

Weakness Made Perfect in Strength Genesis 34

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land.² When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and violated her.³ His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her.⁴ And Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as my wife.”

⁵ When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he kept quiet about it until they came home.

⁶ Then Shechem’s father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob.⁷ Now Jacob’s sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter—a thing that should not be done.

⁸ But Hamor said to them, “My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife.⁹ Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves.¹⁰ You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it.”

¹¹ Then Shechem said to Dinah’s father and brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask.¹² Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I’ll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the girl as my wife.”

¹³ Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob’s sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor.¹⁴ They said to them, “We can’t do such a thing; we can’t give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us.¹⁵ We will give our consent to you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males.¹⁶ Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We’ll settle among you and become one people with you.¹⁷ But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we’ll take our sister and go.”

¹⁸ Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem.¹⁹ The young man, who was the most honored of all his father’s household, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob’s daughter.²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen.²¹ “These men are friendly toward us,” they said. “Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours.²² But the men will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are.²³ Won’t their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us.”

²⁴ All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised.

²⁵ Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male.²⁶ They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem’s house and left.²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled.²⁸ They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields.²⁹ They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.”

³¹ But they replied, “Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?”

This is one of the most disturbing, disgusting and anarchy ridden chapters in all of Scripture and I lay all of the blame at the feet of Jacob. In the crisis with Esau, Jacob had showed his maturity through his dependence on the Lord. Jacob realized how desperate he was with his wrathful brother and 400 men coming to destroy him. He was afraid, but he didn't give up. He was desperate but not defeated. He prayed hard, planned well and literally wrestled with God. The Lord changed Esau's heart from a spirit of revenge into a spirit of reconciliation. Jacob's heart attitude and actions echo Paul words in 2 Corinthians 12:9. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Jacob was weak and God's power was made perfect in his weakness. But in this story with the Shechemites, Jacob does not show evidence of any of the desperate and dependent characteristics like in the confrontation with Esau. This is why I chose the title for this message—weakness made perfect in strength. If God's power can be made strong when we are weak, then it follows that depending on our own strength and our own resources can make us weak. In other words, our greatest point of vulnerability happens when we think we are strong. It may be that Jacob emerged from the Esau situation with a spirit of pride and self-reliance. Regardless, Jacob's fall in this chapter is as great as his victory in the previous.

Let's break down this tragic story and look at the various components. The first thing that is obvious is that this story is filled with people who lusted after all manner of temptations. First of all, Shechem lusted after Dinah. If you recall, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all had supermodels for wives—drop-dead gorgeous woman, so it is not surprising that Jacob's only daughter was probably very beautiful. We are not explicitly told that she was, but it is implied. Secondly, the brothers lusted after revenge. We see their plan unfold throughout the story and the whole thing is nothing but a lust for revenge. In the end, it was a true blood-lust as they killed every male in the entire city. Shechem and his father Hamor lusted after Jacob's wealth. When they attempted to convince the townspeople to carry forth a mass circumcision, they appealed to everyone's greed saying, *Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us.* In other words, why not put up with the temporary pain of circumcision if we can steal their stuff in the end? But Shechem never had the chance to steal Jacob's wealth because in the end, the eleven brothers lusted after Hamor's wealth and they took everything and everyone left in the city. Like the most vicious pirates or ruthless Vikings, Israel's sons murdered, pillaged and destroyed everything in their path.

The second obvious component is the rape and kidnapping of Dinah. Verse two lays out the core of all temptation. *Shechem...saw her, he took her and violated her.* This is the pattern we have seen since the Adam and Eve were tempted in the garden. All temptation begins with seeing the tempting object, whether it is a person or a thing. Eve saw the fruit. Seeing is not sinful, but sin creeps in when you begin to desire or covet the object at hand. Shechem's desire or coveting for Dinah is implied in his “seeing” her. His desire was quickly inflamed into lust and he had to “have” this woman.

There is another aspect to Shechem's crime that it is not revealed to the reader until near the end of the story: *Simeon and Levi...took Dinah from Shechem's house and left* (25-26). This whole time, Dinah was being held in Shechem's house. Was she being held against her will? Was she there somewhat willingly because Shechem "*loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her*"? Dinah went to visit the women of the land and in the process was either introduced to Shechem personally or was seen by him, but either way, she was in his presence. In the story of Amnon violating his sister Tamar, when the evil deed was done, we are told that Amnon "hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!" (2 Sam. 13:15)

But in stark contrast, Shechem's heart was intensely drawn to Dinah. He loved her all the more after what he had done and his desire to have her permanently grew to a fevered pitch. It appears that Shechem genuinely loved Dinah and spoke tenderly to her. Did Jacob ever love Dinah and speak tenderly to her as a father should do? Remember that Dinah was the daughter of Leah, the wife he never loved. Is it possible that Jacob never loved Dinah either? Could it be that Dinah allowed herself to be put in a position of vulnerability because she never had the love of her own father? Could it be that even in the midst of this horrible circumstance that Dinah heard the first tender words ever spoken to her? This is a bit of speculation on my part, but it is no speculation that young girls and women are most likely to remain pure and chaste if their fathers genuinely love and accept them as precious. What right does a father have to demand submission from his daughter if he has not first loved her sacrificially and tenderly? If a rapist can speak tenderly to his victim, why can't we do the same with our daughters and our wives?

