

# On the Beginning

## 33. Jacob's Detour

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 33-34

The long-dreaded day had come. Jacob was to meet his brother Esau! The night before, Jacob had experienced a life-changing encounter with God, and even his name had been changed (to "Israel") as a result (See Genesis 32:28). Genesis 33 begins with Jacob seeing Esau coming with some four hundred men. Jacob had prepared in various ways to meet his brother safely and hopefully *"to find grace in the sight of my lord"* (Esau-vs. 1-16). Remember that his brother had threatened to kill Jacob (Genesis 27:41), but thankfully their meeting was peaceful. Actually, they were reconciled! This was the blessing Jacob had wrestled to get (Genesis 32:24-26). God came through for him, and his brother's heart was turned to him! It's wonderful what getting right with God can change in your life. However, even after becoming a prince with God (Israel), Jacob was about to make a serious mistake. Remember that his journey was to be back to Bethel (Genesis 28:20-22, 31:13). Here he had an appointment with God (Look at Genesis 35). However, Jacob was deterred from that destination (for some reason) after he met with Esau. Look at the record.

*"And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padanaram; and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money. And he erected there an altar, and called it Elelohe-Israel." (Genesis 33:17-20)*

### 1. Off The **Track**.

Here we see Jacob taking a detour from God's plan for his life. That plan is described in Hebrews 11 this way:

*"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11:8-10)*

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to be sojourners, moving about in Canaan, but never settling permanently anywhere. Their home was Heaven. But in Genesis 33, we find Jacob building a house and setting up booths (tents, tabernacles) for his animals (v. 17)! Then he *"came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan"* (v. 18). Chapter 34 tells us of a man in that city who was named Shechem, and so Shalem may have been the old name for the city and Shechem the name it had when Moses wrote Genesis, given in honor of this Shechem. Here Jacob bought land, and he also built the

altar El-elohe-Israel (“God the God of Israel”).

Jacob for a time (some years) quit sojourning. He stopped on his trip to Bethel! When a believer quits walking by faith (See Hebrews 11: 13-16 and I Peter 2: 11-12), he and his whole family is going to get into trouble!

2. **Big Trouble.**

Chapter 34 tells the sad story of Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. She wanted to get acquainted with the heathen girls her age who lived in the city nearby. She came to know “*Shechem the son of Hamar, prince of the country*” (v. 2) who seduced her into sexual sin. Soon he and his father tried to get Jacob’s permission for he and Dinah to be married, not understanding how angry his defilement of their sister had made Jacob’s sons. There is a connection between getting off track and getting into trouble, especially in regard to one’s family! The safe and healthy way to live and bring up kids is to live by faith and stay in the will of God.

3. **Bad Actions.**

Chapter 34 also records what the sons of Jacob (especially Simeon and Levi) did to “get even” with the city for the defilement of their sister. Basically they went on a murderous rampage and “*spoiled the city.*” Both Shechem and his father were killed, and great looting of the city took place. Although the sons of Jacob felt justified in their actions (v. 31), their father soundly rebuked them.

*“And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.” (v. 30)*

Later, Jacob pronounced a curse on their posterity, because of their actions at this city (Genesis 49:5-7). What they did wasn’t right. Believers may feel outrage over the actions of unbelievers but their response should not be vengeance. Moral outrage is understandable, but our interest should be primarily in evangelism. Jacob’s altar and his worship of the true God should have given his family the opportunity to witness to the heathen. However, the decline in his faith and the compromise of his family moved his sons away from witnessing to outrage and revenge. Really, the unsaved in our world often don’t “know any better” than to be immoral. The compromising of the believers may have had more to do with what happened than the low morals of the heathen. Anger is often the reaction of compromised believers to the rest of the world. Those in the will of God should instead display holiness and evangelistic zeal!

