

## Levi and Simeon

SLIDE: KISLEV OPENING...

Good morning saints.

### STORY OF TWO MONKS

I read a story of TWO MONKS who were walking together just after a thunderstorm. They came to a swollen stream. A beautiful, young woman stood there wanting to cross to the other side, but was afraid of the currents. One of the monks said, *“Can I help you?”*

*“I need to cross the stream,”* replied the woman.

The monk picked her up, put her on his shoulder, carried her through the swirling waters, and put her down on the other side. He and his companion then went on to the monastery.

That night his companion said to him, *“I have a bone to pick with you. As monks, we have taken vows not to look on a woman, much less touch her body. Back there by the river, you did both.”*

*“My brother,”* answered the other monk, *“I put the woman down on the other side of the river. You’re still carrying her in your mind.”*

Today is November 22, 2015 which means that we are in the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month of ‘Kislev’ (*KISS–Lev*) 5776. The Bible

uses a lunar calendar which starts with the month of Nisan; Kislev is the ninth month.

Because Kislev occurs at time of the year when the nights are getting longer, it is one of the “darkest” times of the year. And yet, the word ‘Kislev’ comes from a Hebrew root word meaning “*hope*” or “*trust*”.<sup>1</sup> Why this hope? Because, in the last week of Kislev, we have the beginning of the festival of **Hanukkah**, the Festival of Lights (sundown on Sunday Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> this year). The message of Hanukkah is that the power of LIGHT always overcomes the power of darkness—good over evil. **This is the Biblical pattern – first, there is darkness, and then God brings light.**

The month of Kislev is sometimes called the “MONTH OF DREAMS” because the portions of the Torah that are read during this month in the synagogues on the Sabbaths contain more passages about dreams than in any other month. In the five Saturdays of this month, nine dreams appear in the portions that are read.

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<sup>1</sup>Chodesh Kislev, HebrewforChristians,

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The primary Biblical figure connected with dreams is Joseph in the OT, who was hated by his brothers because he was their father Jacob's favorite. He was sold into slavery in Egypt, but thru the grace of God and his ability to interpret the Pharaoh's dream, he rose to the #2 position in all Egypt. Years later when his brothers came looking for grain due to a famine in Canaan, they did not recognize him, but he gave them grain because he loved still them. Jesus also came into the world but was not recognized by His brethren. He also was rejected – but He loved them, He became their savior and our Savior.

I want to begin the presentation today with the opening sentence of Charles Dickens's famous book, *A Tale of Two Cities*:

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way..."*

This could pretty well sum up how WE feel sometimes, can't it? Ups and downs – our lives are medical, financial and spiritual rollercoasters. It certainly was the literal truth about the Israelites in Chapter 25 of the Book of Numbers – the people had just been blessed by YHWH with some of the greatest pronouncements in

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Scripture. And then, from that spiritual high, they immediately descend into the depths of idolatry. And then, THRU THE GRACE OF GOD, they begin to rise again.

**SLIDE: LEVI AND SIMEON**

Well, today I want to tell another TALE, not of two cities but of two brothers – Levi and Simeon – both of whom were involved in selling their brother Joseph into slavery. In this tale, we will hear an echo of the question Nicodemus had for Jesus when Jesus told him that you must be born again to see the kingdom of God: “Can a man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”<sup>2</sup>

As most of you know, Joseph, who was the favorite son of his father Jacob, had 11 other brothers. Their descendants became known as the Tribes of Israel. They are called tribes of “*Israel*” because Israel is the name that God gave to Jacob<sup>3</sup>. So, the descendants of Levi formed the Tribe of Levi and the descendants of Simeon formed the Tribe of Simeon. Of course, by the time of Numbers Chapter 25 in history, Simeon and Levi themselves have been dead for hundreds of years.

- However, it’s the *characteristics* of their DESCENDANTS that make up the Tale.

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<sup>2</sup> John 3:4

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 35:10

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**SLIDE: SEQUENCE**

This tale of two brothers illustrates the concept of SEQUENCE of the Scripture. Our Christian upbringing tends to treat Biblical incidents as *interesting* but isolated episodes or unrelated short stories.<sup>4</sup> But these incidents were never meant to be understood in isolation — **they tell a grand tale that – step by step – leads to Jesus and redemption.** Fortunately, the Holy Spirit has been moving in the Church in the last 20 years to recover the idea that Scripture IS a unified whole – especially concerning the attributes and character of God. Yehovah does not change, so if He says something is true in Genesis and Deuteronomy, it is true in Philipians and Colossians and today.

RECAP

The tale of the two brothers – Simeon and Levi – explains a lot about the dramatic incident on the Plains of Moab that we covered last time. Let’s briefly recall that incident. Israel – all 3 million of them – are encamped just across the Jordan River from Canaan, the Promised Land. Unbeknownst to them, there has just been a spiritual battle in the mountains overlooking the camp. It was a battle between YHWH and the pagan

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<sup>4</sup> [http://blog.alephbeta.org/the-parsha-experiment-and-so-much-more/?utm\\_source=The%20Parsha%20Experiment%3A%20Bereshit&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_term=Blog&utm\\_content=Parsha%20Experiment&utm\\_campaign=RF%20Newsletter](http://blog.alephbeta.org/the-parsha-experiment-and-so-much-more/?utm_source=The%20Parsha%20Experiment%3A%20Bereshit&utm_medium=Email&utm_term=Blog&utm_content=Parsha%20Experiment&utm_campaign=RF%20Newsletter)

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sorcerer Balaam, who tries to get God to abandon His Promises to Israel.

