

LECTURE X

The death of Sarah – Genesis 23

Isaac and Rebekah – Genesis 24

Jacob and Esau – Genesis 26f

The story of Esau and Jacob.

A NT perspective.

Genesis and Romans 9

SCRIPTURE READING: Romans 9

TITLE: God's sovereignty illustrated in his dealings with Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau.

INTRODUCTION.

In chapter 9 of Romans, Paul deals the place of the Jews in God's plan of salvation, although, strictly speaking Israel is not the main topic, the main topic is the faithfulness of God.

Romans 9:6-7 is Paul's response to the charge that God cannot be trusted because so many Israelites, his "kinsmen according to the flesh" (9:3) rejected the gospel.

By the time Paul wrote Romans the church was composed mainly of Gentiles, there were very few Jews, although the Church at first was composed mainly of Jews [see the development in Acts].

This fact was not just a matter of personal sorrow for Paul, who did all he could to take the gospel to his own people, but it created an acute theological problem.

If Israel was God's covenant people, to whom so many glorious privileges had been given (Romans 9:4-5), why were so few Israelites saved?

Why are so many of them "accursed, separated from Christ?" Has God's word failed?

Had God's covenant promise and eternal purpose come to nothing?

Had the rejection of Jesus Christ by the majority of Israelites thwarted God's purpose?

Had the trustworthiness and finality of God's word been undermined by the unbelief of so many Jews?

If God could not be trusted to fulfill his covenant promise to OT Israel, how could he be trusted to fulfill any of his promises to the NT Church?

What was Paul's response to all this?

God's is faithfulness and his purposes had not been frustrated.

Yes, if God's word of promise and covenant was that *all ethnic* Israelites, i.e., all those who are physically descended from Israel, would be saved, then clearly his purpose failed and his word was void.

But Paul denies that God ever intended to save all ethnic Israelites.

His purpose has always been to save a remnant within, but not the entirety of, ethnic Israel.

This is the force of his declaration that "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (9:6).

There was an *Israel* within Israel.

There was a *spiritually elect* remnant within the physical nation.

Paul proved his thesis in Romans 9:6-13 by appealing to the family of Abraham [7-9] and the family of Isaac [10-13].

John Murray sums up: "The purpose of this distinction is to show that the covenantal promise of God did not have respect to Israel after the flesh but to this *true* Israel and that, therefore, the unbelief and rejection of ethnic Israel as a whole in no way interfered with the fulfillment of God's covenant purpose and promise. The word of God, therefore, has not been violated"

Simply put: ***Not every person who is a physically ethnic Israelite is a spiritually elect Israelite.***

You can see this so clearly in the genealogies – where we see the genealogy of our Lord set out – there you see the spiritual seed identified.

Doug Moo summarizes this way: "If the OT teaches that belonging to physical Israel in itself makes a person a member of God's true spiritual people, then Paul's gospel is in jeopardy. For were this the case, the gospel, proclaiming that only those who believe in Jesus Christ can be saved (cf. 3:20-26), would contradict the OT and be cut off from its

indispensable historical roots. Paul therefore argues in [Romans 9] vv. 6b-29 that belonging to God's true spiritual people has always been based on God's gracious and sovereign call and not on ethnic identity. Therefore, God is free to 'narrow' the apparent boundaries of election by choosing only some Jews to be saved (vv. 6-13; 27-29). He is also free to 'expand' the dimensions of his people by choosing Gentiles (vv. 24-26)"

The fact is that the initial promise in Genesis 12 did not mean that all the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be saved or inherit the blessings, such as the land.

We must remember, says Paul (with added paraphrase), that “not all who are descended from Israel [i.e., the physical seed] belong to Israel [i.e., the spiritual seed], and not all are children of Abraham [which is to say, heirs of the promise] because they are his [physical or ethnic] offspring” (9:6b-7).

We can put it like this, because of the work of Christ the meaning of “Israel” becomes focuses on Jesus Christ [the SEED] an through him it is expanded to all who come of faith in him, which is not determined by physical birth but spiritual birth – John 1:12 and chapter 3.

