

Moving on: from Shechem to Bethel Genesis 34-35

The 3 Patriarchs represent 3 different journeys of faith. **The first generation**, Abraham travelled to an unknown land and lived by faith. He knew the Lord, and was **committed** to the Lord. **The second generation**, Isaac dwelt in the promised land. His knowledge of God relied on his father's faith and what God had done through Abraham rather than deep personal conviction. In living by what he sees an element of **compromise** creeps in. **The third generation**, Jacob did not know the Lord nor did he give any priority to God. While aware that God was blessing him because of his godly heritage, it is not until he returns to the land and has a special revelation that he makes that commitment to God. For much of his life **conflict** predominates. Similar generational patterns are seen in David, Solomon and Rehoboam, and in Joshua and succeeding judges. (Judges 2:7, 10) None of us can rest on what past generations of Christians have done and seen. We each need to have a personal encounter with the Lord and make a commitment to him. If we are relying on the experience of previous generations of Christians our lives will be one of compromise and conflict.

In returning from Paddan-Aram, Jacob has had 3 fearful encounters. The first (Ch 31) was with Laban, his controlling father-in-law who had pursued him, accused him and tried to manipulate the situation to his advantage. Eventually a memorial stone was raised to form a boundary between them, for Laban was committed to an idolatrous lifestyle while Jacob was responding to the call of God to move on. The second encounter (Ch 32) occurred the night before Jacob was to meet with his estranged brother, Esau. In Jacob's fight with a stranger, he sensed something special. When disabled by the man, Jacob pleaded with him for a blessing. This encounter resulted in his "conversion" signified in the change of name from Jacob (deceiver) to Israel (Struggle with God). The third encounter (Ch 33) was with Esau, his brother, who he had deceived many years before. Jacob was afraid that Esau would want revenge. But his encounter with God prepared him for reconciliation with Esau. These 3 encounters illustrate the stages of conversion. There needs to be a break with the past, a wrestling with God with eventual submission to his demands on us, and a facing up to an uncertain future.

After meeting Esau at Penuel east of the Jordan river, Jacob moves his family west across the Jordan river and settled near Shechem where Jacob bought land from the local people to set up camp. At this stage, he had a family of 11 boys, and a single daughter. Over the next 10 years, the family grew and, as children would do, they mixed with the local teenagers of the city of Shechem. But the values and behaviours of the locals were different to those Jacob was now teaching his family. And undoubtedly, some of his children were resenting the impositions of their father's standards on what they could do and not do.

Living near Shechem Ch 34

While the events of this chapter may seem strange to be included, we believe all scripture is profitable. Dinah is now a young teenager and has been spotted by Shechem, the local chief's son and sexually violated. However, this was not just a boyish fling. Shechem decided he wants Jacob's daughter as his wife. As custom was, his father turns up to negotiate a bride price with Jacob who seems uncertain as to how to proceed. But his sons have no uncertainty about what was right. They were furious and grief stricken (see Gen 6:6) for their sister and knew that it "should not be done". Hamor's proposal for general inter-marriage goes completely against God's intention for Israel. Furthermore, Shechem shows no remorse for what he did. His moral values are different and Dinah is but a pawn in negotiations for which a price must be paid. But Jacob's boys have inherited the deceitful nature of their father and while Jacob seems to have withdrawn from the negotiations, his sons suggest that the men of Shechem submit to their religious custom of circumcision. Shechem is keen for he is in love, but he takes time to convince the other men of the city to submit. He convinces them on the grounds that by intermarriage, they will gain all Jacob's wealth. But Simeon and Levi have other ideas. On the 3rd day when the men are most incapacitated, they slaughter them and plunder the city. Jacob is now fearful of the reaction of other Canaanites. He seems more concerned about the consequences of his son's actions than the rape of Dinah.

If you are new or visiting; *a special warm welcome to you.* We trust you enjoy your time with us.

Today we will be having communion. If it is your practice to participate in this we welcome you to join with us in celebrating the Lord's Supper. If this is not your custom or if you are unsure of what to do please just pass the emblems (bread and wine) to the person next to you.

Today

- Speaker Ross Pettigrew
- JCF 5.00pm

Friday Kids Club

- Kids Club for Year 3 - Year 7
Thursday 6:30pm - 7:30pm
Wray Street Youth Hall
For more information contact:-
Hamish Smith, (03) 4739547

Next Week

- **Sunday**

Crèche Roster

- June 29 Georgie Urquhart
Sam Symons

Prayer

Chris & Lee Hill, Japan, have now been in Japan for 8 months and are grateful and happy that they have settled in well and can now call Japa home. Praise the Lord for a part time job for Lee teaching for 10 hours a week and only 5 minutes walk from home. Bible courses are being run and it is the first time for many to do in depth bible study. Please pray for this ministry and that the church family will take the opportunities to grow in the understanding of God through His word.

