

LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: GENESIS 34:1-31

To learn how Jacob became Israel.

An Epidemic

One of the great benefits of living in the modern world is that we have more effective means of capturing data to study habits and characteristics of cultures. It is a benefit because data helps identify the reality and gravity of a problem, and according to the data, there is perhaps no greater problem to be solved than that of sexual



abuse. The numbers are staggering. One in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives. In the U.S., one in three women and one in six men experienced some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime. 51.1% of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner and 40.8% by an acquaintance. While it is not a uniquely female issues, it is an overwhelmingly female majority issue: 91% of victims of rape and sexual assault are female, and nine percent are male. And the problem is not new, either. In Genesis chapter 34, we are exposed to the first recorded instance of sexual abuse; the rape of Dinah. What the story demonstrates was true then, and still truth for us today; perpetrators often try and minimize what they have done, and the natural reaction to such a violation is often unbridled anger and a need for revenge.

Shechem's Crime

The chapter opens with Dinah leaving the safety of her home to go and see how the Canaanite women live (Gen. 34:1). This is only the second mention of Dinah thus far. Her birth was (very briefly) described in chapter

31, in the midst of the birth narratives of the 11 (of 12) sons of Jacob (Gen. 30:21). Even afterwards, before meeting Esau, Jacob sends his eleven sons and wives across the river to safety, but no mention is made of Dinah (Gen. 32:22). Was Dinah with the servants or in another party, and if so, why? We aren't told. She is present with Jacob at the beginning of chapter 34, and while she is described as the daughter of Leah here, she is referred to after this only as Jacob's daughter (Gen. 34:1). Below is an overview of what follows her leaving home.

RAPE

Verse 2 says, "And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her." There are few takeaways from this. For one, Shechem was the son of Hamor and a prince of the land that Jacob and his family were in. While we must be careful to not read too much into this, it is a safe assumption to think that Shechem was not treated like most people, and likely enjoyed certain liberties that were otherwise not afforded to your average person.

Secondly, there is a subtle but identifiable pattern in the wording here. He, "saw, seized, and layed with her." It is reminiscent of two prior instances. In Genesis 3:6, Eve, "Saw the tree... *took* the fruit... and *ate* of it." Three chapters later, in Genesis 6:2, the disobedient angels *saw* that the daughters of men were attractive, *took* them, and *married* them." The pattern of seeing something that is pleasing in an unhealthy manner, allowing lust for that object or person to develop, acting on that lust and taking it into one's possession, and consuming it (in some sense of the word) is observable in all three instances, and none of them are good.

Third, the wording indicates rape took place pretty convincingly. It should be noted that there is another word in Hebrew that marks the act of rape, and that word is not found here. However, there are a variety of reasons why that word might not have been chosen, and the act of rape can still be expressed without using the word. The literal rendering of the Hebrew is something like, "He lay with her and humbled her," but given the context and some of the construction, it is overwhelmingly translated by Hebrew scholars as, "He lay with her and violated her," or, "He lay with her forcibly." In modern terms, he raped her. To solidify the point, verse 5 describes the act as a, "defiling," of her.

The results of the act are fairly strange. Verse 3 reads, "And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her." His sexual encounter solidified his lust for her. The word, "loved," means something like, "to breath heavily." This was not an emotionally deep love, but an excited love fueled by emotion. The last phrase is, perhaps, the most alerting. He literally, "spoke to her heart." Perhaps he was attempting to comfort and even woo her after violating her. The whole unfolding of events leaves Dinah as a victim to Shechem's untamed sexual lust.

A PROPOSAL

Eventually, Shechem enlists his father Hamor to help procure Dinah as his wife. Mosaic law (which comes well after this period) obligated a dowry to be paid for a woman who loses her virginity prior to marriage. Hamor seeks to clean up the mess by proposing that Dinah be given as a wife to Shechem, and in exchange the daughters of the Hivites would be given as wives for the sons of Jacob. The Mosaic period expressly forbade this kind of intermarriage (Deut. 7:3-4), and this carried for generations after (Ezra 3:14) but once again, these events predate Moses pretty substantially. However, it is certain that even prior to Mosaic law, the Abrahamic mindset was clearly against the idea of intermarriage. For example, Rebekah was very clearly against the idea of Isaac taking a Canaanite wife (24:3-4; 27:46-28:2). If there was an aversion to intermarriage in a normal context, one can only imagine the extreme ire it would draw if rape had occurred first.