No longer does it refer simply to the physical descendants of Abraham who believe in the Messiah.

Certainly it included them.

The question: Why did God only choose some of Israel?

Using the examples of **Ishmael and Isaac**, and **Esau and Jacob**, Paul states an important truth: God's choice was not based on anything good in those chosen, it was based on his **Sovereign choice, [call it Election]**.

The initiative and the prerogative lay with God – his freedom to do whatever he pleased. Why?

God brings his purposes to pass and carries his purposes out by means of a process of election for one reason only – because it is the only way that guarantees that his purposes will be carried out.

If it depended on man's co-operation, then God's whole plan of redemption would have failed – not one person would ever be saved.

The fact is, as Paul states in chapter 3,

(Rom 3:10) as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;

(Rom 3:11) no one understands; no one seeks for God.

(Rom 3:12) All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Let us consider Esau and Jacob.

In verses 7-13 Paul explains this point by using examples – **read 7-9.**

⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."ⁿ ⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."ⁿ

- Take the case of Isaac and Ishmael, both physical sons of Abraham.

So far as natural descent is concerned, there was no difference at all between the two sons of Abraham – Isaac and Ishmael.

And yet, Isaac was the child of promise.

Abraham was unhappy about this for it seems that Ishmael was a favourite of Abraham.

But it was not Abraham's choice.

V10-13 Paul continues to prove his point.

RO 9:10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac.

¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad--in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls--she was told, "The older will serve the younger."ⁿ ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."ⁿ

Why does he add this?

Simply because someone could argue that of course, Ishmael was not a true son of Abraham for he was the son of Abraham and Hagar, who was not even an Israelite, but a slave.

Therefore it is correct that she should be set aside and that her son should not be the child of promise – it was quite understandable and logical.

But Paul takes the example of Esau and Jacob, who were not only brothers but also twins, they were the sons of the sons of Isaac and Rebekah, yet the same principle applied.

If you remember your O.T. you will realize that Esau became the father of the Edomites, who were enemies of Israel and Jacob the child of promise, the inheritor of the covenant blessings.

So physical birth had nothing to do with God's promise at all.

So the question is: Why did God choose Isaac and not Ishmael, why Jacob and not Esau?

Was it because Isaac was a better man than Ishmael, or because Jacob was a better man than Esau? No, not at all.

The choice of Isaac over Ishmael was God's choice alone.

Isaac all along was the child of promise.

He is the one through whom God would fulfil his promises.

He was the chosen seed.

He was the one Abraham and Sarah were waiting for – 25 years in all.

As you read the story you see how Isaac was in many ways a miracle conception – Sarah was well past child-bearing age.

It was God who performed a miracle in her so that Isaac was born.

Of course all along, as Paul shows in Galatians, it was to show that salvation is of God alone.

You see if salvation needed man's co-operation, then Ishmael should have been the son of promise – you remember the story.

God was showing clearly that salvation would come only through his work alone.

So then what about Jacob?

Why did God favour Jacob over Esau?

Why did he receive the blessing?

Why was it that he was the one whose descendants became the line of promise and the people of God?

In other words, why did God choose Jacob and not Esau?

Now some people argue that because God knows all things, he can see into the future, and he saw that Ishmael was going to be the kind of man he became and that Isaac was going to be a good and godly man.

They use Romans 8:29 for support,

(Rom 8:29) For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

(Rom 8:30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

And similarly, he could see that Esau would despise his birth-right, so God choose Jacob over him.

But this is an untenable explanation for the word '*foreknowledge*' never means to just know before-hand.

Let's see how this word is used in the Bible.

In Acts 2:23, foreknowledge is linked with the will of God.

AC 2:22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,ⁿ put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Was Peter saying that Christ's crucifixion was the result of God knowing before-hand what the Jews, the Romans, Judas and Pilate would do?

Well that would be not only nonsense but would remove the centrality of our Lord's crucifixion from the plan of salvation.

