

Episode: Genesis & Job Series No. 11

Narrator: Reuben

Primary Scriptures: Genesis 35-38

Story Summary: Jacob returns; death of Isaac; Joseph's dreams; Joseph sold into slavery

Location: Canaan

Time: Jacob's birth is probably 2050 - 1900 BC

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Genesis 35:2, 35:10; 37:3

When Jacob returned to Canaan, Rachel stole her "family's gods." As the story unfolds, it is clear that the family's gods were very important. Apparently, Jacob agreed that these gods had power. Before going to Bethel, Jacob requires that they abandon all of their foreign gods and purify themselves.¹ This may be the point when the family finally accepts God as their only God. It is shortly after abandoning their gods, that God reaffirms that Jacob's name is changed to "Israel."²

Although Jacob and Esau had a contentious relationship virtually their entire lives, when their father, Isaac, died, they came together to bury him.³ This could have been a time for the brothers to mend fences for good, but they apparently did not. History shows their descendants fought for centuries.

Choices have consequences, and Jacob's choices had everlasting consequences. He had twelve sons by his two wives, and their handmaidens. Here is the list:

Leah: Reuben, the firstborn; Simeon; Levi; Judah; Issachar and Zebulon.

Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

Rachel's handmaiden, Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali

Leah's handmaiden: Gad and Asher.

As the Bible unfolds, we find that Reuben does have special responsibilities as the firstborn. We don't know the reasons, but Jesus will come from the tribe of Judah.

Although Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah, his lifelong favorite wife was Rachel. Rachel had trouble having children, so both Joseph and Benjamin were born later in his life. Much of the end of Genesis revolves around the fact that Joseph is Jacob's favorite son, just as Jacob was the favorite son of his mother.

Jacob treats Joseph as a favorite. It seems that God treats Joseph as a favorite. And Joseph seems to be insensitive to his brothers. The result: his brothers are dangerously jealous. When they get the chance, they imprison Joseph and sell him into slavery.

¹ Genesis 35:1-5

² Genesis 35:9

³ Genesis 35:29

Discussion Questions:

1. How did Jacob's household purify themselves before going to Bethel? Was this a temporary or final purification?
2. What name change did God give Jacob?
3. What is another name for the town of Ephrath?
4. What is the significance of Genesis 35:20.
5. What is the significance of Genesis 35:22?
6. The Edomites become a traditional enemy of the Israelites. Who were their ancestors?

1. They buried their gods and earrings under the Oak at Shechem. There is no more mention of gods in Genesis, so it may have been the last time that Abraham's descendants had false gods for quite a while. 2. God changed Jacob's name to Israel - Genesis 35:10. 3. Bethlehem. Apparently it was already a village. 4. It indicates that Genesis was written long after Rachel died. 5. Reuben was the firstborn of Israel by Leah. Sleeping with Bilhah would have been incredibly disrespectful to both Israel and Reuben's half-brothers by Bilhah, Dan and Naphtali. The fact that Israel did nothing about it might have showed that he was old and weak. 6. Esau was the father of the Edomites, and Jacob/Israel was the father of the Israelites/Hebrews/Jews.

Application Questions:

1. Genesis 35:29 says that Esau and Jacob buried their father. There is no indication whether this was forced by tradition or if the brothers were amicable about it. Do you think Esau had held a grudge against Jacob all this time? Do you have any relatives you need to forgive instead of holding a grudge against?
2. Genesis 37 is an account of a dysfunctional family. There is one father, four mothers, and twelve children. There is disrespect, favoritism, and hatred. Based on that chapter, what are some things you could do to help your family to have less dysfunction?
3. How do you think your parents treated you compared to your siblings? Do you tend to have parenting traits like the ones you experienced? Why or why not?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Genesis 36 shows several generations of descendants of Esau. Does it ever seem possible to you that you could be the father or mother of generations?
2. Genesis 37 seems to be a partial account of Joseph's life when he was seventeen and after. What types of things did Joseph do that angered his brothers? How much older were his brothers? How did Joseph's father contribute to the tense situation?
3. What sorts of things do you do that irritate your siblings? How would your life, and their lives, improve if you made some changes?