**Lesson 16**

**31 January – 1 February 2022**

**Genesis 34 – 36**

***Another Perspective*: Minor Prophets**

**Timeline for the Minor Prophets –** Last week we began looking at a timeline of when the minor prophets ministered in Israel and/or Judah. If you look at the purple timeline on the new chart, you will see several major events (indicated by lightning bolts) that affected the nation from the time that the kingdom was divided in 931 B.C. to when the temple was rebuilt in 520 B.C. after some of the people returned from exile.

* **Above the timeline** are twelve numbered circles, indicating when each minor prophet began his ministry. Notice that the first two prophets ministered at about the same *time* (although we will see that their *messages* were very different and directed toward very different *audiences*). Prophets #3 and #4 were also contemporaries of each other, as were prophets #9 and #10.
* **Below the timeline** is a chart for recording the name of each prophet and the approximate date of his ministry. I have given you the answers for the three prophets we have looked at thus far, Hosea, Joel, and Amos. Notice that there is a question mark after the date for Joel. We aren’t really clear about the precise time of his ministry, but several commentators think it was some time after the temple was rebuilt following the return from exile, so I have gone with that. As we learn about each of the other prophets in the weeks ahead, we fill out the remainder of this chart in class, beginning with Obadiah next week.

**Map of Where The Prophets and/or Their Audiences Lived –** The other new handout for today is a map we will use to show where each prophet lived. Notice that there are two different symbols shown in the dashed box below the map. The top one is a “talking head” that we will use for men who lived in one area but had a message for another group of people. The bottom symbol, a complete stick man, will be used for prophets who had messages for the people around them. I haven’t filled any of this out, so take a minute right now to draw two complete stick men in the dark blue area identified as the “Kingdom of Israel” and a third stick man in the pink area of the “Kingdom of Judah”. The first two you can label as Hosea and Amos, and the third one is Joel. We will add a symbol for Obadiah in class next week.

**Observations from the Charts** – Notice that Hosea and Amos were only 20 years apart in time, so they were contemporaries and perhaps even knew each other. They both were given messages for the people who lived in the northern kingdom. It is interesting to look at their messages in light of Jesus’ response to the man who asked him about which commandment was the greatest. Jesus replied that the first and greatest commandment was to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Notice that the life and marriage of Hosea, God’s first messenger to Israel, pictured in a very powerful way just how God feels when we do NOT love Him that way. But Jesus went on to say that the second commandment was very similar to the first and greatest one: “love your neighbor as yourself.” So the second messenger that God sent to the northern kingdom addressed how the people were treating *each other*. They were robbing the poor and doing other very unjust things, so God sent Amos to call them to account.

**Observation *About* the Charts** – I also want to let you know that I didn’t notice the relationship between the messages of Hosea and Amos until I had filled out both the timeline and the map exercise for myself. But seeing that both men had a message for the same people, within a relatively short period of time, made me wonder if there wasn’t some connection. And then the realization that one was talking about the peoples’ relationship with *God* and the other about their relationship with their *fellow Jews*—in that *order*—was just amazing. I say all this to say that I don’t want these exercises to be mere busy work for us, but something that God can use them to give each of us more insight into His Word. It will be fun to see what other insights we gain in the weeks ahead.

***Bible Study Fellowship’s Perspective:*** The following comment was taken from Lesson 22 of the BSF course on Genesis.

**God’s Judgment on Simeon and Levi –** Simeon and Levi did not escape the consequences of their ruthless massacre and violence toward the Shechemites. God’s judgment on Simeon and Levi was fully revealed years later through Jacob’s prophetic deathbed denouncement…“Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!” They suffered God’s judgment: “I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.” God…declared that neither of these tribes would have territory to call its own. Ultimately, the Simeonites were incorporated into the tribe of Judah. The Levites became Israel’s tribe of priests. [They had] no inheritance of land. [Instead] God’s sanctuary became their inheritance. This tribe was known for its zeal for righteousness. **In grace, God turned their judgment into blessing.** pg. 3

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**Jen Wilkin, *God of Covenant* video #7: *Trouble at Shechem***

**Women Then and Now** – Life could be very difficult for women who lived in the time of Genesis. Some of the things we read about are hard to understand, but it gives us opportunity to think about what life was like for women who lived in the ancient near Eastern culture. It also gives us opportunities to examine the implications for our own lives and to consider what it means to be a follower of Christ today.