The Scriptures clearly state that it was God's plan all along that he would send his Son into the world to save us through his death on the cross. [He was the Lamb slain from before the creation of the world].

What Peter is saying is that Christ died on the cross because God had planned his death from eternity.

It was God who planned it. We see the same idea in Acts 4.

Although the word '*foreknowledge*' is not used it is the same idea.

AC 4:27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the peopleⁿ of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

So '*foreknowledge*' means to foreordain.

There are other occurrences of the word where the meaning is the same.

But the word goes further – it means to know in a special way – in an intimate way.

It means to set his love upon us.

Now let me just say that there are some theologians, because they are so committed to maintaining man's freewill, even argue that God does not even know all things and he takes risks by giving humans wide-ranging freedom – called 'Open Theism'.

They thus deny God's Sovereignty, his omniscience and his omnipotence – God becomes just a more intelligent human being.

Now coming back to Esau and Jacob – to maintain that God chose Jacob because he foresaw that he would respond to God, is directly contradicts what Paul is saying here and is certainly contradicted by what we know of both these brothers.

- ❑ Consider – Jacob was not the natural choice – he was the younger.
- ❑ Neither was he the obvious choice – he was not what we could call a natural leader.

(Gen 25:27) When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.

Esau was the outdoor type – the macho man – hunting, the favourite of Isaac.

On the other hand, Jacob was the indoor type [stayed at the tent], and instead of hunting, loved to cook and the favourite of his mother, Rebekah.

Who would you rather follow?

- What is more, from a human point of view, Jacob was not really a pleasant person – look at the incident about how he obtained Esau's birthright [Genesis 25:28-34].

The birthright included the covenant blessings.

Now Esau's attitude to his birthright is condemned in Hebrews (Heb 12:16) No one should be immoral or godless like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

Having said this, the question surely is why not just give Esau the food?

You would think that is something one would do out the goodness of one's heart.

No, he has to get something out of it.

No wonder he had the name Jacob = deceiver.

He was born a liar, conniver – a schemer – always on the look-out to get the advantage.

But to make things worse, you will remember how he and his mother schemed to deceive his father, Isaac to obtain his blessing, which would ratify the covenant blessings [chapter 27].

Nothing can be clearer than that God was showing that his blessings had nothing to do with human merit.

Surely it tells us something else about God's great plan of salvation, namely that God does not choose people on merit.

That is the point Paul is stressing.

You see Paul makes it quite clear that God told Rebekah that Esau would serve Jacob not only **before** they were born, but **before** they had done anything good or bad, in other words, it had nothing to do with their actions at all.

No – for notice,
 (Rom 9:11) though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--
 in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but
 because of him who calls--
 (Rom 9:12) she was told, "The older will serve the younger."
 (Rom 9:13) As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

It has nothing to do with human merit but with God's grace.

Genesis shows clearly that the chosen line was not perfect, did not deserve God's blessings.

Noah stumbled.
 Abraham failed numbers of times.
 Isaac and Rebecca were not ideal parents.

Their behaviour is reprehensible on all sides, yet from this God moves on his great plan to salvation.

It stresses the grace of God – God works with imperfect people.

To make this statement even worse notice **verse 13**.

¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."ⁿ

Jacob have I loved = must not be taken in an absolute sense – illustration, Luke 14:26 [hating father etc.]

Hate means to love less, to treat with less favour.

That is the explanation of why it was Esau would serve Jacob though he was actually born before – it was because God favoured Jacob above Esau.

We see this in the subsequent history of the Edomites.

This was distinction drawn by God himself.

Why did God act in the way he did toward J and E?

Was he just haphazard in this?

Did he just do it out of whim?

He did it, Paul asserts, because it was part of his great purpose and plan, which is always carried out by means of the principle of election or sovereign choice.

Paul states that God works out his purpose through this method because it is the only way whereby this process and purpose can be made certain and sure 'that the purpose of God according to election might stand', that it will be carried out – that it will not be thwarted or frustrated.

