

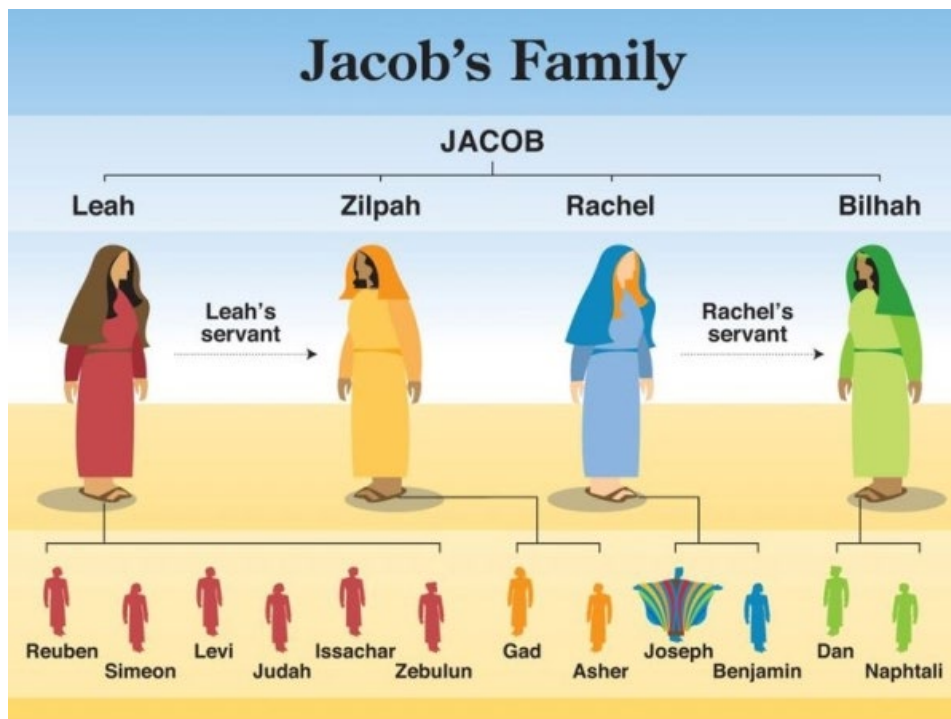
SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY
Genesis 31-33 – Jacob and Esau Reconcile

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTER 29 – HERE COME THE WIVES AND CHILDREN

Jacob heads to the land of Abraham and meets Laban's youngest daughter Rachel by a well. Tricked by Laban, he works seven years to marry Leah and then seven more years to marry the object of his desire, Rachel. Knowing that Leah is unloved, God makes her fertile and she has four children (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah); while Rachel is barren.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTER 30 – HOW TO GET TO TWELVE

Rachel gives Jacob her maid so that she could have children on her side and Bilhah has two (Dan and Naphtali). Leah does the same with her servant Zilpah who has two children (Gad and Asher). Leah then sleeps with Jacob after trading a night with him for some mandrakes and she gives birth to Issachar. Then she has another boy and a girl (Zebulun and Dinah). Still, Rachel has none of her own. Finally, God remembers Rachel and she has a son of her own (Joseph), but she wants one more and so gives Joseph his name which means (to add or increase) saying "May the Lord give me another son." It's not until chapter 35 that Rachel finally has that other son. She dies in childbirth and just before she dies, she names him Ben-oni "Son of my sorrow," but Jacob calls him Benjamin (meaning "Son of my right hand"). What we have seen in this birth of the nation is that it is born to a dysfunctional family; full of trickery, competition and jealousy. Jacob has favorites and it's not always the eldest son.



Who's missing in the image above? Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, born by Leah.

THE TWELVE SONS OF ISRAEL

There were four women in Jacob's life: two wives and two female servants. They gave birth to Jacob's twelve sons in the following order:

Leah (First wife): Reuben (רְאוּבֵן), Simeon (שִׁמְעוֹן), Levi (לֵוִי), Judah (יְהוּדָה)

Bilhah (Rachel's servant): Dan (דָּן) and Naphtali (נַפְתָּלִי)

Zilpah (Leah's servant): Gad (גָּד) and Asher (אָשֶׁר)

Leah (First wife): Issachar (יִשָּׂשכָר) and Zebulun (זְבֻלֹן)

Rachel (Second wife): Joseph (יוֹסֵף) and Benjamin (בְּנִימִן)

Genesis 31 (NRSV)

31 Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's; he has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." ² And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him as favorably as he did before. ³ Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you." ⁴ So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, ⁵ and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me as favorably as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. ⁶ You know that I have served your father with all my strength; ⁷ yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. ⁸ If he said, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore speckled; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped. ⁹ Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father, and given them to me.

