

August 4- Genesis 34-36 Jacob returns to Bethel, Rachel dies

### Chapter 34

This disturbing story describes the first of many violent clashes between the children of Israel and the residents of Canaan. Dinah, Jacob's only daughter, is raped by Prince Shechem of Shechem, who then falls in love with his victim and demands that he be allowed to marry her. He'll pay anything for a bride price just as long as he's allowed to marry his victim. Perhaps this was a custom in this region of Canaan, but it most certainly was not customary among the children of Israel. Israel's family's honor has been shamed by this occurrence, for the leaders of the family were responsible for maintaining the sexual purity and security of all the women of the family in this patriarchal society. Jacob tries to make the best of a bad situation and make peace by setting the bride price as high as possible -all of the men of Shechem must be circumcised in order for them to be deemed worthy of joining with Israel's children of the covenant. Shechem thinks this will not only benefit them by providing wives for them, but also by allowing them access to Israel's many animals for them to profit from. The men of Shechem are all for this plan and only see the benefits. However, circumcision is a painful affair, especially in adulthood. Three days after the whole town was circumcised, Simeon and Levi take it upon themselves to avenge their sister's honor and to break the agreement of peace Israel had made with Shechem. They slaughter all the men of the town while they are still recovering from their circumcision, and then take the women, children, and animals of the city with them as spoils of war. This is an excessive response and seems to be in serving the sons of Israel's self-interests rather than in the best interests of their sister. Israel feared reprisal from other neighboring peoples, and so they fled to Bethel.

### Chapter 35

At Bethel, the whole company is urged to put away false gods and to worship the one true God, the God who had been present with Jacob/Israel all throughout his life. They worship and recommit to the promises of God. Meanwhile, Rachel has a difficult childbirth with her last son. She names him Ben-oni to describe her suffering in labor, which Israel changes to Benjamin. Rachel dies in childbirth and is buried. Reuben sleeps with his father's concubine (a heinous offense, which downgrades his blessing from his father in chapter 49). And both Jacob and Esau return to Mamre to bury their father, Isaac. Twenty years earlier Isaac's eyes had grown dim and he felt that he might die soon, but he held on til he reached 180 years. Both sons, having reconciled with their father and one another join together to bury him as was the custom, just as both Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury Abraham.

## Chapter 36

This section concludes with the genealogy of Esau, the founder of the nation of Edom (to the South East of Canaan). This list of his descendants is part of the promise to Abraham to make his descendants as numerous as the sands.