If God's purposes depended on the faithfulness of any person, then it would certainly fail just like it failed in Adam.

God brings his purposes to pass and carries his purposes out by means of this process of election for one reason only – because it is the only way that guarantees that his purposes will be carried out.

So, Paul's point is that God remained faithful – he fulfilled his promise to Abraham, he never went against his covenant promises.

He has always worked in this way.

His purpose was always to bring in the Gentiles.

Now, the question I want to ask you: What is your natural reaction to what Paul states about God favouring one over the other? Unfair.

Whatever Paul has been saying in verses 6-13 about God's purposes and the way he carries it out must on the surface seem unfair – from a human standpoint.

Paul anticipates someone accusing God of unrighteousness and injustice – 'Not fair!'.

Notice what Paul writes in verses **14-18** that tells me that the interpretation I have suggested is correct for it is the only interpretation that leads to this objection, which Paul quite clearly anticipated.

RO 9:14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,

and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."ⁿ

RO 9:16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."ⁿ ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

If faith or goodness foreseen causes God to elect someone this objection would never have been raised would it?

Paul dismisses the idea of righteousness and justice he speaks of mercy and compassion – why?

Well you see, if God were righteous and just in his dealings with us – what should he do?

If God were righteous, then what – we would all be damned.

But the fact that God shows mercy and compassion then can be complain?

We are not dealing with a matter of justice, we are dealing here with a matter of compassion and mercy.

Let me put it like this – if God condemned everyone in the human race- would he be just – would he be fair?

Yes, of course, we deserve it.

So because he has chosen to save some, is he being unfair?

God is not fair – thank God - he is merciful.

In any case, for God to show mercy to some cannot be unrighteous because God himself has said he does so verse 11.

That is sufficient in and of itself.

What decides whether a man is saved or not is not dependent upon his will or desire, but on God who shows mercy – i.e., not a matter of human merit or works, but of God's sovereign purpose.

Pharaoh – God put him in his place in order to carry out his purpose.

It was not that God created him for this purpose.

Hardening – both – he hardened himself and God also hardened him – compatible.

The point Paul is making is that God planned that Pharaoh would be there at that particular point in time in order that through him and by means of him he might make known his might and his name.

God does not create evil or put it there – it is there already, he uses that evil to carry out his purpose.

Notice now what Paul states in verse 18 – almost like a summary – a statement of principle

⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Let me remind of the context.

Remember that Moses had asked to see God's glory.

In response God proclaimed to him his name.

EX 33:19 And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

What God was saying to Moses was that it is his glory to have mercy on whom he will have mercy and show compassion on whom he will have compassion.

In other words, his glory consists in the exercise of his sovereignty – his freedom to do what he pleases without any constraints.

If you think about it you will realize again that that is what you would expect of God.

Would we want to insist on our freewill against God's freedom?

Verses 19 another objection.

[Again we have the natural reaction to what Paul has stated].

RO 9:19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

How can God hold us responsible?

That is a logical objection is it not?

- How does Paul deal with this objection?

Notice that he does not explain and rationalise what he has stated, or try and water it down – he does not answer the objection at all.

Quote verse 20-24

²⁰ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

RO 9:22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory-- ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Why? Simply because his starting point is God.

To understand election, we must begin with God and not with ourselves.

Our problem is that we constantly see things from our perspective, our point of view – as if God owes us an explanation – as if God is there for our glory – as if the world was created for us – as if God exists for us – as if the world revolves around us.

The Bible makes it quite clear that everything exists for God's glory –
 (Eph 1:5) having predestined us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the good pleasure of His will,**
(Eph 1:6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, in which He has made us accepted in the *One* having been loved.
 (Eph 1:7) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace,
 (Eph 1:8) which He caused to abound toward us in all wisdom and understanding;
 (Eph 1:9) having made known to us the mystery of His will, **according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,**

So Paul reminds us of who God is and who we are, that is the only context in which we can view this matter of election – the absolute sovereignty of God – God is not answerable to us – he has freedom to do as he pleases, he does not have to consult us

He puts a hypothetical case – 'What if...'
 That is the picture we have of God.