Balaam was promised a large bag of money for success, but he went home emptyhanded due to his complete failure. He then hatches a demonic plan – since God will not break His promises to them, why not get THEM to break their promises to Him? Then, God will deal harshly with this spiritual treason.

The plan is to have Moabite and Midianite women start to flirt with Israelite men; the Israelites will think that they're just being neighborly and that they're attracted to their manly good looks. Soon, Israelite men will be seduced into worshipping the local god Baal, thereby breaking their allegiance to Yehovah.

Well – Balaam's plan works: Yehovah is furious at this and instructs Moses to have the leaders of the tribes killed and hung up in public for their failure to stop this. Moses revises God's order to lessen its severity and orders that just the *ringleaders* of this idolatry be killed. But, nothing is done, and God takes action Himself with a plague.

As Moses and other leaders gather at the front of the Tabernacle tent wringing their hands about what to do, the incident with Phineas unfolds.

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SLIDE: Starting with verse 6 of Numbers Chapter 25:

Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman's stomach. 9 Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000...

Skipping down to verse 14: Now the name of the Israelite who was stabbed—the one who was stabbed with the Midianite woman—was Zimri son of Salu, a leader of a clan of the Simeonites. The name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi daughter of Zur. He was a leader over the people of a clan of Midian.

OK.

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*May the Lord be on my mind, on my lips and in my heart, that I might present the Gospel of Jesus in a manner that glorifies Him.*

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**ZIMRI** – the son of a clan leader of the Tribe of **SIMEON**, strolls into the Israelite camp with Cozbi – the daughter of a Midianite clan leader. Since Cozbi worshipped the pagan god Baal, her mere *presence* in the Israelite camp was absolutely forbidden because of the proximity of the Tabernacle. This was a defilement of God's holiness and it was plainly visible to Moses and the other leaders.

➤ And, it appears that this was *INTENTIONAL*.

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Zimri's behavior was no simple, momentary lapse or surrender to sexual desire. His behavior was *ideologically* motivated: he, like many today, are what may be called "*inclusionists*"

- they are people who have the COEXIST bumper stickers on their cars and promote the philosophy that all spirituality and religious practice are equally valid and should be embraced.<sup>5</sup>

Zimri sees nothing wrong with intermarriage with idolaters – he also sees nothing wrong with going after *other* gods in addition to Yehovah – and he wants to *force* the issue by using his elevated status as the son of a clan leader of the tribe of Simeon. They enter the family tent in order to further the insult to YHWH by having sexual relations that are part of the worship of Baal.

Phineas sees this. He is the son of the High Priest Eleazar and the grandson of Aaron, and thus he is a member of the Tribe of LEVI. Now, the Levites were charged by Yehovah with the responsibility of protecting the Tabernacle and His Holiness. Phineas is incensed over this blatant insult to Yehovah's Sovereignty as the Only God of Israel; he grabs a spear, follows the couple into the tent and kills both of them with one thrust. God then *commends* him for his zeal and stops the plague.

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<sup>5</sup> Aish.com, *Pinchas and Zimri: The Anatomy of an Argument*



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The main point of this incident is that God is jealous for maintaining His Sovereign Glory in the eyes of Israel. But, there is something more going on here.

- NOTICE that the offending individual's name (Zimri) and his tribal affiliation (Simeon) are only mentioned AFTER the incident is over. **WHY MENTION IT AFTER THE EVENT – OR FOR THAT MATTER, WHY MENTION IT AT ALL?** Evidently the Holy Spirit is trying to point to something,

Here is where the concept of SEQUENCE comes into play – and again, SEQUENCE refers to the idea that events in Scripture are not isolated incidents but interrelated parts of a story that leads to Christ and redemption.

**SLIDE:** PHINEAS AND ZIMRI, TRIBES OF LEVI AND SIMEON

- Let's begin with looking at the LINEAGE of Phineas and Zimri.

<click> Phineas, being the son of the high priest, obviously was from the Tribe of Levi. <click> And, the text is clear that Zimri was from the Tribe of Simeon.

Both individuals clearly have STRONG PERSONALITIES – Zimri with his blatant display of defiance to God and to the leadership of

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Israel, and Phineas with his willingness to act decisively in defense of God's holiness.

- Was this display *unusual* on both their parts, or was **there something in their genes**, so to speak? Does the fact that one belongs to the Tribe of Levi and the other to the Tribe of Simeon have any significance?

This leads us to the tale of two brothers.

We need to go back 450 years or so from the incident on the Plains of Moab – back to the time when **Jacob** first entered the land of Canaan with this family. This is long BEFORE the Israelites journeyed to Egypt and became enslaved. They're not very numerous at this point in their history – maybe a 75–100 at the most when you count servants.

**SLIDE:** AREA MAP

They are shepherds and herders and are camped near a city in Canaan called **Shechem** (*SHEE-kem*) which is about 30 miles north of Jerusalem.

