

GENESIS

Lesson 50

Genesis 34: Jacob's Daughter Defiled

In this lesson, we will be studying one of the most gruesome, bloody, defiled stories in all of the Old Testament. So, be warned that the Biblical text is graphic; it involves sexual violence against Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and unbelievable violence and revenge by two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi.

Read the Genesis Chapter 34 narrative below, and then let's consider why God placed this violent story in his Holy Word.

Dinah and the Hivites

¹ Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. ² When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. ³ His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife."

⁵ When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he did nothing about it until they came home.

⁶ Then Shechem's father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. ⁷ Meanwhile, Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were shocked and furious, because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter—a thing that should not be done.

⁸ But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. ⁹ Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it."

¹¹ Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. ¹² Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife."

¹³ Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. ¹⁴ They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. ¹⁵ We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. ¹⁶ Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. ¹⁷ But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go."

¹⁸ Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. ¹⁹ The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's family, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. ²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to the men of their city. ²¹ "These men are friendly toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. ²² But the men will agree to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. ²³ Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us agree to their terms, and they will settle among us."

²⁴ All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised.

²⁵ Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. ²⁶ They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. ²⁸ They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. ²⁹ They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." 31 But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

Genesis 34:1-31 [NIV]

For us to understand this story about Dinah, we will need a little context around society's view of women during this time, the institution of marriage as they saw it, the act of revenge in the Bible and God's role, why Jacob saw that what Simeon and Levi did was wrong, and the consequences of their actions—all of which will lead us to important conclusions as to why this horrible story is included in Genesis.

Women in Society at the Time of Jacob (Genesis 34:1-5)

We note from the knowledge we have that women in the Old Testament are rarely mentioned by name. They lived within a tribal culture, ruled by the patriarch of the family. As such, their marriages were arranged, which provided women a value because of the price they could bring to the family as a bride. Many patriarchs only valued them for what they could bring to the family in terms of political, social, or material capital, once they were married.

With this context in mind, re-read Genesis 34:1-5. We are not given specifics as to what exactly occurred, except that whatever the sexual act and context was, it would have been against her will. Shechem was a Hivite, not a Hebrew, and he was a prince who was obviously used to getting what he wanted—and when he wanted it.

As mentioned above, marriages were arranged between the fathers, and normally the actual couple involved had very little influence in the arrangement. But, as we see here, the spoiled prince went to his father and asked him to arrange the marriage.

Hamor does as his son requests, not realizing that Jacob knew of the violence against his daughter. Soon, Jacob's sons would know as well.

Hamor went to negotiate the bride price and was very generous in his offer. Jacob's family would benefit greatly by being given free access to the land of the Hivites, permission to trade with them, and even the ability to acquire property in Hamor's land. In the land of the Hivites, this was the customary practice for arranging and acquiring a bride for one's son, especially a prince. In the case of Jacob's daughter Dinah, none of it involved her or her desires. Throughout the narrative, Dinah's voice is silent; the focus is on the men and their desires—as was typical during this time in history. (Some might say that we can still observe this today in many societies.)

Revenge in the Bible, and God's Role (Genesis 34:13-29)

Outraged by what Shechem had done to their sister Dinah, Jacob's sons plotted revenge against Shechem and his father Hamor. Through deceit, they encouraged the marriage, and the union of the Hivites and the Hebrews. Hamor and his son agreed to their terms—the bride price, if you will. Their agreement set the trap for Simeon and Levi to exact their revenge by killing not only Hamor and Shechem, but also every male living in the city. In addition, they carried off all their possessions and women; they looted the defeated city and headed back to Jacob's camp. (See Genesis 34:18,25-29.)

Expecting Jacob to be pleased that Simeon and Levi had exacted their revenge, they were not expecting Jacob's admonishment: "You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Perizzites the people living in this land." (Genesis 34:30)

Surprised by Jacob's rebuke, they ask a pointed question, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?" This dialogue highlights a large gap between the sons' understanding regarding revenge vs. Jacob's, and also about the principle of honoring your word.

Let's look at the following verses to see what the Bible conveys to us regarding God and revenge.

1. Romans 12:9 - *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*
2. 2 Kings 9:7 - *"You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the Lord's servants shed by Jezebel."*
3. Isaiah 1:24 - *Therefore the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah! I will vent my wrath on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies."*
4. Isaiah 34:8 - *For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause.*
5. Jeremiah 50:29 - *"Summon archers against Babylon, all those who draw the bow. Encamp all around her; let no one escape. Repay her for her deeds; do to her as she has done. For she has defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel."*

Scripture teaches us that God's revenge is just, whereas man's revenge, like that of Simeon and Levi, is driven by personal pride and other motives. As such, no sense of justice is evident in this narrative, just a lust for blood and destruction. Jacob understood this and, as such, would punish them as described in Genesis Chapter 49. In that chapter, as Jacob provides his final blessings, and the twelve tribes of Israel are set, he specifically eliminates Simeon and Levi:

⁵ "Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence. ⁶ Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. ⁷ Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel."

Genesis 49:5-7 [NIV]

In their place, Jacob inserts a blessing for Judah as one of the twelve tribes:

⁸ "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. ⁹ You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? ¹⁰ The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. ¹¹ He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. ¹² His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk."

Genesis 49:8-12 [NIV]

Through Simeon and Levi's sin of revenge, the tribe of Judah is established as one of the twelve tribes, and will become the tribe from which Jesus, our Savior, is descended. Judah, one of Leah's sons, was the tribe whose land included Jerusalem, the Negev and southern Israel. Jesse and King David were both from the tribe of Judah, and God appointed Judah to be the first tribe to enter the land and take possession of their allotment. (See Judges 1:1-2.)

In summary, we can see from this violent story that seeking revenge is not our responsibility; it belongs strictly to God. When we take revenge on others, we are doing it out of selfish pride and worldly passions. How many puffed-up Christians have you known who use their anger to rule over people, or to get their revenge in some other more violent way? We as followers of Christ need to learn the discipline of controlling our anger and allowing God to be the avenger. God's revenge is just, but man's revenge is not, as we see in this lesson.

We can also see that God's will was done even through this horrible act—as King David and Jesus would descend from the tribe of Judah while Simeon and Levi's tribes would lose their allotment in the Holy Land.

May His will be done in our lives as we seek first His kingdom.

Praying that all of you have a blessing-filled week!

Thanks for studying with us.

In Christ,

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