Look at **Job** – God shows him that he does not have to explain anything to Job.

Job has to bow before this mighty God, all powerful and glorious God and say. I am a fool. I shall keep silent.

And we – what are we?

Clay - all humanity lost and under condemnation and he has the right to do as he pleases with the clay.

This means that if we are saved, it is because God in grace has elected us.

We know that we would not have ourselves sought God; we would not have turned to him.

There is only one reason why we are Christians it is because God in mercy choose us before the foundation of the world, and then he called us, and he gave us the ability to respond to that call, he opened our eyes, he gave us spiritual life, he enabled us to believe, he then justified us and he is sanctifying us through the working of the Holy Spirit in us and one day, he will complete that work when he takes us to be with him.

It is all of God – that is my only comfort as a believer and my only confidence as a preacher

How do correlate God's sovereignty and man's responsibility – we do not know, but both are clearly taught in the Bible – the Bible finds no logical difficulty in speaking on the one hand about God's absolute sovereignty and man's responsibility – it is a mystery.

Reconciling **God's sovereignty** and **man's responsibility** is one of the most profound theological challenges in philosophy and Christian theology. It touches on God's control over all things and human free will and moral accountability. Many thinkers across traditions have wrestled with this tension, and different frameworks have been proposed to reconcile them. Here's a clear overview:

Understanding the Tension

- **God's Sovereignty:** God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and in control of everything that happens (e.g., Isaiah 46:10, Ephesians 1:11).
- **Man's Responsibility:** Humans are morally responsible for their actions, called to obey God, and held accountable for sin (e.g., Deuteronomy 30:19, Romans 2:6).

If God ordains everything, including human actions, how can humans be truly free or accountable?

Compatibilism (Often Reformed/Calvinist)

- **View:** God's sovereignty and human responsibility are *compatible*. Humans make real choices according to their desires, but God ordains those choices in a way that doesn't override human agency.
- **Key Thinker:** Jonathan Edwards, R.C. Sproul
- **Illustration:** Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (their evil intent), but God used it for good (Genesis 50:20).

Let me say that election is not a doctrine intended for speculation; it is intended to comfort the believer.

As a believer election focuses on God's amazing grace in my life – it explains why I am a Christian.

So I can say that if I am a Christian it is because God has elected me.

There is no doctrine that so humbles the believer – that there was nothing in me that merited salvation – it was all of God.

There is no doctrine that so exalts God – all the glory belongs to him alone.

There is no doctrine that gives us greater confidence in the face of suffering and our failures.

As believers we can with confidence look into the future and know that no matter what happens, nothing will stop God's purposes in us.

Not my weaknesses, not my failures, not sickness, or anything.

For he chose me before the creation of the world, he called me, he saved me and he has promised and is (Jud 1:24) able to keep you without stumbling, and to set you before His glory without blemish, with unspeakable joy;

There is no doctrine that so motivates me to live a holy life – for I know that he chose me to become like Jesus Christ his Son, he chose us to be

blameless; i.e., not a matter of human merit or works, but of God's sovereign purpose.

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He puts a hypothetical case – ‘What if...’

It has to do with the glory of God, nothing is as important as God’s glory.

God worked in history to create a people for himself – to do so he had to choose some and reject others.

How do we correlate God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility – we do not know, but both are clearly taught in the Bible – the Bible finds no logical difficulty in speaking on the one hand about God’s absolute sovereignty and man’s responsibility – it is a mystery.

That is why we must insist that people’s people are responsible for their ultimate condemnation.

Thus, God’s bestowing of mercy and his hardening of people are not equivalent acts.

God’s mercy is given to those who do not deserve it; his hardening affects those who have already by their sin deserved their condemnation.

24-29 – God’s calling of a new people: Israel and the Gentiles.

(Rom 9:24) even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

(Rom 9:25) As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"

(Rom 9:26) "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

(Rom 9:27) And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved,

(Rom 9:28) for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay."