**Jacob’s Growing Understanding of Who God Is –** At the end of the last lesson, Jacob had gone through a major shift in his thinking. He no longer regarded God as just “the God of Abraham” or “the God of Isaac”, but He is “the God of ISRAEL”, i.e. He is *Jacob’s* God, too. We can relate to the process he went through, because when we were first drawn to the things of the Lord, we knew God as someone else’s God. But then we came to realize that He is also *our* God. He is the God of ME, not just the God of my parents or my mentor.

**Bethel –** Jacob had made a pledge to God that he would return to Bethel, and God referred to Himself repeatedly as being “the God of Bethel”. But when Jacob finally had opportunity to move about freely, he did *not* return to Bethel; he went to Shechem instead and settled there.

**The Trouble Begins –** Dinah is curious about the women of the area and decides to go into the city to see what they are like. Shechem sees her, rapes her, and then decides that he wants to marry her. Jacob says nothing initially, but his sons are incensed by this outrage . . . and even Moses makes a rare
“editorial comment” when he adds, “for such a thing must not be done.” Hamor humors his son and comes to Jacob with a proposal of marriage; actually a proposal of on-going intermarriage between Jacob’s family and his own people. He doesn’t know that such a thing is untenable, because the Israelites are forbidden to marry Canaanites.

**The Trouble Escalates –** Dinah’s brothers are determined to honor their sister even though their father has done nothing. Notice that they refer to Dinah repeatedly as “our *daughter”,* not “our sister”. Their motives were right . . . but their methods were a disaster. Jacob, the deceiver, will reap the whirlwind of his deceptive patterns in the action of his sons. They tell Hamor and Shechem that they will only agree to the marriage IF all the men of the city of Shechem are circumcised. The two men are agreeable to this strange request and convince the men of their town to agree also because they think that intermarriage will gain them all the wealth of Jacob’s family. So each side is plotting against the other.

**The Outcome –** Hamor’s scheme to gain the wealth of Jacob and his family ironically backfires on the third day after he and his men are circumcised. Simeon and Levi kill every male in the city, and then apparently all the brothers join them in plundering the city and bringing Dinah home. They deal out a punishment that far exceeds the crime, horrific as that was: they are after revenge, not justice. Not only that, but they have used the sacred sign of God’s covenant as a cover for murder. But God can work through anyone: the very line (Levites) that began by unjustly shedding the blood of man will become the line of priests that shed the blood of animals on behalf of men.

**Mutual Complaints –** When Jacob challenges his sons about their actions, his statement makes it clear that he is mainly concerned about himself. There is good reason for him to feel concern about how the other Canaanites in the area will respond to the attack on Shechem, but it is very revealing that his primary concern is for his own safety. His sons respond to this with a question: “Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?” In other words, they realize that they are their sister’s keeper. Their father did nothing, but they acted to rescue her. And because their father did not act justly when he had the chance, things have spiraled into a place of violence and desecration. They feel bitterness about their father’s neglect.

**Foreign Gods Among the Israelites –** God appears to Jacob once again and commands him to return to Bethel and set up an altar there. Jacob immediately complies, and he tells his family to put away their foreign gods and to purify themselves. We know that Rachel brought her father’s household gods with her and hid them in her saddlebag. It isn’t clear just when Jacob found out she had them, but apparently these gods had been brought out of hiding and had been used as objects of worship by members of Jacob’s household. Jacob is now finally ready to stop trying to mix idol worship with worship of the one true God, and he urges his family to not only purify themselves, but to bury the idols and leave them behind permanently. He wants them to clean the slate.

**Jacob’s Growing Understanding –** When Jacob reached Bethel the first time, when he was enroute to Laban’s house, he thought that God lived at Bethel. Now he acknowledges that God has been with him *everywhere* he has gone. He also buries the idols under a tree (which had probably been used as a place of pagan worship). In effect, he is holding a funeral for these foreign gods in the very place where they were worshiped.