¹⁰ During the mating of the flock I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats that leaped upon the flock were striped, speckled, and mottled. ¹¹ Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' ¹² And he said, 'Look up and see that all the goats that leap on the flock are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. ¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth.' " ¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? ¹⁵ Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. ¹⁶ All the property that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you."

¹⁷ So Jacob arose, and set his children and his wives on camels; ¹⁸ and he drove away all his livestock, all the property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

¹⁹ Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. ²⁰ And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. ²¹ So he fled with all that he had; starting out he crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

²² On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. ²³ So he took his kinsfolk with him and pursued him for seven days until he caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴ But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night, and said to him, "Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad."

²⁵ Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsfolk camped in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁶ Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword. ²⁷ Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre. ²⁸ And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish. ²⁹ It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' ³⁰ Even though you had to go because you longed greatly for your father's house, why did you steal my gods?" ³¹ Jacob answered Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. ³² But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsfolk, point out what I have that is yours, and take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

³³ So Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent, and entered Rachel's. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt all about in the tent, but did not find them. ³⁵ And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched, but did not find the household gods.

³⁶ Then Jacob became angry, and upbraided Laban. Jacob said to Laban, “What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? ³⁷ Although you have felt about through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsfolk and your kinsfolk, so that they may decide between us two. ³⁸ These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. ³⁹ That which was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself; of my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰ It was like this with me: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. ⁴¹ These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. ⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night.”

⁴³ Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about their children whom they have borne? ⁴⁴ Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me.” ⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶ And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, “Gather stones,” and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸ Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” Therefore he called it Galeed, ⁴⁹ and the pillar Mizpah, for he said, “The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. ⁵⁰ If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me.”

⁵¹ Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between you and me. ⁵² This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. ⁵³ May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor”—the God of their father—“judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, ⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the height and called his kinsfolk to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night in the hill country.

⁵⁵ Early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them; then he departed and returned home.

Source Theory: J Source = normal; E Source = **Bold**; P source = *italicized*.

HOUSEHOLD GODS – (Hebrew תְּרָפִים, *teraphim*), small carved or molded figures that were probably small representations of divinities (Gen. 31:19, 34; Lev. 26:1). Such items have been found in almost every era of occupation in a number of archaeological sites. In Gen. 31, Rachel steals “household gods” from her brother Laban when she flees his house with her husband, Jacob. Laban catches up with them in Gilead and searches for his gods, but Rachel conceals them by sitting on them and saying she cannot get up because the “way of women” is upon her.

GILEAD – (Hebrew גִּלְעָד; “rugged”), a region in the Transjordan (modern-day Jordan) from the Arnon to the Yarmuk rivers, located between Bashan and Moab. Its name describes it well, for Gilead is indeed rugged, mountainous territory, and in antiquity it was densely forested (see Jer. 22:6). The major trade route in the Transjordan, the King’s Highway, passed through Gilead on its way from the Gulf of Aqabah to Damascus, and inhabitants of this region thus controlled an important thoroughfare.

GALEED – (Hebrew גַּלְעָד; “witness pile”), The Hebrew name that Jacob gave the heap of stones that served as a witness to the covenant he had made with Laban (Gen 31:44–54). Laban named the heap in Aramaic JEGAR-SAHADUTHA; both names mean the same: “heap of witness” (in Heb gal means “heap” and ‘ed means

“witness”). Verse 45 narrates that Jacob set up a single stone as a massebah (cf. Gen 28:18), probably serving the same purpose. One suggestion is that v 45 is from the E source of the Pentateuch while v 47 is from the J source.