THE REACTION

Jacob's reaction is restrained. He does not immediately seek any sort of retaliation. However, the brothers are enraged. Verse 7 indicates, "they were grieved... and burned with anger." The thought of an arranged marriage with a foreign rapist drew an even greater rage.

The brothers' plan is nothing shy of deceitful. The text even indicates as such: "The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah" (Gen. 34:13). Their deception lies in their proposal to Hamor. They tell Hamor that they take issue with the idea of their sister marrying a man who was uncircumcised (they were Hivites, not Israelites). They propose that Shechem and all of the men be circumcised. If they meet this condition, they will agree to intermarry and become one people. If they refuse, they will take Dinah and leave.

Hamor and Shechem agree! It's tempting to credit them for such sacrifice, however we quickly find that their handling of this agreement is also quite deceitful. They gather their own men at the gate and propose the circumcision on the basis that they will all give and take wives, and recognizing Jacob's wealth he has amassed they add in verse 23, "Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours?" Nowhere in their presentation is Shechem's violation of Dinah and subsequent obsession of her mentioned. The men, seeing an opportunity of new women to choose from and an abundance of wealth added to their economy agree to the circumcision.

Rage and Revenge

Jacob's sons' plan to exact revenge on Dinah's rapist has fallen into place. The third day after the Hivites' circumcision happened, "when they were sore," Levi and Simeon came with their sword and let their rage flow into an all out attack on the city. With all of the men incapacitated because of the circumcision, and the recently agreed upon treaty, they had no fears or concerns of what was coming. While completely compromised, Simeon and Levi killed every male including Hamor and Shechem (Gen. 34:25-26). The word, "took," is once again highlighted here. Just as Shechem *took* Dinah, the brothers *took* their swords, and then *took* Dinah away from her assailant. The brothers felt justified in their plan. Not only did they murder all of the men, but the rest of the brothers came and pillaged and plundered all of the Hivites' belongings, livestock, wives, and even children (Gen. 34:27-29).

One of the things this passage teaches us is that rape elicits anger. However, we cannot condemn Shechem (and by proxy, Hamor), and then celebrate Simeon and Levi. The crime Shechem committed was detestable, and the attempted cover-up was equally bad. However, murder, theft, and slavery are equally bad. So anger is an ok and even natural response to injustice, but revenge is not. From a Christian perspective, this is a hard line to find. How do we differentiate between the two?

ANGER

Is anger innately wrong? The answer is, of course, no. The Bible speaks very clearly to this. For one, we are told, "be angry and do not sin" (Eph. 4:26). God Himself gets angry at a variety of things: rebellion (2 Kg. 17:18); sin (Rom. 1:18); injustice (Prov. 17:15), and other unrighteous behavior. Jesus expresses anger at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Mk. 3:5). Anger is, in some sense, an expression in humanity that reveals the Image of God in us. Injustice and suffering, especially of other Image bearers, should elicit anger. To not feel some sense of ire towards those who perpetuate human suffering indicates a disconnect from the heart of God towards His creation, and a lack of understanding the importance of God's Image in us.

REVENGE

However, we can't just carelessly give a green light to all anger either. James 1:20 says, "For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." We are told repeatedly to put away anger and wrath (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Ps. 37:8). However, in these instances, anger is seen more as an action than a reaction. One could think of revenge in this sense. Action that is fueled by anger (such as revenge) is forbidden. We are reminded, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). God says, "vengeance is mine" (Deut. 32:35). We are never to repay evil by doing evil (Rom. 12:17; 1 Pet. 3:8).

When we think about Genesis 34, an important distinction needs to be made. Jacob's brothers were not wrong for being angry at the rape of their sister. We should be mad too! The issue occurred when they allowed their anger to fuel their actions towards revenge. Their unbridled rage led to murder, another sin detestable in God's eyes (Ex. 20:13). The same is true for us today as well. Injustice and human violation and/or exploitation should elicit anger, however that anger should not be propped up as a means to justify sinful acts of revenge either.