**What Is Idolatry? –** Think about the irony of God’s people worshipping idols in the promised land. But don’t kid yourselves: the idea that we can worship God AND \_\_\_\_\_\_ is the most common way people practice idolatry down to this day. We tend to think of idolatry as turning and focusing completely on the lie. But for believers who still wrestle with being drawn toward things that are not of God, what we say to ourselves is, “I will worship God AND this thing. I will add this thing to my life, and it will be okay.” We tell ourselves that we can worship God and money . . . or God and power . . . or God and our physical appearance. But have we considered that what happened to Dinah in Shechem may have resulted from trying to hold on to idols while professing to worship the true God as well? So Jacob wisely has his family bury the idols so that they are completely out of their lives.

**God’s Miraculous Protection –** The text tells us that God sent a terror of Israel on all the people groups around them. This is important, because we would expect some sort of terrible retribution from them to punish Israel for what happened at Shechem. So Jacob’s family was able to freely travel to Bethel and settle there. And then we are told a seemingly insignificant detail: Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried nearby. This is the first time she is mentioned, and we are told nothing else about her. But most commentators believe that this is an indication that Rebekah has already died, which means that Jacob and his mother never saw each other again after he fled to Laban’s house years ago.

**Renewal of the Covenant –** God appeared to Jacob once again and restated what He had told him previously: “Your name will not be Jacob, but Israel. Kings will come from your own body. And you and your children shall possess this land.” Does this seem repetitious? But Jacob needed for this to happen again, to assure him that God was still with him and would still bless him. Nothing Jacob had done would keep God from fulfilling His covenant promises. Now Jacob can understand the concept of grace in a deeper way than he ever had before.

This is a picture of the Christian life. We sin, and we find restoration. We remember the new name that has been given to us, and we receive again the blessing. And when we sin again, we know that once again the process will take place. We also know that we must *grieve* our sin. What Jacob is learning is to turn from sin because he has come to hate it. Like Jacob, we must come to the place where we see sin for what it really is . . . and bury it in the ground and pray that it stays buried. The only “resurrected god” we want to serve is Christ Himself.

**Birth of Benjamin –** The account of Benjamin’s birth is an interesting prototype. He is a favored son born to a father who describes him as “the son of my right hand”. And where was he born? Very close to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, the fulfillment of the prototype.

**Reuben’s Sin –** At some point after the birth of Benjamin, Reuben sleeps with Bilhah (Rachel’s servant and Israel’s concubine). So Simeon and Levi, sons #2 and #3 have committed murder, and now Jacob’s firstborn son Reuben dishonors his father in a terrible way. According to the custom of the day, Reuben would have inherited his father’s concubines. When he sleeps with Bilhah, he is telling Jacob in effect, “I wish you were dead.” As a result, Reuben no longer functions as the firstborn, but as someone who is cast off. We will see this more and more as the narrative continues.

**Death of Isaac –** It is interesting that the two adversarial brothers, Jacob and Esau, join in an act of *unity* at the burial of their father. This is the fourth burial recorded in a very short space.

**Death and Repeated Patterns of Disfunction –** Jacob has buried his past. It might be argued that when he buried Rachel, he was burying yet another idol in his life. And yet the pattern of showing favoritism continues in the way he treats her two sons, compared with the other 10. And Leah lived out the rest of her life in Rachel’s shadow.

**Esau’s Descendants –** Chapter 36 contains a massive list of Esau’s descendants. Jacob’s list is very short in comparison: only 12 names in that list, while there are 81 names in the list of Esau’s descendants. Moses’ original audience would have recognized the names of many of their enemies in that list. Notice that of the 81 names, only TWO contain a reference to God (ReuEL and MagdiEL). Most of the names contain a reference to some sensual pleasure, e.g. Adah means “delight”. One of the names, Baal-Hanan, includes the name of the foreign god Baal. So although Esau forgot God, as evidenced by the names given to his sons, God did not forget to fulfill his promise to make Esau a great nation. God always does what He says He will do.

**Application to Us –** If we are honest, we admit that one of the idols we need to bury is US. This is why we are told so often in scripture to put self to death. Bury your idols! Put them in the ground and pray that God keeps them there.

**Implications for Israel’s Future –** The difficult stories we find in Genesis 34-36 will have a deep impact on the rest of the story that we will see as we begin to study the life of Joseph. So keep these things in mind as you study the next few weeks.