(Rom 9:29) And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."

Here Paul returns to the theme of 6-13: God’s call is the sole basis for inclusion in the true people of God.

He uses the OT to prove his point.

God calls Jews	24
God calls Gentiles	24
OT confirmation of God's call of Gentiles	25-26
OT confirmation of God's call of Jews	27-29

SCRIPTURE READING: Genesis 20:1-17 Puts Sarah at risk.

33:18 – 34:31

TITLE: Threats to the Kingdom

INTRODUCTION.

Clear that Jacob was his mother, Rebekah's favourite and Esau his father's favourite.

Through intrigue, Jacob robbed his brother Esau of the blessing that was his by birth.

In addition, he deceived his father.

The problem was that he could not trust God and wait to receive the blessing.

Consequently – his brother hated him, and Jacob had to leave his home and family.

He went to live with his mother's brother, Laban.

For the next twenty years, he and his uncle Laban tried to outdo each other in scheming against each other.

Jacob married Laban's two daughters – that was the first bit of scheming, as you know.

During this time, Jacob became very wealthy as God blessed him.

But eventually, things became so bad, that one night Jacob and his family secretly left Laban.

That brought him to a major turning point in his life, when Jacob's past caught up with him.

It was the day he had to face his brother Esau.

You will remember that they had not parted on good terms – this is what we read after Jacob deceived his father into giving him the blessing of the first born to which Esau was entitled.

(Genesis 27:41) Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

(Genesis 27:42) But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you."

(Genesis 27:43) Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran (Genesis 27:44) and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away-- Now the time of reckoning had arrived.

After leaving Laban, he had to face his brother,

(Genesis 32:1) Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

(Genesis 32:2) And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

(Genesis 32:3) And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, (Genesis 32:4) instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now.

(Genesis 32:5) I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"

(Genesis 32:6) And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him."

(Genesis 32:7) Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps,

(Genesis 32:8) thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape."

It was on the night before meeting Esau that Jacob had that amazing confrontation with God.

It was a confrontation that changed him and left him a cripple, but also prepared to trust God – no more scheming.

Happily, the meeting between Jacob and Esau ended in reconciliation – that is recorded in **Genesis 33**.

In **chapter 33**, we see that Esau was so enthusiastic about their reconciliation that he suggested they settle down as a family again.

For whatever reason, Jacob declined.

However, we can see God's hand in keeping Jacob from entering an alliance with his brother, for it would have endangered this small family, for this family faced some serious threats – the threat of being wiped out [annihilated] and the even more serious threat of being assimilated into the surrounding people.

It is this specific threat that is described in this passage.

READ CHAPTER 33:18 TO 34:31.

Not the nicest story.

It's a story of violence and intrigue.

No one comes out of this story clean.

In fact, it's even difficult, if not impossible to identify the good guys and the bad guys.

It's one of those stories where there are no completely good guys and no completely bad guys.

To be quite honest, it seems to me that each had good and bad motives.

How honest the Bible is about the people in the O.T., it does not hide their failures.

There are no real heroes in the Bible.

Only God is the hero.

Man is shown to be weak, even the best of men, each has some blemish of character and conduct – Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, David, Moses, Elijah etc.]

Coming back to the story, it is obvious from **Genesis 33:18-20** that Jacob decided to settle down.

(Genesis 33:17) But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his liv

(Genesis 33:18) And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city.

(Genesis 33:19) And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent.

(Genesis 33:20) There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

For 20 years Jacob had been an exile but he was now back in the Promised Land and he found a friendly and hospitable people.

So naturally, Jacob was tempted to settle down and buy a piece of land he could call his own.

To mark the significance of this we see that he built an altar to the Lord.

Well, it was not long before the next step.

See 34:1

GE 34:1 Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land.

With all those brothers about, could you blame Dinah?

She did what any teenage girl would do, she looked for friends.

But it was not long before one of the young hunks of the locals – none less than the prince – saw her and guess what happened.

He began to date her and then one day, he went too far and despite her protestations, he raped her.

