**Genesis 34-35**

With these two chapters we come to the end the Jacob and Esau stories. Chapter 35 deals with the religious reorientation of Jacob’s family and Chapter 36 is all about Esau and his heritage.

We left the Jacob story with two of Jacob’s sons tricking and then slaughtering the men of Shechem and taking the wives and children of Shechem as slaves. This event made Jacob and his family a “stink” to the people around them. God intervenes at this point and sends Jacob and his family to a new location. Along the way God protects them by causing “fear” to fall over the cities they pass. God directs them to Bethel (which will become a major worship/sacrificial center for generations afterward) with the command that Jacob build an altar to the God who appeared to him when he first left home. Jacob prepares for this journey with three significant acts. First, he tells his family to rid themselves of all the family gods that they had carried with them (this is a reminder that the God of Abraham and Isaac had not been exclusively worshipped). The family complies with this command and Jacob buries the idols under a tree. Second, the family members were told to ritually purify themselves. Finally, the family was instructed to change their clothes by putting on new garments before the journey begins.

The chapter concludes with God once again renaming Jacob as Israel (which shows that at least two sources of tradition are at work because this same conversation took place a couple of chapters earlier), giving Jacob the Promise of land, children and blessing. The chapter moves on to the death of Rachel in childbirth (giving birth to Benjamin), an interesting single verse about Reuben, one of Jacob’s sons, sleeping with one of Jacob’s concubines (think of a young male lion trying to wrest control from an older lion), a listing of the twelve sons of Jacob (who will become the twelve tribes of Israel) and finally the death of Jacob’ father Isaac, who is buried by both sons, Esau and Jacob.

Chapter 36 is a fascinating look at Esau’s legacy. As a reminder, Esau was Isaac’s older son who sold his birthright to Jacob and then lost the Promise to him as well. We might expect that Esau, as the one who lost both would come to a sad end. Yet that is not the case and in fact the opposite is true. God gives Esau the same blessings that are given to his brother Jacob. Esau has multiple children, acquires much livestock, produces clans and kings from his lineage and otherwise does well. All of this is to say that the older brother is still honored by God.

**Reflection:** There are two key takeaways from these chapters. The first, is a reminder that encountering and following God requires transformation. When one engages with God, certain life changes are sought. Central to this change is the leaving behind of the old life and the taking on of the new one. We can see this in the leaving behind of the old gods, being purified and changing clothes. These are physical acts that publicly demonstrate a change of allegiance from the old way of the gods to the new way of YHWH. This taking on the new life is what we do in baptism. Parents renounce the ways of sin and reaffirm their faith in God and their commitment to rear their child in the love of Christ. It is putting off the old and putting on the new.

The second has to do with those outside of the community of promise. Esau is not in the line of the people of the Promise. Yet, God’s blessings are showered upon him as well. We might consider what this means for our Muslim brothers and sisters, since they are descendants of Esau.

Questions:

1. What does worship look like for you? How does it help give your life meaning?
2. How have you, or are you, putting off the old and putting on the new?
3. What does it mean for you that God blesses all people and not only certain people?