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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

FROM JACOB TO ISRAEL (32:1-35:29)

The Place of the Passage

Previously, we saw that Jacob goes into “exile” in the land of Laban and experienced similar patterns of deception that he had inflicted upon his brother Esau. During the twenty years in that land, God had worked in Jacob’s heart. In this section, Jacob faces his greatest fears in reconciling with Esau. As he does so, we witness a dramatic picture of God’s grace through Esau. In the process, Jacob wrestles with God, is crippled, reconciles with Esau and finishes his journey to Bethel.

Gospel Glimpses

ESAU AND THE HEART OF GOD

Esau unexpectedly runs to welcome his brother Jacob, who has stolen his blessing and birthright. Though Jacob had sinned against Esau, Esau welcomes him back with open arms. Similarly, we have sinned against God, but God the Father welcomes us back with open arms. In fact, just as Esau “ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (Genesis 33:4), so the father in the story of the prodigal son “ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). Just as Jacob stole the father’s blessing, so the prodigal son prematurely demanded the father’s blessing. Just as Esau unexpectedly welcomes back the rebel Jacob, so the father unexpectedly welcomes back the son. What a beautiful picture of the gospel in an unexpected place!

RECONCILIATION

Jacob takes seriously the task of reconciliation with his brother Esau. He sends forth a sizeable present, a “blessing” (Genesis 33:11), presumably repaying the blessing that he had stolen from his brother many years earlier (Genesis 27:35). When his life is realigned to God after wrestling at Peniel (Genesis 32:30), this realignment with God is immediately seen in reconciliation with his brother. Similarly, when Jesus encounters Zacchaeus the tax collector, Zacchaeus immediately responds by paying back what he has stolen from others (Luke 19:8). The gospel not only reconciles us to God (Ephesians 2:1-10), but also restores our relationships with one another (Ephesians 2:11-22).

SIMEON AND LEVI

Strangely, these two brothers play a critical role in God’s plan. Although they arrange the blood-bath of the city of Shechem and are later cursed for their part in it (Genesis 49:5-7), Levi would ultimately become the father of the tribe of the priesthood of all of Israel (the Levites). Simeon is also the father of one of the major tribes of Israel.

JACOB

He is born a cheater (Genesis 25:26) and lives up to his name by deceiving his brother Esau for his father's blessing (Genesis 27:36). Despite Jacob's unsavory character, God's undeserved blessing and promise continue to rest upon him. When he wrestles with God, confessing his name as Jacob in Genesis 32:27, God renames him Israel. Even after he receives his new name, he is still called Jacob (Genesis 46:2,5) and manifests his old character in failing to rebuke his sons for the murder of the men of the city of Shechem (Genesis 34), and in his dotting on Joseph (Genesis 37:3). Indeed, both the old name Jacob and new name Israel are used, even in the same verse (Genesis 46:5). He is both a failure and a loved one at the same time. Generations later in the time of the prophet Hosea, rebellious Israel is called Jacob, indicted, and called to repentance (Hosea 12:2-6). For Paul, Jacob illustrates God's mercy and compassion (Romans 9:10-16).

Theological Considerations

GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS

God's character, and especially his persevering steadfast love, is continually shown to Jacob. He recognizes that "I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant" (Genesis 32:10). God's mercy, not Jacob's merit, is the basis of God's blessing. Even when Jacob waits too long at Shechem and reverts to the old Jacob, God renews his call to him to go to Bethel, and reaffirms his promises to him (Genesis 35:1, 9-12). God's steadfast love is not fickle or easily offended. It reflects who he is.

GOD'S PROTECTION

When God commanded Jacob to return to the land of his fathers, he promised, "I will be with you" (Genesis 31:3). As Jacob goes on his way, the angels of God meet him and he declares, "This is God's camp!" (Genesis 32:1-2). Jacob recognizes God's gracious protection and provision (Genesis 33:5,11). When Jacob is terrified of the Canaanites and Perizzites after the slaughter in the city of Shechem (Genesis 34:30), God sends forth "a terror from God" upon the cities that surround him as he moves forward in obedience. As Jacob moves forward in God's purposes, he experiences God's powerful protection. God is the ever-present protector of his people.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

Are there outstanding relationships of brokenness that need to be healed? Jesus instructed us, "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift [to God]" (Matthew 5:24). The gospel propels us into healed and reconciled relationships with one another—for "by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Repentance

A complete change of heart and mind regarding one's overall attitude toward God and one's individual actions. Rebellion is replaced by obedience, and pleasing oneself by pleasing God. True regeneration and conversion is always accompanied by repentance.

