

Text: Genesis 34:1-31, 35:1-29

Title: Lessons from Genesis 34 and 35

Truth: God graciously keeps His promises to a very faulty family.

Date/Location: May 26, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

All is not well in Jacob's family. Remember that there was some behind-the-scenes idolatry with Rachel (31:34). Now Dinah runs into a severe problem and her brothers exercise vengeance. Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac die. Reuben is way out of line. The next portion of Genesis focuses on Joseph and how he saves Jacob's family from a lengthy famine.

I. The Sons of Israel Take Vengeance for Dinah

- A. Rape is a sin that God takes *very* seriously. It is a grievous violation of a woman's bodily purity, of the marriage institution, of reproduction, of freedom. It attacks the very foundation of humanity. It is indeed defiling, disgraceful, mistreatment and rightly raises anger and grief. It carried the death penalty in the Law of Moses in certain situations (Deut. 22:25; see also 22:22, 23, 28). I understand this to imply that it is permissible for human governments to institute the same penalty. It is also possible for human governments to exercise mercy with a punishment short of death. But it is *not* permissible to ignore this sin. Note that according to the stipulations of the later Law, the Dinah incident does not seem to be a death penalty scenario.
- B. Shechem did not "love" Dinah despite how he would have expressed himself (34:3). He did desire her beauty and found her extremely attractive. But genuine love would have been concerned to observe the proprieties of asking for her hand in marriage before violating her. His "kindness" was able to atone for his prior sin.
- C. Under no circumstances should the sons of Israel have accepted the proposal to intermarry with the pagans of the land. This was a violation of what their dad would certainly have taught them from Abraham's search for Isaac's wife and from Isaac sending Jacob east to find a God-fearing woman. Again, let me reiterate that we should not consider this as a racial or ethnic issue. It is a religious issue. If a woman of the pagan tribes converted to the God of Israel, she would be a perfect candidate for marriage to someone who wanted to do so. For example, Ruth married Boaz, even though she was a Moabite, and that people was prohibited from entering the congregation of Israel because of their sin (Deut. 23:3-4; Nehemiah 13:1).

- D. The brothers used deceit to get revenge on the people of Hamor and Shechem. Deceit is sometimes used in war, but for God's people it should be very rare, only in utterly necessary circumstances (see the Hebrew midwives and Rahab, or underground railroad situations). Some believers cannot stand the thought of using deceit at all, and that is good for them. The sons of Israel pretended as if they would become one people with the Hivites. That was never and could never be the plan under God.
- E. This all was conditioned on the Hivites being circumcised. This was a defilement of the significance and symbolism of the circumcision sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Their proposal lowered the sign to a place of a mere tool, an outward symbol with no internal meaning. What shall we think—that they proposed (yes, deceitfully) that a mere externalism could make the Hivites acceptable before God and thus to be able to come in with them? "If you just get baptized into my church, then we can be married!" As if this makes a meaningful change in someone's spiritual life? This foreshadows how people turn religious symbols and actions into meaningless rituals, whether circumcision or baptism or the Lord's Table or confession or other things.
- F. That Hamor could persuade his men to be circumcised is incredible. They undoubtedly feared or respected him a great deal. But the motivation given in verse 23 explains: they thought that by doing this, they would cleverly out-manuever the sons of Jacob and get a large financial gain out of the deal. They were being very shrewd and dishonest as well.
- G. Instead, what the sons of Israel should have done is demanded punishment of only Shechem. He was the guilty party. Shechem should have paid a serious fine or dowry-equivalent if not the death penalty. It is highly unlikely the latter would have happened because Hamor and the rest of the clan would protect Shechem.
- H. The sons of Israel also should have allowed their father to manage the situation. It was not their place to take over the situation and mete out the punishment they preferred.
- I. The punishment meted out by Levi and Simeon was grotesque, extreme, and completely out of place. It was not righteous. Fathers do not pay for the sins of sons, nor sons for the sins of the fathers (Deut. 24:16, 2 Kings 14:6, Ezekiel 18:20). Not only sons *should not* be punished when their father is a wicked man—because the son did nothing wrong—but also killing a son for the sins of the father *cannot* pay for the father's sin. All it does is create a sin on the part of the person who punished the son. (See Exodus 20:5, 34:7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9 to provoke some thoughts.)

