

Dinah is Defiled

- Genesis 34
- You ever play the “what-if” game? We all do. What if you could suddenly understand your dog? Or what if your mom was a spy? You might want to take a closer look at her right now...But there’s a deadly version that I don’t recommend playing, especially after a tragedy. It can heap shame and guilt on top of the grace the Lord is pouring out to bring you healing. Peter may have played that game for three days after Jesus’ arrest in the garden: what if my sword had been true and I had been able to stop them from taking the Lord? We know how that story ended. Here are some what ifs for today’s text: (as Vic mentioned last week), what if Jacob had obeyed God and gone back to Bethel, instead of settling first in Succoth and then in Shechem? What if Jacob had commanded his household to put away their foreign gods when they got to Succoth or Shechem, and not waited until God told him in the next chapter to go to Bethel? What if Jacob had not let his only daughter wander alone in a wicked city? What if Jacob had not been such a passive bystander after his daughter’s assault? What if Jacob had understood the level of his sons’ rage after the assault and had responded strongly to them? We don’t know. Let’s look at what we do know and try to understand this story under three main points: Defilement, Deception, and Destruction.
- **Defilement (verses 1-7)**
- It’s an ugly story, there’s just no way around it, and like so many of the stories we have read in Genesis, there are no real winners. God is the hero of the book but in this story, he is ignored by all.
- Dinah was the youngest of Leah’s seven children, and the only girl. Most likely she was a teenager around 15 years old, but we cannot know for sure. She “went out” to see the women of the land, and in doing so Allen Ross says she “loosened the stone for the slide.” In the Old Testament, the wording there for “went out” often refers to making a poor moral choice. But the question is whether Jacob or Leah knew she was wandering in the city. Did she tell them she was going to see the town on her own and Jacob just shrugged? Or did Jacob absolutely forbid it and she did it anyway? Again, we cannot be certain. Leon Morris writes, “Unattached young women were considered fair game in cities of the time, in which promiscuity was not only common but, in fact, a part of the very religious system itself.” Even in the near east today Arab women and Muslim women never go out into public alone. They are always together. It was then and is now a dangerous world for young people, especially young girls, and every parent’s worst nightmare happened to Dinah.
- The report of the assault is essential to the story, and Moses makes it clear that it was an assault. Shechem “saw her...seized her...lay with her... humiliated her.” The construction of the phrase, “lay with her” in Hebrew does not include “with,” as it does later when Potiphar’s wife says to Joseph, “lie with me.” There is no indication of consent with Dinah, only force and a violent crime that humiliated this young girl and is one of the most shameful events in the Old Testament. Shechem took advantage of this young woman, and then happily took her to his home. Then? Moses writes that Shechem “loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her.” What a perversion of what God said the order of such a relationship should be: a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Shechem forced Dinah to “become one flesh,” a clear violation of the law of God, and then decided that he “loved her,” which was probably nothing more than sensual desire, and he began to pursue her as a wife. Young people, be careful not to fall into the trap that has been prevalent since the fall. “Young men use ‘love’ to get intimacy and young women use intimacy to get love” is a cliché for a reason. In the case of Shechem and Dinah, he alone was the guilty party, even though she was in the wrong place at the wrong time. His violent demand for immediate gratification would have deadly consequences.
- Jacob heard (verse 5) what had happened. But kept quiet about it. He was waiting on his sons to come in from the fields. This is the most puzzling part of this story to me. Jacob heard. Jacob said nothing. Hamor came to speak to Jacob about his son marrying Jacob’s daughter. Jacob said nothing. The sons

hear about it and come in from the fields, and they display the correct emotion and response: “the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel...for such a thing must not be done.” You can see Moses looking at the men and young men of Israel as he read this text to them, his tone rising sharply, a bit of a growl in his voice when he reads what he had written: “such a thing must NOT be done.” It is true, and the sons of Jacob got that. But did Jacob? This patriarch crawled back into hiding it seems. There is not even a hint in the text that Jacob gets involved at all until Simeon and Levi take out all the men of Shechem with the sword. What Dinah needed more than anything was the love and the protection of her father. As far as we can see, she never got that. And, Dinah will never be mentioned again in the Bible except in a genealogy near the end of Genesis. That leads us to...