Shechem has a history – it was the first place where Abraham had stopped in Canaan after responding to God's call to leave his home and journey to a new land. But at that time, there was no city, not even a village; it was just a "place." It would not even have

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been called Shechem when Abraham was there. He built an altar to the Lord here, and it was here God appeared to him and confirmed the promise that the land of Canaan would be given to him. And, when the Northern Kingdom of Israel broke from the Southern Kingdom of Judah many years later, Shechem would be its first capital.

SLIDE: PICTURE OF NABLUS TODAY

Here's a picture of the area today – the city of Nablus The old city of Shechem was destroyed in the Jewish revolt that led to the destruction of the Temple (70AD). The city was rebuilt by the Romans several years later and renamed *Flavia NEAPOLIS*, **Nablus** is the Arabicized version of the name and today it has a population of about 130,000. It is located in what is called the West Bank today.

When Jacob and his family arrived at Shechem, the place has grown since the time of Abraham, and it is now a city controlled by a Hivite King named Hamor. The city itself is named after King Hamor's favorite son 'Shechem'. This was a walled settlement with a city gate<sup>6</sup>, so it was fortified place, not just a collection of huts, but the city itself was not particularly large. It was, however, the seat of government of the kingdom of Shechem which was a major

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 34:20 and 24

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Canaanite coalition that comprised an area of about one thousand square miles.<sup>7</sup>

Jacob purchase a plot of land from the king and pitched his tent there.<sup>8</sup> Making friends with the king was good for security and good for business.

Jacob chose to live *outside* of the city – Scripture says that he “camped **within sight** of the city”<sup>9</sup>. Evidently, he learned from his grand-uncle **Lot’s** experience of the problem with moving into the pagan city of **Sodom**

- By the way – the Hebrew word for GRACE is ‘chesed’<sup>10</sup> (*HA-sed*), and one of the first times that it appears in the Bible is in Genesis 19:19, when Lot thanks the angels for warning him before they destroy Sodom and Gomorrah:

He said: “...you have shown me great kindness in saving my life.”

The “kindness” that the angels showed is the word ‘chesed’ (HA- sed). **This is precisely what grace means: COMPASSION WITH NO EXPECTATION OF REWARD.**

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[http://www.nelc.ucla.edu/Faculty/Mullins\\_flies/ANE230\\_State\\_Formation\\_files/Na'aman\\_Contribution\\_Amarna\\_Jerusalem.pdf](http://www.nelc.ucla.edu/Faculty/Mullins_flies/ANE230_State_Formation_files/Na'aman_Contribution_Amarna_Jerusalem.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 33:18-19

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 33:18

<sup>10</sup> Strong's #2617

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**SLIDE:** Jacob's Well

While he lived in the area of Shechem, Jacob would dig a well here that became famous<sup>11</sup> – it is **THE** well upon which Jesus would later sit and talk to the Samaritan woman about spiritual drink and the time that is coming when people will not worship Yehovah at one place but in spirit and in truth.

**SLIDE:** JOSEPH'S TOMB

Shechem is also where the bones of Joseph were buried.<sup>12</sup> Remember, Joseph had his family promise that they would carry his bones out of Egypt when they left, and Moses did that.<sup>13</sup> Today, there is a monument and compound here called the **Tomb of Joseph**, but not no one knows if this is the exact place where the bones were buried. The city of Nablus was transferred to Palestinian control in 1995. Jewish pilgrims are permitted to visit the tomb at night, once a month, under Israeli military protection.

- Palestinian rioters have torched this site numerous times, the latest was just last month (October 2015).<sup>14</sup>

The Palestinians today claim that they have always held this land, although they in no way are related to the Canaanites.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 33:18-19

<sup>12</sup> Joshua 24:32

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 13:19

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34547523>

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**SLIDE:** DINAH

OK – when Jacob camps outside Shechem, his immediate family consists of 11 sons by his two wives and their two handmaids; his youngest son Benjamin was not yet born<sup>15</sup>. Jacob also had **one daughter we know of. Her name was DINAH.**

Dinah was the last child born to Jacob and his 1<sup>st</sup> wife Leah.<sup>16</sup> Leah was also the mother of Jacob's first four sons: Reuben, Levi, Simeon and Judah, so Dinah was their young sister and is about 15 years old at this time<sup>17</sup>. We pick up the story in Genesis chapter 34, verse 1:

**SLIDE:** DINAH & NARRATIVE

"Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out **to see** the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, **saw her**, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young woman as a wife."

And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came. Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to

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<sup>15</sup> Benjamin was born in Genesis 35.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 30:21

<sup>17</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Old Testament History*, Vol 1, Chapter 18

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Speak with him. And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done. But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it."

Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife."

But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a reproach to us. But on this condition we will consent to you: If you will become as we are, if every male of you is circumcised, then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone."

And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in

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Jacob's daughter. He was more honorable than all the household of his father."

**I'LL PAUSE HERE.** As I said, Dinah was about 15 years old at this time. The text says that she went out to "see" or "to meet and make friends with" the **cool** teenage girls of the city. The Hebrew word here for "see" is 'ra-ah' (raw-ah), which carries with it the sense of wanting to participate, or explore, or to learn something intellectually; it also has the implications that she wanted "to be seen" by them.<sup>18</sup> Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote that *Dinah "went into the city to see the finery of the women."*<sup>19</sup>

Well, the young Hivite prince Shechem DID see her and liked what he saw. Dinah, young and naïve, was probably flattered at first by the prince's attention; soon, she found herself in the palace where she was attacked sexually. She undoubtedly never meant to go so far.

