

• *Jacob and Esau reconciled*

• *“By many tribulations” – entering into an experience of God’s kingdom*

1. Pain often comes to us through those who are dearest to us

• *Israel was not a model parent*

• *He had a wandering daughter Dinah – who was abused*

• *He was a weak father*

• *There were also two violent brothers*

• *So Israel’s weakness led to a savage reprisal*

• *Israel’s way was weak and passive*

• *Simeon and Levi’s way was violent and extreme*

Israel (as Jacob is now called) has received a wonderful answer to his desire for reconciliation with Esau. He now is able to settle in Canaan and trust that the promises of God to him and through him will go forward.

Yet it is ‘by means of many tribulations that’ we enter into an experience of the kingdom of God ^{☐1}. Israel’s special trials and testings come to him in connection with his children. In the next chapters we shall see of the difficulties he had through Dinah ^{☐2}, through the birth of his last son Benjamin ^{☐3}, through Joseph ^{☐4} and through Judah ^{☐5}. He is confronted with a whole host of family problems which cause him great distress and drive him to move away from Shechem where he had settled ^{☐6}.

1. Pain often comes to us through those who are dearest to us. The patriarchs were all rather irresponsible as parents. Abraham was a polygamist. Isaac showed great favouritism towards Esau. Israel had four wives and twelve sons but he was not a specially good father. We have seen how greatly he showed favouritism towards Rachel and Joseph. After his experiences with Laban in which Leah was imposed on him we can understand why he should feel this way. Yet it was not a good way to be a parent. None of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Israel, was a model parent.

Israel had **a wandering daughter**. Israel settled at Shechem. Some time later when his children were young adults, one of his daughters, Dinah, went visiting with the local Canaanites ^{☐1}. She was noticed by Shechem. He was an arrogant young man, the son of a prince, and forced her to have sex with him ^{☐2}. Despite his violent ways he loved her ^{☐3} and urged his father to arrange for his marriage to her ^{☐4}.

Israel himself was **a weak father**. He knew of what had happened ^{☐1} but he did not take any action or make any protest ^{☐2}. Hamor was seeking to arrange a marriage when the girl’s brothers arrived ^{☐3}.

Then there were **two violent brothers**. Shechem’s father, Hamor, proposed that the two clans intermarry and establish trade between themselves ^{☐1}. Shechem was willing to pay any dowry-price that might be proposed ^{☐2}.

For the moment Israel’s sons pretended to go along with Hamor’s suggestion, demanding only that the people of Hamor got circumcised ^{☐1}. The men of the city are persuaded and they all get circumcised ^{☐2}. But then, when they have just been circumcised and are immobilised with pain, Simeon and Levi kill the entire city including Hamor and Shechem ^{☐3}. It is a case of sheer vindictiveness. They are avenging the assault of Dinah. It is a piece of savage reprisal. The desire for justice was taken to a barbaric extreme. Yet Israel was partly to blame. He had not taken much care of Dinah. He had done nothing when the incident first took place ^{☐4}. If it had been Rachel’s daughter he would have acted differently! Leah’s daughter was being neglected by Israel, and since Israel did nothing his sons went to an extreme in slaughtering an entire community. Israel’s way was weak and passive; Simeon and Levi’s way was violent and extreme. The balance would have been somewhere in the middle. Israel could have protested and demanded some kind of compensation and could have made arrangements for the provision and protection of Dinah – but he did none of these things and allowed others to take vengeance into their own hands. Israel was afraid of the consequences but his protest was weak ^{☐5}; he had taken no action so the brothers felt justified in what they had done ^{☐6}. A

☐1 see Acts 14:22
☐2 ch. 34
☐3 ch. 35
☐4 ch. 37
☐5 ch. 38
☐6 ch. 34

☐1 34:1
☐2 34:2
☐3 34:3
☐4 34:4

☐1 34:5
☐2 34:5
☐3 34:6–7

☐1 34:8–10
☐2 34:11–12

☐1 34:13–17
☐2 34:18–24
☐3 34:25–29
☐4 34:5
☐5 34:30
☐6 34:31

2. Troublesome times forced Israel to realize his need of a fresh touch from God.

• He called his whole family to repentance

• It was the end of an era

• God reminded Israel of his new name and nature

• God reminded him that He is the God who rescues the helpless

weak father produced immature and violent children.

2. Troublesome times forced Israel to realize his need of a fresh touch from God. God takes note of times when we are in need of spiritual renewal. Israel was virtually forced to leave Shechem because of the events that had happened in connection with Dinah. Now God leads him to return to Bethel, the place where he had first met with God and he is asked to build an altar there ^{□1}. Israel needs to return to his original knowledge of God. Sometimes God calls us to restoration by saying to us 'do the deeds you did at first' ^{□2}.

So Israel summons his family to cleanse themselves from every hint of idolatry. They must put on a new set of clothes (speaking of a new public lifestyle) and return to the God who had delivered Israel in a day of distress ^{□1}. The entire clan travel to Bethel ^{□2}. God gives them special protection as they travel ^{□3}. Israel builds an altar, worships God, recalls what had happened to him many years before, and resolves that he and his family will live as worshippers and servants of the God of Abraham.

It was the end of an era. The previous generation was passing away. Deborah died ^{□1}. It was a hint to Israel that his father's generation was passing away and soon he would be alone as the leader of the people of God. God's people were still largely confined to the one family of Abraham; Israel would soon be its one and only leader.

God reminds Israel of his new name and new nature. He is 'Israel', someone able to be blessed by God. He is no longer 'Jacob', a manipulator and twister ^{□1}.

Then God reminds the patriarch that He Himself is 'El Shaddai'. We have come across this name before. It is the name which means 'The God who rescues the helpless'. At this time when his family are wandering into ways of sin and violence and Israel is facing danger from the Canaanites, he can know that God is 'El Shaddai', the God who comes to our aid when we need Him.



□1 35:1
□2

Revelation 2:5

□1 35:2-3
□2 35:4
□3 35:5-6

□1 35:9

□1 35:9-10

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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