Period of the Patriarchs (2100 -1525 BCE)

Dinah and the Men of Shechem

Jacob's Journey Continues

Readings: *Genesis 34:1-35:29*

Reflections:

- The story of Dinah and Shechem is about the battle with the godless culture that Israel will face. Dinah is raped, the men of that area want to intermarry and dominate this small nomad group. In this section of Scripture the term “violated” is a strong word and is therefore understood as raped. There is no mention of it being mutual at any point. He did fall in love with her, but the whole thrust of this story is that she is being violated against her will. This is what fuels the anger of the brothers.
- Many men cringe when they read this story. Her brother deceives the men and then kills them when they are in huge pain. This is not a nice story, but it shows one of the reasons why Israel is viewed as an enemy and will be in constant war with her neighbors.
- We then read through God reaffirming to Jacob everything about his name change, and calling, and God's promises to him. It is like the battle they just went through causes Jacob to start to question everything and now God needs to restate everything again to Jacob.
- We read a great line from Jacob when God calls him to seek him again in Bethel, the place of meeting God: “I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.”
- He purifies himself and his household from all gods. These were his back up plans. These were the other things he could trust in other than God. It was how they would secure themselves when they weren't trusting in God. No back up plans is the lesson here.
- So God helps Jacob work through, again, his new identity (new name Israel), his calling (father of a nation and the coming kingly line from where the Messiah will come), and God's promise of blessing (land, prosperity, etc.). It is comforting to know that God is used to working with people who need to keep on repeating life lessons. Even though we need to do our part to intentionally remember all he has already said and done, it is reassuring to know he is patient.

- Jacob sets up a stone again to mark where God talked to him. Again we see the importance of intentionally reminding ourselves of what God has said and done.
- The birth of Benjamin is very sad. When Rachel dies, Jacob's great love for Rachel is transferred to Benjamin. Rachel only had two sons. Both are the key players in the unfolding story. Again, there is a sense of God blessing the true love of Jacob and Rachel. God blesses us when we love those who don't love us or can't love us. This is what we see in Jesus and his teaching on enemy love. God also blesses us when we love as it was supposed to be. God's original vision of love is a deep bonding between man and woman at heart level. Jacob and Rachel are an example of this as will be David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11, 12). These are two examples of God blessing that type of mutual love.
- The incident with Reuben sleeping with Bilhah is a sad reminder of the sin and failure of Reuben. This family is far from perfect.
- Isaac dies and is gathered with his fathers. We see even death is viewed as an expression of community.
- At this point in the story we see again that the main characters do not see the fulfillment of the entire promise they received from God. Yet in another way, they each received a kind of fulfillment in their lifetime that would make sense to them. Abraham had Isaac and although he didn't see the nation or the fullness of the land, no doubt he felt a great fulfillment in having a son of promise. Similarly, Jacob has his twelve sons and can see in his growing family the birthing of the vision. Each of these men knew the limitations of what God would accomplish in their lifetimes and so felt the sense of fulfillment in what they had received. God not fulfilling his promise to Abraham would have been Abraham not having a son. For Jacob, it would have been having no children and no tie to the land. So God was faithful to them and the promise continued to unfold according to God's grace. This reminds us to look for how God will fulfill his promise without holding God to our preconceived ideas.