Whenever you see this many sins of the flesh you are guaranteed to see a massive amount of accompanying deception, and this is exactly what we have here. First, Shechem attempted to deceive Jacob and his sons (9-10). He didn't mention his dirty deed but instead made the whole deal sound like they were going get rich. They could acquire land, marry their beautiful women and otherwise exist in a utopian society if they would only give Dinah to be the wife of Shechem. The brothers attempted to deceive Shechem, Hamor and the entire town with their requirement for everyone to be circumcised. In turn, Shechem attempted to deceive his own townspeople (23) did not tell them the real reason for the circumcision, that he had violated Dinah. Shechem made it sound like the townspeople would also become rich. There is smooth talking deception at every turn. Shechem has such a silver tongue that he tricked his own people into thinking they would be rich and he thought he had tricked Jacob and company AND he would get his gorgeous girl in the end. If you listened to Shechem's rhetoric, the whole deal was win-win for everyone with the biggest winner being him. But what he didn't know was that the deceiver had just been deceived. Where did the brothers learn the art of deception? Jacob and Laban were the best teachers in the Middle East and these brothers had grown up learning the fine art of subtle deception from them. Shechem may have had a silver tongue but Jacob's sons were clearly more skilled at deception than Shechem because their plan worked perfectly.

Deception and even what we call "white lies" are merely symptoms of more sinister deeds. Lying and deception would cease if no one had anything to hide. We may not be hiding dead bodies under the floorboards of our house, but we do have other things to hide. We hide our insecurities by being fake with one another, especially on Sunday morning. Some of the greatest

lies are told between 10am and 12 pm on Sundays. People come to church and plaster a smile on their face and tell everyone that all is well.

But in this case, lies were the least of the sins. *Simeon and Levi...attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male.* The names of the two killers are very important. Simeon and Levi were both sons of Leah and were blood brothers to their sister Dinah. It makes sense that sons of Leah would be the most angry and vengeful. This is straight up genocide. This is retribution that was many times greater than the original crime. These brothers had every right to be angry. Don't ever let anyone tell you that anger is always wrong. If you don't get angry at gross injustice then something is askew with your soul. We have to be careful here because the vast majority of our anger is sinful anger or quickly leads to sinful anger but it is possible and even necessary to get angry at disgusting behavior like that of Shechem. The question is what are you doing with your anger?

I talked with someone recently who is going through a very difficult situation with his church. It doesn't concern any church in Viroqua, so please do not attempt to connect the dots! This man said that lately when he sits in church it's all he can do to stop from yelling in the middle of the sermon. I know this man's story and he has every right to be angry, but he was telling me how he planned to handle his anger and he was taking some positive steps. What are you doing with your anger? Notice I didn't ask whether you are angry but what are you doing with the anger you already have?

But what happened next was just as bad as the mass murder. *The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled.* ²⁸ *They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields.* ²⁹ *They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.* I wonder how they happened to come upon the dead bodies. Were they waiting nearby in case Simeon and Levi needed help? Instead of being outraged and sickened by this scene of mass murder, the brothers looted the entire city.

It reminds me of the old proverb. "I used to complain because I didn't have any shoes until I met a man who didn't have any feet. So I took his shoes because he wasn't going to need them." In the most perverted way, the brothers said to themselves, "Hey, these dead guys aren't going to need this stuff, I might as well take it." But notice how much they took. It wasn't enough to take a few silver coins or whatever they could carry. They took everything. They made several trips back and forth into the city. They probably took the stolen animals and burdened them down with belongings until the city was completely looted. The description reminds me of the *Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. Their evil was so great and their hearts so hardened that they took every last scrap of food. Look again! They took all of their wealth, all of their women and children and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They brothers murdered, looted and pillaged until there was literally nothing left but dead bodies. The scene is utterly deplorable.