Now we must admit that this was not just plain lust.

He loved her and wanted to marry her as we can see from verses 3-4.

³ His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her.

And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife."

So, his intentions were honourable.

We have seen how the story unfolds.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JACOB AND HIS FAMILY.

You may ask why this terrible story is on record.

What bearing does it have in the context of God's plan of salvation?

What we must understand it that Jacob represented the promised line from which the Messiah would come, it was thus a very **unique family**.

Here was the beginning of the twelve tribes of Israel – the start of the nation of Israel.

We can put it like this Jacob and his family represented the people of God – the line of promise.

They represented the new beginning God was making in the world – the new creation, the creation of a new humanity.

But at this point in their history, they were **very vulnerable**.

They were only a handful – [even a few years later they numbered no more than 70 when they went to settle in Egypt.]

With this small group of people – what do you think was the greatest threat to their survival, the greatest threat facing them?

The greatest threat facing them was they would lose their identity and would be assimilated into the nations around them.

If that happened, not only would God's purposes for Israel come to naught, but the promised line would also be polluted.

The whole of our salvation, the fulfillment of God's purposes depended upon the preservation of this small family.

In fact, the whole trip to Egypt and their settlement in **Goshen** can only be understood in the context of this need to preserve them.

They needed a place where they could be **protected** and where they could develop and grow – and develop and grow they did, which accounted for the slavery – they had become too strong.

WHAT THIS STORY SHOWS IS JACOB AND HIS FAMILY REPRESENTED ONE KINGDOM AND HAMOR AND THE SCHECHEMITES REPRESENTED ANOTHER KINGDOM.

All the problems arose because of this.

You see what Shechem, Hamor's son did was not something unusual in his culture.

Nowhere is there any acknowledgement that something wrong was done.

You will see no condemnation by his father.

On the contrary, his father supported him in trying to get Dinah to marry him.

In fact, they were certain that the marriage would put the whole thing right.

It is obvious that virginity either in women or in men was not important.

What he had done was common in that culture.

But for the sons of Jacob Shechem had violated something sacred in the sight of God.

They had a different value system as we can see in verse 7 and verse 31.

⁷ Now Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were filled with grief and fury, because

Shechem had done a disgraceful thing inⁿ Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter--a thing that should not be done.

But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

Their reaction reveals the gulf between their values and outlook and the ethos of the surrounding culture.

Here we see the effect of more than three generations of separation from the pagan world of that time.

The experience and teachings of their father had gradually, over the years, left a deep mark on their outlook.

Despite all their faults as a family, for three generations now they had been a people living in the knowledge that they were accountable to God.

The God they worshipped was different from the gods of the people around them.

During the centuries to come the difference would even be more pronounced and clearly defined.

WITH THIS DIFFERENCE THE DANGER CONFRONTING THEM AT THIS POINT IN THEIR HISTORY WAS BEING ABSORBED AND ASSIMILATED BY AN ALIEN CULTURE AND OF LOOSING THEIR UNIQUE IDENTIFY AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Look at what lay behind the Shechemites' invitation of cooperation.

²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen. ²¹ "These men are friendly toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. ²² But the men will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. ²³ Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us."

= the loss of everything.

You see, God had called Abraham to leave his nation and people.

They had to remain separate and unique even in the midst of the nations and peoples of the world.

That was one of the reasons why **they lived in tents.**

They were not to settle down until God told them to.

They were to be a separate people. Why?

Because this was a different kingdom – the kingdom of God – it was this kingdom that God was establishing in the midst of the godless kingdoms.

This point is clearly stressed in **Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16**

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Coming back to Jacob and his family, when we turn to chapter 35, we can see to what extent they had in fact assimilated some of the practices of pagan society.

This is what we read in the first verse of chapter 35.

GE 35:1 Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."

It astounds us to read in verse 2, "So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you and purify yourselves and change your clothes.'"

And then in verse 4 we read, "So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem."

Were these not believers and worshipers of the true God? Yes, they were.

But obviously there were aspects of their culture they never broke away from.

