

The Deceit of Jacob's Sons, and the Massacre at Shechem

Genesis 34:13-31

Genesis 34:13-31 - *"But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. ¹⁴ And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a reproach to us. ¹⁵ But on this condition we will consent to you: If you will become as we are, if every male of you is circumcised, ¹⁶ then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. ¹⁷ But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone." ¹⁸ And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. ¹⁹ So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. He was more honorable than all the household of his father.*

²⁰ And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying: ²¹ "These men are at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters. ²² Only on this condition will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³ Will not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us." ²⁴ And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

²⁵ Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. ²⁶ And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went out. ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. ²⁸ They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, ²⁹ and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that was in the houses. ³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I." ³¹ But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"

Background Notes

Genesis 34 is certainly not the most pleasant chapter in the Bible. The name of God is not even mentioned in this chapter. In the first half of the chapter, Dinah, Jacob's daughter, was raped, and in the second part of the chapter the men of Shechem were massacred by Jacob's sons.

After Hamor's son Shechem raped Dinah, he wanted to marry her. At least this was an honorable move on his part (v19). So Shechem and his father, Hamor, tried to make an arrangement with Jacob and his sons. The sons of Jacob said, "Yes, Dinah can marry Shechem. In fact, we'll be willing to trade with you're and intermarry with you - on one condition. All the men of Shechem must be circumcised, because it would be a disgrace for our women to marry anyone who is uncircumcised." But notice verse 13: *"But the sons of Jacob ... spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister."*

So all the men of Shechem agreed, and they were circumcised outside the gate of Shechem. That gate area, by the way, can still be seen to this day in ancient Shechem (present-day Nablus). In fact, part of the very ancient city wall associated with that gate is also still standing.

Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons who were probably in their 20's at this time, plotted to take revenge for the rape of their sister Dinah. After the men of Shechem were circumcised, they were unable to defend themselves because of the pain from the surgery. So Simeon and Levi crept into the city and killed all the men of Shechem, including Hamor and Shechem. They plundered the city, and took the women and children away as captives.

Because of this horrendous deed, many years later when Jacob blessed his sons (who were the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel), Simeon and Levi were sternly rebuked by their father. They lost out on blessing. Genesis 49:5-7: *"Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel."*

Doctrinal Points

1. Misguided religious zeal results from a lack of spiritual leadership.

Where was Jacob during all of these events? It seems he faded into the background. His sons, most of them in their teens and 20's, made the agreement with Shechem and Hamor. Why was Jacob willing to go along with the agreement to let his family intermarry with these pagan Canaanites? Did he go along with this plan for his own profit - for trading or commercial purposes? Whatever the reason may be, Jacob certainly did not give his sons spiritual leadership.

Religious zeal propelled Simeon and Levi to take the action they did. After all, their sister Dinah had been defiled. A wicked and disgraceful thing had been done. *"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" (v7).*

Jacob's sons weren't willing to let this sin go unpunished, and they wanted to eliminate any possibility of intermarriage with these pagans. Some people might even say that they had a "good and proper" basis for their attitude. But it was **misguided** religious zeal! Their religious zeal carried them away, and it resulted in ruthless, excessive and sinful actions. One reason why the situation got out of control was the lack of spiritual leadership from their father, Jacob. Even after the deed was done, Jacob seemed to be thinking only of himself. Notice how many times he used the words "I" and "me" in verse 30: *"Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I."*

There was a lack of spiritual leadership in Jacob, the father who should have been watching over and guiding the spiritual welfare of his family. The same is true today. Misguided religious zeal is a result of a lack of spiritual leadership. Here's a present-day illustration of misguided religious zeal. Have you ever seen "John 3:16" or "Jesus Saves" spray-painted on buildings, or highway overpasses, or even on rocky cliffs? People do that out of religious zeal, but I think we'd all agree that it is **misguided** religious zeal! If the spray-painting was done by teens, why did the spiritual leadership in the home and the church fail to teach these teens how to properly channel their zeal? **Misguided** religious zeal results from a lack of spiritual leadership.

2. Misguided religious zeal leads to sin in God's name.

Circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, a holy covenant between God and His people. However, the sons of Jacob used the sign of God's covenant wrongly and deceitfully! This was actually blasphemy, and it led to a massacre - a horrible injustice. Circumcision, the sign of God's favor, was used as a cover to commit murder, pillage and kidnapping. Misguided religious zeal leads to sin in God's name.

There are many present-day examples that could be given here. The pro-life religious zealot who shoots and killed an abortionist was biblical in his pro-life position, but terribly wrong in his action. His misguided zeal led to sinful action. Another example would be a group of Christians that took another group of Christians to court in a lawsuit over funds – on the grounds of "protecting God's property." Their misguided zeal led them into sin. God didn't need them to file a lawsuit to protect "His property"! Moreover, their action is in direct disobedience of 1 Corinthians 6, which teaches that Christians should not take other Christians to court. Christians should not settle their differences in worldly, secular, pagan courts. **Misguided** religious zeal leads to sin in God's name.

3. Misguided religious zeal ruins the believer's testimony.

When Jacob moved into the area of Shechem, he built an altar there. Genesis 33:20 says, *"Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel."* *El Elohe Israel* means, literally, "God, the God of Israel." Jacob may have thought that

he and his family would be a testimony to the pagan Canaanites in that area, but after the massacre at Shechem that possibility was definitely over. Word of the horrible massacre would no doubt have traveled far and wide. Jacob was right when he said that they would be obnoxious - "*a stench*" - to the inhabitants of the land (v30). Any chance for them to be an effective testimony was ruined because of misguided zeal.

This is still true today. Misguided religious zeal ruins the believer's testimony. A number of years ago, a few overzealous students from our Bible college decided to hold a prayer meeting in a local restaurant. When it became obvious to these students that people at the surrounding tables were being bothered by the "religious fanatics," they prayed more loudly. In fact, one of the overly zealous students called out to the others, "Let's pray these unsaved people out of here!" Talk about misguided zeal!

Needless to say, these students ruined their testimony to anyone who was in that restaurant, and the testimony of Emmaus Bible College was affected as well. Misguided religious zeal ruins the believer's testimony.

Practical Application

What will it take to bring revival into your life?

In Genesis 35 Jacob finally went back to Bethel, where God had appeared to him about thirty years earlier. There was a revival in Jacob's life when he returned to Bethel - but the revival could have come sooner. It could have come ten years earlier, at the time of the wrestling match with the Angel of the Lord. If Jacob had gone back to Bethel then, a lot of heartache and grief and sin could have been avoided!

But Jacob was unwilling to completely obey the Lord, and he continued to do things his own selfish way. He didn't return to Bethel until after the tragic events of Genesis 34. It took the rape of his daughter Dinah, and the ruthless, murderous acts of his sons to finally bring Jacob to his senses, and get him back to where the Lord wanted him to be.

What will it take to bring revival in your life? One of my current students has come to study God's Word at Emmaus Bible College because of a revival in his life - but it took a broken marriage and a near-fatal motorcycle accident to bring him to this point.

Maybe you are not walking with the Lord, and you know it. What will it take to bring revival into your life?