

JANUARY 15

Genesis 34 & 35

Welcome back to the January 15 installment of the Audio (or video) survey of Project 4:4. Once again, I just want to throw some credit where credit is due. John Soper did a tremendous amount of work in setting the foundations for this series in his "Know the Word" project. Thanks to him for all of the scholarship, vocabulary and content for this material!

Today, we read Genesis 34-35. That story recounted in Chapter 34 is another one of the low points in the book of Genesis. The entire Hivite community is deceived and destroyed for the immoral action of one man

There isn't any way to justify either the rape of Dinah or the much more reprehensible actions of Simeon and Levi. The story is sordid from first to last. In the midst of it all, however, there is this issue of religious intermarriage, which will always be a point of tension for the people of God. The attitude of Hamor the Hivite was "Let's encourage intermarriage - it's economic benefits to us are undeniable - over a period of time we will assimilate these Hebrews into our population and all that they have will become ours." That strategy will always have a negative spiritual, as well as economic, impact on God's people. May I be very blunt here? If you are not now married, you cannot - you must not - even toy with the idea of marrying an unbeliever. If you ignore this basic Biblical principle you will certainly create an alliance that will work against your spiritual development all the days of your life. Watch for the destructive power of religious intermarriage throughout the whole of project 4:4.

There are two more things to notice in these chapters before we leave them. The first is, of course, the awful vengeance exacted by the sons of Leah upon the men of Shechem and the deceitful way in which the act was perpetrated. The principle of revelation had not yet ascended to the place at which the principle of "loving your enemies" and "doing good to them that spitefully use you" was a part of their Scripture. The Old Testament principle of justice, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" rule, though not as yet articulated, would be a fairer measure by which to judge their actions. It (loving your enemies) is not a principle to which they could even come close to measuring up. For one man's act, they slaughtered a whole village. They did not even weigh the fact that marriage was offered and that some sort of repentance and restitution was put forward. Simeon and Levi just killed them all - using circumcision, the mark of God's covenant - as the means of disabling their enemies, and then showing that moral outrage was only a portion of their true motivation. They stole all the wealth and the women and children in a final outrage. In the end they intermarried anyway! By stealing the women and children, they insured that. May I ask a question? Where did Simeon and Levi learn to be so deceitful and mean? Answer - by watching Jacob and Laban. Parents - when you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind.

Notice as well that Jacob's reaction to his sons' rash and unjustified revenge is not all that we'd like it to be. Jacob is angry with them because they have spoiled his reputation and because they have endangered the safety and security of his household - this is all the Scripture tells us. There is no word here that he grieved for the evil perpetrated upon his daughter. There is no indication that Jacob is remorseful about the extermination of a whole town, there is no rebuke for the savagery of the act or for the greed of pillaging the community, nor is there any sense that he is concerned about the honor of God in all of this - just an overriding concern for the safety of his house, just like the old Jacob who always could be counted upon to look after old number 1 at the expense of anything and everything else.

Now here's the point. Jacob had a real life-changing experience at Peniel - we have God's word on that. But even after Peniel, he is more than capable of acting quite shabbily. He lies to Esau. His obedience to God is less than complete and when push comes to shove, personal peace and security is still Jacob's number one concern. Mark this - real crises experiences with God, conversion experiences, post-conversion crises of sanctification, are no final guarantee against sin in our lives and they do not instantly install us at a level of maturity and holiness in our Christian lives that puts us forever above the muck and mire of life. In fact, it is quite often true in Scripture that the "crisis spiritual triumphs" in a person's life are followed by the worst failures of faith and obedience. Maybe it's because pride goes before a fall. *"Let him who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall,"* the Bible warns. It may well be that after Peniel, Jacob thought that spiritually he had 'arrived'. HA! Student of the Word - beware. Don't fall into that same pit. Even though it is undoubtedly true that our walk with God is sometimes marked by our own 'Peniel' experience, times when in a crisis experience we take a great leap forward in our relationship with Christ, do not ever fall victim to the notion that you have somehow now 'arrived' - you haven't - and the greatest challenges to your new found life will often lie just ahead - watch out for them.

One last point remains to be made. Knowing now that he cannot stay in Shechem, Jacob finally returns to Bethel - to the place where he should have gone in the first place. God uses the terrible encounter at Shechem to get Jacob's attention again and to draw him finally to the place he ought to be. At the risk of over-spiritualizing the text, it seems significant that for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Bethel seems to function as their spiritual anchor. Whenever something went wrong in their lives, there was a strong urge to return to Bethel and to start over. That's not a bad principle to follow. When your spiritual life has been shattered, when sin has finally brought you down - turn your heart again to Bethel - to the place where you started your walk with God. Go back to square one. He'll be waiting to meet you there.

Note also that it was at Bethel that Benjamin, the last of Jacob's sons, is born. His birth was the occasion of Rachel's death. The "son of Jacob's right hand" was born in Bethlehem (or Bethel - Bethlehem was its later name) where many centuries later,

another "son of His Father's right hand" would enter the world. It all ties together...doesn't it?

This is Mark Ashton reminding you of the words of David in Psalm 119 "Your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight. They are my counselors." May it be so with us.