Please complete the assignments according to their chapters:

Genesis 32 Assignments

Be prepared to discuss the following:

In the opening scene of Genesis 32:1-8, Jacob is gripped with fear on his way to the Promised Land, in obedience to the word of God (Genesis 31:3). Yet as he faces the prospect of seeing his brother Esau again, fear grips Jacob's heart as he hears that his brother is approaching with four hundred men. However, Jacob brings this fear before God in prayer in Genesis 32:9-12. What characteristics and promises of God strengthen Jacob to cast his fears upon God?

Jacob not only wrestles with God in prayer but he also wrestles with the reality of repentance. Read Genesis 32:13-21. He sends a very lavish present to Esau in front of him—goats, ewes, rams, camels, cows, bulls, and donkeys. According to Genesis 32:20, the purpose of these gifts are to “appease him with the present” so that “he will accept me.” This language is often used of sacrifices before God. How do these gifts speak to repentance in Jacob's life?

In Genesis 32:22-32 we see a dramatic turning point in Jacob's life. He wrestles with a man, just as he has been wrestling with different situations up to this point. The turning point for Jacob, though, is the confession of his weakness. In Genesis 32:27, after wrestling with God, Jacob confesses that his name is “Jacob,” the cheater. In light of Genesis 27:36 (“Esau said, ‘Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing’”), what might be the significance of this confession? God gives Jacob a new name, Israel, meaning apparently “he strives with God.” What message was there for Jacob in this new name?

Jacob pled with God to bless him. Was this prayer answered? If so, how?

Please answer the following questions:

1. What happened as Jacob continued his journey? What did he name the place, and what does the name mean — 32:1,2?
2. To whom did Jacob send messengers, and what was the message — 32:3-5? Where did Esau live?
3. What news did the men bring in return? How did this affect Jacob, and what did he do — 32:6-8?
4. Summarize Jacob's prayer — 32:9-12. What was his request, and on what did he base it?
5. Describe his gift for Esau — 32:13-15. What was the purpose of the gift?
6. How were the gifts sent, and what did the messengers say — 32:16-21?
7. Where was Jacob at this time — 32:22?

8. What conflict did Jacob face that night? What injury did he receive — 32:24,25?

9. Where else is this event mentioned? What information does this add?

10. What request did Jacob make? What change was made in his name, and what is the significance — 32:26-28?

11. Explain the purpose of this event. In what sense had Jacob struggled with God and man?

12. What did Jacob name the place where this occurred? What does this mean?

13. How did Jacob's descendants memorialize this event — 32:32?

Genesis 33 Assignments

Be prepared to discuss the following:

Read Genesis 33:1-11. At first, it seems that Jacob is back to his old scheming, as he divides his family to prevent them from total slaughter (Genesis 33:1-2). Yet what evidences do we see that Jacob takes responsibility and actively pursues reconciliation in these verses?

Though Esau had been deeply wronged and formerly wanted to kill Jacob (Genesis 27:41), we see a remarkable change in him as he “ran to meet [Jacob] and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him” (Genesis 33:4). In Genesis 33:12-20, Esau offers to go with Jacob, or at least provide a bodyguard to be with him. Jacob refuses. God had promised him the land of Canaan and had promised to be his protection and bodyguard (Genesis 31:3), so he did not need the protection of Esau. Another reason Jacob may have refused to go with Esau was that he had vowed to return to Bethel (Genesis 28:20-22). God had told him to return to the land of his fathers and fulfill his vow (Genesis 31:3, 13). How does all this tie in to the original promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1 (reiterated in Genesis 13:15, 17; 15:7, 18; 17:8)?

