

June 4, 2017 - Gen. 33:18 – 35:8 - Dinah and the Shechemites, Jacob Returns to Bethel

Torah Readings: Gen. 33:18 – 35:8 - Dinah and the Shechemites, Jacob Returns to Bethel

Psalm 28

Haftorah - (1) Nahum 1:12 – 2:6 + 14

Genesis 33:18 - “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.”

Shalem means “wholeness.” The Targum of Onkelos has it to mean “in peace.” Rashi sees in it an allusion to the cure of Jacob’s lameness. In essence, Jacob’s wrestling and resulting lameness was what brought him into peace and wholeness, spiritually.

This is also where John the Baptist baptized. **John 3:23** - “And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.”

Genesis 33:20 - “And he erected there an altar (or pillar), and called it Elelohe-Israel.”

or "he called upon God, the God of Israel", as the Septuagint has it.

El-elohe-Israel means “God, the God of Israel,” or “Israel’s God is El” using his new name.

What’s the difference between a pillar and an altar?

Jacob gave the picture of an expanding revelation:

“The stone which I have set up as a pillar shall be a house of God.” (**Genesis 28:22**)

[And indeed Jacob returned to Bethel when God commands him to build an altar there (**Genesis 35:1-4**) and they all put away idolatry.]

A single stone (a work of God, not man) served as a place for all humankind to pour out oil and wine libations of thanksgiving to the High God who had receded from their knowledge.

An altar, made from many stones put together by man, was for the dedication of sacrifices and offerings representing the dedication of one’s very life itself to God’s service.

Once the Torah was given, and the Tabernacle was designated as God’s “house,” pillars were forbidden.

Deuteronomy 16:22 - “Thou shalt not raise up for thee a pillar, which the Lord thy God hateth.”

Once the Temple in Jerusalem had been established as God’s dwelling place, worship in the high places like Bethel were no longer needed, and were also forbidden.

The Talmud (Pesahim 88a) comments on **Isaiah 2:3** - “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. Not like Abraham, who called it a mountain (**Genesis 22:14**), and not like Isaac, who called it a field (**Genesis 24:63**), but like Jacob, who called it a house.”

Similarly, our inner idolatry and ways of worship were needed to survive, to get us to the place where we could enter into God’s “house.” Now in the light of truth, the false gods and their worship are forbidden to us.

The Rape of Dinah

A rape leads to “true love,” which leads to a reconciliation, which leads to a slaughter. What’s going on here?

Genesis 34:1-2 - “And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.”

Aben Ezra's note is, that she went of herself, that is, without the leave of either of her parents: according to other Jewish writers (Pirke Eliezer, c. 38. fol. 42. 2.) there was a snare laid for her by Shechem, who observing that Jacob's daughter dwelt in tents, and did not go abroad, he brought damsels out of the city dancing and playing on timbrels

The child begotten in this act of fornication is said (Pirke Eliezer, ut supra. [c. 33. fol. 42. 2.]) by them to be Asenath, who was had into Egypt, and brought up by Potipherah's wife as her daughter, and afterwards married to Joseph, Genesis 41:45.

Shechem’s father, Hamor, makes a proposal:

Genesis 34:9 - “make you marriages with us, and give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to you.”

Abraham's servant was charged by him not to take a wife of the Canaanites to his son Isaac; and the same charge was given Jacob by Isaac, **Genesis 24:3**; and therefore Jacob would never agree that his children should marry any of that nation; and marriages with them were afterwards forbidden by the law of Moses, **Deuteronomy 7:3**.

But Jacob is outnumbered and surrounded by Canaanites, and again in a dangerous situation, with his daughter in their possession.

Jacob, the former trickster, remains silent, as his sons negotiate. Rambam maintains that Jacob was convinced the Shechemites would not agree to the circumcision proposal, and Dinah would be returned to him. His sons were in agreement, except for Simeon and Levi, the two brothers of Dinah by Leah (**Genesis 34:25**). They were secretly bent on revenge.

Once the Shechemites agree, though, Jacob still has some hope. As circumcised, they “might perhaps have repented and returned to God,” according to Rambam.

In convincing the Shechemites to go along with the plan, Hamor and Shechem reveal their own hidden agenda: “Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours?” (**Genesis 34:23**) Thus the whole city joins in on the plan.

Simeon and Levi slaughter the whole city. Why?

The apocryphal “Testament of the Patriarchs” justifies the anger of Dinah's brothers by saying that an angel instructed Levi to take revenge on Shechem for the rape of Dinah. Some rabbinical midrashim condemn Dinah, saying she did not want to leave Shechem. Dinah’s side of the story is not presented in Scripture.

According to a Mishnah passage, the slaughter was justified because the verse (**Genesis 34:27**) could be translated “They sacked the city which had defiled their sister.” i.e. the whole city conspired together.

But this was not justification enough for Jacob. He always is trying to protect the lineage of Messiah, and they had endangered it.

Genesis 34:30 - “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.”

Later, at the blessing of his sons as he is dying, Jacob has not forgotten.

Genesis 49:5-7 - “Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.”

Jacob does not want their infamous deed to be linked to his own counsel, and disclaims responsibility for their conspiracy.

Return to Bethel

Genesis 35:1-2 - “And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the

face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:

An altar is a step up from a pillar - indicating sacrifice and dedication your life to God. This was a step toward what was said in Genesis 28: "The stone which I have set up as a pillar shall be a house of God." (**Genesis 28:22**) Before building the altar, idolatry had to be put away.

Don't Settle for 'Almost' Obedience

The angel had originally told Jacob to "return unto the land of thy kindred." (Genesis 31:13) which is interpreted as "to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan" in Genesis 31:18.

By settling near Shechem, Jacob didn't quite complete this command. Maybe this is why this disaster befell him there.

Later Jacob will experience more troubles - the death of Rachel, and Reuben's sex with his concubine Bilhah.

Jacob finally sees Isaac in Genesis 35:27, just before Isaac's death.

Do we like to settle in our spiritual journey for what seems like good pasture and "almost" obedience? This should be a warning.