This whole story carries with it a tone of a naïve, foolish, young girl getting in way over her head, and then a series of events unfolded that is beyond her youthful capability to recognize as dangerous. We must understand that Dinah – even though only 15 years old – was a girl of marriageable age in that culture; she was a virgin, and her family would NEVER have allowed her to go,

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<sup>18</sup> Strong's Number: 7200

<sup>19</sup> Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, Book I, Chapter XXI



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unchaperoned, into a city.<sup>20</sup> So, she snuck out of camp in typical teenage rebellion and it led to horrible things.

- We can see similar dynamics today – a father’s concern and a daughter’s naive rebellion.

Jacob somehow receives the news of the defilement of his daughter but he doesn’t do anything immediately because his sons are out in the fields. The prince tells his father the King that he really loves Dinah and wants to marry her – whether he really loved her, however, is just his side of the story; you don’t sexually force yourself on a girl because of love.

Shechem and the King go to speak with Jacob. By now, her brothers have returned home – and they’re furious. The King tells Jacob and his sons that Shechem loves Dinah and wants to marry her, and then their two peoples will intermarry and eventually becoming as one.

You may have noticed when I read the text that the king nor his son never apologize for what Shechem did to Dinah. It may have been quite normal in Canaanite culture for a young man of importance to rape a woman to whom he is attracted and then, if he wishes so, to marry her.

And not only did they NOT apologize, but they didn’t even MENTION the violation against Dinah – it was as though nothing

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<sup>20</sup> Tom Bradford, TorahClass, Genesis 34, <http://www.torahclass.com/old-testament-studies/34-old-testament-studies-genesis>

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seriously wrong had happened. It was no big deal. And, THAT'S was what really turned Jacob's sons to rage.

Jacob doesn't respond to the King's offer, but his sons do. The family would agree to the wedding *only* if the King, his sons, and all of the city's males are circumcised.

- Why did *a//* the men have to be circumcised? Because the King was offering for his people to merge with Jacob's people, but it was forbidden for anyone to be a member of Israel without submitting to the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant. And, to be a member of that covenant required circumcision. So, if the King intends that the two peoples intermarry, circumcision was necessary.

It is unclear whether the brothers actually believed that the king would agree to their proposal; they may have been just trying to make an excuse for the release of their sister. You see, Dinah was STILL being held hostage inside the city and they were not strong enough to take her by force. **Rescuing her was going to be a difficult strategic problem.**

LET'S CONTINUE THE STORY:

And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying: "These men are at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For

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indeed the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters. Only on this condition will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. Will not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us." And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went out. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that was in the houses."

What a story.

**SLIDE:** A CITY GETS CIRCUMCISED

To the brothers' surprise, King Hamor and his son agree to the terms and go back to convince the rest of the city to also agree.

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The King calls a public meeting and says that by doing this, they will be able to merge with Jacob's clan and eventually own all their livestock. The men of the city could not have been too thrilled about this, for in those days circumcision of an adult was a pretty grueling process. **But, they eventually agree out of GREED.**

Simeon and Levi plot revenge for the violation of their little sister. Should they go in and just rescue Dinah? Should they also kill Shechem for revenge? If they killed prince Shechem, the King would seek revenge; if they also killed the King, rest of the city would seek revenge. So, they DECIDE TO KILL THEM ALL.

They wait for three days until the males of Shechem were at the height of their weakness. Simeon and Levi then enter the city and go around – probably house to house – killing every male, including the King and his sons. They also rescued Dinah.

- Now, it probably wasn't just two individuals doing all the killing – by now, each brother probably had at least one son and several servants who would have participated, because it would have taken more than a just a few men to kill all those people. So, the TRIBES of Levi and Simeon did the killing.

After the massacre, Jacob's other sons joined in by looting the now defenseless city. We've seen a similar thing recently, haven't we? They steal the flocks and herds, material goods, and whatever produce they can carry. Any livestock that they could not use was

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maimed. And, they then take all the women and children in the city, and make them slaves.

The text does not indicate that Jacob himself was aware of the plot. So, what was his reaction when he heard what had happened?

Verse 30...

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I."

But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" NKJV

Jacob is angry at what happened, but his reaction shows that Jacob's MAIN concern was Jacob. This will cause him to be a "stench" to the Canaanites who were allied to the King, and they probably will now come after him.

- I find it sad that Jacob never expresses any outrage against what has been done to his daughter; he's primarily concerned for his own skin.

Simeon and Levi ridicule their father's reaction – "Should our sister be treated as a harlot?"

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- In other words, **do you think that if they just made some financial payment, everything will be fine? That's treating her as a prostitute – sex for money.**
- And in their reply to Jacob, they refer to **Dinah 'our sister' rather than 'your daughter'** – this is taken by the Rabbis to be a REPRIMAND to their father for his lack of compassion toward Dinah.