- **Deception (verses 8-17)**

- What followed next was a negotiation between Hamor and the sons of Jacob about marriage between his people and theirs. What is shocking to our ears and eyes is that there is no apology. No contrition, no shame, no admission of guilt. In that culture, women were seen as property by the pagans. Shechem is there but his father Hamor speaks first and he uses the plural “you” when he says Shechem longs for “your” daughter. He asks for them to allow her to marry his son, and not only that, for their daughters to marry their sons. For the two people to become one. We will love together, trade with one another, Hamor says. Yes, Shechem adds, and whatever you want from me, I will pay it to have “the young woman to be my wife.” Did he even know her name? The woman he had violently assaulted was now essentially on the auction block, and he was bidding for her!
- This is where the sons of Jacob show themselves to be his sons. His name means deceiver, and we have seen how skilled he is in that craft, and so are they. They (verse 13) answer deceitfully when they say there’s no way they can do what Hamor and Shechem are asking, because their men have not been circumcised. IF each of your males are circumcised, then we will (verse 16) “give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people.” There is a smidgen of truth here stuffed with a lie. The truth is that circumcision was the sign of the covenant for any male who said he was a follower of the one true God. God had said so in Genesis 17, “It shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.” The truth was also that intermarriage with unbelieving pagans would be very dangerous to the covenant family. The lie was the claim of the sons of Jacob that they would become one people with the people who lived in Shechem. Not a chance. Their sole plan and only purpose was to destroy them, down to the last male. We might be persuaded that deception in this case was ok because it was justified. It wasn’t, because their penalty far outweighed Shechem’s crime. But we also need to run from situational ethics of any color or stripe. Deception will damage our souls. Plain and simple. Peter wrote of Jesus, “He (Jesus) committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.” (1 Peter 2:22) He also wrote, “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.” (1 Peter 3:10) The brothers were justifiably angry, but they did not need to sin as a result.
- Shechem took what he wanted and then tried to buy what he wanted, and it is inexcusable. The deception of the sons of Jacob was as well, as they prostituted the sign of the covenant to get what they wanted: revenge.
- You may have noticed that deception is not just practiced here by the sons of Jacob, but by Hamor as well. We will see that in the last point, as we look at...

- **Destruction (verses 18-31)**

- Hamor and Shechem were delighted with the terms of the contract and went straight to the city gate and told all the men what a great deal they had brokered with those simpleton Hebrews. Because they said, after we have done what they require, (verse 23), “Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours?” You see that Hamor was premeditative in his plans, just as Simeon and Levi were in theirs.

- Derek Kidner wrote, “Crudely performed, circumcision could be quite incapacitating, particularly after two or three days.” You think? Pain, inflammation, probably high fever from infection were rampant in the town of Shechem. That helps us understand how just two men, Simeon and Levi, could pull off the massacre of the city by themselves. The men of the city couldn’t respond and apparently this was before the Marvel days of women warriors. No Black Widow, no female Captain Marvel to save the city. This story is true, and the men all died that day. It was a premeditated slaughter, it was an Old Testament genocide. Their indignation about the sin committed against their sister was well-founded, but their response to that sin was not. Paul wrote, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.” (Eph. 4:26-27) As much as Hollywood loves vigilante stories, the Bible warns against them. Was God angry with Shechem for his sin against Dinah? Yes. Was God looking the other way when it happened and after? No. Was punishment for Shechem justified? Yes. But the punishment meted out by Simeon and Levi was disproportional to the crime.
- Remember, Abraham and his descendants were blessed by God and called to be a blessing to others. And not a curse. God said in Genesis 12, “and him who dishonors you, I will curse.” Vengeance is mine...
- After Simeon and Levi killed all the men and took Dinah out of the city, the other sons came and plundered the city, taking everything of value, and also taking the women and the children, presumably as slaves. The story ends with Jacob’s blistering response to Simeon and Levi. But notice the number of times Jacob says “me” or “my” or “I” in verse 30. He seems to be more concerned about his reputation and his own skin than anything else. He had been passive in his first response to the assault on his daughter, and now he responds to the sins of his sons in a selfish, “old Jacob” way. Derek Kidner wrote, “Jacob and his sons, the appeaser and the avengers, swayed respectively by fear and fury, were perhaps equidistant from true justice. They exemplify two perennial but sterile reactions to evil.” Look at Genesis 49 for Jacob’s final “blessing” of Simeon and Levi. **Genesis 49:5-7**
- This Old Testament story of defilement and deception and unbridled violence has much to teach us. Let me leave you with a few applications that I see.
- When those in authority (sinfully) fail to act in a way that reflects love, justice, and maturity, that void is often filled by those who choose to act in a sinful way.
- Let’s make every effort to flee from using deception of any kind and learn to discern the deceptive ways of the world system, which permeates advertising, politics, higher education, and yes, social media.
- As we have seen so many times, and see again today, God is for us. He is for his people. Even in what could be called Jacob’s darkest hour and his sons’ greatest act of disobedience...so far, God continues to give grace. He continues to lead his people. David knew that so well in his own life and wrote to encourage us: “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” -Psalm 103:13-14
- Prayer
- Greet One Another