CHAPTER 31 – JACOB FLEES WITH FAMILY AND FLOCKS

Laban and his sons have begun to resent Jacob. Jacob gets the word from the Lord that he should head back to the land of his father, Isaac. So, Jacob flees with his family and flocks without telling Laban. But unbeknownst to Jacob, Rachel has stolen her father’s household gods. Wait! What? Family idols? What happened to being faithful to the God of Abraham and Isaac? Why are they still dabbling in other gods? Remember, Genesis is part one, the introduction to the Pentateuch. Things and themes introduced here foreshadow what will take place later. The point is that while the later Israelites had a hard time being faithful to God, God was always faithful to them; and God always seems to press on with God’s plans, looking past the inadequacies of God’s people. Anyhow, the loss of the gods is important enough to Laban that he chases them for hundreds of miles. But God warns Laban not to harm Jacob. And when Laban catches up and confronts Jacob, Jacob explains why he left but insists that he didn’t take the idols. But Rachel was sitting on them. Anyhow, both men agree to an uneasy truce, building a pile of stones to serve as a visible reminder.

Genesis 32 (NRSV)

32 Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him; ² and when Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!” So he called that place Mahanaim.

³ Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, ⁴ instructing them, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, ‘I have lived with Laban as an alien, and stayed until now; ⁵ and I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male and female slaves; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.’ ”

⁶ The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” ⁷ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies, ⁸ thinking, “If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company that is left will escape.”

⁹ And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,’ ¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. ¹¹ Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. ¹² Yet you have said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.’ ”

¹³ So he spent that night there, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ These he delivered into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on ahead of me, and put a space between drove and drove.” ¹⁷ He instructed the foremost, “When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you, ‘To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?’ ¹⁸ then you shall say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob; they are a present sent to my lord Esau; and moreover he is behind us.’ ” ¹⁹ He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, “You shall say the same thing to Esau when you meet him, ²⁰ and you shall say, ‘Moreover your servant Jacob is behind us.’ ” For he thought, “I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me.” ²¹ So the present passed on ahead of him; and he himself spent that night in the camp.

²² The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴ Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." ²⁷ So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Source Theory: J Source = normal; E Source = **Bold**; P source = *italicized*.

CHAPTER 32 – WRESTLE MANIA

As Jacob and his family continue on their way, they are greeted by angels. But then they learn that Esau is nearby and so they send messengers to Esau promising him great riches. The messengers return with some terrifying news: Esau is coming with four hundred men. Is he coming for battle or for a reunion? It doesn't look good. So, Jacob does what he does best, he decides to send his brother some advance gifts to pacify him.

But then something weird happens. That night, as his gifts are on their way to Esau and he is waiting alone by the Jabbok River, Jacob has an all-night wrestling match with a mysterious man, who, apparently, is unable to overpower him, yet has the ability to knock his hip out of joint with one touch. It's a bizarre, random story, but Jacob seems to know what is going on. And Jacob tells the man that he will not let him go unless he blesses him. The man agrees and blesses Jacob and changes his name from Jacob, "the deceiver" to "Israel," which means "one who struggles with God." Thus, we are introduced to the very name of God's people. They are the people of Israel; a people who wrestle or struggle with God. And like Jacob, they refuse to ultimately let go of God before they receive a blessing. They will cling to God for as long as it takes because in the end, God will bless them. Jacob names the place Peniel, which means "face of God." And as a result of the match, Jacob will never walk the same again, but now has a "gangsta" limp. Of course, the author uses this detail as an etiology for why the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip. What is strange and stunning about this story is that God wrestles with Jacob but can't prevail!

Genesis 33 (NRSV)

33 Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. ² He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³ He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." ⁶ Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; ⁷ Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. ⁸ Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor with my lord." ⁹ But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." ¹⁰ Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor.

¹¹ Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it.

¹² Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you." ¹³ But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴ Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

¹⁵ So Esau said, "Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "Why should my lord be so kind to me?" ¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷ But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.