Well, God solves Jacob's concerns about Canaanite payback and tells him, "Go up at once to Bethel and live there."<sup>21</sup> **He didn't have to say it twice.** Jacob and his family gladly get into their RVs and vacate the neighborhood. The Bible does not make any further mention of Dinah.

Eventually, you know probably, the entire family migrates to Egypt because of a famine in Canaan – and eventually the Israelites are enslaved by a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph.

JACOB'S PROPHECIES (BLESSINGS)

Jacob never forgot nor forgave Simeon and Levi. On his deathbed years later, Jacob calls his twelve sons<sup>22</sup> in order to give his final blessings before he dies. He is now 147 years

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<sup>21</sup> Genesis 35:1

<sup>22</sup> Twelve biological sons receive a blessing.. Ephraim and Manasseh were not given blessings at this event because they were biological sons of Joseph.

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old; the custom for the head of the family to bless the children before he dies – it's like the reading of the will BEFORE you die. **And in Hebrew culture, this final blessing usually contained a PROPHETIC WORD about a person's future.**

In Genesis 49, Verse 1, we read: Jacob called for his sons and said, "Gather and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days."<sup>23</sup>

Some of the sons received a very encouraging blessing. For example, Jacob said to Judah:

"Judah, your brothers will praise you... You are a lion's cub, Judah, from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches and lies down like a lion; like a lioness—who will rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; the nations will obey him."<sup>24</sup>

You may remember that this prophecy has a lot of similar concepts to those that Balaam was forced to say by Yehovah on the Plains of Moab.<sup>25</sup>

Jacob has a prophetic word for each of his sons **INDIVIDUALLY**, EXCEPT for Levi and Simeon, who he addresses

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<sup>23</sup> Acharit ha'yamim = in the end of days. May be speaking of the Exodus, or of the End Times; prophecy often includes both spiritual and physical manifestations

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 49:8-10

<sup>25</sup> Numbers 23 & 24

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**JOINTLY. They are two of a kind.** Here's what Jacob prophesied for them:

**SLIDE: PROPHECY – VERSES 5–7**

"Simeon and Levi are brothers, weapons of violence are their knives! O my soul, do not come into their council, do not be united to their assembly, my heart, for in their anger they have killed men, and for pleasure they have hamstrung oxen.

Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their fury, for it was cruel. **I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel!"**

Wow. I imagine their reaction was "*You call that a blessing?*"

Simeon and Levi's anger was evil, not because indignation against what happened to Dinah was unwarranted, but because their wrath was marked by deeds of fierceness and cruelty, killing innocent people and maiming livestock.

The prophecy that the descendants of Levi and Simeon would be divided and scattered in the land will play out in Canaan when the Israelites occupy the land 400+ years later. We'll get to that next time.

Jacob saw Simeon and Levi as kindred spirits. They were always together and thought alike. **But, as I said, this is a tale.**



*Levi and Simeon*

While in Egypt as slaves, the Israelite population explodes; and the descendants of Simeon and Levi take different directions spiritually – they both STILL have their anger issues but it will become obvious that Levi's descendants gravitate toward God.

- This is NOT to say that EVERY descendent of Levi chose God, and that every descendent of Simeon took a different path, but overall, Levites gravitated toward the things of God and the Simeonites did not.

Miriam – the older sister of Moses – is born in Egypt. Then, Aaron – the future High Priest – is born, and three years later Moses is born; all three are from the tribe of Levi.

- And you can STILL see the Levite anger against injustice when Moses kills an Egyptian over the beating a Jewish slave.

However, Levi's descendants' anger is NOW mostly channeled toward **protecting the holiness of God**.<sup>26</sup>

- This becomes most obvious in the incident of the Golden Calf.

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<sup>26</sup> Although this was not uniform, as can be seen in the rebellion of Korah, also a Levite – see Numbers 16.

Levi and Simeon

SLIDE: GOLDEN CALF INCIDENT

The Israelites under Moses have exited Egypt and are now encamped at Mt. Sinai. God calls Moses up the mountain where he will be given two Tablets with the Ten Commandments engraved thereon.

But, after Moses has been gone 40 days, many people begin to think he has died. They panic and demand that they have something to follow on their journey. Aaron succumbs to the crowd's pressure and agrees to make a figure to represent God as their journey. A Golden Calf emerges, in complete disobedience to God's command not to make any image of Him. Well, things get out of hand and the celebration turns into a drunken orgy and people start worshipping the idol. Moses comes down off the mountain and is furious; he smashes the two Tablets on the ground.

Reading from verse 26 of Exodus Chapter 32:

<click> (then) Moses stood at the entrance of the camp and said, **"Whoever is for the Lord, come to me."** All the Levites gathered around him, and he said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Each man fasten his sword on his side, and go back and forth from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and each one kill his brother, his friend, and his neighbor.'"

### Levi and Simeon

The Levites did what Moses ordered, and that day about three thousand men of the people died. Moses said, “**You have been consecrated today for the Lord**, for each of you was against his son or against his brother, so he has given a blessing to you today.”

➤ OK – When Moses called out: *'Whoever is for the Lord, come join me!'* And the **ENTIRE tribe of Levi** gathered around him.”