But if all of that wasn't enough, there was more. Through their deception, the brothers perverted the rite of circumcision instituted by Yahweh. It was no longer a sign of God's covenant with Israel but it was used as the primary tool of deception and murder. The brothers used this sacred rite and perfectly manipulated the timing. They waited until the third day when the pain would

have been the most severe. Infections could have been setting in by then and perhaps some of the men had fevers. Many were probably medicated by alcohol or other drugs to deaden the pain.

Today, Christians don't fight so much about circumcision but we do use other sacred gifts to manipulate and control others. For many churches, baptism is essential for salvation and the rite of baptism is perverted into a legalistic weapon or a magical formula. Some churches use leadership as a tool for power and control. Some pastors and leaders abuse their congregations and some congregations abuse their pastors and leaders. Out of the seven churches in Laodicea, how many were *not* condemned for one reason or another? Only two. Two churches out of seven! Where would Grace Church fall—would we be one of the two that were commended or one of the five that were condemned? Are we faithful in using God's gifts?

At the core of this chapter was a power struggle between the two families of people—Hamor representing the Shechemites and the Israelites. Think about if Viroqua was the same size as it is but there was nothing else around for at least a 150 mile radius—not towns, nothing but empty wasteland. Now picture looking to the horizon and you see a large dust cloud forming and then you see some animals and finally some people and you realize that it's Westby coming your way. If another entire town moved right next to us there would be a power struggle even before they met one another. I am guessing that Jacob's family were fewer in number than the Shechemites. The Israelites were at a strategic disadvantage. Shechem had violated Dinah and now was holding her as a hostage in his house. The way in which the bargaining went reveals the power struggle. Shechem was willing to pay "any price" to get Dinah. If these Shechemites are willing to rape and kidnap a foreigner, they were probably capable of going to war over this. Dinah was the bargaining chip and when Shechem approached Jacob and began to bargain for Dinah, he was holding all the cards. He had Dinah and he probably had more fighting men. What were Jacob and the brothers to do? They could "take our sister and go" (17) but they might have to do it by force.

We know they made the wrong choice but let's think about the various options that would have been available to them. The first and most obvious course of action would have been prayerful dependence on the Lord, just as Jacob did with Esau. Along with prayer, Jacob could have engaged in peaceful compliance, meaning that given the fact that the Shechemites probably outnumbered the Israelites, he could have agreed to allow his daughter to marry Shechem. Also along with prayer the third option would have been peaceful negotiation. If Jacob had been adamantly opposed to allowing the marriage, he could have negotiated a deal for her release. Shechem was held in high honor by the entire town so it is possible that he possessed some good qualities and would have come to terms of peace. On the other hand, he may have been honored for being a ruthless and powerful leader who tramples on his enemies at every step. As many have said in the political arena, you can't negotiate with terrorists. If raping and kidnapping were part of his character, then it would have been impossible to have negotiated with him.

The fourth option, again including prayer dependency as the starting point, would have been aggressive resolution up to and possibly including the taking of human life. This is what is often referred to as the "Just War" theory. We can understand just war theory on a smaller scale. If a crazy man decided to rob a bank and hold hostages, do we not expect the police and SWAT teams to swarm the area and put an end to the hostage crisis, even if it means killing the bad

guy? In the same way, given the rape and kidnapping, it would have been completely justified for Jacob's family to take up arms to defend Dinah's honor and to rescue her from her confinement. But Simeon and Levi did not engage in a just war and in the end, their actions were many times worse than those of Shechem. They killed all of the men, kidnapped all of the women and children and stole all of their goods.

Simeon and Levi justified their sinful decision by claiming it was their only option. They said as much in verse 31. "*Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?* In other words, either we kill them all or else we allow them to treat her like a prostitute. They only saw two sinful options before them and they chose accordingly, but there is no such things as being caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. There will never be a time when you have to choose between two sinful options. God always has a way out.

The other thing that this whole mess illustrates the absolute necessity of the Mosaic Law. The law, which was to be revealed 400 years later, would regulate all of the issues in this story. The law had stipulations regarding rape, justice, revenge, retribution, circumcision and intermarriage. It is clear that neither the Shechemites nor the Israelites were regulated by any moral law outside of themselves, though the Israelites should have been so. Just and moral laws serve to restrain evil even among pagans.¹ Laws, especially THE Law of God, while it cannot save a person, often does have the effect of restraining all kinds of evil. In the absence of a community standard of morality, ethics and justice, everyone does as they please. A Jewish writer made a compelling case for this point.