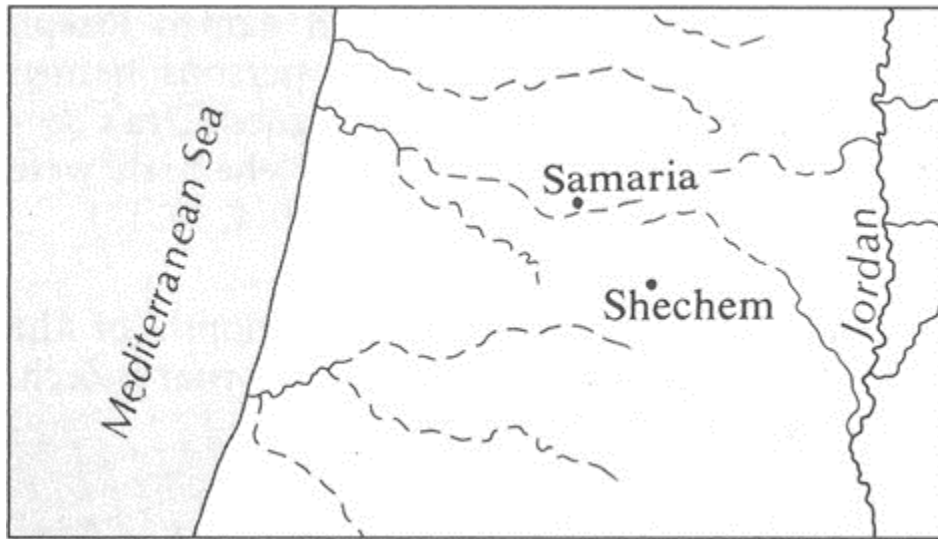
¹⁸ *Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city.* ¹⁹ And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for one hundred pieces of money the plot of land on which he had pitched his tent. ²⁰ There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

Source Theory: J Source = normal; E Source = **Bold**; P source = *italicized*; Redactor = **bold italicized**.

SEIR – Hebrew (שַׁעִיר). The biblical name for part of the country of Edom (Gen 14:6; 36:20–21, 30; Deut 1:2, 44; 2:1; 33:2; Josh 11:17; 12:7; Judg 5:4; Isa 21:11; 1 Chr 1:38; 4:42) and, secondarily, a synonym for Edom, both in the geographical and the political sense (Gen 32:4; 33:14, 16; 36:8–9; Num 24:18; Deut 2:4–5, 8, 12, 22, 29; Josh 24:4; Ezek 25:8; 35:2–3, 7, 15; 2 Chr 20:10, 22–23; 25:11, 14). According to Gen 36:30, "the country of Seir" was inhabited by the HORITES, whereas "the sons of Esau" were living in Edom. In Gen 36:20, Seir is personified as a Horite whose descendants live in Edom. In the archaic text of Judg 5:4, "Seir" and "the field of Edom" parallel each other. Seir is frequently referred to as "the mountain," or "mountains of Seir" (Gen 14:6; 36:8–9; Deut 2:1, etc.). Combined, these references suggest that Seir was a mountainous region which became part of the Edomite state. Etymologically, Seir means "hairy," whereas Edom signifies "red."

SUCCOTH – Hebrew sukkôt (סֻכּוֹת). The name of two places mentioned in the OT. Here it refers to a city located on the E of the Jordan River close to where it is joined by the Jabbok (Nahr Zerqa). Jacob stopped here when returning from Padan-aram and built a house and "booths" for his cattle, hence the name Succoth, "booths" (Gen 33:17). It was located in the kingdom of Sihon and allotted to the tribe of Gad (Josh 13:27). Gideon stopped here while pursuing the Midianites and asked for provisions for his army from the men of Succoth and also Penuel. He was refused in both cases, and upon his victorious return he inflicted punishment on Succoth and beat down the tower of Penuel (Judg 8:5–17). It was also between Succoth and Zarethan on the plain of the Jordan that bronze vessels were cast for the Temple under the direction of Solomon (1 Kgs 7:46; 2 Chr 4:17). The Valley of Succoth is mentioned in the Psalms (60:6; 108:7) with a positive connotation which would fit the location in the fertile region at the junction of the two rivers known as the Ghor Abu Obeideh.

SHECHEM – Hebrew (שָׁכֶם). A city and its environs in the central highlands of Israel, located forty-one miles north of Jerusalem in the pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. It dominated an important trade route and controlled a fertile valley to the east where Jacob's sons pastured their flocks (Gen. 37:12–14). Shechem was a Korathite levitical city of refuge in the territory of Manasseh (Josh. 17:2, 7), although it is also described as being "in the hill country of Ephraim" (20:7). Shechem was the first city visited by Abraham in his migration from Haran (Gen. 12:6), but it figures most prominently in the traditions associated with Jacob. It was the scene of the rape of Dinah by Shechem, the son of Hamor, king of Shechem (Gen. 34; note that in the narrative of the event the prince and the city have the same name). During excavation in the east gate, the decapitated skeleton of a donkey was found, with what appeared to be the bones of an animal sacrifice nearby. The ass was probably the sacred animal of the city; the name Hamor means "ass" in Hebrew.



