

“Jacob Has Sorrows”
Genesis 34:1 – 37:36
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Introduction

- When I was in seventh grade, I read the *Lord of the Rings* for the first time. Later in the year I read it again. My favorite book in the trilogy was the second book: *The Two Towers*. In that book Frodo and his servant Sam broke away from the fellowship of the ring to fulfill the aim of the fellowship: the destruction of the ring that contained most of Sauron’s power, the evil leader that was against all that was good. Frodo and Sam faced many challenges in their quest. The last chapter in the book is named “*The Choices of Master Samwise*.” Frodo had been poisoned by a large spider and appeared to be dead. Sam had a number of choices to make: (1) Should he wait with Frodo and hope that he got better? (2) Should he take the ring and try to complete the quest on his own? (3) Should he turn around and give up the quest? (4) What if he made the wrong decision and all would be lost?
- In our lives we also have to make choices everyday of our lives. Some of these decisions are good and some of them are bad. But, all of our choices have consequences, some that we understand and some that have unintended consequences.
- God had made His choices:
- **Gen. 25:21-23** *And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her, and she said, “If it is thus, why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.”*
- Malachi the prophet provided more information: **Mal. 1:2-3** *I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.*
- God made a choice to choose Jacob over Esau. Was this a good choice or a bad choice? God made His own choice, for His own reasons, and His choice was good and right, though we may not understand it fully.
- As we go through this passage today, I want to look at it from a slightly different perspective: from the perspective of Jacob and choices that he made, whether they were good choices or bad choices. Last week our lesson covered Jacob’s return to Canaan, the meeting with his brother, and his separation from his brother...

Lesson

- **Choice 1: Jacob went to live at Shechem**
- **Gen. 31:13** *I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.*

- God had told Jacob to go back to Bethel when he returned to the land, back to the place where he had lived and where he had first encountered God in a personal way. But where did he go when he went back to the land?
- **Gen. 33:17-19** *But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. 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. 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.*
- It was good that Jacob came back to the Promised Land. That was a good choice. But where did he go to live specifically in the land? He went to Succoth and then Shechem. Succoth was a backward step, spiritually as well as geographically. He stayed in Succoth where he had time to build a house and make places for his livestock. He moved on, maybe a few years later, and went on to Shechem. Was this a good choice or a bad choice? Why?
- God had given Jacob clear guidance on where He wanted him to live. I believe it was a bad choice.
- **Choice 2: Jacob allowed his daughter Dinah to go out alone**
- **Gen. 34:1-2** *Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her.*
- Dinah was probably about 12 when she went out. Dinah's decision was understandable but unwise. She went out alone without supervision. Was this a wise decision or a bad decision on Jacob's part to let his young daughter, who was of marriageable age, to go to a strange city without an escort? She was assaulted and raped by Shechem, the son Hamor the prince or ruler of the city.
- Was this a bad thing that happened? Yes, it was, but unfortunately it was common in the land of Canaan.
- *Unattached young women were considered fair game in cities of the time, in which promiscuity was not only common but, in fact, a part of the very religious system itself.* – **Enduring Word, Genesis**
- Here we see that the choice that Jacob made in choice #1 and in choice #2 led to the rape and defiling of his daughter Dinah.
- **Choice 3: Jacob waited for his sons to return**
- **Gen. 34:5** *Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came.*
- After Jacob learned of his daughter's rape, he "held his peace." Should Jacob have done something about the defiling of his daughter? She was defiled both ethically and religiously. When Jacob heard about Dinah, his sons were out with their livestock and not at home. The father of Shechem came to the grieving Jacob in order to get Dinah as his son's wife. Was Jacob's choice of no reaction to the defiling of his daughter a good or a bad choice? No

outrage is found in the text. Jacob did not react. He did not confront Hamor. He did not demand retribution. He did not show anger. He waited for his sons to return.

- **Gen. 34:7, 13** *The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done... The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.*
- The brothers of Dinah returned from their flocks and they were very angry, and yet, they were deceitful in their response to Shechem and Hamor, maybe a characteristic they had learned from their father. Ancient Middle Eastern cultures had a strong sense of family honor. It was strong enough that they would defend this sense of honor with violence. Notice that there was seemingly still no response from Jacob and the plan seems to be fully from his sons. The brothers said deceitfully they could not agree to the marriage unless all the men were circumcised. Shechem and Hamor agreed and the men were circumcised.
- **Gen. 34:25-27** *On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister.*
- Simeon and Levi, the brothers of Dinah, killed everyone in the city, including Hamor and Shechem. The other sons of Jacob plundered the city because of their sister. This was a brutal and deceptive act and also disgraced God's covenant of circumcision. The brothers had learned deception from watching their father's dealing with others. Like father, like son.
- **Choice 4: Jacob rebuked his sons**
- **Gen. 34:30-31** *Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household." But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"*
- Once Jacob learned of his sons' actions, he rebuked them. But what did he rebuke them for? Seemingly not for the act, but for the consequences of the act. Was Jacob's choice to rebuke his sons a good or bad choice?
- Jacob's rebuke was based upon his fear of what would happen to them once the inhabitants of the land learned what had happened at Shechem. Jacob was concerned that his whole family would be destroyed because of his sons' desire at retribution through trickery. Dinah's brothers said that the defilement of their sister was justification for their killing of all the people.
- **Choice 5: Jacob listened to God**
- **Gen. 35:1-3** *God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and*

purify yourselves and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.”