A Note to the Reader

You may find this study interesting and hopefully helpful to your understanding of what happened to Dinah, and how these things apply to us today. It is important to understand Genesis 34 in the grand context of not only Jacob's narrative, but the whole of Genesis. Jacob's journey is fundamental to understanding how Joseph ends up in Egypt, and why Moses must lead the Israelites back to the land. However, I would remind you that a large contingency of especially females who are participating in this study find not just an interesting lesson, but a difficult reminder of abuse that they have already experienced.

To the first group I would say how important it is to stand with and comfort those who have been violated. You can play a pivotal role in the healing process by listening, consoling, and walking with those who have been abused. You can also call out perpetrators of ignorant behavior that lays the groundwork for sexual abuse. You can war against the porn industry that desensitizes millions to the horror of sexual violence and sexual exploitation. You may be one person, but you can play a role in consolation and prevention.

To the second group, I would say several things. One, that it is never within the heart of God for sexual abuse to happen; it is a result of unchecked sin, and it is not your fault. Two, God says, "vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Deut. 32:35). We believe that with you. We believe that God is angry with those who have harmed you, and that in eternity those crimes will have consequences far greater than one Simeon and Levi exacted. Three, You are loved and cherished by God, and one day He will wipe away every tear you've cried over your abuse (Rev. 21:4). Four, we are both angry for you and angry with you. Five, it is *ok* to be angry, to express your anger, and to grieve through what has happened. In fact, it's not only ok, but *necessary*. And finally, that you have a safe place in City On a Hill where real dialogue can happen, void of shame. Real healing can take place by working through the hurts you've experienced. We want that for you, and we stand with you in your hurts. Do not keep silent. Speak out loudly and clearly. We want to hear your story.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Genesis 34:1-4. Where does Dinah go? Who takes her? What does he do to her? What is the result of this action, and who helps him try and take Dinah as his wife?

2. Read Genesis 34:5-7. Where are Jacob's sons when he finds out? What is Jacob's response? How does his sons respond?

Day Two

1. Read Genesis 34:8-12. In your own words, describe the proposal made to Jacob and his sons by Hamor.

2. Read Genesis 34:13-17. How do his sons respond? Are they honest? What is their one condition for marriage? Who must be circumcised?

Day Three

1. Read Genesis 34:18-22. Who do Hamor and Shechem gather to share the proposal? Where do they gather at? What do they say to the men? What do they notably leave out?

2. Read Genesis 34:23-24. How else do Hamor and Shechem entice the men? How do the men respond? Do they agree with the arrangement, or do they reject it?

Day Four

1. Read Genesis 34:25-29. How long after the circumcision do Simeon and Levi enact their revenge? What do they do? What do they take?

2. Read Genesis 34:30-31. What is Jacob's response? Why is he so angry? What does he fear will happen? How do the brothers justify their actions?

Week 27 Discussion: Sexual Abuse

Genesis 34 recalls an awful part of Jacob's family's history. Jacob's daughter is raped by Shechem, and then her brothers Simeon and Levi take revenge in an equally dark manner. No one wins at the end of the chapter. It is a stark reminder that this epidemic of sexual abuse in the modern world is anything but new, and that the desire for revenge is normal. At the core of every sexual abuser is a depraved heart riddled with sin. It was true of Shechem, and it's true today too. Talk as a group about the importance of talking about abuse, specifically in the church, and how we as a church can become not just a place, but *the* place people come to for help, hope, and healing.

1. Watch the Fearless Series for Women trailer as a class, and discuss it.
2. Icebreaker: Should sexual abuse be a topic of discussion in churches today? Why or why not? How can the church become a safe place that fosters these kinds of discussions?
3. Does sexual abuse make you angry? Should it make you angry? Why or why not?
4. How important is it for individuals who have been sexually abused to talk about it? Who should they talk to?
5. How important is it to speak out against sexual abuse, and to hold those accountable who have abused someone else? How important is it to do this with grace?
6. Challenge: If you are a victim of sexual abuse and you have never talked about it, pray about when God would have you share that with someone. It can be an individual, a pastor, or your small group. You cannot walk in freedom from the pain of sexual abuse if you never take the first step.

Takeaways:

1. Shechem, son of Hamor, rapes Dinah and then attempts to cover it up by marrying her.
2. Her brothers deceive Shechem, Hamor, and their whole land into being circumcised, and then murder them while they are incapacitated in an act of revenge.

PRAYER REQUESTS: