

Beginning with Genesis 34 more attention will be given to the sons of Jacob. It is one of those tragic portrayals of sinfulness which does little to commend Jacob and his sons to the reader. Though Jacob had returned safely from Paddan Aram and had experienced a life-changing encounter with God, he faces in this chapter a great and dangerous challenge which foreshadows one that would follow the nation of Israel for generations: conflict with the Canaanite culture.

I. *The historical account – some helpful observations*

Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, decided to get to know the local women better. She was probably between 14 and 16 years old (cf. Gen 17:2 for Joseph).

Shechem took her, lay with her and defiled her – possibly a forcible rape, but potentially without resistance or even with consent. Related regulations & term usage (Deut. 32:23-29) does not require force. Her continued presence with Shechem raises questions.

No reason is given for Jacob's silence but it shows that the shift of focus to the sons of Jacob.

There is in this chapter a first time reference to this family as "Israel" which may hint that the conflict in this chapter is a foreshadowing of future conflict for Israel.

The deceitful response to the proposal from Hamor & Shechem comes from Jacob's sons and not from Jacob – a further indication of a shift of focus from Jacob to his sons. They pretend to agree to marriage under the condition of circumcision but were probably covering up the evil intent which they later carried out.

Hamor and Shechem agree to the conditions, convince their fellow townsmen to do so as well, and follow through with the circumcision. After 3 days, when any infection would have brought complications, Simeon and Levi struck, killing every male as well as retrieving Dinah from the house of Shechem. The other sons of Jacob looted the city.

Jacob's rebuke was very self-centered without concern for God's will or honor and without any indication of a trust in God for protection. The response of Simeon and Levi shows that they apparently viewed the offer of a bride payment after an illicit sexual relation as no different than paying for a prostitute. But the final word come in Genesis 49:5-7 where they are passed up for blessing.

II. *The place of chapter 34 in Genesis and the big story*

1. *A foreshadowing of the conflict with pagan surrounding*

a. Evidences:

- 1) the opening: Jacob's choice of location & Dinah desire to know the women better
- 2) the closing: Jacob's concern for acceptance
- 3) the invitation to intermarry: in contrast to the desire of Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah
- 4) the invitation to acquire property: despite its promise by God
- 5) the Canaanite intent to absorb Israel as a people (v 22) and in possessions (v 23).
- 6) the actual taking of Dinah by Shechem: an indicator of Canaanite immorality, often associated with idolatry.

b. The warning:

We should not live like the world, because, though in the world, we are not of the world (John 17). Temptations are similar: curiosity, acceptance, integration, etc. But we are to be salt and light. Our own culture is dangerous because we may not even recognize the temptations as such. Consider, for example, our elevation of education over spiritual needs and our acceptance of life-style standards.

Have we pitched our tents facing the city and gone into town to investigate what the people are like? Are we more concerned with our acceptance by the people around us, than with our standing before God?

2. *God's providential working out of His program despite the moral failures of His people*

God was calling out a people for Himself and planning blessing through them, specifically through the seed of Abraham. Nothing was going to stop God from accomplishing His purposes, not an unhealthy curiosity, nor a man's concern about what people thought, two cruel, hot-tempered men. God protected His new, fledgling people, Israel, from merging with the surrounding pagan culture.

What if Shechem and Hamor had come to Jacob first, and asked to marry Dinah? Would Jacob and his sons been tempted to allow this and to accept the invitation to settle and intermarry? On reflection the sinful actions and responses of Shechem, Dinah, Jacob, and his sons all worked to keeping Israel separate from the nations around them. God is not the author of sin. Yet He is the designer of a plan that includes sin and works with sinful people.

It is very encouraging to know that nothing will thwart God in accomplishing his purposes. When the apostles were threatened, the early church praised God and recognized that wicked men had conspired against Jesus but ended up accomplishing what God had determined beforehand should happen. Then they turned over to God the problem of the threatening world and asked for boldness to do what was right. (Acts 4:21-29)

This, too, should be our response: resist the conforming pressures of the world, pursue God and let His word change us. Jacob and his family do not set before us good role models. But this chapter does reveal a God who is intent on accomplishing His plans even despite evil people and faulty servants. For that we can thank and praise him.