Egyptian texts of the nineteenth century BCE indicate that Shechem was an important urban center during the patriarchal period. Archaeological evidence shows that during the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BCE the city was surrounded by a massive embankment of earth, topped by walls of mud-brick on stone foundations. The highest ground within the walls was occupied by a multiroom palace-temple complex set off from the rest of the city by a stone wall. In the seventeenth century BCE the embankment was replaced by a wall composed of huge stones and entered by impressive gates on the north and east sides. The royal palace was moved to a position directly against the inner face of the new wall, and the palace-temple complex was replaced by a rectangular “fortress temple” with walls 17 feet thick.

While the Israelites were in slavery in Egypt, Shechem continued to flourish. Its king, Lab’ayu, is described in the Amarna letters (fourteenth century BCE) as the most important ruler in the area, controlling a small empire and making inroads into the territory of his neighbors. During this period the fortress-temple was rebuilt and continued in use into the Israelite period. It is the temple of the Lord of the Covenant (NRSV: “Baal-berith,” “El-berith”) mentioned in Judg. 9:4, 46.

When the Israelites entered Canaan (thirteenth century BCE) Shechem passed peacefully into their hands and became the earliest religious center of the tribes. Indeed, they buried the mummified body of Joseph in a tomb near the city (Josh. 24:32). At Shechem Joshua renewed the Sinai covenant with Israel’s tribal leaders, probably at the temple of the Lord of the Covenant (Josh. 24). Abimelech, a son of Gideon by a concubine who lived at Shechem, roused the Shechemites to his support and had himself declared king (Judg. 9:1–6), against the spirit and traditions of the old tribal confederacy, which held that the Lord was the only king in Israel (8:22–23). Shechem soon revolted against Abimelech’s rule and in reprisal he destroyed the city (9:45).

After a time in which the site was occupied only by crude huts and grain-storage pits, the city was rebuilt. The old Canaanite royal tradition, which had long been associated with Shechem, continued to be attached to the rebuilt city. Rehoboam went there to be crowned king in the northern part of his kingdom (1 Kings 12:1). After the revolt of the northern tribes Jeroboam I rebuilt the city (12:25). Traces of his work survive in the tower of the east gate. For a time Shechem served as Jeroboam’s capital, but its population had too many local loyalties, and he moved his capital to Tirzah. Shechem then settled down to a fairly prosperous existence as a provincial center. Typical Israelite four-room houses were built on a series of terraces rising from the east gate to the former sacred area, which was now transformed into a granary, probably for the collection of taxes. The fortifications of the Israelite city followed the plan of its Canaanite predecessor. Israelite Shechem was destroyed by the Assyrian armies in 722/1 BCE. The walls of the houses were covered by over 4 feet of destruction debris.

Shechem was rebuilt ca. 350 BCE as the religious center of the Samaritans. Their temple stood on Mount Gerizim, and at the foot of the mountain they constructed a city designed to rival Jerusalem. A strong defensive wall enclosed solidly constructed houses and at least one luxurious villa near the old sacred area. The city was destroyed, probably by John Hyrcanus during his conquest of Samaria, in 107 BCE. It was razed to the ground. Its walls were buried beneath deep layers of fill, and it was never rebuilt.

CHAPTER 33 – THE BROTHERS MEET AND RECONCILE

Having wrestled with God and been blessed in the process, Jacob finally has the courage to meet his brother Esau. It had been 20 years since Jacob stole Esau's birthright, leaving Esau to pick up the pieces of a life he neither wanted nor deserved. Now Jacob and Esau were about to meet for the first time since. You can imagine how Jacob felt. He bows before Esau seven times, bowing in humility and fear, a sign of total submission known to us from other ancient cultures. As Jacob approached Esau, suddenly Esau broke into a sprint, threw his arms around Jacob, embraced him and kissed him. Esau welcomed Jacob with undeserved grace. Then Jacob introduces his family to Esau and presents his flocks to Esau. Jacob begs Esau to accept the "gift" of livestock. The Hebrew word for "gift" here is the same word used earlier for the "blessing" stolen by Jacob at the beginning of the story. And so, in a way, Jacob offers back to his brother the blessing that is properly his. That is, out of the blessing he received from God, he now returns that blessing to his brother. And notice how Esau reacts. He's not greedy. He only accepts because Israel is insistent. And we see that God has blessed Israel and through him others are being blessed.