Here we see the passion of Levi, but it is now directed toward **upholding the holiness of God**. They kill 3,000 people involved in the worship of the calf as directed by God, even if the idolaters were *members of their own family*. No one from the tribe of Simeon joined Moses. It is a stark and powerful contrast – the entire tribe of Levi stands by God’s side, ready to do whatever He commands, and everyone else keeps out of the fray.

And, after this, Yehovah separated the tribe of Levi *AWAY* from the rest of the other tribes due to their zeal for His Glory, and He held the Levites to Himself as a special tribe, no longer counted among the tribes of Israel. Moses tells the Levites:

“You have been consecrated today for the Lord, for each of you was **against his son or against his brother**.”

Levi and Simeon

This was a radical commitment. But is it any more radical than when Jesus said... "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me..."<sup>27</sup> ?

God INSISTS on being first – that's why He is jealous of those things that represent His Holiness and Glory. He demands that we value Him MORE than we do anything else, even our own lives.

SALVATION THRU FAITH

Now – I want to make an important point here.

SLIDE: SACHEL PAIGE

Satchel Paige, the great pitcher in the Negro Leagues, once said: *"the only difference baseball made is that it changed me from a 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizen to a 2<sup>nd</sup> class immortal."*<sup>28</sup>

Please do NOT make the mistake of believing that the Israelites were **2<sup>nd</sup> class saints** because they only had the Levitical system and did not have Christ -- that they were operating under a *salvation thru works* system.

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew 10:37-38

<sup>28</sup> <http://satchelpaige.com/quote2.html>

Levi and Simeon

- Anyone who thought that back then, or who thinks that right now, is radically mistaken!

They were not “play-acting” in the OT with the Levitical sacrificial system – God Himself gave it to address sin and holiness and point forward to Christ. Up close and personal, you could see that your works would not satisfy God’s righteousness; it was an innocent sacrifice that was needed – your works were not what restored you to Yehovah.

- Paul writes in Romans 4:3, “Abraham **BELIEVED** God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Abraham BELIEVED God and that saved him. The good works *did NOT* save OT saints, any more than our good works save us NT saints. Only the GRACE of God saves us thru FAITH.

CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

When we read Paul’s statement that “...circumcision (is not) merely outward and physical... a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code”<sup>29</sup>, we tend to *think* that the idea of “circumcision of the heart” is only a NT concept. BUT THE CONCEPT APPEARS ALL THE WAY BACK IN DEUTERONOMY:

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<sup>29</sup> Romans 2:29

Levi and Simeon

"Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live."<sup>30</sup>

Israelites did try to keep the Torah, but those who understood its purpose did so as a *sign of their commitment* to Him. It is very similar to when Jesus said that "If anyone loves me, he will obey My word."<sup>31</sup>

And part of Abraham's believing God concerned Jehovah's PROMISE of a coming Redeemer. Jesus said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing MY day; he saw it and was glad."<sup>32</sup>

The OT saints were saved the SAME WAY that we are saved – FAITH. That's the whole argument of Romans Chapter 4.

- The difference between then and now is that the OT saints had to WAIT in Paradise until the Resurrected Jesus freed them<sup>33</sup>, because only thru His sacrifice could full atonement for their sins be made.

Old Testament believers were **SAVED BY FAITH** and **LOOKED FORWARD TO THE MESSIAH**, while **WE** are saved by FAITH that **LOOKS BACKWARD to the Cross**.

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<sup>30</sup> Deuteronomy 30:6

<sup>31</sup> John 14:23

<sup>32</sup> John 8:56

<sup>33</sup> Ephesians 4:8-9

Levi and Simeon

- The objective ground for the salvation for BOTH groups is the same—the Grace of God thru the atonement of Christ.

JEWISH HERITAGE

I understand how Christians of Jewish descent sometime are uncomfortable in normal church settings, as historically Christians have unconsciously looked at OT saints as 2<sup>nd</sup> class saints. And, I also understand how it can be **uncomfortable with putting up with Irish Catholics – to say nothing about Lutherans.**

When I was in the **diaconate class** of the Catholic Church, I once asked the instructor why the Catholic Church doesn't refer to people in the OT like Moses as "saints" – *because even three angels are labeled saints by the Catholic Church.*<sup>34</sup> The teacher was stunned into silence because he had not thought about it before.

Don't disregard that heritage!

- **Because, it's NOT about you. It is about the GLORY OF GOD.**

He manifested His Holiness and Grace not by choosing the mighty nations but by choosing the Jews, the least of the peoples on earth, to progress His plan. He entrusted with them with His Word and nurtured them thru prophecy<sup>35</sup> as a father does with his child. The

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<sup>34</sup> Michael, Gabriel and Raphael: <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/saints/saint.aspx?id=1153>

<sup>35</sup> Romans 3:1

Levi and Simeon

Jews preserved the Torah, and we here today follow a Jewish Messiah Who kept the Torah perfectly.

**Man's chief end in life is the Glory of God.** When anyone discounts that heritage, **they are diminishing the Glory due to God for what He accomplished.**

- It's easy to forget that God made the promises to Israel, not to the Gentiles. We Gentiles are saved by being GRAFTED INTO the Spiritual Israel.

Paul states in Galatians 3: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then **you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**"<sup>36</sup>

- So, besides being historically wrong, I would suggest that denying the reality of ANY display of God's Glory is NOT a very PRUDENT stance to take, because He is jealous for His Glory to be acknowledged.