Delwyn Houghton, Zambia, request prayer for her Work Permit Extension application, which has been submitted to the Immigration Department for consideration. Work Permits for non Zambians working in Zambia are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. Delwyn's current permit expires early August 2008.

Living near Shechem will always produce conflict and compromise. We have to live in the world but we must recognise that we are not of this world. Perhaps Jacob thought that he could demonstrate the love and grace of God to these Canaanites but ultimately the only message they would see was one of judgement. They will not accept God's values or demands and there will never be agreement between God's people and the world. When it comes to the test, we are strangers and aliens in their world (1 Pet 2:11). We are citizens of another country (Phil 3:20). Conflict is inevitable. In living by God's standards we are an aroma of death to those who are perishing (2 Cor 2:15-16). Compromise will always dilute our faith, not bring outsiders to faith.

Moving back to Bethel Ch 35

Bethel (House of God) has particular significance for the patriarchs. Abraham first built his altar there when he arrived in the Promised Land (12:8). It was where Jacob had his first encounter with God when fleeing from Esau (28:19). When God told Jacob to return to Canaan, he called himself "the God of Bethel" (31:13). It appears that while Jacob has been living at Shechem he had avoided going back to Bethel. But now God tells him to move to Bethel, a move that he knows is going to need personal purification. So he buries the family idols under the tree at Shechem before he leaves. When he settles at Bethel, God confirms the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac, reminding him that his name has been changed to Israel. But not everything goes smoothly. His mother's nurse, Deborah, dies. Then his beloved Rachel dies after giving birth to Benjamin. His oldest son disgraces him and his father Isaac dies. He might ask does God really care about him? Will he really fulfil his covenant? Why do all these bad things happen if God is really in control? Jacob will learn that God's eternal perspective is greater than ours. We are born with a self centred view and a tiny allotted time span on earth. He will need to learn that even in our greatest grief, God is working out in human history his greater plan of redemption.

Where is your "Bethel"? – that place where you first encountered God or first made a commitment to follow Christ. Have you wandered from the place of God's will for your life and need to come back there again? As time goes on, our commitment may wane, our joy diminish and our memory grow dim as we venture into life but God wants to draw us back to that place of our first love. Perhaps we may have become too close to the world around. We need to break the ties that have developed and bury the idols so we can get back into our relationship with the Lord. It will not be easy. There will be circumstances that make us feel that God does not care, but ultimately, he will be glorified in our tiny contribution in his great plan of redemption.

Lessons for today

1. Can I identify the break with the past, the struggle with the present and the concern of my future associated with Jacob's return to the promised land? Do any of these aspects of God's call still affect me today in my Christian walk?
2. Where am I in my spiritual journey today? Paddan Aram? (knowing God's blessing but not committed) Shechem? (Made a commitment but living close to the world) Bethel? (Purified and knowing the perfect will of God)
3. Are there any idols I need to bury in order to purify myself so that I may move on to the place where God wants me to be?
4. Which Patriarch's experience best represents my spiritual journey?

NOTICES

- **Urgent request for people to volunteer for the crèche roster. We have had people asking to be taken off the roster but no one to take their place. If you can assist please contact Vicki Halford 488 1820.**
- Fliers, on notice board and front table promoting C.S. Lewis series Chronicles of Narnia 'Prince Caspian' being shown at Dunedin theatres now.
- The next Promise Keepers Conference is coming up 25 - 26 July 2008 at the Elim Centre, Dunedin. See notice board and front tables for registration forms.
- Brochures promoting summer camps from Mission Without Borders, see notice board.
- Bible League of New Zealand request for funding to supply bibles to persecuted Christians, see notice board.
- See poster, fliers and notelets promoting 'Holiday Swap' for Christians on the notice board.

Small Groups

Tuesday

- Ladies Home Group - see Laura Hannah 473-7954
- Central Home Group - see Steve Clark 479-2070
- Brockville Home Group - see Geoffrey Stewart 476-7888
- Town Home Groups - see Dave Smeaton 477-2110

Thursday

- JCF Home Group - see Gideon Chang 488-2118

Friday

- Friday morning Home Group - see Bethney Stewart 476-7888

Prayer Groups

Thursday

- All Saints main church building from 5:15pm

Sunday

- All Saints Hall from 8:30am