With nothing to fear from his brother, Jacob then goes on to settle near the city of Shechem, which is in Canaan. Abraham had also passed through there. Jacob buys a parcel of land, digs a well (a way of laying claim to the land) and builds an altar that he names El Elohe Yisrael (which means something like "God, the God of Israel"). Notice that he is still going by the name of Jacob. He will have his name changed once again in Genesis 35:9-10.

THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

The twelve tribes of Israel were named after the sons and grandsons of Jacob. Jacob, named "Israel" by God (Genesis 32:28; 35:10), had 12 children with his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and his concubines, Zilpah and Bilhah. The names of Jacob's sons were Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, and Levi. The tribes are named after ten of Jacob's sons, all except for Joseph and Levi. Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are named as the final two tribes. Levi is not named as one of the twelve tribes of Israel; however, Levi is the "Tribe of the Chosen," set apart from the others as "God's Tribe."

Nearing the end of his life, Jacob names each tribe after ten of his sons and two of his grandsons: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. From his deathbed, Jacob goes into detail about each tribe, sharing his blessings and prophecies for their descendants: "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him" (Genesis 49:28).

Reuben

Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob. The Hebrew name Reuben translates to "Behold a son!" The birth of Reuben was exciting for his mother Leah, who felt that Jacob loved Rachel more than her (Genesis 29:16-17). Leah believed that this child would make Jacob love her as much as he loved her sister (v. 32). The symbol used for the tribe of Reuben, described by Jacob as "my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength" (Genesis 49:3), is either a rising sun or a blossoming plant.

Simeon

In Hebrew, the name Simeon means "to be heard." One of the notable Bible stories about Simeon is found in Genesis 34. After his sister Dinah was defiled, Simeon and his brother attacked and killed the men of an entire city to avenge her. The symbols of his tribe are a gate and a sword. The sword is used because Simeon

used a sword when he slaughtered the men of Shechem. The gate is also used because it symbolizes the gate located on the road between Shechem and Jerusalem.

Judah

The tribe of Judah was the first territory established in the land of Israel, and it occupied the southern part of the Holy Land. After settling south of Jerusalem, Judah quickly became one of the most powerful tribes in Israel. Known as the Tribe of Kings, Judah has many notable biblical descendants, including King David, King Solomon, and Caleb, as well as Mary and Jesus in the Christian Bible. In Hebrew, Judah (Yehuda) means “praise” and is often symbolized as a lion.

Dan

The fifth son of Jacob, Dan’s name translates to “God is my judge” in Hebrew, as the Tribe of Dan was known for its judges and laws. In fact, one of the most prominent judges of Israel, Samson, descended from the Tribe of Dan. The tribe is often symbolized as the scales of justice or as a snake, the latter the result of Jacob’s blessing for his fifth son: “Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that his rider falls backward” (Genesis 49:17).

Naphtali

Both Naphtali and Dan shared Jacob and Rachel’s maidservant Bilhah as their birth mother. Jacob’s sixth son was born when Rachel and Leah were still competing with each other for his love. As a result, Rachel named Bilhah’s second son Naphtali, which means “I have prevailed” or “to win through wrestling” in Hebrew. Jacob blesses Naphtali with words of beauty, saying he is “a doe let loose” (Genesis 49:21), thus the Tribe of Naphtali is symbolized by a gazelle running.

Gad

Settled into territory east of the Jordan River, the Bible describes the Tribe of Gad as “brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear” (1 Chronicles 12:8). The name Gad means “warrior” in Hebrew, and this tribe is symbolized by a military tent, for those who protected the borders of Israel, traced back to Jacob’s blessing for his seventh son: “Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels” (Genesis 49:19).