How had they come to possess these gods?

We are told in Genesis 31 that Jacob decided to leave Laban his uncle and return to his own home.

In Genesis 31 verse 19, 30-34 we read that.

GE 31:19 When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods.

When Laban caught up to him, Jacob explained why he left, and Laban's response is recorded in verse 30.

³⁰ Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's house. But why did you steal my gods?"

GE 31:31 Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. ³² But if you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

GE 31:33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maidservants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing.

31:35 Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods.

So, Rachel herself was involved.

From **verse 2**, it is obvious that Jacob must have later discovered that his wife had these idols.

However, he took no firm action to get rid of them.

And then, it would not surprise me that when his sons sacked Shechem they took with them objects of pagan worship.

Jacob probably thought this was all quite harmless, without realizing that the existence of these gods meant they had a hold on the hearts of members of his family and that they were a threat to their worship of the true God.

They worshipped Jehovah and these gods.

Then there would have been certain infiltrating influences of the Shechemites on his family.

The many years of Shechemite influence, especially during the critical teenage years of most of his children made them very vulnerable to other pagan influences [as the history of Israel later showed].

It seems to me that Jacob just did not understand the danger of all this.

Here they were worshipping the true God while at the same time hanging on to some of the superstitious practices of the pagan world around them.

Jacob did not recognise how it corrupted them and made it easier to be assimilated by the pagan world.

You see the problem is that Jacob did not make God Lord of his entire family.

And so God told him to go to Bethel.

He had to leave the pagan atmosphere of Shechem.

Bethel was only about 15 miles away, but it represented two different kingdoms.

What was the significance of Bethel?

It had an important spiritual meaning for Jacob.

It was the place where Jacob started his walk with God.

It was the place where he first met God – personally.

You remember that he had an amazing dream there – Genesis 28:12-22 – 30 years previously.

Now God called him back to remind him of the vow he made then to put him first in his life.

God called him back to recommitment.

Bethel was the place of final separation for Jacob – his commitment to finally and separate himself of all that bound him to the world.

Bethel called from Jacob a commitment to put God first in his life – and also in his family's life.

It was after making this full commitment that God again revealed himself to Jacob and renewed his promise to him – READ 35:9-15.

(Genesis 35:9) God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him.

(Genesis 35:10) And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel.

(Genesis 35:11) And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. **A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body.**

(Genesis 35:12) The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you."

(Genesis 35:13) Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him.

(Genesis 35:14) And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it.

(Genesis 35:15) So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

See verse 11b – a nation – *'You belong to another kingdom – through you I am establishing my kingdom – creating a new humanity – never forget that.'*

Again, it is clear that nothing would stop God's purposes.

The fulfillment of God's plan of salvation was not dependent upon any one but God.

(Rom 9:11) though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call--

The only guarantee that God's purpose would be fulfilled was God's sovereign will.

That is still the only guarantee we have – in a world that is in a mess, that has rebelled against God, that is sinking further and further into wickedness – none of these things are in any way hindering God's plan which is being continued through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[That applies generally in the world and specifically in our lives as God's children].

TWO PRINCIPLES:

- There are two kingdoms, one which belongs to God and another which belongs to this world – under Satan and each has a totally different value system – and they will always be in conflict.
- It is a matter of fact that the kingdom of this world tries to either destroy or assimilate the kingdom of God.

Now what does this say to us?

Paul, writing to the Corinthians states:

1CO 10:11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

The most obvious point of contact between this incident and ourselves is the fact that as Christians we too are God's people.

And we too live in a society which is pagan and godless.

We have to be careful that the godless values of our society don't rub off on us and that we become assimilated by the world around us.

If that happens, we must not expect to come out unharmed like Dinah.

That is why Paul warned, 'Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good character'.

As believers we must be careful of being sucked into this system, or being assimilated, of losing our distinctiveness.

Paul urges and warns.

RO 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritualⁿ act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

1PE 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

We must stand out in our society - living in that society, but standing out, unique, witnessing to the reality of God in the way we live.