This Biblical principle must be reiterated today considering the modern evil doctrine that present discrimination can be used as a tool to make right the evil of past discrimination. That present “adjustment” could come in the form of financial support like scholarships and reparations, preferential treatment in hiring or admission, etc.

- J. The other brothers joined in taking the spoils, so they are not faultless in this situation, though Simeon and Levi were the ringleaders. Is it any surprise to you that they would sell one of their brothers into slavery?
- K. Their violence had ramifications. The nations roundabout rightly thought they were awful people. Israel was “obnoxious” in the sight of the inhabitants of the land. Their behavior subjected them to physical danger to the family because they were few. We can count on the fact that God would still protect Jacob in fulfillment of His promise. But this does not mean they can do whatever they want. God could allow them to fall into some very hard times.
- L. There is a connection to Genesis 49:5-7. There, Jacob speaks about the future consequences of the sin of Levi and Simeon. Not all consequences are punishment. In fact, even though Levi was “scattered” throughout Israel and had no tribal land allotment of their own, they had a privileged place, in part due to their later faithfulness to God. They had a distributed allotment throughout the land—the cities of refuge—as well as the worship gifts of God’s people.
- M. We learn another lesson from this incident: our young ladies should not be “going out on the town,” especially un-accompanied, because it is simply too dangerous. An ounce of prevention... Dads and moms have a job to protect their children until they are married. Of course, no one can guarantee a young woman will be obedient to her parents because she has a sin nature with its desires. She needs to know very well that the world is a dangerous place. With drugs today and the massive degradation in society, it is ever more dangerous for women. Men have a job to protect their daughters. That responsibility does not stop when the daughter reaches 18 years of age. Selection of a place for post-secondary education is critical—if such a place is selected, for it is not necessary to life.

III. Events of Chapter 35

- A. Jacob comes back to Bethel and worships God. To his credit, he had his family members put away all their foreign gods/idols. But he “hid” them under a tree by Shechem. Why not destroy them? Did they repent of

idolatry and reform the worship in the family? We do not know. Jacob may have given his tithe at this point, but it is not clear to me to whom he would give it, unless it were an animal sacrifice.

To protect the clan, God arranged that the city-states around them fell into fear and would not attack them. God replayed the covenant again, including the posterity and land promises. Jacob (Israel) marked the location with another pillar of stone and gave a drink offering and oil offering on it.

- B. Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, died. This is interesting because Jacob's wives were Leah and Rachel. Rebekah was the wife of Isaac, Jacob's mom, as we learned way back in chapter 24. 24:59 mentions her without giving her name. She apparently outlived Rebekah, was taken into Isaac's family, and then died at this point.
- C. Rachel died in childbirth. She died before her father-in-law Isaac. Her son was Benjamin, the brother of Joseph and the youngest of Jacob's sons.
- D. Immorality by Reuben. He could not control his passions. What is the point of even saying this? It seems unnecessary at first. But it is appropriate as an explanation for why Jacob gave the curse on Reuben in Genesis 49:3-4. After Reuben came Simeon and Levi. All three of these did not show worthy character. Judah is next, and we know that the kings of the nation of Israel came from his descendants.
- E. After listing the 12 sons, the death of Isaac is recorded. He lived to 180 years. Jacob and Esau buried him. The second generation, which had not played a major role in the last decades, was now gone. It is ironic that Isaac thought he was close to death four decades earlier.

Conclusion

It has often been pointed out that the Bible does not sugar-coat the human condition. It is very realistic as to what goes on in the world—even to the point of being uncomfortable for parents to read with their sheltered children! This evil serves not as a focal point, but as a pointer to *the* focal point: the need and provision of God's grace. Without His favor, Jacob, his sons, and all of humanity for that matter, would be doomed forever. God maintained His promise to the family for a fruitful posterity and a homeland. God saves people *despite* their sinful condition. If you trust Him, He will save you in spite of your sin too!

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