- God spoke to Jacob and told him two things: **(1) Go to Bethel; and (2) Make an altar to worship God.** Jacob immediately went to his children and told them to get rid of the foreign gods, the idols, and to purify themselves so they could worship the true God. Was this a good choice or a bad choice?
- We see that Jacob’s family only got right with God when Jacob himself did. This indicates that men have a tremendous leadership role with their family. **(1) They got rid of the idols; (2) They got rid of the pagan things like their earrings; (3) They went to Bethel; (4) They went to worship the true God; (5) They had to separate themselves from the world and follow God.**
- What was the result of their following God?
- **Gen. 35:5** *And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.*
- God protected Jacob and his family and the surrounding people left them alone. Upon arriving at Bethel, Jacob built an altar and then God appeared to him once again:
- **Gen. 35:9-12** *God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. 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. 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. 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.”*
- When Jacob finally arrived at the place that God had told to go, he immediately found great blessing. God appeared to him when he arrived at Bethel and God called him by his new name that He had given him in **Gen. 32:28** *Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.”*
- God had changed his name from Jacob, meaning “supplanter” to Israel, meaning “one who strives with God” or more likely “God rules.” Jacob had wrestled God and endured until the end, but God had finally conquered him.
- *When you battle with God, you only win by losing and not by giving up until you know you have lost.* – **Enduring Word, Genesis**
- In the Bible names are very important. They are generally an indication of a person’s character, their strengths and weaknesses. Here Jacob’s name changed from one who supplants others to one whom God rules.
- God identified Himself as God Almighty and the covenant that was given to Abraham was given to Jacob and his offspring. His descendants would be a nation, with kings also coming from his descendants. The land of Canaan would be theirs to live in and rule.
- **Choice 6: Jacob did nothing to Reuben**

- **Gen. 35:22** *While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it.*
- Being nomads, Jacob and his family would move from one place to another. On their journey to Ephrath or Bethlehem, Rachel died during the birth of her son Benjamin and was buried.
- After this we are told that Reuben went and laid with his father's concubine Bilhah. This was an egregious and shocking action by Jacob's oldest son. What does the Scripture say at this point? It says that Jacob heard of this incident between his eldest son and his concubine. What did he do? The text says nothing, not a word, not an action, just that Jacob was aware of this. I am sure that he grieved and was disappointed in his eldest son. We know nothing of any reaction from Jacob.
- **Choice 7: Jacob favored his son Joseph**
- **Gen. 37:2-4** *Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. ... And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.*
- The next instance we are aware of in Jacob's life occurred when Joseph was seventeen years old. It said that Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons. Joseph was his favorite son. Jacob made him a coat of many colors, an outfit that signified a position of favor, princely standing, and birthright. It was a tunic that extended all the way down to the wrists and ankles, as opposed to the typical short garments that were worn during that time. It was a dramatic sign that he was going to receive the birthright.
- Was this a good or bad choice that Jacob showed Joseph favoritism?
- How did Joseph's older brothers feel? To say that they were upset was an understatement. They hated him and did not speak to him in a kindly manner. To say that this favoritism was well received was the opposite to what really happened. A parent that has a favorite child seldom ends well. Joseph also brought a bad report about his brothers to their father, tattling on them. Joseph also had dreams that he would rule over his father and his brothers. Joseph definitely did not make a choice to win friends and influence people.
- **Choice 8: Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers**
- **Gen. 37:12-14** *Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word."*
- The last incident that we have in our lecture today about Jacob's choices was his choice to send Joseph the favored child, who was a tattletale, who was wearing his robe of many colors, who was able to stay at home with his father sleeping in his own bed, to check up on his brothers. Was this a good or a bad choice?
- The brothers of Joseph saw him coming from a distance and did they want to greet him? No, they wanted to kill him. Reuben wanted to save him. Joseph was thrown into a pit and when Reuben was away tending his cattle, the other brothers sold Joseph to a group of Ishmaelites

as a slave, who then sold him to an Egyptian as a slave. The brothers figured they might as well make a profit from Joseph's demise.

- The brothers took the robe of many colors, dipped it in goat's blood, and showed it to their father Jacob. Jacob came to the conclusion that Joseph had been killed by wild beasts and mourned and wept for him, refusing to be comforted.

- Review**

- Let's review the choices that Jacob made in this passage and see if they were good or bad:

- Choice 1: Jacob went to live at Shechem**
 - Choice 2: Jacob allowed his daughter Dinah to go out alone**
 - Choice 3: Jacob waited for his sons to return**
 - Choice 4: Jacob rebuked his sons**
 - Choice 5: Jacob listened to God**
 - Choice 6: Jacob did nothing to Reuben**
 - Choice 7: Jacob favored his son Joseph**
 - Choice 8: Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers**

- God is working in each of our lives in order to conform us to His image (Rom. 8:29). This is a long process that occurs during our lives and only ends when we have died. We see in our passage today that God continued to put Jacob in positions where he had to make choices. Some of the decisions were good and some of them were bad. Sometimes Jacob followed what God wanted him to do and sometimes he made choices from his own sin nature.

Application

- How does this passage impact our lives? Here are my suggestions:
- (1) We need to realize that God is sovereign and that we can trust Him**
- Col. 1:16** *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*
- (2) We need to make choices that honor God and not compromise our standards**
- 1 Cor. 10:31** *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*
- (3) We must spend time in God's Word to understand His ways**
- Psa. 1:1-2** *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.*
- After our prayer, please stand for the doxology. Let us pray.