

## GENESIS 35:23-27 AND THEN THERE WERE TWELVE

*Jacob had twelve sons:*

<sup>23</sup> *The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.*

<sup>24</sup> *The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.*

<sup>25</sup> *The sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali.*

<sup>26</sup> *The sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.*

<sup>27</sup> *Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed.*

God's intention to expand the kingdom begins to find expression in the fourth generation of the promise. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were solitary figures in their generation, but now with the twelve sons of Jacob we have the initiation of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the garden, God commanded Adam and Eve to *"be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth"* (Genesis 1:28). After the Fall, God's promise to the Abraham was, *"Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them."* Then he said to him, *"So shall your offspring be"* (Genesis 15:5). This same promise was repeated to Isaac (26:4) and Jacob (28:14; 35:11), and now was beginning of its fulfillment.

From the very beginning, God's plan was to employ humankind as his agents for establishing his order in the world. He placed them in a garden with the command to cultivate and expand the order of the garden over the disorder of the surrounding wilderness. Our disobedience did not derail God's plan, it only made our job exceedingly difficult (Genesis 3:17-19). God began with a people and a nation with the call to proclaim his blessing through word and deed throughout the world. As the kingdom expanded from a people and a nation to the nations, membership in the kingdom was no longer genetic but spiritual; through faith (Romans 4:16).

The Divine command to the people of faith is the same as that to Adam and Eve, the Patriarchs and Israel: to *"be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth"* Our purpose is to proclaim the Gospel, the blessing of God, throughout the world, by word and deed. Jesus told his disciple to go made make disciples (Matthew 28: 19-20). As followers of Jesus we are to do likewise. Not that we are to cultivate followers who would parrot our teaching, but that we are to make new disciples of Jesus, the Lord. To do so is to bring people into the kingdom and expand God's order over the spiritual wilderness and to fulfill our purpose in obedience to God's will.

**God of all the nations of the world, as you call and send me on your Divine mission, equip and empower me with the Holy Spirit for that work so that I may not fail to glorify you. May my words be your words and my actions your actions so that your gracious will might be done according to your call. Amen.**