It is not overstated to say that the Torah's prohibition of non-marital sex made the creation of Western civilization possible. Societies that did not place boundaries around sexuality were stymied in their development. The subsequent dominance of the Western world can largely be attributed to the sexual revolution initiated by Judaism, and later carried forward by Christianity.²

In other words, laws are good and anarchy is bad. This is why the word "freedom" is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. Many define freedom as "free to do whatever I want to do." Such a life may feel like freedom for a while but it will always enslave the person in the end. They will become slaves to their passions and what was once something that they wanted to do will eventually become something that they have to do. Teens and young people, don't tell me that your parent's rules are dumb. I am sure they are not perfect and every parent could use more wisdom, but the rules your parents have are infinitely better than not having rules or allowing you the kind of freedom that you think you want.

Out of all of the trauma and tragedy in this chapter, I believe that far and away the worst thing that happened was the absence of leadership and moral authority on Jacob's part. First of all, Jacob did not show any outrage at the news of what happened to his daughter. Compare his reaction at this news to how he reacted to news of Joseph's death. When he was brought news that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal, he "tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days" (Gen. 37:34). Why did he not have a similar reaction to the news about Dinah? Second, why did he hide the news from his sons? Did he fear they would act out of revenge? If this is what he thought then it was all the more reason to take charge of the situation.

Third, when Shechem came to Jacob to ask to marry Dinah, Jacob was present but he did not speak. Jacob abdicated his responsibility to his sons who in turn devised this evil plan of deception and genocide. Jacob should have taken charge from the beginning but instead he retreated into the background. He failed again when he was told about the genocide on the Shechemites, his reaction was selfish.³⁰ *Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed."* Jacob did not condemn the killing or the stealing. He didn't seem to care that his sons had just decimated an entire town. All that he cared about at that moment was the fact that he might get caught, that the Canaanites might retaliate against him. What a wimp!

Why did Jacob have such an apparent lack of love for his daughter Dinah? Could it be because she was the daughter of Leah, the wife whom he never loved? Could it be that Jacob also did not love Dinah and was willing to let her suffer as a prostitute? When Simeon and Levi said to Jacob, *Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?*, I think it had a double meaning. I think it was partly directed at Jacob. Why did Jacob treat her like a prostitute? Why did Jacob not care that she was violated and why was he willing to accept a gift in return for the violation? Is that not the definition of a prostitute—one who is violated more or less against her will and someone else profits from the dirty deed? In a very real sense, Jacob acted like a pimp over Dinah. Can you imagine how this incident would have furthered the resentment among the eleven sons from four different mothers? Can you start to see why the brothers were so eager to sell Joseph into slavery? Their resentment did not start with the multicolored robe given to him by Jacob. Their resentment was deep and decades old by then. But on the other hand, is Jacob any worse than Abraham or Isaac who allowed their wives to be subject to rape by Pharaoh and Abimelech? It turned out "OK" for Sarah and Rachel but not for Dinah, but does that make Jacob's actions any worse than Abraham's or Isaac's?

But this is what happens when we abdicate our moral authority. Whether you are a parent, a pastor, a boss at work or have responsibility for even one person, you can't look the other way when morality is spinning out of control and then suddenly jump back into the story whenever you wish. Moral authority is built upon trust and it cannot be wielded carelessly. As believers, our ultimate moral authority is the Word of God and we must be careful not to pick and choose which commands we like and which ones cramp our lifestyle.

In addition to some of the applications we have already talked about, I think there are two basic reactions to this passage. The first reaction is from the person who says, "I know that I am not perfect, but I am not as bad as these guys." Yes, you are. Romans 3 says "There is no one who is righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands. No one who seeks after God." If God were not restraining evil and giving his grace and mercy, we would be just like them.

The other reaction is from the person who says, I haven't committed genocide, but I have done a lot of bad things. I don't feel like there is any hope left for me. Is there any sin so great that God cannot forgive? This was a gruesome chapter, but do not forget the other characters that God worked with. King David was an adulterer and a murderer. Matthew was an unrighteous tax collector who stole from untold families living on the edge of poverty. If the apostle Paul were

living in our day, he would have been convicted of racketeering, terrorism and first degree murder. For those who turn from their sin and turn to the Lord, there is no sin, no matter how great, that he cannot forgive. But he didn't just wave his hand and do away with your sin. He became a man and traded his life for our, he was the righteous and we the unrighteous. Before he lifted us up out of the miry clay of sin, he rolled around in the miry clay of sin and became sin for us.

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¹ However, compare the behavior of the Shechemites to that of the Egyptians (ch. 12) and the Philistines (ch. 20 & 26). The Egyptians and Philistines feared even the possibility that they would have defiled Sarah or Rebekah. They had strict codes against stealing a man's wife, though it is possible they would have taken a foreign woman by force.

² Prager, Dennis. "Judaism's Sexual Revolution: Why Judaism (and then Christianity) Rejected Homosexuality." *Crisis* 11, no. 8 (September 1993).