Please answer the following questions:

1. In what order did Jacob’s family meet Esau — 33:1-3?
2. Describe the meeting of Jacob and Esau — 33:4. What conclusions can be reached and what lessons learned?
3. Based on what we have learned, discuss why this would have been such an emotional event.

4. How did Jacob describe his children, and how did his family act toward Esau — 33:5-7?
What can we learn?

5. What did Jacob say was the purpose of his gifts to Esau — 33:8-11?

6. What discussion followed about the gifts, and what was the end result — 33:9-11?

7. How did Esau suggest they proceed? How did Jacob respond, and why — 33:12-14?

8. What did Esau suggest next, and what was the result — 33:15,16?

9. Where did Jacob go next? What did he do there — 33:17?

10. What did he name this place?

11. Where did Jacob go next, and where is it located – 33:18?

12. What two things did he do there – 33:19,20?

Genesis 34 Assignments

Be prepared to discuss the following:

Look carefully at Jacob's response in Genesis 34:5-7, 30-31. Jacob tends toward passivity and cowardice, as in the past. Jacob also favored Rachel over Leah, and here he favors the children of Rachel over the children of Leah, as Dinah is the daughter of Leah. How would you describe Jacob's response here? Where is his focus?

Look at the response of the sons of Jacob to this tragedy. How do their actions reflect some of the characteristics of their father?

Please answer the following questions:

1. Where did Jacob's daughter go — 34:1?
2. Whom did she meet there, and what sin occurred — 34:2?
3. List other passages about sexual union between unmarried people.
4. Application: What can we learn about the problems of keeping children pure in an immoral society?

5. What did Shechem want to do afterward? Why — 34:3,4?

6. Contrast the reaction of Shechem's family to the reaction of Dinah's family — 34:5-7. What does this show about the morals of that society?

7. What proposition did Hamor present to Jacob and his sons — 34:8-11?

8. What request and proposal did Shechem make — 34:12?

9. What answer did Jacob's sons give — 34:13-17?

10. What troubling family trait showed itself in Jacob's sons' answer?

11. How did Hamor and Shechem present this proposed arrangement to the men of the land — 34:18-23?

12. How did their proposal to the men of the land differ from what they had proposed to Jacob's sons? What does this tell you?

13. What does 34:19 tell about Shechem? What does this in turn show about the other men?

14. What did the men of the land do — 34:24?

15. What did Jacob's two sons do to the men of the city? Which two did it — 34:24-26?

16. What did Jacobs' sons do then — 34:27-29?

17. What did Jacob say about this to his sons — 34:30?

18. How did they reply — 34:31?

19. What was later done to Simeon and Levi because of this (49:5-7)?

20. What was right or wrong about the sons' deed? What responsibility did Jacob bear in it?

Genesis 35 Assignments

Be prepared to discuss the following:

In spite of the disaster of Genesis 34, God does not give up on Jacob. God reaffirms his call to Jacob in Genesis 35:1. As Jacob responds to this call in Genesis 35:2-4, what must he and his family do before they arise and go up to Bethel? What is the significance of this?

How does God confirm his promise to Jacob in Genesis 35:9-15? How does this confirmation pick up on things God has said to Abraham and Isaac, as well as on God's original words to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28?

Please answer the following questions:

1. What instructions did God give — 35:1? What else had happened at Bethel?
2. What did Jacob tell his family — 35:2-4? What does this tell you?
3. How would God's instructions relate to recent events? What lessons can we learn about the impact society can have on our families?
4. How did the people of the land treat them — 35:5? Why?

5. Who died — 35:8? Where else have we read of her? Where was she buried? What does this show about the importance of servants?

6. What did God do at Bethel this time — 35:9-12? What does this show about Jacob's relationship to God?

7. What did Jacob do in response to God — 35:14,15?

8. Describe the birth of Jacob's last son. What was he named (define) — 35:16-19?

9. What happened to Rachel? Where did this occur — 35:19,20?

10. What sin did Reuben commit — 35:22? Should Reuben have known better?

11. What punishment did Reuben receive?

12. Summarize Jacob's wives and sons — 35:23-26.

13. Describe Isaac's death — 35:27-29.

14. What can we learn from the sins and evil we have seen in Jacob's family?