

Genesis Chapters 34-36 Summary - John Karmelich

Like the last lesson. I'll begin with my title: "What to do when the bottom falls out of one's life!" I need to begin by summarizing the horrid stories in Chapters 34-35. It opens with a daughter of Jacob leaving home to "check out the town where Jacob's family is currently at!" She got raped for her troubles! You may recall in the previous chapter Jacob became crippled, after he literally wrestled with God all night! In his weakened state Jacob submitted his life to God. You'd think his life would go smoothly after that incident! Instead, we read that his daughter got raped! It goes downhill from there! His sons of course were mad, and asked the townsfolks to get circumcised for their sister to marry the man who raped her. The townsfolks were weakened from that surgery! That led to two of Jacob's sons (the full brothers of the daughter who was rapped) to kill every man in town. Then the rest of Jacob's sons took everything in that town (theft) plus they took all the women and children as slaves. All of them got to where Jacob grew up. While it's not stated in the text, Jacob found out his mother died, and his blind father was still alive. Then we read of the death of his mom's nurse.

If all that isn't weird enough, we read of Jacob's oldest son having sex with one of his stepmoms. That was probably done for that son to assume leadership as the oldest. The horror doesn't end there! Next, we see Jacob dealing with the death of his favorite wife, literally as she was giving birth to his last son! We also read of the death of one of Jacob's other wives. (One of the two, who had a lower status as the handmaidens of the two wives.) I'm also throwing in Chapter 36 in this lesson as it is a list of names of Jacob's brother Esau's family. It marks the end of an era. Chapter 37 (next lesson) we begin the story of Joseph (one of Jacob's sons) as the main character!

My first thought after digesting all of this is, "And I thought my family has problems!" If I had to deal with half of this stuff, I'm not sure I could handle all of that. Despite of all the sins and death we see in these chapters, God still wants to have an intimate relationship with Jacob! I'm not sure about you, but if I was in charge, I'd give up on Jacob's family a long time ago. So, if God still works with Jacob even after all of this, what does that say about our relationship with God? Did God give up on David after he committed adultery and murdered his new girlfriend's husband? All that leads me back to the question of what do we do when the bottom falls out of our lives? Imagine losing everything one holds dear and one's family is causing you nothing but grief! What do we do? First, we turn to God for guidance. The thing God wants from us more than service, commitment or obedience is a relationship. Consider what David said was his greatest desire, "To be a pillar in the house of God". (Psalm 27:4). I'd argue that is what God desires of us more than obedience is a close relationship with Him despite all we are dealing with at any moment in time. Of course, that doesn't mean we spend 24/7 "on our knees". It just means God desires we stay intimate with Him daily in spite of whatever problems we're dealing with! Ok got all of that out of my system, so now I can discuss Jacob's family issues. As you study this with me, I'm just asking we think about how God is guiding your lives in spite of any and all problems we're facing!

With that said, I'm ready to give more details of this "Soap Opera". When we last left on in Chapter 33, we read that Jacob came to the land of Israel, but not where he was supposed to end up (God wanted to see Jacob and his clan reunite with his father in Bethel, in the southern part of Israel, while Jacob made the decision to settle in Shechem in the northern part. (That city was the first capital of the North Israel kingdom centuries later.) My simple point is it's not where God wanted Jacob to be and we're about to read of events that got Jacob "moving again" to where God wanted him to be!

The first thing we read in Chapter 34 is Jacob had a daughter (Dinah) who wanted to "go check out the city"! It led to her being raped by the leader's son there. After that rape, he's still infatuated with her as

he wanted to marry her! Jacob who was recently crippled by his wrestling match with God, (in Chapter 33) didn't say anything about it. When Dinah's brothers and half-brothers heard about this, anger filled the room! The brothers said for Dinah to marry him, all the Shechem men must be circumcised. All of them agreed and while those men were sore from the "surgery", Dinah's two full brothers murdered the grown men that lived there. Then all Jacob's sons looted that place and took the women and children as prizes. Jacob as a cripple, announced, "when word about this spreads, we'll all die". Jacob's still a man of fear even after all he's been through. Then God tells Jacob to go to where he last encountered Him in the land of Israel (a town called Bethel). The point for us is despite all the ways we mess up God wants a relationship with us. If God can still work with this bunch, there's hope for the rest of us!

After God tells Jacob to go there and make an altar to Him (It's not for His ego's sake, it's a reminder to Jacob that He's still in control). Jacob also tells his family to get rid of the idols they had on them! That means the one that Rachel (one of his wives) stole five chapters ago wasn't the only idol there! Jacob's realizing God knows all things! God "clears the path" for Jacob to travel (nobody attacked them) as the text says the other cities feared him. By the time he got to where God wanted Him, his troubles weren't over yet as we read of Jacob dealing with death in the next set of verses!

Next, we read that his mom's caretaker died. Nothing is said of Jacob's mom passing so we don't know when he found out. The caretaker is mentioned as Jacob had to deal with it. Speaking of death, we are just warming up in this chapter. Next, we read that Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, was dying while she's giving birth to Jacob's 12th son (from 4 women), named Benajmin. Rachel named the baby as, "the son of my sorrowers" due to her pain, but Jacob named him son of his happiness (which stuck).

Remember I titled this lesson, "What to do when the bottom falls out of one's life?". If all of this is not painful enough for Jacob, the last part of the story talks about the death of his father Isaac. Way back in Chapter 27, we read that Isaac was going blind (old age). Apparently, he lived a good 40 years after all of that. My guess is his wife's caretaker took care of Isaac in his old age, and Jacob took over when he got back. (My speculation!) Bottom line, the chapter ends with Isaac dying. Then we read both Jacob and his brother Esau burying him. Obviously, there was a time delay as both of Isaac's sons were there to bury him.

Let me cover Chapter 36 quickly. Chapter 37 begins the whole Joseph story, so it's best to start that in my next lesson. Chapter 36 is a list of Esau's children and grandchildren. Why is that there? I figured while Esau visited Jacob, he got the "list". So why is it in the bible? A major reason is to show God is keeping his promise that all offspring of Abraham (Jacob's grandfather) will be blessed. Chapter 36 tells us in essence the children of Esau became the leaders of what the bible calls the land of Edom. Today, it's part of the country of Jordan. The tribes that came from Jordan were a problem for Israel for many centuries. In short, it's there so when we see history play out about Isaac saying to Esau at his blessing that his "hands will be against his brother" it came literally true as his family were a problem for Israel for many centuries to come! In short, this Chapter 37 lineage is here to show how predictions about the family became literally true.

Ok John, this is all interesting ancient history, why should I care? It is not about memorizing all of this ancient history! It's to remember that if God's still willing to work with "this bunch" after rape, murder stealing not to mention keeping idols in their possession, what does that say about God's relationship in dealing with you and me? It doesn't mean we're free to sin all we want! There are consequences for all that we do. This family did suffer for all these sins! It reminds us that no matter how bad we mess up, we are still saved! So what's the motivation to do what's right? For starters, it's the best way to live. It

is also the reason why God created us in the first place to be a witness for Him. God will use us in spite of our faults, but He still wants us to use the Holy Spirit to guide us to make a difference for Him!

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John