Are we OK? Let's move on...

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<sup>36</sup> Galatians 3:27-29



Levi and Simeon

SLIDE: FLAGS OF THE TWO TRIBES

You may remember back to an earlier presentation when we noted that each tribe carried a banner or flag as they journeyed in the wilderness. Judah's flag was sky blue in color and had the figure of a Lion on it.

<click> The flag of the Tribe of Levi was one third white, one third black, and one third red and had the symbol of the urim and thummim. The urim and thummim were two objects used by the high priest for DETERMINING GOD'S WILL. God instructed that they were to be carried in the High Priest's breastplate so that they would be over "(the High Priest's) heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord."<sup>37</sup>

- NOTE the symbolism – **The Will of God would be paramount over hearts!**

And, the Levite flag was also the ONLY flag that contained **THREE COLORS** for a background – I think this is significant, signifying that the *Levitical sacrificial system was a Model of how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit interact with men thru sacrifice.*

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<sup>37</sup> Exodus 28:30

### Levi and Simeon

<click> The background color of the flag of the tribe of Simeon was said to be *green* (not *brown* as shown here). The symbol on it was a gatehouse that represented the city of Shechem.<sup>38</sup>

- Two brothers, and two tribes, each with the same emotional make-up, the same characteristics. Levi's history was TRANSFORMED BY GRACE; Simeon's history remained STUCK IN THE PAST.

The different outcomes DEPENDED upon THE CHOICES they made in RESPONSE to GRACE, NOT by their inborn traits.

- I THINK THIS IS SIGNIFICANT. How many of us EXCUSE our actions by saying “*well, that’s just the way I am.*” But, that’s NOT an excuse – it’s an EXPLANATION BUT it DOESN’T excuse anything. When you and I CHOOSE to act in an unredeemed way, that doesn’t glorify God. God says “*chose to act in some other way that will glorify ME.*”

All this is the tale of two brothers that we see playing out in Numbers Chapter 25, where Phineas the Levite killed Zimri the Simeonite; one had zeal for God’s holiness and the other’s only desire was to be in charge of his own life and seek his own pleasure. Numbers 25 is a microcosm of two tribes traveling in opposite directions, and a microcosm of the Church and society today.

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<sup>38</sup> BaMidbar Rabbah 2:7

Levi and Simeon

- With the gate of Shechem on their tribal flag, **Simeon's descendants carried their past sins as part of their character** for the rest of their journey.
- With the breastplate of the High Priest on their three-colored flag, **Levi's descendants' turned away from their past sins and carried the banner of lives transformed by the Grace.**

Remember how on his deathbed, Jacob had cursed both Levi's and Simeon's anger? It is significant that 400 years later when **Moses was on his deathbed**, he **blesses the tribe of Levi**, calling it "the holy (or righteous) one".<sup>39</sup>

Moses also blessed all the other tribes – **EXCEPT the tribe of Simeon**. Simeon stands out as the only tribe to receive no blessing, no comment, from Moses -- ONLY SILENCE. And it is a silence which speaks volumes.

Responding to the Grace of Yehovah, descendants of Levi chose Yehovah, and YHWH blessed them...

- A Levite would led the people out of bondage;
- Only Levites were permitted to serve in the tabernacle.

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<sup>39</sup> Deuteronomy 33:8-11; Strong's #2623 - 'chased' -faithful, devoted to God's service

Levi and Simeon

- Only Levites could carry the Ark of the Covenant
- Only Levites could perform the animal sacrifices that foretold of the need for Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross.
- And the role of the Levites in the Promised Land would be to teach the rest of Israel the Torah.<sup>40</sup>

➤ And so, I believe that it is very fitting that a descendent of Levi was the individual who FIRST made the announcement that Jesus was the innocent Lamb of God Who came to take away the sin of the world.<sup>41</sup> That individual was **JOHN THE BAPTIST**<sup>42</sup>.

It wasn't an Irish Catholic or a German Lutheran – it was a Levite!

Of John, Jesus said:

"Truly I say to you, among those born of women **there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!** Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."<sup>43</sup>

Of all the prophets that had been in the world, including Moses himself, there had not been raised up by God a greater prophet than John. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. **And, he was a Levite.**

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<sup>40</sup> Deuteronomy 33:8-11

<sup>41</sup> John 1:29

<sup>42</sup> Luke 1:63

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 11:11

*Levi and Simeon*

**OK – WHY DID I GET INTO THE TALE OF LEVI AND SIMEON?**

Because their story is about **CHOICES IN RESPONSE TO GRACE.** Somewhere along the line, the descendants of Levi **CHOSE** God and looked forward to His promises, and the descendants of Simeon chose the seemingly easier path centered on their own pleasures. The tale of two brothers is about the outcome of two radically different choices in response to Grace.

- Two brothers very much alike in personality and temperament
- Murderous rage
- Both would be divided and scattered in the Promised Land
- But, the Tribe of Levi was adopted by God, given responsibility for Torah instructions and Temple service
- While the Tribe of Simeon fades away.
- Choices...
- It wasn't their differing temperament (they were alike) – it was the choice to either pursue God or personal pleasure.

