

Jacob and His Family in Shechem

Genesis 34:1-12

Genesis 34:1-12 – *“Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. ² And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. ³ His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman. ⁴ So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this young woman as a wife.” ⁵ And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came. ⁶ Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. ⁷ And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, a thing which ought not to be done. ⁸ But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. ⁹ And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. ¹⁰ So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it.” ¹¹ Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. ¹² Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife.”*

Background Notes

After the happy reunion between Jacob and Esau in Genesis 33, Jacob settled in a place called Succoth, on the east side of the Jordan River. He lived there long enough to build a house and barns. After some time Jacob moved across the Jordan River and settled in the area of Shechem.

The Hivites, a pagan tribe, lived in Shechem at that time (v2). At the time of the Conquest of Canaan, they were one of the tribes that God would tell Joshua and the Israelites to drive out of the Promised Land. In Joshua 24:11, God recounted the conquest of the land under Joshua: *“Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you—also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand.”*

Even though the pagan Hivites lived in Shechem, Jacob settled in the area, and he raised his family there. He bought land and dug a well that became known as Jacob’s Well. The Lord Jesus met the Samaritan woman at that same well, many years later (John 4). You can visit Jacob’s well today, and you can still draw water from it. Ancient Shechem is the present-day city of Nablus.

The sad events of Genesis 34 took place while Jacob was living near Shechem. His daughter Dinah was raped by Shechem, the son of Hamor, who was the ruler of the area. *“And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her”* (v2).

Shechem showed no remorse for his sinful act, and Hamor didn't rebuke his son. The laws and customs of the pagan peoples in that area did not condemn Shechem's violent act. After all, he was the prince, so he could do whatever he wanted! In fact, his friends may even have admired him for his “conquest.” But Shechem had fallen in love with Dinah, and at least he was willing to marry her. So Hamor and Shechem tried to work out a deal with Jacob and his sons so Shechem and Dinah could be married, and they also made a plan for intermarriage and trade between the two peoples for the future.

Doctrinal Points

1. Concerning the wickedness in this world, the Bible tells it like it is!

Genesis 34 is one of the most unpleasant chapters in the Bible. It includes the rape of Dinah in the first half of the chapter, and a massacre in the second half of the chapter, when the sons of Jacob killed all the men of Shechem. So this chapter of the Bible doesn't give us a nice warm devotional feeling as we read it. And when was the last time you heard a sermon from Genesis 34? Maybe never! Genesis 34 is certainly not an easy chapter on which to preach. It's interesting to notice that many commentaries completely pass over Genesis 34 - or they may only make a few remarks and then move on.

Why would God include a chapter like this in the Bible? It's included because the Bible “tells it like it is,” when it comes to the wickedness that is in this world. The Bible does not sweep sin under the rug, or euphemize wickedness, or treat it lightly. Concerning the wickedness in this world, the Bible tells it like it is!

Although this chapter is not pleasant reading, it is evidence of the authenticity and the inspiration of Scripture. If the story of Jacob were merely a “Jewish legend” of early human origins (as some of the liberal critics of the Bible like to say), there would be a tendency to omit or cover up ugly events. After all, Jacob was one of the great patriarchs of the nation of Israel, so “Jewish legends” would want Jacob to emerge as a squeaky-clean hero! But in Genesis 34 Jacob appears as a failing father, who didn't care for his daughter properly - or do a good job of training and controlling his sons!

Well, this chapter is no “Jewish legend”! This is the **inspired Word of God**, and the inspired record of events does not hide the truth. The Bible tells it like it is! Sin and failure are not omitted or glamorized or covered up in Scripture. The ugliness of sin is included. Concerning the wickedness in this world, the Bible tells it like it is!

2. Concerning the wickedness in this world, let the believer beware!

You've heard the expression, "Let the buyer beware!" In other words, don't get taken in by fraud! Don't get ripped off! On our tours to the Middle East, before we go into the street markets we always remind our tour members, "Let the buyer beware!" In other words, don't be deceived or taken in or ripped off by unscrupulous merchants.

When it comes to the wickedness in this world, let the **believer** beware! The world may seem like a fun, friendly, inviting and entertaining place - just like Shechem - but the believer needs to beware! Jacob should have been more aware of the dangers of Shechem. After all, it was a city of this world, and the inhabitants of Shechem were not believers - they were pagans! Jacob should have been more concerned about the possible negative effects of Shechem on his family.

Verse 1 says that Dinah, Jacob and Leah's daughter, went to visit "the daughters of the land." Dinah was probably a teenager at this time. Like all teenagers, Dinah wanted to go out to the Shechem Mall to meet her friends. It was natural for her to want some girlfriends, but Jacob and Leah should have been more concerned about Dinah's whereabouts. Maybe they should have asked some of Dinah's older brothers to go with her. Or perhaps Dinah went out to see her friends without parental permission. We don't know all the details, but regardless of the details, Jacob should have been more aware of the situation! Shechem was a city of this world, and this world is wicked.

Let the believer beware! We live in a wicked world. Don't ever get the idea that this world is really not so bad after all, and that our children will be OK. The values and attitudes of this world system are contrary to the biblical standards, and the world system is out to undermine God and His Word.

Recently we saw an appalling example of just how wicked this world really is. For political reasons, the US Senate voted to continue the horrible practice of "partial birth abortion." It's hard to believe that this procedure is actually legal and occurs on a regular basis in our country. To allow a living infant's head to be born, and then to insert scissors into the base of the skull and suction out the brains - that is worse than tragic! The excuse that the health of the mother is at risk is blatantly false. It's an outrageous lie. The bottom line is, this is a wicked world!

Don't be fooled into thinking this world is fun or good or loving. No! This world is filled with wickedness, and Satan is out to deceive whomever he can. So - let the believer beware!

Practical Application

1. Parents, consider your children when deciding where to live

Apparently Jacob didn't consider his family when he decided where to settle down. No one forced him to move to the vicinity of the pagan city of Shechem. Jacob was a wealthy herdsman, and he moved there for the good of his flocks and herds, and for growing his wealth. It was a huge mistake to settle near Shechem, especially while his children were growing up. Clearly the family was heavily influenced by the pagan culture and immorality of Shechem.

There's a lot of pressure on Christians today to live in the "right" place, because of jobs and careers and prestige, etc., etc., etc. However, parents, I hope that at least you consider your growing children when you decide where to live.

Look first for a good church for your family to attend. Find out about the church's youth program. Take a good look at the community and the culture of that community. Find out about the schools and the influence of the school environment. Be sure to consider your children when deciding where to live!

2. Teens, honor your parents for considering your wellbeing.

Teens - right now you probably think that your parents poke their noses into your affairs way too much - right? Well, remember - that's because they love you, and they want to protect you from harm! And (believe it or not!) they know a lot more about the dangers and wickedness of this world than you do.

You may not agree with me now, but a few years from now you will! Do you remember the familiar quotation, spoken by Mark Twain about his father? "When I was fourteen years old, I thought my father was a fool. By the time I was twenty-one, I was amazed at how much he had learned in just the last seven years!" So true!

Even though it seems hard right now, honor your parents for caring for you. Respect them for carefully considering your safety and wellbeing in their decisions. They really do know more about this world and the wickedness of our culture than you do at this point! Even though you probably think they don't understand, and they're wrecking your life, and some of their decisions are "so stupid," and so on - remember that they love you, and they're looking out for you! Honor your parents for considering your wellbeing.