Asher

Genesis tells us of the birth of Jacob’s eighth son, whose name means “happy” and “blessed” in Hebrew: “Then Leah said, ‘How happy I am! The women will call me happy.’ So she named him Asher” (30:13). Jacob blesses Asher, telling him that his “food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king” (Genesis 49:20). An olive tree is the symbol for the Tribe of Asher, assigned by Joshua to territory near Galilee known for its fertile land and olive trees.

Issachar

The Tribe of Issachar is symbolized by a donkey, after Jacob’s biblical blessing: “Issachar is a rawboned donkey, lying down among the sheep pens. When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor” (Genesis 49:15-15). Known for their wisdom and foresight during the reign of David, tribesmen from Issachar are described in the Bible as “men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Zebulun

Zebulun, another son of Leah, was born after Issachar. Derived from the word “zabal” in Hebrew, his name means “to dwell” and is symbolic of Leah’s hope that a new son would find Jacob dwelling with her instead of her sister Rachel. The most common symbol for the Tribe of Zebulun is a ship, after Jacob’s blessing that says this son “will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships” (Genesis 49:13).

Manasseh and Ephraim

Both Ephraim and Manasseh are the sons of Joseph and the grandsons of Jacob. Ephraim and Manasseh are often called the “two half-tribes of Joseph” since Joseph is not listed as one of the tribes. The name Manasseh, Joseph’s first son, means “one who forgets.” While this may sound negative, Joseph named his son Manasseh “because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household” (Genesis 41:51). In his blessing of the two sons of Joseph, Jacob “put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh” (Genesis 48:20). The name Ephraim means “fruitful, fertile, and productive,” which Joseph chose “because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering” (Genesis 41:52).

Benjamin

In Hebrew, the name Benjamin translates to “son of my right hand.” In his biblical blessing, Jacob called his youngest son “a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder” (Genesis 49:27), so a ravenous wolf is the symbol of the Tribe of Benjamin. King Saul and Mordecai were a couple of the most famous tribesmen from this tribe also known for standing against all of Israel during the civil war (Judges 20:14-21:24).

Levi: God’s Chosen Tribe

The Tribe of Levi is often not listed among the 12 Tribes of Israel. However, it is a tribe, but is set apart from the other 12 as “God’s Chosen Tribe.” In Hebrew, Levi means “attached” or “joining,” and is the one tribe that did not join in worshipping the golden calf the Israelites created when Moses was on Mount Sinai.

What Are the Lost Tribes of Israel?

Today, ten of those twelve tribes are considered to be the Lost Tribes of Israel. How is it possible to lose entire groups of people? To answer that question, we need to have a brief history lesson. Following the death of King Solomon, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms—the northern kingdom, called Israel; and the southern kingdom, known as Judah. The tribes of Reuben, Simon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, and half the tribe of Manasseh made up the northern kingdom. Benjamin and Judah made up the southern kingdom.

In 722 B.C.E., the kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians, and according to Scripture, many of the Israelites were deported and scattered in foreign lands: “In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:6). Unfortunately, those from the northern tribes have not been heard from since.

WHAT ABOUT DINAH?

The name Dinah occurs only once in the Bible, as the only daughter of Israel’s arch-father Jacob (Genesis 30:21). Her mother is Leah, and Dinah is Leah’s seventh child and Jacob’s eleventh child, only to be followed by the two sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin.

On account of Dinah’s rape by Shechem the Hivite (who actually wished to marry her, even afterwards — Genesis 34) Dinah’s brothers Simeon (Jacob’s son number 2 who rose to number 1 after Reuben slept with Bilhah — Genesis 35:22 and 49:4) and Levi (Jacob’s son number 3, and later number 2) first manage to make the men of Shechem’s town circumcise themselves and then kill them all by sword and loot the place (that means steal all the livestock, women and children). When Jacob hears of this, he mentions nothing about any ethical rules that were transgressed, but rather, his fear for political or military retaliation (Genesis 34:30).

On his deathbed Jacob curses the brothers and disperses them into Israel (Genesis 49:5-7). The tribe of Levi became the landless priestly clan, and Simeon was assimilated by Judah. Judah was son number 4, but moved up the list because of the actions of his three brothers Reuben, Simeon and Levi.

The name Dinah is the feminine form of Dan and both come from the verb דין (din), meaning to judge or plead: thus her name means “judged” or “vindicated.”