Levi and Simeon

SLIDE: EPHESIANS 4

I think that the events surrounding Simeon and Levi, and Phineas and Zimri, are good illustrations of the differences between what Paul calls the “old man” and the “new man”. The descendants of the two brothers had the SAME temperament and the SAME emotional makeup, but they choose radically different paths:

- One changed, the other did not. One chose God’s holiness and the other chose personal pleasure.

The battle between the new and the old natures rages until we die. Yet the very fact that the battle IS raging within us is a GROUND FOR HOPE.

- Grace is THE GLORY OF GOD in us that it makes us ENEMIES OF OUR OWN SELVES.

Paul wrote that we are to : “... put off, concerning your former conduct, **the old man** which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the **new man** which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:22–24

- Paul says “PUT OFF the old man” – that implies an ACTION on OUR part. IT’S A CHOICE.

Levi and Simeon

**SLIDE:** DISCOURAGED?

*The problem is not the problem; the problem is your attitude about the problem. –Captain Jack Sparrow*

Have you ever thought to yourself that your past *disqualifies* you from achieving success or being seen for anything other than your past? Do other people reinforce this opinion? **Do you see yourself as a 2<sup>nd</sup> class saint?**

That's how the descendants of Simeon saw themselves – **they carried the memory of their sin on their flag thru the wilderness** – they adopted the “*that's just who I am*” mentality and their lives naturally reflected what they thought about themselves.

- The descendants of Levi had the EXACT SAME past as the descendants of Simeon. But, they chose to accept God's grace and **let His will rule over their hearts.**

When we look back, we need to look back not at our actions but at the Cross, for our true identity hangs THERE.

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When the memories pop up, they hurt, but they are also a reminder of the fact that ONLY by the Grace of God can we saved!

Levi and Simeon

How easy it is to be obsessed with the past at the expense of the future. Remember, if you are in Christ, you are a new creation – no matter who says or acts otherwise. When anyone does that, they are robbing God of part of the Glory due to Him for saving you and transforming you. They are sinning against Him. God has buried your sin in the deepest ocean. He is the one who said, “I will remember your sins no more.”<sup>44</sup>

**How is that possible?** How can an All-Knowing God *forget*? He is not a man, like us, who have memory problems. How can an All-Knowing God say to someone at the judgement, “I never knew you. Get away from me, you who practice evil”?

- I don’t know, but if He says that’s the way it is, then that’s the way it is.

Our choices will NOT remove all time-based CONSEQUENCES of sin in our past; both the Levites and the Simeonites were scattered in the Promised Land because of their unholy anger, just as Jacob prophesied, but HOW their lives worked out was **radically different** (as we shall see next time).

The sound that God prefers is the sound of praise and rejoicing. The Cross is the divine ACE that trumps all cards of the devil. We must CHOOSE to *look FORWARD toward HIM*.

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<sup>44</sup> Isaiah 43:25



Levi and Simeon

**SLIDE:** AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE...

I want to close with this famous verse: "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15

Joshua said this after Israel conquered the land of Canaan. He was addressing the people about their future. They're now in the Promised Land and are about to live as God intended.

- Do you know WHERE he made the statement? HE MADE IT IN SHECHEM.<sup>45</sup>

THEY CAME BACK TO SHECHEM!

Joshua said that they must choose...

"And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the **gods which your fathers** served which were beyond the River, **or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living**; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"

- Joshua said "**CHOOSE FOR YOURSELVES TODAY**"

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<sup>45</sup> Joshua 24:1

Levi and Simeon

- ❖ You can choose “**the gods which your fathers** served which were beyond the River.” ~~ Formally, the Israelites mostly served Egyptian gods. Perhaps your parents were not Christian – or even had a veneer of Christianity. Do go along with that. Even if our parents were Christian, **we still need to choose Christ for ourselves.** We still need to come to a place where Jesus is OUR God, not just the God of our parents. God wants to know us personally. We have to take a personal ownership and responsibility with our relationship with God.
  
- ❖ Or, you can “...choose **the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living.**” In other words, you can choose to follow the culture you live in and be loyal to its priorities. And this includes the choice of the latest flavor of self-centered Christianity that comes down the pike.

Or, we can CHOOSE as Joshua did – choose the Lord of the Scriptures, as revealed in the Torah and fulfilled in Christ.

- Joshua’s point is that you must **CHOOSE ON HOW TO PROCEED TOWARD YOUR CHIEF END IN LIFE, WHICH IS THE GLORY OF GOD**

DAVID CROWDER, COME AS YOU ARE

Come out of sadness

*Levi and Simeon*

From wherever you've been  
Come broken hearted  
Let rescue begin  
Come find your mercy  
Oh sinner come kneel  
Earth has no sorrow  
That heaven can't heal  
Earth has no sorrow  
That heaven can't heal

So lay down your burdens  
Lay down your shame  
All who are broken  
Lift up your face  
Oh wanderer come home  
You're not too far  
So lay down your hurt  
Lay down your heart  
Come as you are

...

Earth has no sorrow  
That heaven can't cure.

*Levi and Simeon*

This month of Kislev is a point in the year that represents a TIME TO DREAM AGAIN, a time to find rest in the One Who never changes and a time to gain new strategies of war.

CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY. CHOOSE TO BELIEVE IT.

*Levi and Simeon*